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Feminism in Britain: From William Shakespeare to
Mary Wollstonecraft

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Abstract

This thesis entitled *Feminism in Britain: From William Shakespeare to Mary Wollstonecraft* falls within the category of research on gender studies or feminist scholarship. It sheds light on the origin and evolution of Liberal feminism and its contradictions during the period stretching from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. It focuses on the shift of paradigms of thoughts and discourse about the place of gender in the public sphere. The humanist episteme promoted the spread of the feminist discourse because of the very contradictions inherent to the liberal ideology. In an attempt to prove that British feminism evolved from a sympathetic attitude reflected in the writings of the Renaissance to a defensive type during the Glorious Revolution to reach towards the end of the eighteenth century an offensive phase with Mary Wollstonecraft who broke into the public sphere and entered a fierce debate with many of her contemporary philosophers and writers, I selected six authors, three male, William Shakespeare, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and three female, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft and Susanna Haswell Rowson as representative authors. The thesis is divided into three main parts, with three chapters each. Part One “Shakespeare’s England and Women” discusses how the gender issue emerged in Shakespeare’s time. Chapter One “Women in Shakespeare’s England: Humanism and Reformation Influences” considers the status of women in Shakespeare’s England. Chapter Two “Shakespeare, Patriarchal Bard or Feminist Sympathiser?” views Shakespeare as a patriarchal Renaissance man who sympathises with women. Chapter Three “Shakespeare, Empire and the Tuning of Feminist Sympathies According to the Ethnicities of Empire” deals with the impact empire had on the emergence of feminist sympathies in Shakespeare’s time. Part Two “Hobbes, Locke, and Mary Astell: Dialogue and Polemics” considers the dialogue and polemics between Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Mary Astell with regard to the gender issue. Chapter Four “An Overview of the Revolutionary Ideas of the Enlightenment” is devoted to the historical and intellectual background behind the birth of the stated dialogue and polemics. Chapter Five “Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*: Theoretical Foundations of the ‘Myth of the State’” analyses the manner Hobbes and Locke for the first time in modern European intellectual history theorised differently about the separation of the public from the private realm. Chapter Six “Mary Astell’s *Some Reflections upon Marriage*: a Feminist Reading of Locke’s Hypothesis” considers Astell as the first liberal feminist to stand against the bourgeois man’s confinement of women in that bourgeois conjugal family’s internal space without access to the economic, the political, or cultural spheres of the private realm. Part Three “Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Gender in Eighteenth Century England” argues for the evolutions within British feminism in the eighteenth century. Chapter Seven “Gender, Nationalism, and the French Revolution: Mary Wollstonecraft vs. Male and Female Writers” is devoted to an analysis of anthologized essays from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* to show how these early eighteenth-century periodicals instituted the cultural and social norms of Enlightenment Britain and beyond. Chapter Eight “Mary Wollstonecraft: Dialogue on the Political Rights of Women” analyses the works of Wollstonecraft to illustrate how the expanding world of letters constitutive of the bourgeois public sphere of civil society was intruded into by her works due to the political radicalism unleashed by the French and American revolutions. Chapter Nine “Mary Wollstonecraft’s and Susanna Rowson’s Liberal Feminism and Orientalism” considers the contradictions of the liberal feminism of Wollstonecraft and Rowson, who re-tooled orientalism in defence of women’s rights.
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General Introduction

This thesis entitled *Feminism in Britain: From William Shakespeare to Mary Wollstonecraft* falls within the category of research on gender studies or feminist scholarship. One might rightly ask the question why one more feminist research has to be written on authors who have already received a huge amount of criticism. One might equally rightly ask the query why one has always to go back to Shakespeare in British literary studies in issues related to gender relations. Other questions are also likely to crowd into the mind. Aren’t there women authors in British literary canon with whom one can start? And then why do I feel obliged to go back to the supposed beginnings of British feminism at a time when etiological studies are looked at askance? If I write about “British feminism,” does that mean that I assume that “British feminism” is all of one species of discourse that one does not need to add a plural mark? And just to close the floodgates in face of the flowing questions, why have I decided to limit the study of “British feminism” to the historical period extending from Shakespeare to that of Wollstonecraft, and not to another period in British cultural history? Does that mean that British feminism started with Shakespeare and that with Wollstonecraft feminism entered into a post-feminist phase because all the problems issuing from gender domination were solved?

I shall start by responding to the last question because it is the one that is most likely to be asked first. Arguably, the best answer to this question comes from Jacques Derrida, one of whose statements about the necessity to go back to beginnings Alice A. Jardine uses as an epigraph in one of her chapters of one of her books, carrying the very suggestive title *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. This epigraph from the French pioneering deconstructionist reads as follows: “The legitimate renunciation of a certain style of causality perhaps does not
give the right to renounce all etiological demands. (Quoted in Jardine A. Alice, 1995) Jardine’s play on the Greek stem word “gyne” (woman in Greek) which is at the basis of such words as “gynaecium” and the Genesis as the beginnings of the relationship of gender domination aims to highlight the vital importance of origins for the explanation of social phenomena. Though diachronic perspectives, as a result of the structuralist and post-structuralist emphasis on synchronic research, are largely deprecated in the academic world today, they cannot be done without in the study of such complex cultural issues as gender.

If Jardine has tried to legitimate her recourse to etiological research on gender by citing an authority in deconstructionist studies who admits that a diachronic approach is sometimes a necessity, one can ask why, as far as I am concerned with the same issue as Jardine, I am obliged in my turn to retrace the origins of British feminism and its evolution up to the time of Mary Wollstonecraft. In answering this question, I shall lay down the issue and the approach to it all at the same time. In the first place, this study is a cultural or civilisation study of gender domination within a circumscribed period in British (and only to some extent American) history. As such, it necessarily demands a historical or a diachronic perspective. However, this provides only half the answer. In feminist scholarship, one very often comes across such labels as “liberal feminism,” “cultural feminism,” “Marxist feminism,” “Freudian Marxism,” “Existential feminism,” “Radical feminism,” and “Womanism”. These labels often refer to the types of discourse that feminist researchers, both man and woman, appropriate after the abrogation of their ideological contradictions to make the case or militate for women’s emancipation in academic circles. One can easily guess from the authors selected for study that this research of mine falls within the ambit of “liberal feminism.”
From a diachronic perspective, liberal feminists, authors and critics alike, are the first among all the other categories of feminists, to have been interested in the ideological contradictions of liberalism. The reasons for this first emergence of the liberal feminist discourse are not difficult to locate. Discourses, as Nietzsche states in one of his books, are either timely or not. In other words, their rise and circulation as discursive currency are largely determined by the historical evolution of the cultural conditions that made them possible. So, as I would argue in this thesis, if the issue of gender relations started to be raised in the time of Shakespeare it is because it was during his time that the debate about human nature became really relevant because of the humanist revolution of thought. For example, it would be really unrealistic and anachronistic to talk about a philosophical controversy about gender relations in the medieval period because in that period these relations were managed by a religious or theological discourse, which as Edward Said tells us in one of his books, is a “closed” rather an “open” discourse giving priority to faith over rationality. To paraphrase Alexander Pope in another context, until the humanist age of the Renaissance when “the proper study of man” was declared to be “man” rather than God, a feminist discourse as a discourse about the relations of man to women could not have emerged and circulated because of the constraining religious paradigms of thought that had, until then, concentrated exclusively on the relation of man to God.

The humanist episteme or paradigm of thought as it evolved from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment period increasingly promoted the spread of the feminist discourse because of the very contradictions inherent to the liberal ideologies carried by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In this research, I have selected six authors, three male authors, William Shakespeare, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke,
and three female ones, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstoncraft, and Susanna Haswell Rowson as representative authors to discuss the rise and evolution of this liberal feminist discourse. This corpus is not an emanation of an arbitrary choice. So if this dissertation starts with Shakespeare, it is because there is a quasi consensus in literary studies that he stands as the best representative playwright of the humanist age of the Renaissance. His theatre or drama is the ideal platform in which one can hear what men and women of that time loudly thought of their relations in the home and society.

If I follow the discussion with an analysis of Hobbes, Locke, and Astell, it is because the dialogue between the two first authors is rightly considered as having presided over the birth of the liberal philosophy and liberal society, and also because of the way Astell redeploy their arguments in defence of woman’s emancipation. The triangulation of the three authors foregrounds the ideological contradictions of the liberal thought and the manner female authors like Astell takes hold of their contradictions to put forward her feminist arguments. With Mary Wollstonecraft, liberal feminism takes a radical turn because she expressed it in the context of the late eighteenth century political radicalism. The British-born-turned American Rowson develops further this liberal feminism in another similar context across the Atlantic. Four revolutions can be said to have presided over the birth and evolution of the liberal feminist thought captured by the selected authors in our study, the humanist revolution of the Renaissance, the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the French Revolution in 1789, and the eight-year long American Revolution and the constitutional debate that marked the end of the Confederacy.

As the bibliography included at the end of this research shows, liberal feminism has been the focus of a huge number of published and unpublished works with an
emphasis on gender separation of the private from the public sphere. However, to date, the discussion of this issue remains under-theorized so that very often the meaning of these sociological categories of private and public are either taken for granted or just understood in the contemporary sense of the words. The other issue is that the literature about liberal feminism often overlooks one of its major contradictions that can be located in the context of empire building that skewed the culture of humanism and Enlightenment from which liberal feminism originally emerged. Hence was born the paradox that while man’s empire over woman was contested first in the name of humanism, and then universalism and the Western cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, the empire over non-European nations was defended by the same liberal feminists through a redeployment of an Orientalist discourse.

In what follows I shall employ Jurgen Habermas’s sociological categories developed in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (2010) to show first how Shakespeare uses the stage to blur the start of the demarcation of the private from the bourgeois public sphere. The theatre in the Renaissance, Habermas argues, constituted a forum similar to the Greek market place or *agora* wherein free men discussed public affairs. The emphasis will be on the concept of the “representation of publicness” or “publicity of representation” that the Renaissance man best embodied by the nobility influenced by bourgeois humanist culture, used to advertise its authority to the public or audience. Shakespeare, as I shall argue in the first part, demotes, downgrades, or uncrowns this ideal of the Renaissance man and the attached public/state authority through the manipulation of the carnivalesque or grotesque realism. The stage in Shakespeare’s hand provisionally assumes the critical function that the public sphere which in the words of Habermas was composed of
private bourgeois individuals who, in the course of the eighteenth century, came together to debate and negotiate matters of public concern, in other words to formulate “public opinion” and monitor the state in its decisions. The merit of Shakespeare is that he brought the gender problem and the anxieties related to it to the public attention giving the floor to subversive female characters. However, I shall put a caveat to Shakespeare’s commitment in the cause of women because when he deals with empire building, he undermines that commitment by developing a sort of endogamous romance. In this endogamous romance, European women appear in good light whereas non-European ones are put outside the limelight as evil except when they accept conversion.

I shall start the second part of the thesis with a historical background to highlight the many revolutions at the basis of the demarcation of the private sphere from the public sphere in Habermas’s sense of the word. In the same manner as the first part, this historical background chapter will be followed up by two other chapters, one of them dealing with the way Hobbes and Locke for the first time in modern European intellectual history theorised differently about the separation of the public from the private realm. It is in these two authors’ dialogue that we start to see clearly for the first time the conceptualisation of the private sphere, composed on the one hand of civil society as the realm of commodity exchange and social labour in which is “embedded the family with its interior domain,” and on the other hand, of the public sphere attached to the world of politics, the world of letters, and the world of cultural production in general. Historically and sociologically speaking then, as Habermas argues, in the emerging liberal thought, the “private realm was the authentic ‘public’ sphere, for it was a public constituted by private people (2010:30)” to criticize and monitor the decisions taken by state authority. Astell, as I shall argue, can be
considered as the first liberal feminist to protest, mildly it is true, against the bourgeois man’s confinement of women in that bourgeois conjugal family’s internal space embedded within the civil society which denied access to the economic, the political, or cultural spheres of the private realm as the “authentic public sphere” that monitors state authority.

The third part starts with a chapter devoted to an analysis of anthologized essays from *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* with the purpose of showing how these early eighteenth-century periodicals which are part and parcel of the emerging “public sphere of civil society” alongside affiliated coffee-houses instituted the cultural and social norms of Enlightenment Britain and beyond. A particular emphasis will be placed on their fashioning of gender in the context of the bourgeois struggle for self-definition, empire building and the nationalist wars against France. The discussion will be followed by an investigation of the construction of femininity in anthologized conduct manuals and literature about sexuality. The two chapters that follow up will deal respectively with the works of Wollstonecraft to illustrate how the increasingly expanding world of letters constitutive of the bourgeois public sphere of civil society as defined by Habermas was intruded into by women authors like Wollstonecraft and Rowson as the result of the political radicalism unleashed by the French and American revolutions. The contradictions of the liberal feminism of Wollstonecraft and Rowson will be illustrated in the manner in which they re-tooled orientalism in defence of women’s rights.

As I use Habermas’s critical categories, I also illustrate the limitation of his model of the British eighteenth-century public space by showing that it was far from being the sole domain of property-owning bourgeois males. It is true the participation of women in the public sphere was timid at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but
as the century unfolded, it assumed the shape of a “counter-public sphere” in its last revolutionary decades. In this I follow in the footsteps of Linda Colley’s assertion that in the decades following the American Revolution, “separate spheres were being increasingly prescribed in theory, yet increasingly broken in practice. (Coley Linda 1992: 251)” In accordance with Habermas’s approach, which “combines materials and methods from sociology and economics, law and political science, and social and cultural history,” I shall use Habermas critical categories in combination with other critical categories borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault and other theorists. These will be introduced in the course of the nine chapters that constitute the three parts of this thesis.
PART ONE
Shakespeare’s England and Women

Introduction

This first part of my work may at first sight read as a contradiction of the title of the thesis itself by the placement of William Shakespeare at the ‘origin’ of British feminism or Feminisms. Indeed, in the light of the recent rediscovery of Elizabethan/Renaissance female dramatists like Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621) and Elizabeth Cary Viscountess Falkland (1585-1639) author of respectively The Tragedy of Antony, and The Tragedy of Mariam, I am likely to be read as a born anti-feminist who keeps refusing the recent revision of the literary canon by feminist scholarship. However, as I shall argue, feminism as I conceive it receives its full relevance as a struggle for human emancipation only if it does away with the gender misconception that only women can speak to and for other women. In addition to overlooking the fact that gender interacts with class, nationality and race, this gender misconception belittles even the human capacity to recognize, understand and sympathize with the oppressed across gender lines. Gender relations represent a type of relations of domination which males themselves can experience and against which they can respond negatively.

In a nutshell if I have chosen to start my discussion of British feminism with Shakespeare, it is simply because he was the one of the playwrights of his time who managed to reflect major lines of the debate about gender relationships in the Elizabethan period. Admittedly, a study of a female dramatist like the ones mentioned above can help us have a picture of this debate, but this picture will remain at best a fuzzy snapshot because most of their works went unpublished and so difficult to retrieve. My choice of the Elizabethan period as the start for a discussion about British feminism is also far from being arbitrary. As the first chapter will
attempt to highlight, the Elizabethan period was marked by the emergence of the humanist ideology and the gradual erosion of the residual ideology of feudalism or medievalism. One of the hallmarks of humanism, as the name of this philosophy indicates, is its re-centring of attention on human nature.

It is in the light of this regained humanist interest of what is human and non-human that Shakespeare’s conception of gender power relations will be discussed in the second chapter. One of my arguments is that humanism as a cultural movement unleashed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period a militant sort of feminism best captured in the male persecution of witches. This militant feminism must have been as acute as the militant feminism of the Suffragettes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the feminist radicals of the 1960s in the United States to deserve the intervention of King James I through his disquisition on witches and witchcraft as an unorthodox type of knowledge. I shall argue that though Shakespeare’s plays seemingly confirm to the prejudices of his time in his definition of the nature of men and women, he undermines this impression by the grotesque mode of representation. His ironical projection to the woman’s cause, as I shall contend, relates to sympathy expressed in the theatre, which in the course of pre-modern age increasingly became the platform of bourgeois public sphere.

In the third chapter, I shall try to demonstrate that Shakespeare underwrites this sympathy when he moves to the treatment of empire. I shall argue that in his capacity as a spokesman for Queen Elizabeth I and then for James I, Shakespeare uses allegory both to criticize the political romance between Queen Elizabeth I and the North African Princes and to celebrate the reversal of this politics by her successor. The major claim that I shall flesh out is that Shakespeare, no matter the sovereign which he served during his long career as a dramatist, is an adherent to an
endogamous system of European exchange. One of the fundamental features of his plays is that European women and men involved in relationship outside this endogamous cultural area are lost to Europe. Women belonging to other cultures and religions do not have the same value as European women.
CHAPTER ONE
Women in Shakespeare’s England: Humanism and Reformation Influences

“There was no Renaissance for women, at least not in the Renaissance,” wrote the twentieth century feminist critic J. Kelly Gadol (1977: 137-64). While I agree with this opinion about the place that women occupied in the public sphere, I can only qualify it in terms of the debate that arose as a consequence of the Renaissance. I shall argue that the Renaissance is primarily a debate about the nature, place and function of man in this critical period of human history. The Renaissance is primarily marked with what later came to be called humanism. The humanist philosophy is centred on man, but it did not specifically address man as a gender category, man or woman, but man in the generic sense of the word, even if the reference to woman and man is hierarchized.

In what follows, I shall argue that the Renaissance debate about man also involved directly and indirectly the discussion about the nature, the place and the function of women. As it can be expected, the debate on women and power relations between men and women is not one-directional, it involved contradictory views about what women are and what their place in the family and society should be. I shall illustrate this contradictory debate with reference to two major figures of the Renaissance. Before embarking on any details about this controversial debate, an acknowledgement of the concept of the Renaissance and Renaissance Humanism is necessary.

Renaissance is one of the greatest periods of growth and development in Western Europe. It stretches from the early fourteenth to the late seventeenth century, and is considered as the period of transition between the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. The term Renaissance literally means “rebirth”, and is conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in classical learning and values. It was the revival, the recovery of antique Greek and Roman cultures with emphasis on the individual as subject and no more as the object of God’s ordained order; the latter being severely put into question.
It is widely agreed that the Renaissance movement emerged in Italy, in the city of Florence, and then it spread to the rest of the European continent reaching the British shores by the end of the fifteenth century. The artistic development is the most outstanding aspect of the movement, though undeniable social and political improvements were inspired by the Renaissance. The latter cannot be referred to, as a whole phenomenon, to any one cause or circumstance, nor can it be limited within the field of any one department of human knowledge. It is a wide revolution concerned with a wide range of interests, including architecture, painting and sculpture.

The Renaissance witnessed the discovery and exploration of new continents, the adoption of the Copernican system of astronomy, the decline of the feudal system and new inventions such as paper, printing, the compass and gunpowder. The European scholars became subsequently more interested in studying the world around them. Their art became truer to life as they began to explore new lands. The Renaissance was primarily the time of the revival of classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation (Gresh, 2003: 45). Major advances, in different fields occurred during this period. Both social stratification and prevailing order were to be replaced. At all levels, things were never going to be the same.

At all events the Renaissance was heralded through the recovery by Italian scholars of Greek and Roman classical literature. When the movement began, the civilization of Greece and Rome had long been exerting partial influence, not only upon Italy, but on other parts of mediaeval Europe as well (Blaynley, 1957: 54). However, in Italy especially, as the wave of “barbarism” had passed, the people began to feel a returning consciousness of their culture and a desire to revive it. To Italians, the Latin language was easy, and their country abounded in documents and monumental records which symbolized past greatness.

It would be difficult to point to one factor that singularly led to the emergence of the
Renaissance movement. The Crusades and the recapture of Jerusalem was one leading factor. The crusaders brought back lost works from the Roman Empire and opened trade with the Middle East. Arab scholars had preserved the writings of the ancient Greeks in their libraries, and when the Italian cities of Verona, Napoli or Genoa traded with the Arabs, ideas were exchanged along with goods. These ideas, preserved from the past, served as the basis of the Renaissance. This increase in trade and abundance in wealth resulted in the focusing on the arts.

The Bubonic Plague was another factor leading to the decline of papal supremacy. The outbreak led people to question the church and set the stage for massive social, political, economic and philosophical change (Blaynley, 1957: 23). In fact, the miraculous ability of spiritual healing failed to fulfill its promises, since one third of the English population passed away. Survivors of the plague were disillusioned by the church’s inability to explain or deal with the ravaging Black Death.

It would be difficult to give a single definite answer to the question what is Renaissance? For the scientists it is the discovery of the solar system by Copernicus and Galileo, the anatomy of Vesalius, and Harvey’s theory of circulation of blood. The origination of a truly scientific method is the point which interests them most in the Renaissance. The political historian would answer the question in another way. For him it is the extinction of feudalism, the development and the growth of monarchy, and the limitation of ecclesiastical authority. It is the rising of a sense of popular freedom which exploded in a social revolution. For thinkers it deals with philosophy, and discovery of manuscripts, that passion for antiquity, that progress in philology and criticism, which led to the correct knowledge of the classics, to a fresh taste in poetry, to new systems of thought, to more accurate analysis, and finally to the emancipation of the conscience.

It follows that, the Renaissance was meant to revalorize the individual and elevate him
to “l’uomo universale”, the universal man. In *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) clearly recognized that the beginnings of modern individualism lay as far back as the fourteenth century, the time of Dante and Petrarch. It was, he argued, the time that witnessed the birth of the modern spirit—with its critical attitude, its faith in objective and organized knowledge and its self-assertiveness. In this respect, he wrote:

> In the Middle Ages […] human consciousness lay half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith […] In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The subjective side, at the same time asserting itself with corresponding emphasis; man became the spiritual individual and recognized himself as such. (qtd in Burckhardt, 1958: 60)

In the light of the quotation above, I can argue that man in the Middle Ages was conscious of himself only as a member of some general category – race, family, gender. The triumph over darkness however, turned him to the depiction of the inward resources of his own nature, and thus to the improvement of his knowledge which was once confined within narrow limits. It was left to the humanists to raise this kind of knowledge. The return to secularity was therefore, meant to deny both to the Pope and the church any divine claims to authority. It is however, important to underline that it was not an anti-Christian movement, but one which had at stake the limitation of the temporal power of the papacy with a widespread condemnation of the notorious abuses in the medieval church. Therefore, the unchastity of the supposedly celibate clergy, the luxury and extravagance of the monasteries and the dubious financial dealings of the papacy such as the sale of indulgencies were to be attacked.

The Renaissance stimulating ideas, current in Italy, spread to other areas and were used to criticize the contemporary societies all over Europe. Combined with indigenous developments, they produced other European Renaissances, among which the English one. Great thinkers and philosophers, religious and secular, agitated for reform. This resulted in
various popular uprisings that urged towards reforming the established order; to move away from monarchical and papal absolutism, towards a greater sense of social and religious independence. By the sixteenth century, the whole of Europe was ablaze with fervour of reform, and England was no exception.

Sixteenth century Britain’s civil and ecclesiastical histories are so closely related that it would be difficult if not impossible to separate them, so as to state where either of them starts or ends. Tudor England (1448-1603) was a society in turmoil, both religious and political. Social upheaval and religious strife dominated English public life. The Renaissance movement had finally reached the remote island, and the English phase of reform was now under way. During the Renaissance, the English society was transformed into a society increasingly urban, commercial and individualistic. People’s curiosity overcame their fear and many people started to venture out and explore. Literacy spread out as new schools and colleges became more and more common. Commonly called Elizabethan England, the period is considered as the Golden era of the English history. Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the English nation witnessed the flourishing of the arts with the emergence of outstanding figures of the English and the world’s literature. Undisputed poets and dramatists such as Edmund Spencer, John Milton, Christopher Marlow or William Shakespeare produced amazingly timeless pieces of works. Humanism was the intellectual movement of the Renaissance. The movement had placed human beings once more in the centre of life’s stage and infused thought and art with humanistic values. This constituted the premises of a social revolt that would result in the English Reformation and the establishment of the Anglican Church. Humanist theory would prove to be of great benefit for the feminist cause.

In this research I shall argue that English feminism had its roots in Renaissance humanism. Renaissance socio-ideological context constituted a fertile ground to the emergence and the propagation of revolutionary ideas as concerns women’s conditions. I shall
demonstrate that there was a theological debate between Humanists and Protestant reformers over the issue of women. In fact, both Humanist scholars and Reformers showed interest and deep sympathy towards women. Protestant reformers and Humanist scholars, as they sharply criticized church practices and the dogmas of scripture, inevitably rejected God’s gender stratification, and therefore women’s attributed place, and shed light on women’s conditions as never before. The different views on the education of women and the place they should hold within the marriage institution, led to a clash between Humanists and Reformers. Whereas the former promoted education for all, including women, along with perfect eloquence, some Reformers focused on the virtue of silence and on full submission as essential to women. In her *Half Humankind: Texts of Controversy about Women*, Mc Manus argues that the debate over women’s worth has proved a staple during the English Renaissance among people of the middle class: “Women provided the English Renaissance with prolific topic for attack and defence” (M.C. Manus 4). This debate, around the issue of women, would result in the feminist movement of the coming century.

Before dealing with the time’s theological debate, let us have an over view on the social context of Renaissance England. The intellectual movement of the Renaissance was Humanism, and Humanist philosophy became quite popular during this period in England. This movement which originated with the study of classical culture and a group of subjects known as the humanities is an approach to life based on humanity and reason; the classics contained the lessons needed to reach high level of morality. Humanism is a “human centred” philosophy which relies on reason and empirical evidence to oppose the supernatural dogmas of scripture. It is a naturalistic view encompassing atheism and agnosticism as a reaction to theistic claims (Kurtz, 1983:45). The universe does not need a divine power outside itself to have value. Humanists asserted first and above all “the genuine of man”. Their aim was to revive an ancient Greco-Roman ideal, the Uomo Universal; a man able to behave honourably
and virtuously thanks to his ability of thinking (Ibid.).

Humanism believes in human natural goodness, in the individuals’ endowment with moral value, and advocates their rights and freedom. Humanist advocates conceived society as based on cooperation and mutual respect. People are able to find solutions to their problems by their own means, gaining inspiration from the art and culture of the surrounding world, in the aim of providing quality of life and improvement (Olin, 1994: 34). Therefore, they wrote extensively in praise of the ability of the human mind, asserting that education alone could lead to such a status. In fact, education is a central element of the Humanist philosophy.

Humanist theory would shape the modern idea of the “self”. In fact, individualism or the discovery of man as an entity is the most important development and achievement of the Renaissance (17). Renaissance Humanists were concerned with the idea of “self-knowledge”; man started to become aware of his existence as an individual, no more as belonging to a certain social category or to a given group (18).

Renaissance Humanist reformers such as Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, optimistically assumed for themselves the ability to remedy the ills of the age, with acquaintance with the cultures of the past. They advocated that individuals’ thoughts should no longer be of abstract speculation or rely on absolute Christian thinking, but rather on observation and reasoning. In fact, the church became incapable of providing spiritual leadership and direction for the rapidly changing society and the newly growing merchant class. Feudal ties were broken and the new perspective emerged thanks to the Renaissance. They relied on education as a means of promoting one’s abilities, and, for the first time, spoke about women’s education. This constituted a great revolution in itself since never before women had been associated with any cognitive abilities, women were considered as inherently inferior to men.
Humanist reformers defied the might of the church and of the Empire for the sake of a personal, direct relation to God. In fact, people were troubled by the anxieties of being constantly under the burden of guilt, and the eminent punishment of a stern judge. Their conscience was exhausted and calloused by restlessness and fear. Church absoluteness extended beyond all human comprehension. It was bound to neither ethic, nor logic and was required to be unquestionably accepted, believed and obeyed. It was widely agreed that only “full submission accompanied by the active love of God wipes out sins” (Blayney, 1957: 135), though it offered no consolation for a soul in distress. For the sake of freedom of religious belief and freedom of conscience, Humanist thinkers sought to find out the real experience which alone could vouchsafe peace of mind (Ibid).

At first humanists’ talents were hired to reanimate the church and to create an image of the popes as enlightened modern rulers of the church; however collaboration proved impossible (Gresh, 2003: 54). Humanists involved their own views on theology, and criticized important church doctrines and institutions. Those who supported Plato’s philosophy seemed in danger of becoming pagans themselves (Ibid.). Humanist ideals were best expressed in the works of Desiderius Erasmus.

Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) was a Dutch humanist. Strongly critical of papal influence in secular life and church abuses, he was determined to reform it from within. He revolted against the European society and the absolutism of the monarchy. One must not be mistaken; Erasmus was a Christian humanist who wanted to reform the church and did not want it to be removed. He asserted that he was not attacking church institutions and that he had no enmity toward churchmen. His movement was for pure scholarship with the aim of reform. His work, In Praise of Folly (1509), is a satirical attack on the traditions of the European society, the Catholic Church and popular superstitions. For him, “The chief evil of the day was formalism, going through the motion of traditions, without
understanding their basis” (Olin, 1994: 43).

Erasmus advocated the doctrine of free will as opposed to that of predestination; Individuals are free agents able to take decisions without the constraint of religious determinism. As a substitute, he advocated Libertarianism, the freedom of choice. His *Gospel Preacher* (1516) is one of the most notable essays of the Reformation. He favoured flexibility and condemned over rigid belief systems. He bitterly attacked the abuses of power. His destructive criticisms were widely directed to the monarchs since the latter had the power in hand. One recurrent theme in this works was that: “while good kings are a theoretical possibility, tyrants are an ever present danger” (Olin, 1994: 57). His *Christian Prince* 1516, though it was dedicated to the sixteenth-years-old king Charles of Spain of whom he was councillor, the work was written in England and is therefore part of the English humanist literature. He exposes the “maleducation” of the future kings; “the process by which a young prince is corrupted and brought up to be a potential tyrant” (Ibid.).

The educational ideals that had been formulated in Italy had been taken up, augmented and spread by Erasmus. As an effective champion of learning on a large scale, his revolutionary views on education came to be adopted in countries of Northern Europe (Major, 1923:59). In her article *women’s history in transition*, Nathalie Zenon Davis asserts that Desiderius Erasmus countered the misogynist underpinnings of male thinking about women: “He was one of the most important champions of women’s rights in his century” (Davis 77).

He was one of the few men in his time to challenge the gender dichotomies of the western culture which linked “masculinity to rationality” and “feminity to illogic and sensuality” (Ibid). There is, further, no reference to be found in his writings to the physiological nonsense, so prevalent at the time, that women were inferior by nature to men (Olin, 1994: 56).

In fact, interest in the defence of womankind was stimulated by humanist educational
theory (Johnson, 1994: 24). Educational programs were vigorously set up at the turn of the sixteenth century, supported by Humanist scholars such as Roger Ascham or Thomas More. Their pedagogical manuals did not only offer a complete programme of humanistic education, but also an evocation of their ideals towards which this education should lead to (Ibid). Erasmus’ masterpiece was dedicated to his close friend and collaborator Sir Thomas More, as the following quotation suggests: “I thought it more pertinent to employ my thoughts in calling to remembrance several of those highly learned, as well as smartly ingenious friends, among whom you dear Sir were represented and the chief” (Erasmus, Holbein, 1876: 14).

Thomas More (1478-1535) was another great Humanist writer and political philosopher of the Reformation. Walking along the lines advocated by Erasmus and sharing the latter’s ideas; Thomas More also criticized the European society and defended women. His *Utopia* is considered among the masterpieces of the period. *Utopia* was a work Inspired by Plato’s *Republic*. More attacks and severely criticizes England as well as the neighbouring European countries. Then he turns to describe an ideal state submitted to democracy. He shows hints of the concept of the welfare state; the state and the monarchy should be a great deal more involved in the social concerns of its subjects, such as education and health. He attacks the Christian most cherished beliefs and practices, and advocates religious toleration. Polytheists and even atheist were tolerated.

**Thomas More’s Ideas on Women’s Education**


In her *The Invention of the Renaissance woman: The Challenge of Female*
Independence in the Literature and the Thought of Italy and England (1992), Pamela Joseph Benson argues that Thomas More was a “pro-feminist” educator (Joseph-Benson, 1992: 98). Though Thomas More did not publish his theories on education, The Instruction of a Christian Woman, by Juan Luis Vives have been assumed to speak for Sir Thomas More (Ibid.). His ideas on women’s education can also be found in his Latin epigram of choosing a wife, published in 1517, and in some of his correspondences. The Latin epigram was the only description of More’s female ideal available to the public in his life time in a published form. He gives an extraordinary prominence to the role of education in making good wives, and advocates women eloquence as opposed to Protestants’ virtue of silence (Olin, 1994:78).

Female eloquence, which was potentially so dangerous a skill that many Humanists argued for the need to prevent its acquisition, was presented entirely positively by Thomas More (Ibid.). The wife’s intellectual autonomy, which she gains through her education, and her willingness to use her wisdom to relive her husband’s cares are the essential elements of his idealized conception of domestic life. In his advisory texts to men on how to choose a wife, he makes the latter a product of Humanist imagination as overwhelmingly educated and perfectly eloquent. He asserts that women’s literary activity does not constitute a threat to domestic harmony, as argued by most of the contemporary Protestant advocates, but is rather an occasion of pride from the part of father and husband. Educated women must be seen as part of the society, not as a threat to social order (Olin, 1994:65).

Thomas More challenges the reader to radically revise the notion of the wife, as traditionally relegated to silence in marriage by Protestant reformers, and the idea that her speech was naturally bad. He asserts that silence does not mean obedience, but rather ignorance. The wife’s speech does not constitute rebellion against the husband’s rightful authority, but rather a sign of her ability of thinking and understanding. The wife described by Thomas More is free to speak her understanding based on her education.
In all the works wherein he deals with women’s education, Thomas More “pits the private world of learned women against society instead of praising her for conformity to society’s values” (Horvat, 2002 V. 13 N° 104). By “society’s values” it can be understood that More referred to the standards of the female ideal and the model wife described by Protestant reformers, so prevalent at the time. As Thomas More formulated his ideas about education, he put them into practice in his household, which consisted mainly of girls. He had great respect for women's intelligence and encouraged his children's tutor not to differentiate between them on the basis of sex. The results of his efforts with his daughters and wards were so impressive that many of his contemporaries who followed his example and educated their daughters cited his success as justification for their enterprise, and the names of the young women who were educated under his auspices became a fixed part of lists of famous women not only in England, but abroad also (Ibid.).

Thomas More praises education for providing women with spiritual and moral autonomy, that is, the ability to know what is right, rather than with the reinforcement of the outward form of chastity; indeed, he never speaks of chastity. Through More's system of education, a woman achieves a capacity for moral judgment and is freed from the bondage to male authority that characterizes woman's role in conventional marriage (Joseph-Benson, 1992:157). He, however, did not reject the marriage institution as he argues,

> Because of her education, the wife’s company provides for the husband not only a retreat from the cares of the world, as the company of any wife might, but a solution to those cares through the husband’s submission to her wise perspective on them.

(Olin, 1994: 98)

The ability to judge right from wrong frees women to be responsible for their own morals rather than committing them to male strictures on their conduct. Through education, women have been made morally responsible members of society. And although the result of this education will be virtue, Thomas More does not subject this virtue to public scrutiny, or
value it for its usefulness to society, as did utilitarian Protestants; he rather emphasized it to its value to the individual.

Thomas Elyot was a supporter of the humanist ideas concerning the education of women. Writing in support of learned women, he published *The Defence of Good Women* in 1540. In this writing he supported Thomas More and other humanist authors’ ideals of educated wives who would be able to provide intellectual companionship to their husbands and proper education to their children (Kenney, 1986: 67).

Roger Ascham was another Humanist that preached for the education of women. *The Schoolmaster* (1570) is Ascham’s best known book. The work presents an effective method of teaching Latin, but its larger concerns are with the psychology of learning, the education of the whole person, and the ideal moral and intellectual that education should modal. Roger Ascham was the educator of Queen Elizabeth I.

It comes obvious that, as already stated, Humanist educational theory stimulated reform in favour of women’s defence, through the praise of individual abilities. Beside the praise of the individual, it is the use of this term in a generic sense; without any reference to gender categories or any differentiation on the basis of sex, which would prove praiseworthy to the feminist cause. As Pauline Johnson explains in her *Feminism as Radical Humanism* (1994) that “feminism is humanism in a straightforward sense since the feminist message is the assertion that women must be considered first and foremost as human beings” (Johnson, 1994: 01).

**Protestant Reformers**

Humanist libertine spirit led to the Protestant reform. Church influence weakened and papal authority became increasingly challenged as critics, known as heresy, became more outspoken and numerous. Church’s authority and women’s attributed places were also being challenged by popular heretical reformers, the Protestants. The latter were inspired by
humanists’ scepticism that questioned past beliefs and traditions as they found a paved way to walk on. However, divergences emerged among Protestant reformers. In fact, Protestants criticism of Church institution proved to be harsher, and more radical. Whereas some reformers supported the humanist theory of the educated wife, others held the belief that submission, silence, and total obedience constituted the only virtues the wife, and therefore women, ought to acquire.

It needs to be stated, as a preface, that the origins of the English Reformation can be traced to the writings of John Wycliffe, an English theologian of the fourteenth century. Wycliffe is recognized as the father of Protestantism and as “the morning star” of Reformation (Maslin Hulme, 1915:76). He was the very first rebel against ecclesiastical influence in common life. His translated version of the bible, into vernacular English, was meant to make the Christian religion more intelligible by more people, and to put an end to intermediary between God and his worshipers.

In fact, the church had incurred a tremendous amount of bad feelings over the years and became widely criticized. Feelings against churchmen and church’s practices ran high. People got tired of the ties imposed by the Roman Catholic Church and its abuses such as selling indulgences to diminish the sentence a person were unquestionably to spend in hell, no matter how pious she or he were. Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century were also inspired by Martin Luther’s ideas, a German theologian who declared his intolerance to Roman church’s corruption and its abuses.

Though it gave voice to a popular desire to move away from religious ties, The English Reformation was more a matter of business than of faith. It was driven by financial and personal reasons. Over the course of his reign, King Henry VIII managed to turn the Crown’s bulging treasury into a gaping black-hole of debt. His life style and his desire for military glory had left him in a precarious financial position. He was in a sharp need of
money, and the church had lots of it. Furthermore, the king was in love with one of the queen’s ladies in waiting. Facing Pope’s refusal to grant him the right to divorce from Catherine of Aragon, his brother’s widow and present wife, Henry divorced from the church instead. Therefore, Reformation was more a personal and a political move than a doctrinal split.

Reformation was sealed through the Act of Supremacy (1534). King Henry assumed for himself the mantle of ecclesiastical authority. His purpose was to firmly establish himself as the official head of the Church of England, supplanting the power of the catholic pope in Rome, and firmly establishing the Anglican Church of England.

**Protestant Views on Education and Marriage**

Protestant spirit had dominated the outlook of Western civilization since the 1500s. It has been transfused, like lifeblood, into the economic, social and political life. It is then natural, that this revolution had strong influence on women. Dr Horvat asserts that the role of women changed significantly after the Protestant Reformation (Horvat, Maslin Hulme, 1915: 34). Protestant thinking had altered God’s attributed roles for his creatures, men and women. The balance of nature, as God intended it, was being challenged by Protestant reformers, rebelling against God’s will (Ibid.). Here are some of the roles of women, according to the founders of Protestantism.

**John Calvin**

In his *Is Education Necessary?* Dr Samuel Blumenfeld asserts that the root of education for the common person goes back to the Reformation, and especially, to John Calvin: “When it came to the concept of education for the common man, all roads led to Calvin” (Blumenfeld). Dr Loraine Boettner wrote in her *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*: “Wherever Calvinism has gone, it has carried the school with it and has given a powerful impulse to popular education. In fact its very existence is tied up with the
education of people” (Boettner,). Calvin promoted education for everyone. He emphasized the importance of education having moral relevance. Calvin also was insistent that it was the parents’ responsibility to educate their children. Therefore, the control of education should remain with the parents. For him, the purpose of education is to know God and to glorify him. In Geneva, Calvin promoted education for everyone, without any gender based discrimination, and therefore, he promoted education for women. His Academy was the model for many of the early colleges and universities established by the Puritans and their successors in America.

**Martin Luther’s Ideas on Marriage and Education**

As a controversial case, though advocating the same ideology, John Calvin and Martin Luther held opposite views on the issue of gender. In fact, while Calvin promoted education and eloquence, along with the Ciceronian ideal of “honst man”, Luther saw silence as female’s sole virtue, and marriage as her true role.

In her *Luther on Women: A Source Book* (2003), Susan C. Karant- Nunn asserts that Martin Luther proclaimed himself as an authority on marriage, for he asserted that before him “Not one of the fathers wrote anything notable or particularly good concerning the married state” (Luther, Karant-Nunn, 2003:58). Martin Luther was a fervent advocate of the institution of marriage. Marriage is God’s ordained order to the humankind since he created Eve from and for Adam, as a suitable companion for purposes of marriage. Marriage is human beings’ predestination; it is godly salubrious norm, as God said: “It is not good that men should be alone. I will make him a helper who will be close to him” (*A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage, 1519:166*, Wiesner-Hanks, 2003: 89).

The reformer saw marriage as a way of promoting women’s dignity inside home. He therefore, attacked the celibate life of the Catholic clergy and the nuns. He publicized his own marriage to show that a man could be a married, sexually active, and pious at the same time
(Horvat, 2002 v13 no104). Celibacy could only lead to social disorder, since marriage was among the only institutions where a chaste life could be maintained. The Catholic Church had given high respect to unmarried women, the virgins. Because of their complete dedication to God, religious women, like religious men were considered necessary. Protestantism with a single blow cut down the various mediators, to whom the church and its adepts had recourse, including saints and priests. By closing convents, the religious vocation was no more of high status (Ibid.). Protestant utilitarianism dealt with everything in terms of usefulness, and all intermediaries were no more necessary. Therefore, marriage became women’s only social opportunity. The rejection of the celibate ideal of the Middle Ages was a great revolution. Luther literally transferred the praises and esteem that Christians had heaped upon the celibate monks and nuns, to marriage and the home (Wiesner-Hanks, 2003: 91).

Marriage was submitted to hierarchy. A woman, as the Bible said, should be governed by a man and no longer had any right to any vocation but marriage. She should be bound to the domestic sphere, as the following quotation shows: “Their (women’s) very physique is a sign from the creator that they ought to be domestic; they have narrow shoulders and large hips” (Luther, Wiesner-Hanks, and 2003: 59).

The husband went out to engage in activities that would enable him to earn his dependants’ livelihood, while he delegated the domestic administration to his wife. Hierarchical structure of marriage stipulated full and absolute obedience of the wife to her husband, as both the Old and the New Testaments abound with examples of positive female behaviour, according to God’s commend to female believers (Karant-Nunn, 2003:64). Female obedience, as it had to be total, was ungoverned by any rules, since intermediary obedience such as the one owed to the Christ or to the priests was excluded by Protestantism. In fact, one of the rudiments of Protestantism was the absence of any intermediary between God and the worshiper (Maslin Hulme, 1915: 98). Therefore, as the Protestants sought a new point of
authority, apart from that of God and as a substitute to that of the intermediaries, they found it in an exaggerated authority of the husband and the father (Karant-Nunn, 2003:88). Obedience was seen as an essential virtue for women. Protestant fundamentalists stressed a kind of unthinking obedience, that when Sarah asked Abraham to expel Hagar, Protestant scholars saw that even this limited challenge to male authority, was not to serve as a model for other women (Ibid.). Marriage was primarily meant for procreation; to ensure the propagation of the human race, and of the species according to God’s plans for reproduction: “A Christian body must generate, multiply, man must unite with woman and woman with man” (Luther, Krant-Nunn, 2003: 76). In fact, marriage is the only way to get children, through the satisfaction of human sexual drive, since only companionship and offspring are sought. All other forms of desire and lust are evil (Stubbes, 1583), and are therefore contrary to God’s commend. Sex was not to be enjoyed. Wife and husband are complementary, men handling the concerns of the public arena, and wives adhering to the home. Marriage was the only way to reach what Luther called “bridal-love”; the feeling that wife and husband exclusively share (Ibid.). The latter would sustain the couple through the tribulations of life.

Protestantism permitted divorce and re-marriage on some well defined grounds, such as adultery, abandonment or impotence. This was a revolution; never before had women been allowed to divorce abusive husbands. But this supposedly protection from abuse created a new category of social marginal, divorced women. The latter suffered hardships; they had no way to earn a living, they had no husbands to be taken care of, and no social vocation. Protestant patriarchal power conflicted with protestant principle of equality. Whereas, Protestant reformers agreed on the attribution of the wife to the private sphere, some openly advocated women’s right to education. Though the latter was meant to glorify the Lord, it would inevitably awake women’s self-awareness of their rights, and would result in their demand to be entitled to the same rights as men. Therefore, while the first movement of the
Protestant revolution would uphold a strict family structure with an exaggerated authority given to the father and the husband, the seeds of the revolt would eventually produce a different kind of family structure (Horvat, 2002, V 13 no 104). It would be the feminist revolution that would demand absolute equality not only in matters of religion and private interpretation, but in every social institution including marriage.

Reflection of the Spirit of the Time in Literature

As already stated, the poetic revolution was the second stage of English humanism, and it was led by the outstanding literary figures of the time. Deviating from the religious play and the morality of the late Middle Ages, English playwrights explored new horizons. Whereas the works of Edmund Spencer and Philip Sidney well defined the spirit of the time, innovations were being introduced by William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlow. Their works are considered as striking examples of the close relation of literature to history.

In the aim of creating a great national literature for England, equal to the classic epic poems of Virgil and Homer, famous authors such as Edmund Spencer and Philip Sidney, produced some of the greatest masterpieces of the English, and the world’s, literature.

Prominent Elizabethan writers wrote much like the model of Greek and Roman predecessors such as Virgil or Petrarch, mainly on themes of classical mythology. Edmund Spencer (1552-1599) was one of the greatest poets of the Elizabethan period. His *The Faerie Queen* (1590-1596), is celebrated as one of the greatest and most important works of the English verse, written in the historical and cultural context of Elizabethan England and the Protestant Reformation. Being referred to as a highly persuasive representation of Queen Elizabeth I, the work is an allegorical epic poem, much in the tradition of the Greek poets like Virgil. Critics agree to say that it is the most extensive and eloquent defence of a female monarch to be written in the Renaissance (Joseph-Benson, 2003:251). The work discusses the religious conflicts and national politics. Spencer lived in post-Reformation England which
had recently replaced Roman Catholicism by Protestant Anglicanism. Religious protest was therefore, part of Spencer’s life. It is understood to be both a religious and political allegory concerning the domestic status of Elizabethan England (Ibid.). “Spencer illustrated, in his verse the affinity between the authorship of the time and the public life of the nation” (W Hint, 1900: 40).

Inspired by Aristotle’s conception of human virtues, the work celebrates chastity, friendship, and justice. Other prominent figures include Philip Sidney, Walter Raleigh and William Bird. Humanism in the cultural life of the sixteenth century is almost nowhere as visible as in the field of drama. Being two of the most representative playwrights of their time, William Shakespeare’s and Christopher Marlow’s views on society were incorporated into their plays, as these views were so much part of their life and world.

Renaissance culture and especially literature had appeared both as a standard and an issue of debate among known poets when it comes to matters and relations with women. Shakespeare is one of the most famous Elizabethans who wrote intensively on love and women. He used the beliefs expressed by Castiglione and placed them into his works.

Castiglione’s book of the courtier (1528) is at a high point of humanistic thought and antiquarian interest in Renaissance Italy. The work did not only describe a perfect courtier, he also moulded his female equivalent. He held high view of female mental ability which was to be balanced by their femininity. His ideal woman is someone highly educated, graceful, feminine, able, witty and charming, especially the kind of heroines Shakespeare created in his plays. The court lady was described in a way similar to that of the courtier; her areas of knowledge were to be very similar to his. She has the same virtues of mind as he, and her education is symmetrical with his. He saw culture as an accomplishment for noblewomen and men alike, used to develop the self (Kelly-Gadol, 1977:148). The writer spent a great deal of his book defending women and attacking the hypocrisy of men. His work was a valiant
attempt to defend women and eliminate their inferiority.

**Women’s Conditions in Renaissance/ Elizabethan England: The Obverse Side of the Picture**

On reading the above summary of the humanists’ and reformers’ call for the education of women, one might wrongly imagine that Elizabethan and Jacobean England was indeed “a paradise for women (Rye B. William, 1865”). However, an investigation of another type of literature, comprising sermons, conduct books, homilies, and catechisms, suggests that not all was fine for women in Albion at the time. In this literature, the conception of the ideal woman was a silent, chaste, virtuous woman, whose sole function would be to provide a peaceful home for her family, and submit to the whims of her husband. Women were to be “delicate creatures innocent of sexual desire by both nature and duty chaste” (Harrison, Dereseiwicz, 2007: 57). Women were brought up to become perfect householders and child bearers. Tudor women took great pride in being mothers. The results of this stereotypical depiction of women, was the dominance of this preconceived idea that would prevail during the coming decades.

Renaissance writers who wanted to attack women found ample precedent in classical antiquity. Greek mythology reveals several elements of hostility towards women. Let’s take the example of misogynist Greek poet Hesiod in his work *Pandora*. The latter sees women as created to give men troubles and suffering, women seem to personify the quintessence of evil.

Branded as an ideologue of sexism and patriarchy, Aristotle, too, asserted the inferiority of women. His works offered the most offensive and misogynist attack on women. Biologically women were infertile, unable to procreate without men’s help. Women are more emotional than men, and this accounts for their irrationality. At the social level, he described them as “apolitical beings” belonging solely to the private domain (Stone, 1990:71). The relation between husband and wife was by nature that of superior to inferior, or ruler to the ruled.
The Romans were sexist too; Juvenal’s *Sixth Satire* constitutes a full scale attack on women. The work is a wide-ranging attack on marriage, as the following extracts may suggest: “Posthumous, are you really taking a wife? You used to be sane enough!!, what fury got into you? [...] why endure such bitch tyranny”. Wives are depicted as vulgar, lying, shameless, vicious oppressors.

Women’s exclusion from the public sphere and confinement to the home was supported by theology. The Bible provides an important source for both women attackers and defenders, as it contains both examples of wicked and virtuous women. However, most of the Christian writings about women reflected the anti-feminine bias of the biblical story of Eve (Joseph-Benson, 1992:56). Single women were considered as a source of temptation; women not bound by matrimony offer an occasion to sin. Women were accused of infidelity and of inciting males’ lust.

Women were considered as naturally inferior to men. They were considered as the weaker sex both in terms of physical strength and emotions. Branded as irrational, they were considered as being incapable of rational thinking, and as being incapable of possessing this capacity, and therefore, in need of the constant presence of a male protector.

It was an age in which women’s education caused deep anxieties, and it revolved exclusively around household management. Women’s education was to combine strict formation on Christian principles and rigorous training in domestic skills. All the professions were closed to them, except those gender discriminated jobs such as cooks or maids. It happened that if a craftsman died his widow could carry on his work, but did this constitute a sign of progress whatsoever?

Marriage was the only social opportunity, especially after the reformation and the closing of monasteries. There were not many avenues open to single women, it is not surprising therefore, that most women married. Marriage was arranged and divorce did not
exist; the contract lasted as long as the couple lived. Marriage was God’s ordained order, its links were so strong that in the New Testament the relationship between the Christ and the Church was described in the vocabulary of married persons. People married for purely domestic purposes; a man had to find a wife and she had to be taken care of. Spinsters suffered hardships since they had to work to support themselves. Being considered as males’ inferior did not mean idleness. Women had to perform hard manual work to support their husbands in farms. They had to milk the cows, sell the goods in the markets, perform household tasks, and take care of the children as well.

So the protestant-humanist gender rhetoric against the Catholic counter-reformers in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods strangely resembles the “Kitchen debate” between the United States and Russia in the twentieth century when the former wanted to show the superiority of its civilization by the comfortableness of American housewives in modernized kitchens. Some quotations from the anti-female satire of the time are in order at this point to show the observe side of the male portrayal of British women. For example, in Edward Gosnyhill’s satirical “rectification” of those lines of the Genesis which speak about the creation of Eve out of Adam’s rib: “For a dog ran away with the rib and ate it, forcing God to make woman out of the dog’s rib. This is why the woman, at her husband doth bark and bawl, as doth the cur, for nought al. (1985: 149)"

Gosnylls tells his contemporaries that the ideal woman is a silent one. It is the one who listens rather the one who “barks” like “cur” for nothing. In nearly similar terms, Thomas Becon urges women to the same observe of chastity, obedience and silence when he catechises in his Workes (1564) that they must obey “with the head, eies, tong, lippes, hands, feete, the shoulders, or with any other parts of the body. (Anthologized in Newman Karen, 1991:149)” Nearly thirty years later, Henry Smith, another British catechist, in his A Preparative to Marriage (1591), separates the chaste woman from the unchaste woman by
saying that “the ornament of a woman is silence [because] the open mouth hath much uncleanness. (Ibid., p.149)” The major idea that emerges from the above quotes is that woman is a potentially polluting agent who needs man’s moral strictures to keep her chaste both in the home and outside of the home. So on the whole, Kathleene Davies is to the point when she qualifies the ideal image of the Elizabethan and Jacobean woman constructed by other writers on the basis of the documents I have already discussed above. In this respect, she claims that

the purposes of marriage, [...] the relationship between husband and wife in all its behavioural aspects – choice of partner, dominance of husband, mutual affection and respect, sexual activity and sharing of work, indicate that Puritan Conduct books do not show any change to domesticity and affection as ideals of marriage. There was nothing new in such ideals. (1981: 78)

The humanist literature also makes too much of the case of the necessity for noble women to have an education that one is prone to construct the image of an “open” Elizabethan and Jacobean society. But apart from what I have already noted about the non-vocational nature of this education, the humanists contradicted themselves in the promotion of the ideal of an eloquent and learned wife while condemning her to be a mere ventriloquist or reproducer of man’s ideas. Women of eloquence who do not conform to the ideal of the obedient wife and daughter, as Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew shows, are dismissed as hybrid monstrosities with no value in the matrimonial market. In these social conditions, women could not fully invest their little share of humanist learning in expressing their sentiments and thoughts. In the light of the recent excavation of the literature written by women, I qualify without denying the truth of the following description of the condition of women in Shakespeare’s England made by Virginia Woolf:

If a woman in Shakespeare’s day had had Shakespeare’s genius... any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at.[...] Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. (1996: 74-75)

Admittedly, Woolf was not to the point when she assumes that there were no British women
playwrights or authors in the time of Shakespeare. However, I would argue that if she was obliged to conjure up a sister for Shakespeare whom she called Judith, it is because the so-called humanists in Shakespeare’s age like King James I managed to censure the woman’s voice and authorship to such extent that literary historians today are obliged to excavate those female authors who were able to survive the literary witch hunt.

In conclusion, I can say that if humanism and the Reformation launched the discussion about the nature of women, they did not reshuffle the relations of gender domination. Surely, the “New woman” of whom literary historians of the Tudor and Jacobean periods had made a case really existed because of the male gender anxieties expressed in the literature of the time. However, due to the restricted number of the women and their noble status, the Tudor and Jacobean “feminine mystique” managed to outlive the short-lived of their feminist protest even during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Hopefully, this survey about the debate about the nature of women in these two periods will help in the analysis of Shakespeare’s stand in the public debate stirred by the humanist polemicists and protestant reforms that will be object of the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO
Shakespeare, Patriarchal Bard or Feminist Sympathiser?

Introduction

Some critics argue that Macbeth’s tragic fall is due to his inherently evil nature while others take the contrary stand contending that it is caused by external female evil influences. Write a literary essay of about 25 lines taking sides for one point of view and bringing evidence from Shakespeare’s play to support your claim.

The above quote represents one of the typical questions that Algerian college students of English literature are usually dished out today as issues to argue about in examination literature papers. I helped myself to the same fare when I was studying at Algiers University Department of English some 25 years ago. At the time, the number of female and male students attending English courses was more or less the same. Since then, the democratisation of education, urbanisation, and the ambition of Algerian women to go out of home and look for academic achievement have led to a dramatic change in the profile of the student population in our universities, with female students standing nowadays at approximately 80 percent in Departments of English across the country. In the meantime, feminist theory has carved a significant place in literary studies which have been dominated until recently by male critics interested in the maintenance of the gender status quo. And yet, when we look at the classroom or lecture hall discourse about Shakespeare in Algeria, we realise that no change of perspective whatsoever has occurred. Shakespeare is still read with masculine lenses magnifying those plays of his, plays like *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, whose male title heroes are offered for discussion to a predominantly female student population.

As a result of the militant feminist movements in the West in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s feminist critics, both male and female, have turned their attention to William Shakespeare’s stand towards the patriarchal system of his time, generating a tremendous volume of literary studies. However, though a critical consensus has emerged about the importance and recurrence of the theme of patriarchy in Shakespeare’s plays over these last
four decades, there is as yet no similar critical agreement as to his ideological position towards gender relations. Indeed, critics have agreed to differ, giving rise to a wide spectrum of contradictory opinions, more or less strongly expressed and defended. On the credit side of the spectrum, there are those critics like Marilyn French and Juliet Dusinberre who claim that Shakespeare “anticipated the women’s movement by four hundred years,” taking sides for gender equality in a “world which declares them unequal (309).” On the debit side, we find other fellow critics like Kathleen McLusie (1985), who argues that in spite of claims to the contrary, Shakespeare remains “The patriarchal Bard” par excellence.

A review of the recent literature shows that “feminist criticism of Shakespeare is still too new to have established any orthodoxies (Lenz et al.) So, obviously, Shakespeare’s positioning towards gender relations is too complex to admit of a ready-made critical consensus. In what follows I shall steer a middle-of-the road course in this feminist criticism by arguing that Shakespeare holds an ambivalent attitude towards unequal power relations between women and men, an ambivalence largely dependent on whether the reader looks at the thematic or formal aspects of his plays. On the one hand, I agree with those critics who claim that Shakespeare’s drama offers possibilities for resistance to the persistent patriarchal system that makes of him our feminist contemporary. But to locate the site of resistance to and negotiation with masculine power, the reader has to probe into the ideology of form in his work. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, artistic form in Shakespeare’s drama is the feminist message. On the other hand, I also agree with those critics who argue that Shakespeare has not fully managed to escape the hold of patriarchy. This shows particularly strongly at the surface level of themes or contents of the plays, the titles of which tend to foreground and give precedence to male characters.

To the best of my knowledge, how Shakespeare uses form to express thematic concerns has been largely overlooked in feminist criticism. Indeed, many critics (Bamber
Linda, have already pointed out the fluctuation in Shakespeare’s relation to the patriarchal system as the reader moves from his tragedies to his comedies. With the comic genre, these critics tell us, the Stratford-upon-Avon bard gives representations of women who are able to challenge the patriarchal structures imposed upon them. To quote Bamber’s words, in Shakespeare the self (man) is privileged in tragedy, the Other (woman) in comedy (p.6). This claim is confirmed by recent critics. Though I agree with such divergence in gender perspectives across generic lines, I would maintain that if Shakespeare gives a more positive picture of women in comedy, it is because comedy as a genre has its roots in popular festive forms that it absorbs alongside the classical forms of literature. I would also maintain that as heir to these festive popular forms Shakespeare does not fully abrogate them when he moves to the writing of tragedy even if they are not as salient in the tragedies as in the comedies. Looking at the stand Shakespeare takes in terms of gender relations uniquely through generic lenses responds more to the critics’ need to compare, categorise and classify. Such contemporary generic reading does not certainly comply with the expectations of Elizabethan and Jacobean readership and audiences, for whom genres were not as tightly separated as Aristotle would have made them.

One of my working hypotheses in the following paper, therefore, is that Shakespeare the feminist shows up more in the formal or textual aspects than in the overt contents of his plays. In other terms, the thematic aspects of the plays have their ideological bearings in the patriarchal system of the time that Shakespeare plays up in order to tune up ideologically with the theatre-goers’ patriarchal expectations the better to circulate his plays. Hurting patriarchal sympathies across gender lines may put his career at risk. In this case, the contents are employed as a sugar-coating technique or strategy for making the audience swallow the bitter pill of feminist unsaid (non-dit in French)) that we find in-between the lines of his plays. Quite aside for managing audience responses, this ambivalent attitude can find an answer in
the fact that in spite of the timelessness and universal dimension of his drama, Shakespeare remains a man of his time. If one has to characterise this time, one can say that it is a time of transition from the medieval period to the Renaissance or the pre-modern. As such, Shakespeare cannot escape contradictions no matter the degree of his commitment to womanhood. In this position as a transitional dramatist, his feminist commitments are less likely to surface in the contents or themes than to be buried and disguised in the interstices of form to pass both his own censorship and that of his audience.

A few words about what we mean by patriarchy and feminism with reference to Shakespeare are in order before moving to the discussion part of this chapter. We take patriarchy to refer to that social system ruled in the name of a father figure. This system sets significant differences between men and women to the advantage of the former in their various social relationships and roles as husbands to wives, fathers to daughters, brothers to sisters, etc. The unequal power relations obtaining between men and women are regarded as belonging to nature rather than culture. Furthermore, the social system of patriarchy is propped by a discourse with a bundle of statements dictating what is considered as appropriate verbal and physical behaviour for women in different social spaces. Patriarchy poses no problem when it is applied with reference to Shakespeare since, as Engels puts it, it is the oldest system of domination that men has ever invented.

However, the matter is quite different when feminism is brought to bear on the Bard of Avon. Indeed, speaking of feminism in the narrow sense of the word as an ideology of women’s liberation is a flagrant misnomer and anachronism in the case of Shakespeare. According to Josephine Donovan (1992), the gender politics of feminism was born in the Enlightenment period when scientific discoveries and political revolutions caused the final demise of the medieval religious order. The disappearance of the medieval religious order enabled the emergence of a liberal public space for the discussion of political, economic and
social affairs until then largely regulated by divine decrees. Liberal thought does not put an end to misogyny and sexism because the same liberal thinkers considered women as inferior and belonging to the domestic sphere wherein liberal ideas of freedom do not apply. However, this paradoxical rearguard reaction for the maintenance of the patriarchal system has not barred some women from the employment of liberal ideas in defence of women’s rights. The case of Mary Astell (1700) is quite illustrative in this regard. Astell can be regarded as a proto-feminist who took hold of John Locke’s justification of the 1688 Glorious Revolution against political tyranny in his civil treaties on government to denounce in similar terms the domestic tyranny of husbands and brothers inside English homes.

So Shakespeare is not a feminist in the sense that he wrote his plays with a political agenda about gender relations in mind as contemporary feminists like Juliet Dusinberre (1999) would do today. Yet, the fact that feminism, as we understand it today, had not yet emerged in the time of Shakespeare does not mean that he does not deserve that title if we stretch the term, as O. Banks does, to include “any groups that have tried to change the position of women, or ideas about women” (1981: 3). In this case, we discover a face for Shakespeare that qualifies him as a feminist sympathiser without being a died-in-the-wool ideologue of contemporary radical feminism. I shall try to demonstrate Shakespeare’s feminist commitment with reference principally to the three tragedies, Macbeth, Hamlet and Othello, and three comedies Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure and The Taming of the Shrew. The choice of these plays is not fortuitous. In the first place, these plays are the ones that are mostly studied in feminist criticism. The critics’ interest in these plays is due not only to the strong presence of the dialectic of patriarchy and feminism in them, but also to the high number of cinematographic adaptations of the six plays, adaptations that have drawn feminist critics’ attention to the original texts. The choice is also justifiable on the ground that reading three representative tragedies against three equally representative comedies will help illustrate
the claim that Shakespeare deploys artistic techniques and forms, though at a lesser extent in
the tragedies than in the comedies, to express feminist concerns that cannot be voiced at the
surface level of thematic contents.

To explore the issue at hand, I shall adopt a historicist and cultural materialist
perspective. I make my own Paul Hamilton’s following definition of historicism: “Historicism
is a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the
interpretation of texts of all kinds (2003: 2).” Historicist criticism as defined by Hamilton
emphasises the importance of contextual reading. It assumes that the meaning or meanings of
texts can be restored if and only if the enabling conditions of their circulation, conditions
reflecting both the interests and bias of the period in which they were produced, are taken into
account. As far as historicists are concerned, reading texts without due care to their contexts, a
critical practice propounded by the New Critics, is simply a big critical fallacy. Since texts,
for historicists, are supposed to represent, in the double sense of both reflecting a socio-
cultural reality and defending specific interests, historicism adopts a suspicious attitude
towards both the stories that the past tells about itself and the versions of the past that the
present restored from them. It follows that historicists are doubly careful about the possible
ideological bias of the original texts and the critical/historicist versions elaborated from them.

The above historicist approach will be supplemented by an appeal to cultural
materialism. The cultural materialist perspective can be justified as follows. For one thing,
according to Hamilton, the British brand of the “historicism of the present” as practised by
Jonathan Dolimore, Alan Sinfield, Peter Stallybrass, and the late Allen White owes as much
to Greenblatt’s New Historicism as to Raymond Williams’s cultural materialism. The
cultural materialist stance that the British “historicists of the present,” a phrase that Hamilton
uses to refer to New Historicism, accord to criticism stems from a strong British socialist
tradition and a belief that history is not “literature’s background but an extension of the same
plane of action on which literature makes sense” (p.141). In proclaiming the cultural activism of literature, historicists depart from American historicists’ political ambivalence while sharing with them the view of the Renaissance and Romantic periods as preferred fields of historicist research. Finally, I shall prop up the historicist and cultural materialist approaches by Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of grotesque realism as developed in his seminal book *Rabelais and his World*. As it might have already been implied, Bakhtin’s critical categories evolved out of the analysis of the deployment of popular festive forms in Shakespeare’s contemporary fellow French writer are suitable for the exploration of the same forms in the English playwright’s drama. Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque literature as much as historicism and cultural materialism belong to what Keith Booker (1997: 6) calls “historical poetics.”

The first play in our corpus is *Othello*. The problem with this drama is that it is often read or rather misread as a site of a tragic cross-racial encounter of a Moor by the name of Othello and Desdemona a noble Venetian white woman. Of course, because of the context of reading, racial rather than gender belonging determines to a large extent the students’ reaction to the final scenes when Othello decides to smother his wife suspected of the crime of adultery with Cassio his lieutenant. It has to be reminded here that adultery in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods is punishable in a virtually similar way as in seventh-century Arabia by being pilloried in public (Fletcher Antony and Stevenson John eds, 1985). It is so even in our students’ Mediterranean honour and shame culture which finds nothing shocking in a husband taking the life of a wife for a supposed crime of adultery especially when the wronged man is not one of their own Bourdieu Pierre (1965) Tillon Germaine (1966), Khodja Souad (1991). The problem in such a response is that Othello himself makes out a small case for his racial belonging at the time of the execution of his wife concerned as he is with the patriarchal vindication of murder. To Othello, Desdemona must die or “else she’ll betray more men.” It is not as a Moor that he speaks but as a custodian of patriarchy mindful not only about his
honour but the honour of his patriarchal species as a whole. It is only when he discovers that
he has been wrongly induced to murder by Iago that he comes back to blame his own race for
the murder of his love, which of course, counts for little in comparison with the injured
honour of his tribesmen.

**Feminist Concerns in Shakespeare’s Artistic Forms: the Case of Othello**

We have said earlier that Shakespeare best expresses his feminist concern through the
artistic form. *Othello* provides a pertinent illustration of this point. In Elizabethan and
Jacobean periods, many social historians remind us, compare marriage or matrimony to
adventure. It is this metaphor of romantic adventure that Shakespeare takes hold of in
propping up his plot. The first act of the play, it has to be recalled, closes off with the
embarkation of Othello at the head of the Venetian army to intercept the Turkish forces on
their way to Cyprus, a Venetian outpost. The reference to 1571 Lepanto’s battle between the
Ottomans and the Christian coalition is clear. It is grudgingly agreed by Othello that
Desdemona follows up behind him in Cassio’s company. Though the newly wed manage to
weather out the storm that providentially wrecks the Ottoman fleet (a wink to the failure of
the Spanish Armada in 1588 with the association of Catholics with Turks) they have not yet
secured success for their amorous adventure. Indeed, the wrecking of the Turkish
fleet/Spanish Armada has displaced the political conflict that might have given epic
proportions to Othello into a domestic conflict as soon as the couple lands safely in Cyprus
with Othello as governor.

With the establishment in Cyprus, a Venetian military outpost, the matrimonial
adventure takes on a risky turn. Shakespeare pulls up a thread that he has temporarily dropped
out in the first act, which consists of the test of whether the amorous marriage will survive the
patriarchal obstacle or not. It has to be noted that if the marriage has taken place, it is because
Desdemona has taken a strong stand against patriarchy by refusing to comply with her
father’s wish to marry within her own so-to-speak respectable Venetian tribe. Social historians like Tillion G. (1966: 102) that the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean, North and South were known for the practice of endogamy that Shakespeare ascribes to Venice. However, we see that in spite of the charivari, or ritual of popular protest triggered against her free choice of partner and her breach of the endogamous system of marriage, Desdemona has remained inflexible in her decision. Her resistance to patriarchy, all in the name of love that patriarchs hypocritically celebrate, and her indifference “to incur a general mock (I, iii)” makes Desdemona a real feminist heroine ready to take a perilous adventure with the man she loves. The problem is that patriarchy has many faces and wears many disguises. Using a double technique for characterisation, Ovidianism and Platonism, Shakespeare shows how Othello, listening to Iago’s patriarchal reasoning about women’s “fickle” and “evil” nature, metamorphoses in the course of the conjugal adventure into a foaming were-wolf, killer-husband whereas Desdemona remains constant to her first love.

Indeed, we are entitled to claim on the basis of textual evidence that it is in the heroine’s constant and unconditional love set against man’s love metamorphosis into lust and other unhealthy passions that Shakespeare demonstrates his commitment to women of his age unjustly dismissed by the patriarchal order as being incapable of this noble sentiment. Love for patriarchs, Shakespeare tells us in this play, is a shallow and sham sentiment. Brabantio’s love for his daughter is a case in point. At the beginning before he learns that his daughter has eloped with Othello with her own consent, Brabantio is portrayed as a loving father with a “protective affection for A maiden never bold/ So still and quiet, that her motion/ Blush’d at herself “(I, iii, 94-96), but as he realises that the elopement from the patriarchal system that he represents is voluntary he declares his revulsion against her daughter by saying “I had rather to adopt a child than get it (I, iii, 191).” He even warns Othello that she will betray him just as she has already cheated on him. The other case of man’s changing love is that of Othello’s
enemy Iago hurt by the Moor’s decision to promote Cassio over him. We catch him at one moment of self-revelation avowing just before he hatches his revenge plot saying to himself “Now do I love her too (II, I, 286).” At another moment when his machinations for revenge are well under way, he declares his admiration for our heroine’s “blest condition (III, i, 47.” However, Iago’s love for a woman weighs little in the masculine world and honour culture of man because he easily swaps his revealed loving reflection over Desdemona for those of lust in order to assuage his revenge over his enemy.

Contrary to man’s easily perverted love, women’s love remains more or less healthy throughout the play. Shakespeare’s commitment to women in this play goes so far as to include sympathy for prostitutes, who surely win their bread with their bodies, but retain an admirable integrity of mind when it comes to their love for their men. So, is the case of Bianca, who though a prostitute, is deeply in love with Cassio. Quite apart from this integrity of women’s mind, Shakespeare suggests, through the friendship that Desdemona entertains with Cassio, that women’s love has that Platonic touch to it which strongly distinguishes it from that of men. Ironically, this Platonic love is the flaw that causes the tragic failure of Desdemona’s amorous adventure in the patriarchal world of the Jacobean period. In spite of her elevation after her death to sainthood by the patriarchal system that she has defied, Desdemona remains ultimately a victim of that same system. If Desdemona falls as a result of conjugal violence, it is because she has not obeyed to the catechisms of the time which advises women to obey the male “with the head, eies, tong, lippes, hands, feete, the shoulders, or with any other parts of the body” (Beacon Thomas, quoted in Newman Karen, 1991: 149). It is because Desdemona has not conformed her gestures, facial expressions, and verbal behaviour according to the patriarchal norms of her time when she is in Cassio’s company. This makes her look like an adulterous wife in the eyes of a husband all prone to believe in the patriarchal principles when Iago asks himself to observe her gestures during her friendly
encounters with his lieutenant. To all evidence, in the feminist figure of Desdemona, Shakespeare shows us what today social historians call the “new woman” of the Tudor and Jacobean periods in grip with patriarchs of different shades whose unhealthy sexual anxieties at her liberation have led to assassination that they whitewash with an iconic beatification.

**Hamlet and Macbeth: Cases of Shakespeare’s Feminist Face**

This feminist face of Shakespeare also shows in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, two other tragedies included in the Algerian University curriculum. As usual, the former is mostly studied from a male perspective even though it comprises a cultural element very close to the reality of widowed women in Algeria. A brief summary of the play will make this parallel clear. The drama represents the incurable grief of a son-prince at his father's death. His mother Gertrude’s quick remarriage with his uncle Claudius wakes up in him a sense of betrayal heightened at his ghost father’s intimation that his death is after all a fratricide as well as a regicide. While the ghost father seems to be as shocked as his son at the quick remarriage of her ex-queen whom he qualifies as a lustful and “pernicious woman,” he advises his son to take revenge on the uncle and spare the mother by “letting her to heaven.” Of course, Hamlet has no solid evidence that his father’s death is a regicide and fratricide. So legally speaking, he has to hold from revenge until he gathers strong evidence that can make a good case before the jury of his conscience and that of the audience. Hamlet dominates so prominently the play that readers are likely to espouse his masculine views. As in *Othello*, it is the observation of the Queen’s behaviour, this time at the instigation of the paternal ghost that eventually leads Hamlet to declare her guilty of an adulterous relationship and a possible complicity with the “usurper king” in the father’s murder. On the basis of flimsy evidence thus collected, the grieved son finally takes action against the kingly couple during which he himself receives a deadly blow.
What has to be observed is that though Shakespeare concentrates on Hamlet’s misogynistic reflections, he has left a lot unsaid that we can read between the lines. Indeed, Hamlet phantasmagorical ravings are unstitched through the brief but very important interventions of Gertrude in the play. Telling or narrative predominates over showing in the unfolding of the drama. At no moment does the reader see all the guilty behaviour, guilty according to patriarchal tenets that Hamlet adduces to his mother. On the contrary, Shakespeare shows us a loving mother and wife as if to undermine what seems to be Hamlet’s tell-tales. So at her first appearance, we see her trying to persuade her son to put an end to his grief and to enjoy his life. When he has decided to leave for England, she pleads with him to stay with her (I.II, 118-119). Once there, she does not fail to direct Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “visit / My much changed son (II, ii.).” Mother’s love has carried her to such an extent that we also see her pleading the case of her son at his murder of Polonius in a fit of madness. When all is considered, therefore, the sole grievance held against her (a grievance if seen from a patriarchal perspective) is that she has taken into account her desire and decided “too quickly” not to die as a widow by marrying Old Hamlet’s brother. It is in Gertrude’s breach of this patriarchal convention that Hamlet displays his commitment to feminist principle that women have a similar sexual desire as men. Following this desire is a way of affirming their “sexual self”.

Shakespeare’s feminist face will come out prominently if his play is compared with The Duchess of Malfi (1623), a play with more or less a similar theme, by his contemporary John Fletcher. In this play too, the title character is a widow who, against all advice by her brothers Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal, falls in love and marries secretly with her steward Antonio giving birth to three children. At the discovery of her secret, the two brothers first interned her and then murdered her for having flouted the patriarchal order. Contrary to the Duchess who affirms herself only at the end when she is garrotted, Gertrude does not hide her
marriage and her love for her new husband. From the start, she takes it for granted that her “quick” remarriage is as natural as that of widowers. When her son turned- surrogate-patriarch has begun throwing innuendoes about her adultery she silences him by saying “What have I done, that dar’st wag they tongue/ In noise so rude against me (III, iv, 39-40)” Though quite loving, the Queen loses no opportunity to remind both her husband-king and her son-Prince that she has her place in the chess-board of life, and that she is not ready to accept false moves from them.

All in all, through the gender distribution of the techniques of telling and showing, Shakespeare deflates or explodes the patriarchal afflatus and juridical scaffolding that the revengeful son erects in condemnation of his mother. The preposterous and abstract charges that Hamlet narrates against his loving mother do not resist to the concrete reality of the latter’s behaviour in the ten out of 20 scenes where she makes a brief appearance. If Hamlet has resorted to the dramatic uncovering of his mother’s adultery by having a play about regicide staged in the court to see how the mother will react, Shakespeare stages his as a court of appeal that contradicts and refutes the accusations presented by the actor prosecutor. In this court of appeal, Shakespeare acts as a feminist defendant of Gertrude that he represents to us as a victim of a gratuitous murder committed by a surrogate patriarch, who is no one else but her son.

*Hamlet* is not the only play where Shakespeare debunks the patriarchal myth of female moral monstrosity through the investment of feminist concerns in artistic form. *Macbeth*, another work studied in Algerian universities, provides a better illustration of the way Shakespeare seems to appeal to the prevalent misogyny of his time while undermining it through the manipulation of artistic technique. Feminist critics have already tried, in various ways, to re-appropriate the play for the feminist cause by looking for evidence to attenuate such declarations as that of G. Wilson Knight who declares Lady Macbeth an “embodiment-
for one might hour-of Evil; absolute and extreme (1930:168).” Very often when this play is criticised, emphasis is placed on whether the various political murders that he commits in his ambition to become King of Scotland are internally or externally driven by women such as his wife and the three witches whom he has encountered in the woods. Here, we shall put aside the three witches’ royal prophecies for Macbeth in consideration to the fact that their presence as tabooed women with dangerous knowledge figures as a counterpoint to Lady Macbeth. It is Lady Macbeth that we see at work in the realisation of the witches’ prophecy, which Macbeth hurriedly reports to her while he is still in the battlefield.

If we follow the storyline, it is all too easy to declare women’s inherent monstrosity. For example, as soon as she learns about the prophecy, she makes a reflection just as if her husband was with her: “Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be/ What thou art promis’d. – Yet do I fear thy nature/ It is full o’ the milk of human kindness (I. v.15:17). Through the major part of the play, we hear her shaming her husband, according to the conventions of the time, to be a man and to take action for the realisation of his political ambition. “When you durst do it (kill the king), then you were a man (I, vii, 49),” she further shames her husband to commit a regicide when she comes back from the guest chamber where Duncan the king is soundly sleeping.

Lady Macbeth goes as far as declaring her wish to “unsex herself” to be able to commit murder on behalf of her husband. So we hear her imploring “murdering ministers” to “come to [her] woman’s breast,” and “take [her] milk for gall (I, v, 46). Her deepest wish is to assume man’s cruel nature by being filled from “the crown to the toe top full/ of direst cruelty (I, v, 40-43!” and to have evil powers block in her “th acess and passage to remorse,” and the “compunctious visitings of nature.” At first sight, then, Lady Macbeth is a monstrosity of nature to be put on the same part as the witches. Yet when we look closely at it, this self-condemnation hides in it a harsher condemnation of the patriarchal system that pushes women
to harbour the wish of unsexing themselves to secure the same privileges as men. The same patriarchal system pushes wives, even those belonging to the higher ranks, to identify themselves with their husbands’ often perverse ambitions for power. It has to be noted that contrary to her husband who keeps harping on his ambition to reach the highest echelon of power, declaring his wife “my partner in greatness,” only once during the play, Lady Macbeth never speaks of her future ambitions as queen of Scotland. Much more than this, she makes it her obligation to help her husband reach what he wants. It follows that Lady Macbeth’s fantasised monstrosities do not belong to her nature but to the patriarchal culture that makes women identify themselves obsessively with their husbands’ political carriers instead of thinking of realising their own projects. It is Macbeth who turns Lady Macbeth into a monster and not the contrary.

Shakespeare shows his feminist commitment not only through the ironic implications of the text but also in the way he redeployes the Aristotelian notions of tragedy and heroism. Aristotle tells us that tragedy demands that the hero or heroine be neither perfect nor exclusively evil in order to square in with the mimetic functions of the genre as a reflection of human life and reality. It is Lady Macbeth rather than Macbeth who seems to meet this requirement in Shakespeare’s play. If we look at the development of these two characters, we can see that while Lady Macbeth sheds her evil character in the course of the play, Macbeth gradually reveals his inherently murderous, inhuman and inhumane nature. Indeed, in the first acts we hear Lady Macbeth fantasising about unsexing herself and committing murder, but she is incapable of taking action herself. For example, when she comes out of the guest chamber where Duncan sleeps, she undermines all the rhetoric of manliness by telling us “Had he not resembled /My father as he slept, I had done’t [murdering the king] II, ii, 14).” From the start we know that Lady Macbeth is not true to that verbal image or representation of “fiendlike queen” that she gives us about herself. She knows all too much about “human
kindness” to mean all she claims in the play, for instance, unplucking her nipple from the boneless gums of her infant and turning her milk into gall. At the end, when the political murders are committed she shows that she has not succeeded in forestalling remorse in spite of her previous appeals to sinister powers to stop the “visitings of compunctions.” Finally, before she turns into a madwoman, we see her rising from her bed, walking in her sleep betraying pangs of conscience.

So, Lady Macbeth is a tragic heroine in the full Aristotelian sense of the word. Her talk about “visiting compunctions,” and the guilt that she feels at the dramatic reversal at the end of the play when the political murders are committed show that she distinguishes between evil and good. Her character is, therefore, neither too good nor too evil to qualify as a tragic heroine. The flaw or character weakness that leads to tragedy is cultural rather natural. It is derived not from some innate evil nature peculiar to women but from the patriarchal culture which makes women, wives in the case of Lady Macbeth, identify too much with their husbands’ ambitions. This identification has made her repress her feminine nature and indulge in a temporary but fatal aberration for the sake of a husband’s obsession of gaining access to political power.

The reversal of roles between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is too significant to escape the critic’s attention. So as Lady Macbeth reassumes her humanity and we, as readers, cathartically identify with her tragic fall, Macbeth’s evil nature gradually emerges to reveal him as a political monster. Quite interestingly, if Lady Macbeth at the beginning of the play stands as some sort of echo or domestic surrogate to the witches, at the end it is Macbeth who forsakes home and wife to rejoin them in the wilderness. Lady Macbeth, as can be expected in a patriarchal culture, touts her husband as “full of human kindness,” but echoes from the battlefield shows that he is prone to bloody and savage violence. In the sergeant’s tale, we are told that Macbeth is a man whose sword “smoked with bloody execution (I, ii, 18),” and who
“meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha (I, ii, 40-41).” Quite apart from his murderous “imaginings,” he thinks that people are expendable if they stand on his road to political power: “For mine own good / All causes shall give way (III, iv, 135-36).”

Moreover, Macbeth, by contrast to Lady Macbeth, does not experience that moment of reversal or recognitio in Latin when, according to Aristotle, tragic heroes recognise their errors by weighing their deeds on the moral balance. If, after his political assassination of the king, he hears the cry in the house that tells him that “Macbeth shall sleep no more,” this seems to be related more to his usual superstitious imaginings than the emergence of a guilty conscience at the regicide. At no moment do we see him to have grown into an insomniac as his wife because of murder. True he stands helpless with bloody hands lamenting that “all great Neptune’s Ocean” will not clean them, but his behaviour and words are not those of a guilty man, but of a cynical man acting a role in front of his wife. Even if he is temporarily true to his words, Macbeth seems to have got over his guilty pangs by physically watching those bloody hands of his whereas we effectively see Lady Macbeth in her ritual attempt trying desperately to get rid of the blood stains. For her, the blood stains are too deeply ingrained in her conscience to be cleansed physically as Macbeth seems to have hurriedly done with in order to attend to the preservation of the usurped throne. We see him seeking prophetic help from the witches as if he had become one of their disciples, leaving a loving wife in the grips of madness without any sense of gratitude.

On the whole, Shakespeare’s commitment to feminist concerns over patriarchal ones is shown in the reversal of gender roles in relation to the notion of moral monstrosity usually attached to women as witches. We see this reversal of roles in the notions of Aristotelian tragedy and tragic heroism that seem to shape more the characterisation of Lady Macbeth than that of Macbeth. As these characters develop through the play, Lady Macbeth assumes Aristotelian heroic features to which the reader can respond with cathartic sentiments of fear
at her temporary moral failing and pity at the miserable conditions she lands in. On the contrary, Macbeth takes on the shape of a monster who offends the reader, incapable to identify with an altogether evil character that Shakespeare himself seems to have ritually cleansed off the stage.

What conclusions can we draw from this investigation of the patriarchal faces and feminist faces that Shakespeare shows in the three tragedies? The most outstanding feature of these plays is that Shakespeare uses three different techniques to represent the tragic consequence of women’s resistance or abusive identification with patriarchy. Ovidianism and Platonism are the means that he deploys in Othello to unveil the cross-racial face of patriarchy more mindful of the honour of men as a species than interpersonal love relations between individuals called Othello and Desdemona. Patriarchy is too deeply ingrained, Shakespeare tells us in this play, that it easily crosses racial lines. The other face of patriarchy that Shakespeare unveils through the technique of telling and showing involves a son-to-widowed mother relationship. Not yet fully a man, Hamlet considers himself as an heir to that patriarchal system of gender domination demanding the regulation of women’s sexual self by the males in their roles as husbands, sons and brothers. In Othello and Hamlet, we have the case of women resisting the restraints or constraints that the patriarchal system puts on the right of women to regulate their own desires. In Macbeth, Shakespeare delivers us a heroine who excessively identifies herself with that patriarchal system through the promotion of her husband’s political ambitions. Through the technique of role reversal and the redeployment of the notions of Aristotelian tragedy and heroism, Shakespeare reveals the monstrosity of an ego-inflating patriarch-tyrant called Macbeth. So whether women resist or conform in excess to men’s dictates, Shakespeare portrays them as tragic victims of the patriarchy system of gender domination.
Does this mean that in spite of the feminist faces that Shakespeare displays in these plays, he remains pessimistic about a possible negotiation and equal gender relations? The answer is negative because Shakespeare demonstrates a more optimistic view of gender negotiation in the genre of comedy rather than in that of tragedy. As we shall show, and as many critics have already argued the point, it is in comedies like *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*, and to lesser extent in *The Taming of the Shrew* that we find feminist characters capable of resisting and negotiating in honourable terms with the patriarchal system. This is not at all surprising if we know that the genre of comedy belongs to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls carnivalesque literature. Its mock-serious dimensions, unlike the seriousness and solemnity of tragedy, enable both the dramatist and his feminist characters to turn upside down gender hierarchies to state explicitly what remains in the domain of the *non-dit* or the implicit in his tragedies.

**Shakespeare’s Overturning of Gender Hierarchies in *The Taming of the Shrew***

Let us see how Shakespeare overturns the gender hierarchies in the most controversial of his comedies, which is *The Taming of the Shrew*. To see the commitment of Shakespeare to the woman cause in this play, one has to suspend, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues in his *Rabelais and his World*, reacting to laughter in the Renaissance with modern eyes and ears. Unless we historicize the concept of laughter and try to laugh in the way Shakespeare’s contemporaries in the festive popular culture laughed, it is more likely to consider the laughter in this comedy about gender relations as being misplaced and jarring to our modern ears. True as Juliet Dusinbere makes the case in her work, historical parallels can be established between our contemporary feminism and the Elizabethan and early Jacobean feminisms. Indeed, the women who rebelled against social conventions in the two last decades of the sixteenth and the first years of the seventeenth centuries by wearing man’s clothes are not all that different from their contemporary sisters to whom Dusinbere calls the “flappers” of the 1960s. In both
cases, the reaction against what Betty Friedan calls the “feminine mystique” is not a fleeting, spontaneous phenomenon but the result of a radical shift in episteme in matters like matrimony, which enabled the women’s movement in both eras to take a militancy turn. This militancy is one of the sources of gender anxiety at what men in both ages consider as the “monstrous” phenomenon of “masculine” women.

Dusinberre is also to the point in drawing parallels between the feminisms of the two periods and the anxiety to which they gave rise. However, her historical perspective as a reader of Shakespeare’s comedies including *The Taming of the Shrew* develops into an anachronism when she investigates the way Shakespeare handles the overturning of gender and class systems and the resulting anxiety. Sticking closely to the assumption that the Puritan ideology with regard to women, especially matrimony, and theatre is not as negative as it is described by previous critics, Dusinberre overlooks what Shakespeare owes to the festive popular culture of his time in his representation of gender and class relations. It is this festive popular culture rather than the official Puritan ideology that has to be brought to bear on Shakespeare’s comedies if we wish to place them in the right perspective. If looked at from this carnivalesque viewpoint of the “Globe,” a festive theatre open to all the body social, as Dusinberre seems to agree, we can easily see that Shakespeare does not work so much at reproducing the anxieties about the collapse of gender and class hierarchies as to degrade or debase them to project in the very process of this festive debasement freer and more positive relations between man and woman and between classes.

Bakhtin writes that one of the functions of the festive popular culture that permeated Renaissance literature and society at all levels is to free man in the generic sense from fear and seriousness inherent to the official ideology of the period. In this regard, the case of *The Taming of the Shrew* is quite illustrative. The play starts in a tavern wherein a drunken Christopher Sly, a tinker arguing about the payment of his drinks before being thrown outside
to fall dead asleep at the front of the tavern. Following the popular festive culture patterns of crowing and uncrowning of his time, Shakespeare has Sly carried dead drunk from the tavern to a lord’s house and crowned with a noble title. This reads all like a Fool’s festival whose attraction and pull the lord himself cannot resist since it is he who starts it by ordering his men to play the whole trick on Sly by making the latter believe that he is a mad man restored to his senses after 15 years of folly. More importantly, he joyfully uncrowns himself by acting as one of the servants in his own household. In the hands of Shakespeare, the class anxiety resulting from what seems to be a collapse of status hierarchies is diffused to become a joyful matter for all the social body independently of the class to which the characters belong. Indeed, throughout the play, we come across characters, masters and servants, who fully give themselves to cross-dressing as if in affirmation of the principle of the fundamental similarity in the identity and nature of men and women. Tranio exchanges roles and clothes with his master scholar Lucentio and woes Bianca on his behalf. Lucentio’s main competitor, Hortensio, does the same by swapping clothes and roles with his servant. A pedant is made to assume the role of a father in order to have a counterfeit marriage contract signed.

This atmosphere in which social bodies were born into each other bears a strong resemblance to the festive atmosphere of carnival culture. Played in the Globe, The Taming of the Shrew is really a banquet or a feast for the entire world. So, even low status characters like Lucentio can speak gay truth to power in the person of Lucentio’s father, Vincentio, when he has rebuked him for wearing Lucentio’s clothes in defiance of social differences qualifying his claims to social difference as a madman’s illusions. Catherine speaks the same gay truth to patriarchal power in its attempt to keep women silent. Critics are still divided in their opinions over the taming plot. While some regard it as a negative representation of gender relations, others try to salvage the positive side of it. We would argue that this ambivalence in representation with its negative and positive poles is part and parcel of the popular festive
culture to which Shakespeare, as Bakhtin notes it, is heir alongside other fellow Renaissance authors like Rabelais. It has to be observed that the original story of the taming of a shrew known as “A Merry Jest of a Shrewed and Curst Wife Lapped in Morel’s Skin for her Good Behaviour (1550) belongs to what can be called didactic serious culture. When Shakespeare incorporates it in a comedy announced as a festive joke played on a tinker, he degrades its seriousness and solemnity to become a matter for laughter at male fantasies of gender domination. As it is handed to us, Shakespeare does not uncrown on the stage Sly at the end of the play after uttering these conceited words included in a dramatic version of the same theme entitled “A Pleasant Conceited Historie, called The Taming of a Shrew (1594)”:  

I know now how to tame a shrew  
I dreamt upon it all this night till now  
And thou hast wak’t me out of the best dream  
That ever I had in my life, but lie to my  
Wife presently and tame her too.  

(Shakespeare)  

We would argue further that if Shakespeare does not dismiss the conceited Sly in the manner of the 1594 dramatic version of the theme wherein Sly is thrown out of the stage, it is because he knows well that his contemporary audience imbued with the popular festive spirit would anticipate this uncrowning expulsion. Steeped in the popular carnivalesque culture of the Renaissance, the play belongs to the art of the unfinished in face of which the accustomed audience is left to imagine the triumphant male fantasy of gender domination being overthrown by the march of utopian time and the social body in accordance with the festive popular culture to which this audience was born.  

Read from the perspective of the Renaissance popular festive culture, Shakespeare’s feminism in the comedies emerges as something not optional, to be taken or denied, according to the pole (negative or positive) which has thus far drawn the most critical attention. Just as the festive forms on which they are based, they show ambivalence as new orders of things struggle to be born out of the old ones. This is the case of The Taming of the Shrew in which
Catherine breaches the code of silence imposed on women. Tongue-in-cheek, she mimics or plays the role of a tamed shrew in front of drunken tinker which in line with the festive popular culture will be awakened from his fantasy of domination over women. In a way, by letting Catherine speak about the necessity of women to accept their husbands as their masters, Shakespeare delivers us one of his militant ironies. Catherine’s speech is addressed to the drunken spectator who may well stand for all the male audience but also to Petruchio and the other male characters in the play, who might have forgotten or taken their roles too seriously just as the real lord has advised them to do at the beginning of the play.

The non-optional nature of Shakespeare’s feminism in the comedies is also evident in *Twelfth Night*. The title of this play, contrary to that of *The Taming of the Shrew*, clearly indicates that our playwright places himself within the context of popular festive culture. In this short space, we shall not refer to all the festive forms like Saint Valentine, Rock Monday, Valentine and Orson, the Janus cult, and Shrove Tuesday, a ritual falling at the end of the twelve days after Christmas (Chardin Jean-Jacques, ed.1996). How these festive forms are deployed in Shakespeare has already received the attention of many critics. Instead of this, we shall attend to the carnivalesque functions of these with reference to gender relations. One of these functions is that of inversion of roles through cross dressing and twinning that Shakespeare uses to debase the rhetoric of love over which men want to exercise monopoly to the exclusion of women. “There is no woman’s sides/ Can bear the beating of so strong a passion/ As love doth give my heart,” Duke Orsino tells Viola disguised as Cesario. Launched in his pathetic rhetoric about love, Orsino (French anagram for little bear), continues as follows: “No woman’s/ So big to hold so much; they lack retention./ Alas, their love may be call’d appetit-/ No motion of the liver, but the palate -/ That suffer surfeit, cloyment, and revolt:/ But mine is all as hungry as the sea, and can digest as much. Make no compare/ Between that love a woman can bear me/ And that I owe to Olivia (II: iv, 45- 30).”
Already in love with Orsino, Viola disguised as Cesario listens to the Duke speaking about his unrequited love before recounting a story about a woman whose love is certainly not coached in the same exaggerated rhetoric as that of the Duke, but is nonetheless the more tragic. Thinking that Viola is a eunuch, the Duke asks “What’s her history.” Viola, responds: “A blank, my lord. She never told her love, / But concealment, like a worm i’ th’ bud,/ Feed on her Damask cheek. She pin’d in thought;/ And with a green and yellow melancholy/ She sat like Patience on a monument,/ Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed? (II:iv,109-114)”

Disguised as a eunuch, Viola unveils the true nature of love felt by women and reveals that it is more imbued with dignity than that of “men who may say more, but indeed/ Our shows are more than will; for still we prove/ Much in our vows, but little in our love(II:iv,115-121).” Man’s exaggerated notion of love is not the sole big idea that Shakespeare demotes through the deflation of its rhetoric in man’s love poetry. We have other ideas like man’s courage that receives the same grotesque thrust as that of love. For example, Sir Andrew Aguecheek who besieges Olivia in the hope of winning her love gives a grotesque picture of a medieval warrior knight fighting for the hand of his lady. Cesario’s recurrent visits to Olivia’s have stirred anger and hatred in him because he is made to believe that he is an amorous contestant. At the playful investigation of Sir Toby, cousin to Olivia, he decides to write a letter of defiance inviting Cesario to a duel. However, when the time comes to take action against him, we see that his courage is just a verbal show since he grows as hesitating as the woman in man’s disguise. This is just one case of uncrowning of man’s ideas in the play. That of Malvolio is another. The Puritanism of this character is uncrowned as he is made to believe by Maria through a faked letter that his mistress Viola is deep in love with him.

With his character acting on this illusion, Shakespeare invites us to one of the festive banquets in the play wherein this Puritan man’s seriousness, solemnity, courage, love and so on are mocked within a joyful atmosphere.
However, as usual in the festive popular culture, it is not negation only that matters in Shakespeare, but also the positive side of the renewal. As the play unfolds and man’s illusions are destroyed mostly through the work of women characters like Viola and Maria, we see the triumph of a utopian type of gender relations. The play climaxes with love marriages contracted in a popular festive atmosphere, celebrated in one case by clowns disguised as priests. What draws the most attention in these love marriages is that it is women rather than men characters who take the initiative in the venture. The initial situation of an Orsino pining for Olivia’s love is reversed to have Viola espouse the Duke, and Olivia contract clandestinely at first a marriage vow with Sebastien, who is mistaken for Cesario. It is this utopianism in gender relations that makes Shakespeare’s play read as committed to the woman’s cause.

We agree with David Bevington’s view shared by many other critics that “young women in Shakespearean comedy are often cleverer, more resourceful, and more knowledgeable about themselves than male woers (2005: 40).” However, to really understand the resourcefulness of women in Shakespeare’s comedies, one has to set them within the carnivalesque tradition in which they are steeped. It is this tradition that enables Shakespeare to reverse gender roles and to come out with a more positive picture of gender relations. Even a play like Measure for Measure very often described as a “problem play” dealing with such high ideas as justice and mercy can be understood more fully only if it is set within the framework of popular festive culture. If the title of the play sounds Biblical and its theme as a whole is a wink to James I’s theory of government elaborated in the Basilicon Doron (1598), what comes out most strongly in the play is its festive nature. True there is no explicit reference to popular festive forms as in Twelfth Night. However, when looking closer at its plot, we see a similar process of uncrowning and crowning peculiar to these forms. The supposed departure of the Duke from Vienna, his disguise as a friar, and the delegation of his
power to Angelo have many things in common with the process of uncrowning and crowning peculiar to carnivalesque culture of the Renaissance.

Many serious themes like justice, mercy, honour, etc are passed through the sieve of the popular festive culture for refinement. We see, for example, that the seriousness, Puritanism, and supposed justice of the Duke’s Deputy are debased since he turns out to be as morally corrupt as the corruption of mores that he decides to fight during the supposed absence of the Duke, transformed in like manner as in popular festive forms into a reluctant observer and participant-spectator. The Duke “who love[s] the people, / But do [es not] like me to stage me to their eyes,” leaves the political stage for the “loud popular applause,” which he knows that it “do well [Sic]” to the people but does not personally “relish. I.i. 67-71.” Yet, however strongly he tries to protect himself from festive forms by cross-dressing as a friar, the clamour of the streets reach him in jail in the form of confessing prisoners unjustly sent there by a puritan Deputy, who takes himself for what he really is not. Changing persons does not save the Duke from being elbowed in the streets by the fantastic Lucio, who reveals him to be as corrupt as the Deputy with whom he changes places for the festive period that he does not like.

From the gender point of view, it is the question of man’s honour that Shakespeare foregrounds the most. He does this by rewriting from the popular festive culture perspective the work of George Whetstone’s Promos and Cassandra included in his story collection of Heptameron of Civil Discourses (1582). This story said to be inspired from the Italian author Cynthio relates the experience of Cassandra who finds herself caught in the same dilemma as Isabella: yield her honour and save her brother or keep it and let him be executed for the fornication crime. We know that in Whetstone’s version, Cassandra after an internal debate decides to sell out her honour thinking that Promos will keep his word of honour by liberating her brother Andrugio. After Andrugio’s execution, Cassandra is caught in another dilemma
involving a struggle of whether to kill or not to kill her brother’s executioner. In Shakespeare’s hand, Whetstone’s psychological drama and the heroine’s incessant inner struggle assumes in conformity with popular festive forms a sociological dimension. Ignoring the popular festive nature of his play, Tyllard (1959) among other critics, have faulted Shakespeare for his mixture of realism and folklore. We would argue that there is indeed a blending of realism and folklore in the play, but they are not in disjunction as Tyllard claims, but put together into what Bakhtin calls grotesque realism, a form of realism that borrows its roots from folklore.

No matter what technical judgement can be put on the play, what remains mostly prominent in it is the “clash over the referent” of honour that Shakespeare triggers by making his heroine uncompromising over this issue. Women’s honour is not an issue that men can dispose of the way they like, and according to their own interests. The festive popular drive of the play calls back the heroine from the convent just before her final vows to confront the issue of moral principles with reference to gender. We see a puritan Angelo pressing Isabella to conform to social convention by yielding her body to what is supposed to be an honourable purpose from a male perspective which hypocritically offers the entry to the convent as repentance for the sin once it is committed. Isabella breaches this convention hoping that her brother will give more importance to this eminently masculine concept of honour, but she is shocked to hear her brother accepting the trade-off when she reports to him Angelo’s proposal. The patriarchal system has one of its main stays on honour supposed to be a man’s property. In abrogating the male monopoly over this concept, and re-appropriating it for women, Shakespeare, through his uncompromising heroine over the question of the integrity of her body, comes close to being our feminist contemporary.

In conclusion, both Othello and Measure for Measure are said to have one of their sources of inspiration in Cinthio’s collection of short stories (Tyllard, E.M. W., 1959). But to
all evidence, the treatment of the theme of honour and gender relations in the two plays is as
different as the genre of tragedy and comedy in which they are rendered. Othello kills
Desdemona to defend man’s honour across the racial board whereas Isabella is ready to let her
brother die to preserve the integrity of her own body and her own honour. On the whole, we
observe that the ideology of form as it is deployed by Shakespeare in the sample of plays that
we have analysed is committed to the women cause. But we also observe that this
commitment varies in degree as we move from the tragedies to comedies. In other words, this
differential in the treatment of gender relations has much to do with genre. The comedies are
steeped more deeply in the Renaissance festive popular than the tragedies, hence the greater
utopian vision of gender relations that they project. All in all, even if the patriarchal themes
are not exploded in a wholesale form in the comedies as in the tragedies, Shakespeare remains
true to the Renaissance festive popular culture to which he is heir because of the ironic twist
that the “serious” matter of his tragedies receives through the ideological deployment of form
and technique. However, as I shall try to show in the next chapter, Shakespeare does not
extend his sympathy to all women. When sex and politics of empire building interweave in
his plays, he reveals a propensity to allegorize women as good or evil according to ethnic or
cultural background.
CHAPTER THREE
Shakespeare, Empire and the Tuning of Feminist Sympathies According to the Ethnicities of Empire

Introduction

Here you are, Reverend father, you take this [a bowl of holy water] and sprinkle the room with it, just in case there’s one of those hordes of enchanters from those books in here, and he puts a spell on us as a punishment for the torments they’ll undergo once we’ve wiped them off the face of the earth.

(Cervantes, 2001: 52)

The reader will no doubt remember these lines uttered by Don Quixote’s housekeeper in the sixth chapter of the book wherein a priest is called to cleanse the reading room of the “ingenious hidalgo, Don Quixote de la Mancha,” by committing to the flames the romances thought to have caused our hero to take himself for a knight errant. The reader will no doubt also remember that in the same chapter a controversy arises as to whether to burn out indistinctly all the “enchanters” or whether some of them deserve to be saved. Against the protest of Don Quixote’s niece as well as that of the housekeeper, the priest finishes by winning the argument that in spite of their harmful effect on imagination, the romances will not be destroyed without a selective reading. In the course of his book, Cervantes seems to have followed up the priest’s opinion regarding the necessity to make a critical reading of romance as a genre by inserting many romances in his fiction. One of these is the “Barbary” captivity tale recounted to an enchanted audience in chapters XXXIX, XL and XLI of the book. This captivity tale tells us the romance between Zoreida and a soldier made captive in Algiers on his way back to Spain from Lepanto, where a Christian coalition defeated the Ottoman fleet in 1572. The invocation of the controversy over romance in Cervantes’s fiction leads us to raise the issue whether a similar controversy over the genre exists in the plays of his English contemporary William Shakespeare, and how he solves the problematic of representation of empire in general and that of the cross-cultural encounter between the East and the West in the pre-modern times in particular. From Cervantes we know that romance as
a narrative genre of cross-cultural encounter was indeed in crisis, a crisis of representation
that he solves not by an epistemic rupture as Michel Foucault (1970) tells us but by its
absorption into the novel genre whose origins many critics retrace to Don Quixote.

William Shakespeare is often referred to as a writer of comedies, tragedies, and
sometimes of tragicomedies. The list of critical books carrying an explicit reference to the
genres of tragedy and comedy in which the bard of Avon supposedly excels widely ranges
from A.C. Bradley’s Shakespearean Tragedy (1904, 1968), L. Danson’s Tragic Alphabet:
Shakespeare’s Dramaturgy of Language (1974), M. Long’s The Unnatural Scene: A Study in
Shakespearean Tragedy (1976), L. Champion’s Shakespeare’s Tragic Perspective (1978), P.
Rackin’s Shakespeare’s Tragedies (1978), S. Booth’s King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and
of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (1984), R. S. White’s Innocent Victims: Poetic
Injustice in Shakespearean Tragedy (1986) to N.C. Liebler’s Shakespeare’s Festive Tragedy:
reference is no less extensive, but it remains quite substantial with titles like C.L. Barber’s
Shakespeare’s Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom (1959)
and E. Berry’s Shakespeare’s Comic Rites (1984).

So, on the whole the literature review about Shakespeare’s plays shows that his
reputation is built on his excellence as a tragedian or comedian. Following the hierarchy of
the genres established in the Elizabethan period and confirmed later by the Romantics, it is
the former qualification that comes uppermost in contemporary criticism of Shakespeare’s
drama, with sometimes the hybrid qualification as a tragicomic playwright. This generic
hybrid quality conferred on the bard of Avon is also done in accordance with the critical
categories prevailing in his time. Apart from the critics’ reference to Shakespeare as tragic,
comic, and tragicomic playwright, the review also reveals Shakespeare as a chronicler-
historian, a poet, and a sonneteer. However, except for reference, here and there in articles and book-length studies, by Northrope Frye for example, his extraordinary capacity as a romancer is not esteemed at its right because of the scaling down of romance in relation to other genres both during Shakespeare’s time and ours. Indeed, the genre of romance has been degraded, vilified so much ever since the Renaissance when it underwent its crisis that critics seem to have deliberately refrained from calling the bard a romancer even when they recognize the prominent romantic features in his works.

The relation of Shakespeare to postcoloniality or postcolonialism as described by contemporary critics is as problematic as the generic categorisation of the playwright and his drama. Two major controversial issues emerge from the literature review of Shakespeare’s postcolonialism, which is by now clear that it is far from being a homogeneous body of writing. One of these issues relates to the study of Shakespeare and his position to empire, particularly in *The Tempest* and *Othello* from a predominantly New World perspective, which has for a long time obscured the no less important place that the Old World premodern empires in Europe and the Mediterranean basin occupy in his drama, independently of the genres to which it is assigned. For instance, though there are explicit references to the Mediterranean world in *The Tempest*, it is the cross-Atlantic relation that is most often emphasised in critical readings of the play. This critical “trend towards an American-focused interpretation of *The Tempest* by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic drew much of its inspiration from a concurrent cultural and political rapprochement between England and the United States” at the end of the nineteenth-century (Vaughan A.1988: 142) marked among other things by a cross-Atlantic celebration of the Anglo-Saxon empire over the affairs of the world. Through the inspiration of critics like Leslie Fielder and Leo Marx, Shakespeare’s text is subsequently elevated into one of the foundational texts of American letters. The over-emphasis on English-American cultural connections continues in American new historicist
writings and English postcolonial writings, though with a different political stance towards Shakespeare’s attitude to the British cross-Atlantic empire.

More recently, Shakespeare’s postcolonialism has been placed within a context closer to home than the transatlantic Virginia or Bermudas, posited as the location of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. This shift from a New World to the Old World and Mediterranean perspective in Shakespearean studies came mostly as a result of the recent re-emergence and consecration of medievalist and pre-modern studies in Western, especially in Anglo-American academia. Among other areas of scholarly interest for pre-modern or early modern studies figure the encounters of different genres between Britain and the Mediterranean empires and how these encounters have shaped English history, culture and representations. Samuel Chew’s *The Crescent and the Rose* (1937) and Sir Geoffrey Fisher’s *Barbary Legend* (1954) are among pioneering works that paved the way for the recent wave of premodern studies undertaken by both post-colonials living in the West like the Moroccan scholar Nabil Matar or British-born scholars such as Maclean Gerald (2005). A new perspective in studies of the issue of empire in relation to Shakespeare has opened up as a consequence of the pre-modern orientation given to scholarly research into pre-modern British connections with the Mediterranean world. Naturally, this new perspective has put into relief the critical anachronism which consists of deploying a New World framework for the interpretation of Shakespeare’s idea of a British cross-Atlantic empire that came only after the fact of British late eighteenth and nineteenth-century imperialism. However, if post-colonial studies of Shakespeare have known a radical orientation in its focus on the multiple imperial encounters in the Mediterranean, the relation that Shakespeare holds with empire is more or less still examined from the position of nineteenth-century imperial domination over the rest of the world. The unequal power relations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Britain with the dominant empires of their times and their impact on Shakespeare’s representation of empire are hardly taken into account.
This research is built on the assumption that “a great deal of world’s history is the history of empire... [and] that all history is imperial- or colonial- history if one takes a broad enough definition and goes far enough back.” (Howe Stephen, 2002:1) The issue, therefore, is not whether Shakespeare is a postcolonial dramatist or not, but that of the position of power from which he produced his plays. Making Shakespeare speak from the perspective of nineteenth century imperial Britain, or that of the independence of the countries once under British rule in the second half of the twentieth without due regard to the power position of Elizabethan and Jacobean Britain among premodern empires will necessarily lead to the abrogation of an important dimension in Shakespeare’s postcolonial condition. My claim is that Shakespeare lived or experienced this postcolonial condition much more from the periphery of powerful Spanish and Ottoman empires than the centre of a still embryonic British Empire.

I shall further argue that unless we look at Shakespeare’s cross-generic representation of empire, the complexity of this representation can easily escape critical attention. It is in the displacement of romance, more specifically medieval romance, either towards tragedy or comedy that we can locate the meanings that Shakespeare assigns to the cross-cultural encounters that resulted from the rise of the various empires in premodern times. I assume that by looking at Shakespeare mostly as a romancer as some critics have done very recently, my reading of what he makes of these cross-cultural encounters, the material out of which romance is fabricated, will avoid the pitfalls of classical postcolonial criticism and theory that have privileged the image of Shakespeare as a postcolonial “contemporary” speaking from the centre over that of a premodern postcolonial speaking from a doubly uncomfortable position of periphery. In Shakespeare’s deployment of romance and its strategic displacement to the other dominant genres of his time, we can see the playwright at work in the role of cultural critic of his age trying to “move the centre” of empire from the East to the West and from that
of other European powers like Spain to Britain. In this claim, I follow in the lead of Robinson Benedict (2007) who has already defended the case of Shakespeare being interested in shoring up the fragments of a Medieval Christendom that broke up on the rocks of the European religious and political wars of the sixteenth century for the purpose of building a secular European cultural space.

Northrop Frye (1971, 1976) rightly defines romance as a “secular scripture” whose main plot is propped up by a quest motif, and whose hero stands above both his environment and his kind. In terms of literary evolution, romance comes in just after myth and before high mimetic genres like the epic and tragedy. In what follows I shall contend that the main quest in the Shakespearean Mediterranean plays *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *The Tempest* is the demarcation of a European cultural space through the refurbishment of the medieval chivalric romance from an endogamous perspective. In other words, I shall attempt to show the playwright at work in a misreading of romance which in the pre-modern or Renaissance times was suspected of being a hybrid genre, the result of the contact of Christendom with the Muslim world during the Crusades and the long occupation of the Iberian Peninsula by the Moors.

I subscribe to the view which holds that medieval chivalric romance, a literary legacy bequeathed to Shakespeare along with his Spanish contemporary Cervantes, is of the order of wish-fulfilment. Through chivalric romance Christendom tries to sublimate its forceful retreat from the Oriental space by re-imagining it as a romantic conversion narrative wherein Muslims being male or female love partners are always converted to Christianity to become its most enthusiastic defenders. Therefore, we can say that the history of romance as a genre is marked by an assimilative or cannibalistic drive through which Christendom absorbs what it considered then as the heretic counterpart on its borders. This imaginative containment of the Muslim world worked for a while, but in the course of time with the fall of Constantinople in
1452 and the expulsion of the Temple Knights from Rhodes to Malta in 1493, the dream turned into a nightmare, especially with the fragmentation of Christendom in the first half of the sixteenth century. Tested against the geopolitical reality of the time, the use of romantic conversion as a strategic mode of representing the cross-cultural encounter with the Ottoman Empire and its Muslim extensions in North Africa was found to be in need of revision through a misreading of medieval romance.

When we look at it closely from a historical and comparative perspective, the latter then stood as a major military, economic and cultural force exerting influence on a similar global scale as America does today in the “global village”. The European countries that issued out of the fragmentation of Christendom sought military alliance with the Ottomans (France in 1535 and England in the 1580s) against the supremacy of the equally powerful empire of Spain. The same countries sought commercial treaties with the Ottomans to guarantee their economic prosperity. On the whole, therefore, I can claim that pre-modern England at the time of Shakespeare, in the words of Maclean Gerald (2007) “looked east” and envied the power of the Ottomans. So its major authors such as Shakespeare might well be “repositioned” (Cartelli Thomas, 1999) as a postcolonial dramatist writing back to the powerful Mediterranean-based empires in the same manner that today’s postcolonial authors write back to the British Empire (Ashcroft Bill, et al, 1989). In these reversed power relations between the East and the West, chivalric romance was no longer viable as a genre for the representation of cultural containment.

The Cross-cultural Encounter in *The Merchant of Venice* and Chivalric Romance

I shall begin this discussion of the way that Shakespeare handles the representation of the cross-cultural encounter with an analysis of what he makes of romance in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1598). The latter as the title shows deals with commerce in the Mediterranean basin, a commerce that laid the basis of the British Empire through the establishment of
companies chartered by Queen Elisabeth I. Among them, I can mention the Levant Company started in the 1570s and the 1580s with the commercial privileges accorded to England by the Ottomans. The play starts with what seems to be the unexplainable spleen or anxiety felt by one of the most prominent Venetian merchants Antonio, who opens the first scene as follows: "In sooth I know not why I am so sad./It wearies me: you say it wearies you;/ But how I caught it, found it, or came by it, / What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born, / I am to learn: and such a want-wit sadness makes of me,/That I have much ado to know myself (p.23)."

However, as the play develops we discover that what he calls his “want-wit sadness” has much to do with the cultural implications of the very commerce he practises. Towards the end of the first scene, we learn that his best friend Bassanio is in love with a rich heiress from Belmont, and that he has not in his possession the means to compete with other suitors for her hand. Already indebted to Antonio, Bassanio nonetheless seeks another loan from his friend who quickly responds to the request as soon as he hears of the purpose for which the money will be used:

In Belmont is a Lady richly left,/ And she is fair, and fairer than that word,/ of wondrous virtues, sometime from her eyes/I did receive fair speechless messages:/Her name is Portia, nothing undervalu’d/To Cato’s daughter, Brutus’Portia,/ Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,/ For the four winds blow in from every coast/Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks/Hangs on her temples like a golden fleece,/ Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos’strond,/ And many Jasons come in quest of her./ O my Antonio, had I but the means/ To hold a rival place with one of them,/ I have a mind presages me such thrift,/That I should questionless be fortunate.

(p.28)

When we know that in English words like “commerce,” “Traffic,” and “Commodity” cover a range of meanings going from the literal to the erotic or sexual, it is easy to understand what makes for Antonio’s anxiety or sadness. Antonio is not as much concerned about his merchantmen sent to the four corners of the world as he is about the impending contest for the hand of Portia, a glance at Queen Elizabeth and her Kingdom. It is commerce that has brought him fortune at first hand, but he is ready to forfeit his life by contracting a “pound of flesh”
from his body with Shylock the usurer just to have the necessary money for his friend. The latter takes himself for a latter-day Jason figure ready to participate in a contest that he elevates to a romantic quest for the Golden fleece. This Golden Fleece is Portia and her fortune that has to be fetched from the island of Colchis that is Belmont (Britain). The contest takes place against the background of chivalric romance since in Act II we learn that the two other major final knightly contestants for Portia’s hand are “Morocco, a tawny Moor all in white,” and Prince of Aragon from Spain. At the time of the writing of the play in the 1590s, the latter was not much different from Morocco since Spaniards at the time were referred to as “White Moriscoes” in English Anti-Spanish propaganda. Because of the long presence of Moors in Spain, the Spanish were considered to be a corrupt hybrid race. Both Morocco and Prince of Aragon fail the test of the three caskets, one of them made of gold, the other two of silver and lead. At her father’s death, Portia is left a will that demands that her future husband be the one who rightly chooses the casket that contains Portia’s picture.

At this stage it is perhaps necessary to recall some historical facts about Morocco and Prince of Aragon, not as individuals but as political and cultural embodiments of empires to better understand the anxiety of Portia, as a collective personification of another fledgling empire, which is that of Britain. If Morocco is associated with gold, it is not just one of Shakespeare’s fancies, as it might seem at first sight for those who do not look beyond the romance to the last quarter of sixteenth-century Moroccan history. Indeed, this history tells us that the Moroccan sovereign Ahmad al-mansur, Ahmad the Victorious in English (1578-1603), is also known as al-dhahabi, “the man of gold.” In the course of a reign that was as long as that of Queen Elizabeth I, Ahmad al-mansur managed not only to re-establish peace in Morocco after the collapse of the Marinids, but also to give it high prestige as a wealthy country. In 1578 Ahmad al-mansur (the Victorious) won the battle of Alcazarquivir also called the battle of the three kings in which the Portuguese King Sebastian was killed and a
large proportion of his ruling class captured. The huge ransoms that the Portuguese aristocracy paid to Ahmad al-Mansur’s treasury served as the first step towards the building of his image as a “man of gold”. However, his prestige as a victorious and wealthy monarch came as a result of the 1591 mounted expedition to the desert empires of Gao and Mali, that terminated with a booty consisting of “a train of sixteen camels” loaded with gold. (Harvey L.P. 2005) The widespread popularity of Ahmad-al-mansur in England was such that the Barbary Company was set up in London in 1585 in order to benefit from Moroccan affluence.

So, the presence of Morocco and his decision to participate in the knightly contest for Portia’s hand in Shakespeare’s play is far from being fanciful. Indeed, Morocco more than deserves to be in this Shakespearean heroic and historical romance for the simple reason that he figuratively stands in for a real historical figure that of Ahmad al-mansur, whose military victories and wealth had endowed him with a knightly, romantic aura both at home and abroad. Prince Aragon is no less deserving to participate in the knightly contest for Portia’s hand. His association with silver is as true to historical fact as that of Morocco with gold. J.H. Elliot writes that “During the last decade of the sixteenth century American silver was still reaching Spain in very large quantities, and the port of Seville had an undeniable air of prosperity.” (2002: 291) Moreover, though the Crown of Aragon constituted only a small part of the Hapsburg/Spanish Empire, and in spite of the antagonism that existed between Phillip II’s empire and Elizabeth I’s England, it shared in the prestige of the Spanish conquest of America by the conquistadors, a class of military men inspired by the “example of the great heroes of chivalry” (Ibid. 64), as well as in Phillip II’s military triumph over the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The latter point will be developed later in this chapter.

Putting Shakespeare’s imagined romance in a historical framework reveals other allegorical correspondences at the higher level of plot and motivation of characters. In
Morocco’s quest for the hand of Portia, we can easily see Shakespeare’s wink at Ahmed al-mansur’s amicable relation with Queen Elizabeth I, both of them at war with Phillip II’s Spain. According to Nabil Mattar, “notwithstanding the dangerous allure of Islam, Queen Elizabeth cooperated commercially and diplomatically with ... [Ahmed Al-mansur who was] repeatedly sought for military and diplomatic help. (1998:9)” Indeed, the relations between the English and the Moroccan monarchs were so good that, in 1603 the last year of life for both, Ahmed al-mansur proposed a military joint attack on American Spanish colonies with the purpose of winning them and peopling them with their own respective countrymen according to their accommodation to the climatic conditions in the Western hemisphere:

And therefore it shall be needful for us to treat of the people thereof, whether it be your pleasure it shall be inhabited by our armie or yours, or whether we shall take it in our chardg to inhabite it with our armie without yours, in respect of the great heat of the clymat, where those of your countrie doe not fynde fit to endure the extremitie of heat and of the cold of your partes, where our men endure it very well by reason that the heat hurtes them not.

(Quoted in Ibid. 7)

Historical analogues for Prince Aragon’s romantic courting of Portia come even more easily to mind. For example, before launching his Armada against Protestant England in 1588, Prince Phillip II had tried to win it back to the Catholic fold through a royal marital match with Mary Tudor in 1554. This marriage arranged by Charles V before his abdication in 1556 for his son Phillip II turned out to be politically unfruitful since Mary Tudor died childless in 1558, the same year as her father-in-law. During a life marked by a succession of marital funeral corteges, (Maria of Portugal, Mary Tudor, Elizabeth of Valois, Anne of Austria) Phillip II made several marriage proposals to Elizabeth I who rejected them all with the declaration that she was already married to her country. Clearly, even though Frye dissuades us from seeking the meaning of literature and romance outside the covers of books, that is in the historical context, the story of romance such as the species of historical chivalric romance dramatized by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* can never be detached from the
economic, cultural and socio-political concerns peculiar to the various stages of a people’s history.

What is also worth noting about Shakespeare’s chivalric romance and its contest part is that we know beforehand where Portia’s heart leans. Unlike Desdemona in *Othello*, (More about this later) Portia is not impressed by the heroic romances that Morocco recounts to her as a prelude to the test of the three caskets. In spite of his appeal for Portia not to “Mislike me not for my complexion,” because complexion, according to the thinking of the time, is but “The shadowed livery of the burnish’d sun (p.39),” Portia’s reactions to Morocco’s wrong choice is one of happiness, for as she tells us at the moment of his announcement, “If he [Morocco] the condition of a saint, and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me (p.32).” However, what is arguably the most important reason for Portia’s negative reaction against Morocco is contained in the Golden casket. Instead of Portia’s picture, what Morocco finds in this casket is a picture of a “carrion death/ Within whose empty eyes there is a written scroll. (p.55)” It follows that the odds against Morocco as a suitor do not reside solely in his dark complexion but also in his association with death of several sorts, spiritual, cultural, etc that the allure of gold can lead to. Portia is also happy when Prince of Aragon, “the white Morisco” makes the wrong choice by falling for the silver casket. All in all, then, Shakespeare delivers a romantic narrative that swerves from the exogamy of the medieval chivalric romance to a romance that celebrates endogamy. If Bassanio makes the right choice that of lead and ultimately wins the contest it is because he knows the symbolic value invested in this metal that constituted the major English export and wealth at the time. If marriage, as for Claude Levi-Strauss is mostly a system of gift-exchange, Shakespeare seems to tell us that the love object is accessible solely for those who use the right currency (lead) in circulation in the home matrimonial Rialto, or Exchange. Obviously, the anxiety that prevails in the first scenes of the play lightens up as Portia
weathers up the rocky waters of Gibraltar belonging to Morocco and the Prince of Aragon to be finally chosen by one of her kind in the person of Bassanio.

To all evidence, Shakespeare was aware that Portia faced a similar dilemma as Queen Elizabeth as she tried to steer her ship of state between the predominant empires of the time, that of Catholic Spain looked at as a conquering enemy, and the “empire” of Morocco and that of the Ottoman from which she sought military assistance, but whose allure and cultural pervasiveness through commercial exchanges were no less disturbing than the military Spanish threat. In such a context, Shakespeare could not offer the reader or the audience of his time a medieval chivalric romance without committing a literary offence. The medieval chivalric romance, whose hybrid origins are traced to Spain and the Orient (Ganim John M, 2008), could no longer contain powerful enemies knocking at the door of England in the form of the Spanish military presence in the Channel and the cultural and military imperialism of the Muslim Empires that menaced the social fabric through the importation of Eastern commodities and cultural goods or icons of all sorts and the allure that Muslim empires had for British citizens in quest for social advancement at the time (Maclean Gerald, 2007). As a corollary to the Elizabethan politics of containment, Shakespeare displaces the medieval European chivalric romance by giving it an endogamous turn, a turn that seems to be divinely sanctioned if we look at the luck that Portia has in the play.

In view of the anxiety that reigns in the matrimonial Rialto caused by the participation of foreign suitors like Morocco and Prince Aragon, Shakespeare gives the real measure of power relations of Elizabethan England and other Mediterranean-based empires like Phillip II’s empire of Spain and the “empire” of Morocco and that of the Ottomans. Contrary to some postcolonial readings portraying a conquering Elizabethan or Jacobean England, Shakespeare gives us an image of a less secure and confident Portia/Elizabeth, symbolising a country and a Tudor dynasty afraid of being conquered by more powerful imperial suitors at the death of her
father Henry VIII. Admittedly, Shakespeare can be said to have lived in empire as some postcolonial critics would claim, but he lived it not from the position of British domination over other countries, an imperial position to be achieved only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but from a position of an Elizabethan postcolonial deploying endogamous romance as a means of resistance to the more powerful premodern empires of Morocco, Spain, the Ottomans and the Regency of Algiers.

Apart from the endogamous turn of his chivalric romance, the bard of Avon resorts to its demotion to a species of popular romance by staging a bankrupt merchant (Bassanio) as a participant knight in an international matrimonial contest involving knights of confirmed noble military rank like Morocco and Prince of Aragon. By featuring a bankrupt merchant defeating other knights in the battlefield of love and winning the trophy (Portia), Shakespeare gives a popular twist to the chivalric romance, and at the same time solves the conundrum of homosexuality peculiar to the latter species of chivalric romance. Certainly, Bassanio is not featured as that other popular romance figure cut by Richard the Lion Heart working side by side with his soldiers in English medieval romances. But he is popular in his way in the sense that he represents that emergent but already popular class of pragmatic merchants who made the wealth of Elizabethan England/Venice, and on which the future of England would largely depend. So instead of a heroic chivalric romance of the type of Geoffrey Monmouth’s Morte d’Arthur that is deeply soaked in a knightly warrior tradition that knows no national boundaries, Shakespeare finishes by delivering us a popular romance imagining a national community hitched up to the new ideal of man, the merchant. Thus, arguably, it is the formation of the family that is the most remarkable feature of this popular romance wherein a merchant weds a character figuratively standing for Elizabeth I in the play’s semiotics. Like chivalric romance, Shakespeare’s starts in a homoerotic atmosphere that shows Antonio keening over Bassanio. Because of this homosexual love, Bassanio borrows the money to
champion his beloved friend’s bid to conquer and serve Portia. However, in the course of the romance, Shakespeare, through a magic turn peculiar to the genre, plays down Antonio’s homoeroticism portrayed by playing up heterosexual passion ending with the naissance of a class hybrid family. The unrequited love of Antonio for Bassanio that has nearly caused his death, because of an unpaid debt contracted with Shylock in exchange for a pound of flesh, is compensated for by a requited heterosexual love which does not only constitute a family but also save the life of a friend, seemingly “healed” of his homoeroticism.

It follows that the all-powerful Portia not only marries one of her kind (Bassanio), but comes to the succour of the bankrupt Antonio, faced with having a “pound of flesh” cut from his body because of the delayed payment of the debt contracted with Shylock. I shall not go into the details of how Portia, now turned into a disguised lawyer, hails from Belmont to Venice to plead the case of Antonio, and who finishes not only winning the court case but having a provision stating that half of Shylock’s fortune will go to Antonio and the other half to be inherited by his “gentile” son-in-law at his death.

Shakespeare’s plays are well-known for their double-plots. *The Merchant of Venice* is no exception to the rule since the main romantic plots develop in parallel with other romantic subplots. One of these romantic subplots is the love story of Lorenzo and Jessica, Shylock’s daughter. What is remarkable about this romance is its kinship with the medieval exogamous romance involving Muslims and Christians. For example, like the Algerian Zoreida in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Jessica turns Christian and hides her conversion from her father. Furthermore, in the same manner as Zoreida, she escapes from her father’s home with her gentile lover Lorenzo carrying her father’s fortune with her. In both romances, the heroines are the sole inheritors of their respective father’s wealth that each of them bestows on a Christian favourite. The lamentations of the Muslim Sheikh Murad over the loss of his daughter and his fortune to the “Christian dogs” on the “Barbary Shore” of Algiers echo the
lamentations of the Jew Shylock over his stolen “stones” (note the sexual connotation of the term) and his daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*.

In Shakespeare’s play, the medieval exogamous romance seems to be divided across gender lines. The romantic subplot involving Lorenzo and Jessica acts as a foil to the main romance, the one between Bassanio and Portia. Portia is constant (a reference to Constance in Chaucer’s *The Man of Law’s Tale*). In other words, she remains true to her faith and first love and does not wish to marry outside her religious fold whereas Jessica is culturally changeable and, therefore, inconstant in her faith. Not only does she turn Christian and adopt gentile manners, but she also hands her father’s capital to Christians at what seems to be a critical phase of the Venetian/English economy. Exogamous romance, therefore, remains an imaginative asset when it concerns the representation of the female Other, be it Muslim or Jew, but it is a serious imaginative liability when it involves a Christian female of the order of Portia and her historical stand-in Queen Elizabeth I. There is another romantic subplot which seems to sustain the idea that when this female Other refuses to give in to Christian advances, sexual abuse remains an alternative. This is what Shakespeare seems to suggest in Launcelot’s unpunished abuse of the Moorish female in *The Merchant of Venice*. Launcelot the Clown has first worked as servant for Shylock, and then has resigned for supposedly racial and religious reasons to be employed always as servant in Bassanio’s household.

Shakespeare’s ambivalent attitude to the medieval chivalric romance assumes clearer tragic contours in *Othello* (1604). In this play, we have a clear case of a medieval chivalric romance gone wrong. We learn that Othello has enchanted and seduced Desdemona through the telling of the same romances to which Portia has remained insensible in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Morocco has proceeded to recounting them to her. Written later than *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* seems to refer to an earlier period in Elizabethan history, a period when Queen Elizabeth I was pushed by strategic reasons to look for an “unholy” and
“scandalous” alliance with the Ottomans and Algerines to ward off the ominous attack of the Spanish Armada. The wrecking of the “Turkish” fleet on its way to Cyprus, a Venetian colony parallels the wrecking of the Armada by the “winds of God” in the Channel in 1588, a wrecking that saved Britain from a Spanish Reconquista. So, by Act Two, the external threat has already been diffused to give place to an internal one, leading to the reconsideration of the exogamous romance of Desdemona and Othello, reluctantly accepted by the Senate in the last scene of Act One because of the urgency of the times. Medieval chivalric romance as is the case with Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso comes in the form of a conversion narrative involving a last-minute desertion of a Muslim leader like the Saracen hero Brandimarte to the Christian cause defended by Orlando, or the acceptance of baptism by infidels like “Ruggiero, who not only for her [Bradamante’s] sake/The Christian life and all that it implied/Most willing was straightway to undertake/... And so, to be baptised, and thence to claim/Fair Bradamante as his spouse” (xxii.35-36).

**Romance as Intertext in Othello**

The English translation of Ariosto’s romance by James Harrington in 1591 could not have been made without a political agenda in mind. Like Bradamante in Ariosto’s romance, Queen Elizabeth I is often featured in English histories as a warrior Queen leading her army against her enemies. Just like Bradamante, she sought at one of the most critical moments of English history to ally herself with the Ottomans to fight together what they both considered as Spanish “Idolaters”. The translation of Ariosto’s romance and the publication of Robert Greene’s dramatic version The Historie of Orlando Furioso in 1592 could not have escaped Shakespeare’s attention either. His employment of Dalinda’s impersonation of Ginevra for the situation of Hero in Much Ado about Nothing, and the Orlando carving initials on the bark of trees in As You like it are distinct echoes of the influence that the Italian poet had exerted on the English bard. Shakespeare’s use of Ariosto’s romance as intertext in Othello is even more
obvious, and so textual evidence is not hard to localise in the drama. One of these pieces of
evidence comes at the beginning of Act II wherein the “warlike Othello” calls his sweetheart
Desdemona “my fair warrior (p.53).” A short time later, Cassio, Othello’s lieutenant and
second refers to her as “the captain’s captain.” So by scene II, Act II, the play has done with
the “Turks without,” and moves to the invocation of the last scene of Ariosto’s poetic
romance. Our two warriors in the manner of Bradamante and Ruggiero retreat to their “silken
nuptial canopy,” but unlike them they are bound to fail in their romantic adventure.
Shakespeare through what seems to be his trickster double, Iago (a Spanish-sounding name),
elaborates the diabolic trap of disturbing public peace in order to make it impossible for the
couple to consummate their romance.

As we go through the play, Shakespeare, always through his surrogate or mouthpiece
Iago, in the manner of an inquisitor tests Othello on his adopted faith and finds him still a
Muslim or “Turk” in his habits of thought. After showing us Othello caught in an epileptic
crisis, perhaps an indirect reference to the Prophet Muhammad in the Christian theological
polemics of the time, Shakespeare delivers us an Othello with an angry look staring to death a
fearful Desdemona. In the hands of Shakespeare, Ariosto’s silken nuptial canopy woven for
the warrior couple turns into some sort of The Saracen’s Head which in the Elizabethan
period was a name used to refer to an inn. As Sari J Nasir tells us, Elizabethan inns carry such
a name because their fronts are ornamented with a Saracen “head pictured as grotesque in
features and of a red or garnish colour (1976:34).” Sari quotes in support of his argument
Shakespeare’s contemporary Joseph Hall who writes, “His (Saracen) angry eyes look like all
so glaring bright/…like a painting staring Saracen” (Ibid.).

In the painting of his romantic heroes, Shakespeare resorts to both Ovidian and
Neoplatonic modes of portrayal. The former mode is used to show the metamorphosis or
sliding back of the “noble Othello” into his original state because of his “changeable nature”
while the latter is employed for the depiction of the “constant” and “perfect” Desdemona. This divergence in the modes of representation cannot be the work of Iago, but that of Shakespeare the dramatist bent on demonstrating the impossibility of having Othello integrated or absorbed within a Christian entity. In accordance with the Ovidian mode of representation, Othello is degraded down in the scale of the chain of being to assume the “prophetic fury” of the Oriental silken handkerchief that he reclaims as a legacy. On the other hand, through the contrary neo-platonic mode, Desdemona is not only maintained but elevated up in that same chain of being to become a venerated cultural and religious icon. The end result of these contrary modes of representation is the displacement of the exogamous romance towards tragedy, a displacement that signals its complete failure since tragedy in the case of Othello is not followed up by that interlude or intimation of reconciliation between opposite camps as is the case in Romeo and Juliet, for example. Northrop Frye tells us that reconciliation is one of the hallmarks of Christian tragedy following in this Georg Friedrich Hegel’s claims for Greek Tragedy.

The tragic failure of the exogamous romance in Othello has much to do with the context(s) in which it was written and performed. I have already indicated that the first act of the play evokes the Anglo-Spanish war that climaxed with the wrecking of the Armada in the Channel in 1588, but which continued, though in a reduced form, up to the end of Queen Elizabeth I’s reign in 1603. We can hold that the historical presence of the “Noble Othello” in the first scene as a witness of the alliance between Elizabethan England on the one hand, and the Empire of Morocco and that of the Ottoman on the other in that first critical period of English history. In medieval romances, the name of Othello evokes Otuel that other converted moor who espouses Charlemagne’s daughter to become the commander of the Christian faith (Robinson Benedict S, 2007). I shall argue that Shakespeare’s revision of the medieval chivalric romance obeys to the cultural politics of the time. The politics of cultural
containment at the heart of medieval chivalric romance cannot withstand the demonstration that, after all, skin pigmentation is not an environmental matter as Morocco tells Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, but that of genes. Shakespeare’s contemporaries were dismayed to see that the marriage of Moors with English women did not issue in the birth of children with a fair complexion as the environmentalist theory held at the time. The decision of Queen Elizabeth to expel Moors in the 1590s reflects the popular anxiety of a racial threat to the purity of the race. Thus, Shakespeare’s cultural politics in *Othello* seems to have borrowed some of its lines from Elizabeth’s political agenda and the folkloric enactments “executed by ... Morris (Moorish) dancers on village greens all up and down the land ... cheering on Saint George as he fought the Turkish (i.e., Muslim) knight... (Harvey L.P., 2005:349)”

Moreover, Shakespearean criticism tells us that *Othello* is the first play to be performed in the court at the accession of James I to the English throne in 1603. No matter what the exact year when the play was staged, the fact is that *Othello* is marked by the same antagonism towards “Turks” for which James I was known. “Turk” is a general term of abuse whose range of references includes Ottomans, Moors, Spaniards, English, and any national whose behaviour or thought habits are judged inappropriate to English manners. However, in the context of the reconciliation of James I with the Spaniards at his accession in 1603 and the Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1604, the ambiguity of the term “Turk” is metaphorically reduced to cover solely the reference to Muslims or subjects of the Muslim empires. Consequently, Othello’s death can be read as a ritual expulsion of the “Turk” and the tragic failure of the exogamous romance as a renunciation of the Elizabethan politics of rapprochement with the Muslim world. With the shift of context of performance, Shakespeare’s evocation of the failure of the Spanish Armada in 1588 becomes that of the defeat of the Ottoman fleet in Lepanto in 1571 at the hands of a European coalition. As a King’s man, Shakespeare seems to
have followed up in the steps of James I, who celebrates the victory of Christian forces in Lepanto in a poem known by that name.

**Matrimony in The Tempest**

*The Tempest* (1613) follows up James I’s cultural politics a little further. In this play written for and staged in celebration of Elizabeth’s marriage, the King’s daughter, with the Palatinate Elector, Frederick, a matrimonial strategy adopted by the king as part and parcel of a larger policy of European alliance, Shakespeare revisits the medieval chivalric romance to give it one more turn of the screw after its tragic failure in *Othello*. In the manner of James I, Shakespeare chooses to remember to forget the Elizabethan “unholy” alliance with the Muslim world by serving us an unfinished exogamous romance involving the marriage of the King of Tunis with the King of Naples’s daughter Claribel. This disavowed or abrogated romance happens out of stage and is evoked only to be regretted as a breach of taboo. In their return journey from Tunis where they have been for the celebration of the marriage, the King and his court are caught in an illusory tempest caused by the Duke-Illusionist of Milan, Prospero exiled twelve years earlier with his daughter Miranda in an unnamed Mediterranean Island over which reigns a “blue-eyed” witch from Algiers called Sycorax and her son by the name of Caliban. The King’s ship is shipwrecked and its crew and courtly or royal passengers are stranded in different corners of the Island. Taking the appearance for the real, the King and his court look at the tempest as a sign of divine disapproval with and retribution of the matrimonial alliance of Naples with Tunis. The lack of ethical judgement comes in the following admonition addressed to the King by his brother Sebastian “Sir you may thank yourself for this great loss,/That would not bless our Europe with your daughter,/ But rather loose her to an African,/ Where she at least, is banish’d from your eye,/Who hath cause to wet the grief on ‘t (p.48, Emphasis mine).” This is the closest Shakespeare comes to King James I’s matrimonial politics of European rapprochement and reconciliation and its exclusion of the
North African states as the Other. Medieval chivalric romance shipwrecks on the bedrocks of King James’s politics, which sees matrimonial and political alliance as ethical only within a nascent European cultural space.

This leads me to the claim that Shakespeare is one of the early modern cultural architects of what today is referred to as Europe. Indeed, as soon as he drops out or abrogates the medieval chivalric romance as a loss, he re-appropriates it in the form of a “secular scripture” to celebrate the marriage of the King’s son Ferdinand with Prospero’s daughter Miranda. The “brave new world” of Europe was born and existing imperial conflicts are resolved at the altar of this endogamous romantic alliance. After Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, Othello in the play of the same name, the King of Tunis in *The Tempest*, it is the turn of the Algerian-born Caliban, in the same play, to be dismissed as possible conjugal partners of European females. He is even accused of sexual harassment by Prospero and his daughter when he has tried to have a romance with the latter.

Critics’ affirmation of Shakespeare’s postcolonialism in *The Tempest* needs qualification in the light of the failure of the Constance model of exogamous romances and the celebration of the endogamous one instead. Recent research into medieval romance shows that texts like Chaucer’s “Man of Law’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*, Gower’s second exemplum in the *Confessio Amantis*, Nicholas Trevet’s *Chronicles*, etc constitute a community of texts whose dominant gendered figure is Constance. According to Geraldin Heng:

> When Constance, a foreign beauty from an old empire, arrives on Muslim and pagan shores, bringing Christianity in her wake, and reconfiguring, from within, the families of the nations who receive her, she locates the entrance of a new instrument of empire particularly apposite for the late Middle Ages: a cultural hegemony that is the sign and type of modern empire formations.  
> 
> (2003: 183)

The loss of the territorial possessions in the East in the late medieval period was compensated for by a hegemonic type of possession at the level of the cultural production of romances. *The*
Tempest shows that this modality of hegemonic domination was no longer culturally viable as a narrative model of containment by the time of Shakespeare. Claribel does not convert the King of Tunis to the Christian civilisation as is the case in the Constance romances. In other words exogamous romance of the Constance species does not come to the rescue of the harsh political reality of the loss of Tunis for the Ottoman Empire in 1574. In this regard, Eliott writes that “by the time of Phillip II’s accession, Spanish North Africa was in a highly precarious state, from which the new king’s efforts were unable to rescue it (2002:55).” For Shakespeare to indulge in a Constance romance type at the time when a stalemate in the imperial wars between the Spaniards and the Ottomans was reached would have meant the commitment of the same ethical mistake as Antonio’s acceptance of his daughter’s marriage with the King of Tunis. He would also have brought on his head a tempest similar to the one that his romance surrogate Prospero brings on the royal retinue on its way back home from Tunis. James I is known for his call to his countrymen to disengage from Muslim affairs because of the allure that the latter exerted on them.

Apart from being construed as divine punishment by Antonio and his retinue, the “tempest” can also be regarded as a discursive strategy to prevent another Constance type of romance from developing between Miranda and Caliban in Sycorax’s island. The rejection of Caliban’s romantic urges for Miranda is followed up by an imaginary tempest that brings to the shore a suitable suitor in the person of Naples’s Prince Ferdinand. So for the second time in the play, the possibility of an exogamous Constance species of romance is dropped out in favour of an endogamous romance that moves the focus of the play away from Prospero’s “colony” to European affairs of dynastic succession. In this shift of narrative perspective from exogamous romance to an endogamous one Prospero’s “colony” becomes more a liability than an asset. As a King’s Man, Shakespeare makes his own his master’s foreign policy that the resolution of imperial conflicts through marital alliance in order to create a viable peaceful
European cultural space is much more superior in terms of ethics than the “scramble” for colonies that the exogamous romance can encourage.

Contrary to the tragic displacement of exogamous romances like the ones developed in plays like Othello, and Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare’s endogamous romances involving conflicts between contemporaneous European imperial households are most often inflected towards the genre of comedy. Arguably, among Shakespeare’s comically displaced endogamous romances, The Tempest is the one romance that takes place outside the imperial centres of pre-modern Europe, in a recognizable North African setting. Much has been said by postcolonial critics about the cross-Atlantic allegorical reference of Shakespeare’s play in spite of its explicit reference to Tunis and Algiers. If an allegorical interpretation has to be brought to bear on this romance, it contains many more elements referring to a North African setting than a cross-Atlantic one. For example, it is suggested above that Prospero stands for Philip II to whom Charles V conferred the Duchy of Milan in 1540. The latter had come to the possession of this Italian Duchy as an imperial fief attached to the Spanish Crown five years earlier with the death of the last Italian Sforza duke in 1535. This allegorical association of a historical Spanish figure and a literary surrogate finds support in Shakespeare’s reference to Prospero, who in total negligence of state affairs of his dukedom, is deeply immersed in his books leaving his plotting brother Antonio in charge of his dukedom. Much the same is said about the real Duke of Milan, also King of Spain Phillip II. Eliott describes him as being “safe only among his state papers, which he would tirelessly read, mark, annotate, and emend, as if hoping to find in them the perfect solution to an amenable conundrum – a solution which would somehow dispense him from the agonizing duty of making up his mind (2002:250).”

Prospero-Phillip II allegorical connection brings to mind another association between Antonio and Don Juan of Austria, King Phillip’s half-brother, who is also known for political treachery against his royal brother. It seems that Shakespeare has found in King Phillip’s
relation with his half-brother Don Juan of Austria a historical material out of which to construct a polarised characterisation peculiar to romance. Don Juan of Austria/ Antonio is the Doppelganger of Phillip II in Spanish history and Prospero in Shakespeare’s play. The bard of Avon’s romantic separation between the “good” and the “bad” or “ugly” Spaniards came as a result of the political rapprochement between James I’s England with Spain following the 1604 treaty. With this distinction between the two faces of Spain (more about this later), Shakespeare can go so far as to suggest a symbolic triangulation between Phillip II, (once married to Mary Tudor), Prospero, and King James I. The homology between the two historical figures and Prospero shows in the attributes of intellectualism, reclusion, and belief in divine kingship that he assigns to his central character. James I is reported to have been shocked to discover the “scandalous” covert support of Elizabethan England for the Moriscos’ rebellion against their king at the start of his reign. His outrage had much to do with the fact that the author of The True Law of Free Monarchies (1598) and The Basilicon Doran (1599) believes that “subjects owed complete and unconditional allegiance to their monarch (Harvey E.P., 2005: 350). The divine conception of Kingship was also defended by Phillip II, who in this light appears as the political father of King James I, with the significant difference that Shakespeare makes his Prospero-King James I appear much more as a European peace-maker who believes that war must give precedence to matrimonial diplomacy.

This allegorical reading of Shakespeare’s romance can be pushed further by an investigation into the motivation of the characters. Shakespeare’s whole drama starts with Antonio’s usurpation of power and the placement of Prospero’s Duchy of Milan under the control of the King of Naples, Alonso. A short reminder of the history of the Kingdom of Naples can help understand better the source of conflict between Milan and Naples in The Tempest. Except for the suppression of the “f”, Alonso strangely enough reminds us of Alfonso the Magnanimous. According to Eliott, the latter “chose to live in the Kingdom of
Naples, which had fallen to him in 1443,” a decision taken as a symbol for the disenchantment that the Catalans felt as a result of the accession of a Castilian dynasty to the Crown of Aragon in 1412 (2002: 36). Alfonso belongs to a junior branch of the house of Aragon. In 1495, the Kingdom of Naples became one of the battlefields between the forces of Charles VIII of France and the Holy league between England, Spain, the Empire and the Papacy. The most important actor of this mostly Franco-Spanish war is Ferdinand of Aragon, another name that Shakespeare borrows for Alfonso’s son in his play.

The most remarkable aspect of the Franco-Spanish war that ended in 1504 with the French recognition of the Spaniards as lawful possessors of Naples is the deployment of Spanish diplomacy for winning the support of other countries for its cause. The placement of Naples under the “government of viceroys and the jurisdiction of the Council of Aragon” was as much a diplomatic triumph for Spanish foreign policy as a military one (Ibid. 134). This foreign policy was mostly based on alliances propped up by dynastic marriages, one of which was the arranged marriage between Catherine of Aragon and Arthur, Prince of Wales. In the short term, these marital alliances terminated with that most formidable pre-modern European empire known as the Holy Roman Empire or the Hapsburg Empire. James I seems to have held his cue from this Spanish foreign policy to build his empire of peace in Europe. Obviously, the first scenes of The Tempest underline a breach in this Spanish foreign policy by privileging marital alliances with Muslim enemies in the manner of medieval romances over European Renaissance endogamous marriages for establishing permanent peace. At the same time, they refer to political usurpation consisting of Antonio’s placement of the Duchy of Milan under Naples. As Paul A. Olson claims, these scenes might well have been inspired by the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559) that ended the war between France and Spain by the confirmation of Philip II as Duke of Milan. Following this treaty, both the two Kingdoms of Sicily and the Duchy of Milan were placed under the authority of Naples, itself subordinated
to Spain. Olson further argues that a Duchy of Milan “independent from Spain would also have carried an appeal for James, who had his eye on acquiring a role in Europe through his daughter’s 1612/1613 marriage to the Palatinate Elector. (Olson A. Paul, 2008: 214) The last scenes of the European romantic comedy that closes Shakespeare’s are in line with James I’s foreign policy for resolution of conflicts in Europe.

However, the endogamous romantic comedy in Shakespeare also resolves the problems of incest and miscegenation, both of them related to the genre of romance. Technically, if Prospero/ Shakespeare has not caused the tempest that throws the royal crew to the shore, the filial love between Miranda and Prospero can easily be tainted by incest, and the resistance to miscegenation or exogamous romance will not have sounded true. However, the form or organisation of the plot in this case is not without implication at the level of content, which suggests a significant difference between the Spanish and the English as regards empire building. There is a stark contrast between the exogamous romance that the King of Naples has arranged for his daughter Claribel and the endogamous romance that Prospero/James I has arranged for his daughter Miranda/Elizabeth. Rolan Greene has well documented the relation between “love and Empire in the Americas,” how love poetry and romance was used as a medium to speak about issues of colonial expansion. The hallmark of these two parallel emotional states (colonial expansion and love) is that of “unrequited conquest.” In his discussion of how petrarchism accommodated itself to the expression of colonial building in America, the relatively higher anxiety that the English felt towards the problem of social miscegenation caused by “putting desire for conquest ahead of other ends. (1999: 183)” In the case, this anxiety is attached to exogamous romance of Claribel and the King of Tunis condemned as amoral rather than the celebrated endogamous one of Miranda with the King of Naples’s son. In the former’s case that love or romance goes wrong whereas in the latter the love story or romance is requited with reconciliation.
In short, the anxiety of the English over the “desire of conquest ahead of other ends” is also self-referential in the sense that it points to a reversal in English foreign policy that came with King James I’s accession to the throne of England. Prospero’s Island might well be an allegory for Elizabethan England’s multiple Muslim alliances. The “blue-eyed hag” associated with Algiers can well stand for Queen Elizabeth I, whose “evil” policy of allying with the Christian enemy (Algiers) were dismissed by the witch specialist James I/Prospero.

North Frye reminds us that romance involves the motif of dream marked by descent into the other world and the ascent into a higher one. We notice the same pattern in Shakespeare’s romance marked by Prospero’s exile into what seems to be a desert island, and the ascent into a “brave new world” made possible by Prospero-cum-James I. This leads us to the claim that the history of Prospero’s dream Island is one of decolonisation rather than conquest, and that Shakespeare lived a postcolonial condition in the manner of an early modern ex-colonised English man rather than a coloniser.

It follows from this discussion that the cross-generic representation of empires in Shakespeare’s plays is marked by tragic or comic displacements of medieval romance. The genre of medieval romance is inflected towards tragic failure in cases involving imperial encounters with the Oriental Other as is the case in Othello and Antony and Cleopatra. On the contrary, when conflicts deal with contemporaneous European imperial houses as in The Tempest and Much Ado about Nothing, it is comedy that always takes over, signalling the resolution of conflicts and ultimate reconciliation among European antagonists. Speaking from the European perspective, Shakespeare displaces the exogamous urge of medieval romance by an endogamous urge in an attempt to substitute a secular idea of a peaceful Europe for the religious ideal of Christendom that shipwrecked with sixteenth century religious cleavages. It is highly significant that Shakespeare ended his dramatic career with a play putting on stage Prospero who, in the manner of James I, glories in the title of Rex.
Pacificus in a nascent “brave new world”. This early modern “brave new world” comes as a result of reconciliation between early modern European powers and the “pacification” of the Mediterranean Island of Sycorax attached to Eldjzair (the Arabic name for Algiers which also means Island). The Tempest, it has to be noted, was enacted as a kind of supplement in a wedding programme of the King’s daughter Elizabeth in 1603 that included a Thames show or spectacle staging the defeat of the Barbary Pirates of Algiers by the British Navy. In many ways, Shakespeare’s brave new world is as rosy as the brave new world imagined by African and Asian ex-colonised politicians in the 1950s and 1960s. It is of the order of wish fulfilment, because in reality European peace was soon overtaken by the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) and insecurity in the Mediterranean Sea continued even after Sir Robert Mansel’s expedition against the Regency of Algiers in 1620. Finally, as David Delison Hebb (1994) has superbly demonstrated it, the domestic violence that ultimately led to the beheading of Charles I in the 1640s has one of its remote sources in the fiscal problem caused by the Ship Money levied at James I’s decision to suppress piracy in the Mediterranean basin.
Conclusion

This first part of the dissertation leads me to the following results. In the first place, it has to be remarked that the Renaissance or pre-modern period thanks to the humanists and protestant polemicists made possible the circulation of a new discourse about women, at least the noble ones. No one would seriously argue, as Juliet Dusinberre does in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1996), that humanism and Puritanism had a widespread effect on the relation of domination between women and men during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods because the former were still victims of misogyny even if their chains were refined. No one would also seriously argue that women knew no Renaissance in the Renaissance period because women, for the first time in European/British history, became a centre of focus in the debate about human nature. Obviously, the debate launched by the humanists and protestant reformers had enough impulse to find a strong echo in the works of Shakespeare.

As I have attempted to make clear, though Shakespeare acted mostly on behalf of Queen Elizabeth I and James I, his plays had a popular and grotesque flavour. His humanism is not a classical humanism in the sense that it does not celebrate man and woman solely for their refinement. In other words, his plays do not indulge solely in what Habermas calls “the representation of publicity” which consists of staging spectacles involving representative Renaissance women and Renaissance men like Queen Elizabeth I and James I in order to enhance public authority.
PART TWO
Hobbes, Locke, and Mary Astell: Dialogue and Polemics

Introduction

The purpose of this second part of my thesis is to study the thematic concern of human emancipation and construction of commonwealth set forth in the Enlightenment philosophical, political, and social project which “seeks to replace fear and superstition with consent and truth and looks forward to the establishment of a social order based upon reason and natural law” (Macey, 2000:111). Consent, truth, reason and natural law constitute the very nature of the Enlightenment. These will eventually concretize in a social contract between the governor(s) and the governed. Once the members of society—by consent—enter civil body politic, rationality, tolerance and equal rights will prevail. Therefore, the paradigm of the Enlightenment is emancipation. This emancipation is not restricted but tends to universality; its *raison d’être* is mutual consent and compact which will displace absolutism.

Emancipation, according to John Locke and other philosophers of the Enlightenment, can be reached only if knowledge, that hero of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is reached. In other words, in order for humanity to attain universal peace and freedom, it is necessary to understand the natural world and man’s place in it on the basis of reason. Looked at from this perspective, the Enlightenment posits a secular philosophy which assumes change and progress. This assumption draws its force from the fact that history was considered in terms of dialectical progression. So in the first chapter, I shall summarize in broad outline the major revolutions that marked the seventeenth-century century as a commencement of what in cultural history is known as the Enlightenment. One of my major contentions is that the germs of Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment in Britain were sown in the first half of the seventeenth century and even earlier in the constitutional
struggle for English man’s rights, the scientific and geographical discoveries, and the reformation. My assumption is that the historical material evolution interacted with the idealism of some thinkers of the time to give birth to new ideas of humanity or rather mankind and society.

The second will investigate the dialogue between Thomas Hobbes and John Locke as social theorists of the nature of social contract and other related ideas like freedom. I do not pretend to be original in this comparison since these two authors have already received the attention of a huge number of scholars. The little contribution that I seek to bring to the debate resides in the dialogic and triangular perspectives that I bring to bear on the two male authors by associating their thought with that of a contemporary female author Mary Astell. So while I concentrate on the dialogic relationship between Hobbes and Locke in the second chapter, I look forward to the analysis of the manner Astell will redeploy their paradigms of thought in the third chapter to protest against the exclusion of women from the newly born political kingdom of the Glorious Revolution. My major contention is that Hobbes, Locke and Astell constitute a conflictual triumvirate over the political thought in their time. In fleshing out this claim, I bring out the first evidence that the public and private spheres of political activity were not as watertight as Jurgen Habermas envisages them in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Moreover, contrary to his claim, I would argue that women did not wait until the twentieth century to enter the world of bourgeois letters in an attempt to shape public opinion in favour of the expansion of human emancipation to women.
CHAPTER FOUR
An Overview of the Revolutionary Ideas of the Enlightenment

Before embarking on the study of the texts proper I think it appropriate to throw some light on the historical context of the Enlightenment period. I shall explore the salient aspects of the period which bear relation to the texts under discussion. Like all historical trends and movements, the Enlightenment had its roots in the past. Three of the chief sources for Enlightenment thought were the ideas of the ancient Greek philosophers, the Renaissance, and the scientific revolution of the late Middle Ages. The ancient philosophers had noticed the regularity in the operation of the natural world and concluded that the reasoning mind could see and explain this regularity. Among these philosophers Aristotle was preeminent in discovering and explaining the natural world. The birth of Christianity interrupted philosophical attempts to analyze and explain the universe purely on the basis of reason.

The transformations brought about by the Renaissance thought, reformation ideology, and the scientific spirit impacted the different walls of the social life in Europe and particularly in England and France. Let us briefly outline the various social mutations. As mentioned above, the hierarchical divine order was seriously challenged by the new wave of scientific and philosophical theories that started with by Galileo's discovery of the movement of the Earth around the sun and around itself and Machiavelli's separation of political action from moral considerations. This trend was later on reinforced in England with the findings of such scientists and theorists as Francis Bacon (1561-1625), Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and John Locke (1632-1704). Their theories were subsequently applied to many fields including politics and, in this respect one would assert that the Glorious Revolution (1688) would not have happened without them.
Seventeenth-century England could not remain unaffected by this tide of change which is said to have no boundaries: François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694 -1778) admitted that enlightenment ideas even owed much of their advancement in the course of the eighteenth century to Sir Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and John Locke from England (cf. Kramnick, 1995). Between 1600 and 1700, the country went through unprecedented events ranging from the Civil War, which created several divisions among the English population, the execution of Charles I and the rule of Oliver Cromwell, the restoration of monarchy with Charles II to the Glorious Revolution in 1688. The latter put an end to monarchical absolutism during the reign of James II (1685 - 1688) and brought William III from Holland to the throne in England (1688-1702).

To most people, this “Glorious Revolution” which holds its qualification from its bloodless aspect was the outcome of the release of people’s minds from the fetters of the imposed traditional chain of being. It was not influenced by so many “miraculous circumstances as the first Earl of Clarendon explained: “That men might think that heaven and earth, and the stars designed it” but rather a victory of pragmatism and human reason responding to a clearly perceived threat to the laws and liberties of the kingdom.

John Locke (1632- 1704), the patron philosopher of liberalism, tried to justify this Glorious Revolution by the people’s willingness to protect these liberties from the abuses of Monarchy under James II, who tried to rule without the consent of the governed through their representatives in Parliament. In his Second Treatise on Civil Government published in 1690, Locke advocated a political contract between the governor and the governed. The contract should rely on consent and trust, not on the
absolute authority of the monarch who derives his power from the Divine Right doctrine.

Before the wind of change blew into the country, the English life was organized in an established hierarchy within a God-centered world. It was dominated by a blind absolutism of divinely mandated kings to rule over their subjects, an assumption defended by Sir Robert Filmer in his work *Patriarcha* published in (1680). According to the latter, kings are the fathers of their societies and derive their just power from the ancient Patriarch Noah who was the natural father of his people.

In *A social History of England*, Asa Briggs quotes Richard Hooker’s *Law of Ecclesiastical Polity*, (1593) saying that: “Obedience of creatures to law of nature (was) the stay of the whole world” and that “all things do work after a sort according to law.” The laws of society, therefore, required that “every part do obey one head or governor.” (1983:118).

These “ecclesiastical laws” of nature were implemented at all the social levels, including the management of the relationship between the governed and the governor. They were reinforced by paternal authority within the family and the preaching of the church in society at large. Each household, like society as a whole, had its head who in theory at least, expected obedience in his small realm. Wives, by law as well as by customs, were held to be subordinate to their husbands. So, also were children to parents. It is in this respect that William Perkins, the great puritan of the period wrote a *Domestic Conduct* book in 1590. According to him, the definition of a husband was: “He that hath authority over the wife”, and of parents: “They which hath power and authority over children”.

(Ibid.118)

It is then for the purpose of maintaining this chain of being that the Bible was brandished as a shield to justify that “the order of nature” – God’s dispensation – was directly linked with the order of man. Such a justification was preached every Sunday from the pulpit or the parish church. The latter was a social center where elections were held, poor relief distributed and announcements either private or
public made. The pulpit was almost the sole source of ideas including those on economics and politics.

With the teaching of the clergymen, the English were indoctrinated by the theories of predestination, whereby man’s fate was in God’s hands, not in his own. They also believed in the eternity of the other life (the life to come) which seemed for them much more real than the brief and uncertain life on earth. The same belief also reinforced the assumption that the relationship of a ruler to his subjects, of a Lord to his tenants, of a master to his servants and of a husband to his wife should all be governed by the same rules. So was then the hierarchical chain of being ranking from God at the top to women at the bottom.

However, the growth of education and the advancement of learning which started in Renaissance Italy were gradually stretching their influence to all the parts of Western Europe. Thanks to this growth also, seventeenth century England became the cradle for the emergence of a new spirit and a new vision of the world that were to give birth to a number of revolutions which, as I mentioned before, converged in their flow to the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and which are actually very difficult to be separated one from another. Though they apparently covered specific domains of social life such as science, religion and politics, they formed a network of correspondences and influences. The Glorious Revolution is then not to be dissociated from the scientific, the religious and the parliamentary revolutions which preceded it.

**The Religious Revolution**

In the early years of the 1600s, the First Stuart King, James I (1603-1625) allowed the first Authorized English version of the Bible. The St James Bible, as it is referred to, could thus be at the reach of the English people who were not initiated to
Latin. It follows that they could not only read the Bible themselves, but also had henceforth the opportunity to interpret it. The translated version offered them the possibility for skepticism on what the pulpit was dictating them. Previously, questioning or even being dubious about the church’s recommendations and instructions through the clergymen was not tolerated, and the laymen had no accurate knowledge of the content of the Bible to dare challenge the established mystical truth about a miraculous universe. In this respect, Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, pointed out in an essay he wrote in 1748, the warning of both the state and the church for the people so as not be skeptical and reluctant towards the received instructions. He says: “But I hear on all sides, “Do not argue!”” (quoted in Kramnik, 1995: 3) This explains that England, as a society of clergymen, would be justified in obligating itself by oath to a certain unchangeable order so as to enjoy an increasing guardianship on each of its members and thereby over the people as a whole.

However, a considerable proportion of the people gradually came to understand that humanity was not innately corrupt as the clergy taught, nor was the good life found only in a beatific state of other worldly salvation. Gradually also, the English people embarked on a self-construction process as regards religious faith. They could thus slowly throw off the yoke of superintendence and tutelage from their shoulders.

This slow release from tutelage, along with the individual reading and interpretation of the Bible, resulted in religious disputes which were an undeniable feature of this period. It was the case of Puritanism viewed by a number of socio-historians as a movement of religious reformers prior to the Civil War. Lawrence Stone, for instance, defines Puritanism as: “A generalized conviction of the need for independent judgment based on conscience and Bible reading”. (in Kenyon, J.P.,
1978: p. 28). For G.R. Elton, another eminent historian, the word 'puritan' is one which “those best learned in the field do not use without reluctance and apprehension.” (Ibid. 28)

From these two definitions, one could hardly avoid concluding that the emergence of puritanism as a religious category was not going on in the same direction as that of the reconstruction of the English religious landscape, a reconstruction that advocated the use of reason to understand the world through questioning rather than blindly believing in the suspiciously established “divine” code. But the puritans were not the only revolutionary group of the period. There was a variety of other sects claiming the authority of the Bible. Independents, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and Millenarians played a preponderant part in the Civil War that broke out in 1642 between Parliament and King Charles I.

The Scientific Revolution

Goethe, Johan Wolfgang Von (1749-1832) says:

Of all discoveries and opinions, none may have exerted a greater effect on the human spirit than the doctrine of Copernicus. The world had scarcely become known as round and complete in itself when it was asked to waive the tremendous privilege of being the center of the universe. Never perhaps, was a greater demand made on mankind for by this admission so many things vanished in mist and smoke! [...] a doctrine which in its converts authorized and demanded freedom of view and greatness of thoughts so far unknown, indeed not even dreamed of.

(Goethe quoted in Biographies, 2012)

This quotation summarizes the great revolution that started in Renaissance Italy and that took root with Francis Bacon in the scientific domain at the end of the middle ages, attained its completion with Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century. Francis Bacon was one of the pioneers of the scientific spirit. He substantially contributed to the development of the scientific method that relies on observation and experimentation. He announced among many other things, the necessity of rationality
in the quest for truth. According to him, the extraction of truth from nature and the inquisition of witches in courts were analogous. Therefore, many critics associated nature with women. Among them one could refer to Carolyn Merchant who assumed that it was during Bacon’s period that women became identified with “resisting nature” that needed to be subdued and witches as “chaotic nature” that needed to be controlled.

Another fundamental paradigm of the Enlightenment, set by Sir Isaac Newton reinforced the change of the world view. His *Principia Mathematica*, published in 1687 laid down the theorem of the law of universal gravitation whereby the physical universe operates by simple rational laws (cf. Donovan, 1992). However, the Newtonian world view presumed that all which did not operate according to reason was Other and insignificant. That’s why it was postulated that the public world and the physical cosmos on the one hand, and the emotional, moral and the aesthetic matters on the other, were to be set apart, dissociated. (Ibid.) The former is governed by reason while the latter is subjective, capricious and unreasonable. By means of extrapolation, male liberal thinkers held a presumption that women fell into the second category. Therefore, they were considered as being non-rational and had to be controlled and subdued by men, the presupposed superior and reasonable members of the species of mankind.

Before Bacon and Newton, Nicolai Copernicus (1473-1543) was considered as the founder of modern astronomy. The latter's investigations and celestial observations led him to give the world his great work *De Revolutionibus* (*On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies*), published in 1543. In this work, he asserted that the earth rotated on its axis once a year. Before that, people used to believe in Ptolemaic theory (of Claudius Ptolemy, an Egyptian living in Alexandria about 150
A.D) whereby the universe was a closed space bounded by a spherical envelope beyond which there was nothing. Earth was a fixed, inert, immovable mass, located at the center of the universe, and all celestial bodies, including the sun and the fixed stars revolved around it. Bruno (1548-1600) and Galileo (1564-1642), both of them Italian physicists, embraced the Copernican theory unreservedly and as a result suffered much personal injury at the hands of the powerful church inquisitors. Giordano Bruno had the audacity to suggest that the sun and its planets, were but one of a larger number of similar systems. The implication of this was the probability of the existence of other inhabited worlds with rational beings equal or possibly superior to us. For such ‘blasphemy’, Bruno was tried before the inquisition, condemned and burned in 1600.

This episode shows the extent of the grip that the church had on the established faith and beliefs in the miraculous world. It also shows that any attempt to challenge this traditional view was not tolerated. The most important aspect of Copernicus’ work was that it changed the place of man in the cosmos forever. Thanks to these findings, some men in seventeenth century England were becoming conscious of these new possibilities of controlling the forces of both nature and society. The great geographical discoveries, scientific, technical and medical advance, the liberation of thought during the Reformation and after, offered quite new perspectives for fresh thought about the nature of man.

Central to the emergence of this tide of change in England, was the belief in objective truth, independent of the observer, expressible in vigorous human terms. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was among the English pioneer scientists who had appealed for a methodological procedure to search for this objective truth. In his *Novium Organum* published in 1620, he said: “I [...] assert that not much can be
known in nature by the way which is now in use” (Kramnick, 1995: 41). Bacon’s method was both inductive and experimental, amassing data on important subjects, classifying them and developing from them wider rules and hypotheses.

He started from the fact that: “Man, being servant and interpreter of nature, can do and understand so much only as he has observed in fact and in thought of the course of nature: beyond this, he neither knows anything nor can do anything”. (Ibid. 31)

Bacon advocated the primacy of interpretation of natural phenomena relying on the instruments of the mind, over anticipations that have their foundations in commonly received notions. He said that “In sciences founded on opinion and dogmas, the use of anticipations and logic is good; for in them, the object is to command assent to the proposition, not to master the thing.” (Ibid. 40)

With this experimental methodology, Bacon rejected the old Aristotelian and scholastic methods of learning implemented in universities. He affirmed that one could not “expect any great advancement in science from the super inducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin a new from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a while with mean and contemptible progress.” (Ibid. 41)

The repudiation of the traditional curriculum set forth a new scientific approach which seemed to have had a large echo among the scientists that came after Bacon. Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Robert Boyle and John Locke brought about the assessment of natural laws and natural phenomena in a way that metamorphosed the human existence than ever before. Experimental science spread quickly during and after the Civil War (1640-1660). Under the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell, there had been a group of remarkable resident scientists at the universities and in the
city of London. Their work came into the limelight of fashion and favour at the court of the Restoration (1660). The Royal Society was founded under the patronage of King Charles II (1600-1688) and his cousin Prince Rupert, himself a conductor of chemical experiments. Many subjects of daily importance were being studied in a Scientific Spirit that already had a great influence on educated thought in England.

Isaac Newton, Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University immortalized this new science and its ideals for the coming century. The advances reached in seventeenth century England and even in the following centuries were greatly indebted to this man. He had a tremendous contribution in familiarizing the minds of his countrymen with the idea of natural law in the universe. With Newton, modern civilization did something that the ancient had not been able to do. According to him, the natural universe is governed not by the miraculous whimsy of supernatural forces, but ruled by rational scientific laws which are accessible to human being through the scientific method of experiment and observation. Newton’s idea resulted in a coherent system of verifiable predictions and set up the tone for much of what would follow the publication of his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1687.

**The Political Revolution**

The period we are concerned with also went through a political revolution which was no less important than the scientific and the religious ones I have outlined before. It had its consequences, not only on the political system, legislative methods and the organization of the relationship between the governed and the governor, but also on the assessment of the natural rights of people. The European mind that had considerably improved in its scientific and philosophical view was then demanding a similar improvement in terms of political theories.
During his life time, Nicolai Machiavelli (1496-1527), the Italian philosopher had been calling for a new political paradigm that separates between morality and politics. Half a century later, the French philosopher, Jean Bodin (1530-1596) did the same with his appeal for the institution of a high legislative authority that symbolized the state in his book *Les six livres de la République*, published in 1576). It follows that, in the seventeenth century, Europe had reached such a political thought that new political theories were imposing themselves as a necessity. It is then in this context that the natural rights theory and the notion of the social contract appeared in the second half of the century with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

However, if the political ideas had reached a certain level of advance since the late sixteenth century in Europe as whole, it was in England that the political events of the mid seventeenth century urged a serious debate for their implementation in the system of government: the political situation culminated in a conflict between the King and Parliament during the 1630s and 1640s. This political and constitutional problem arose mainly from the controversial relationship between the executive and the supporters of the Divine Right doctrine on one side, and the parliamentarians of the House Commons on the other.

In reality, this conflict between Parliament and King is as ancient as the reign of King John I in the thirteenth century. The tradition of associating parliament to the king’s rule had taken its root in the Magna Charta or the Great Charter that the king was obliged to sign in 1215. This document had limited the king’s abuses in imposing taxes. It also stipulated that nobody should be executed or kept in prison without a fair trial. During this period, it was the Barons who had impelled the king to take their advice in ruling the country, but in the course of time, a parliament with two houses, the Lords and the Commons, was instituted. Yet the Magna Carta
guaranteed only against arbitrary disregard for feudal right. The authors (the barons) neither intended to dismantle the royal government nor legitimate rebellion. Still the document was a forerunner of the rights of Man and the Bill of Rights of 1689.

In the seventeenth century, the relationship between the parliament and the king was raised to debate and conflict over the question which was to what extent parliament was to be involved in decision making. In James I’s reign (1603-1625) parliament, composed mainly of the propertied men, was quite clearly arrogating more power to itself over taxation and asserting its liberties and independent status. James often retaliated by enunciating the theory of the Divine Right of the king and stretching the royal prerogative. But because of his urgent need for money, he usually resorted to compromise with parliament. His son Charles I (1625-1649) was less wise, however. When parliament tried to limit his power and oblige him to sign the Petition of Rights in 1628, he ignored it and continued to impose taxes without parliamentary consent. More than this, he proceeded to arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of those who refused to pay the taxes. In 1629, Charles I simply dissolved parliament and ruled the country for twelve years without it.

Yet, under the threat of the Scots’ invasion of England, the King felt the need to summon Parliament in April 1640. But militant, and at the same time apprehensive, the Commons refused to vote the huge sum demanded unless their multitudinous grievances were settled. The result was that parliament was dissolved again after only three weeks.

Consequently, a civil war broke out between the military parliamentarians and the King’s army. The war ended with the execution of Charles I at White Hall in 1649, and Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), a Member of Parliament, was to rule the country with the military leaders of the civil war until he died in 1658. Cromwell’s
successors did not have his skills, but their harsh military rule led the English people to feel nostalgia towards the softer monarchical rule that was restored in 1660.

In his book *Oceana* (1656), James Harrington claimed that the war had broken out because of shifts in the ownership of land from the Crown and lords to the commons resulting in a transfer of power. But for Karl Marx (1818-1883), the English struggle was that of Bourgeois against feudal England, and that the power followed property; it was a Bourgeois revolution led by progressive elements in the society. Many others, evoked reasons which ran in the same flow: it was the members of the nobility and gentry who drew England into the civil war.

Before the war, the Long Parliament had abolished the Court of Wards. Then after, Land lords were free, not only from the burdens of feudal service, but from monetary substitutes as well. Enormous areas of confiscated ecclesiastical and royalist land thus changed hands into the growing mercantile community, the yeomen and the artisans’ classes where there was much personal and economic independence. The 1628 Petition of Rights, which I mentioned before, is another sigh of relief in the sphere of civic rights. The Bill was a catalogue of grievances and demands to put an end to non approved parliamentary taxation, martial laws and unregulated powers of imprisonment.

The conclusion one can draw from the Cromwellian revolution is that it resulted from the new political and religious thought. The latter were only possible with the spread of a new scientific spirit. It was a war of ideas both in church and state. Men chose their sides on account of their religious and political opinions; there were more lords and gentlemen on the side of the King, as there were more yeomen and townsfolk on the side of Parliament. Above all, the extending city of London was on the side of Parliament.
England went then through the *Interregnum* when monarchy and the House of Lords were abolished. The state was governed by an elected debating assembly in the body of the House of Commons. Oliver Cromwell, originally a farmer, symbolizes the downfall of a whole system of traditions in which the king and the lords reigned under the aegis of the Divine Right doctrine.

The puritan aspect of the revolution needs also to be underlined. As already mentioned, the puritans had emerged as a revolutionary group before the outbreak of the war. Therefore it is almost systematic that they were to influence the way England was to be run during this period. The Major-Generals exercised their authority in the name of “godliness and virtue”, and the puritan Richard Baxter hoped England to be “a land of saints and a pattern of holiness to the world”. (Quoted in Travelyan, G.M., 1942: 346)

The Stuart Dynasty resumed power with Charles II (1600-85) and James II (1685-88). Politically, it restored the office of the king, parliament and law in place of the military rule of the *interregnum*. Ecclesiastically, it restored the bishops to reinforce the religious inequalities in place of Puritanism. Socially, it restored the nobles and gentry to their hereditary place as the leaders of local and national life. Many of the Roundhead leaders disappeared into exile, and religious non-conformists suffered intermittent persecution. The victims of the restoration were thus members of the middle class who were the effective actors and promoters of the civil war, both among the puritans as a religious sect, or as merchants as an economic class.

But the restored monarchy was no more absolute in character as it was before the parliamentary revolution. Apart from the last years of Charles II’s reign (1682-85) and James II’s short reign; its most important feature was the supremacy of the non-monarchical elements of the constitution, that is to say, the House of Commons
in Parliament and the Common law. The seeds of a new system of government were already sown. The French Ambassador in Charles II’s London wrote to Louis XIV about English monarchy describing it as one which “has a monarchical appearance, and there is a king, but it is very far from being a monarchy”. (Quoted in Hill: 36)

This is indeed evidence for the birth of a new type of monarchy that has, though reluctantly and with much resistance, absorbed the liberal ideals of the revolutionary period. These ideals were held as safeguards against any abuses from the monarch and the gentry. The legislative body through Parliament proved to be a necessary component of a germinating new English political system. People rejected absolutism and abandoned belief in divine monarchical patriarchy. When the Stuart king James II tried to revive these falling-apart dogmas, he was overthrown in the Glorious Revolution in 1688.

These changes that were brought by the different revolutions of the seventeenth century resulted in the enhancement of the importance of the natural rights and the reduction from the despotic authority of the monarch over his subjects. It was however, not the only face of facts. The citizens were in fact freed from the fetters of an absolute monarch and his abuses. John Locke advocated that no civil government could be effective without the agreement and the consent of the governed. But was this freedom enlarged to cover the rights of women in the seventeenth century family and society? Did their conditions improve? Did these changes also diminish their subjection to the male sex? I shall attempt to answer these questions in the following section which is devoted to the woman issue.

**The Condition of Women**

In the seventeenth century women were generally acknowledged by all as the ‘Weaker Vessel’. This phrase had originated with Tyndale’s translation of the New
Testament into English in 1526, and later was given further prominence in the King James Bible. In the latter, Saint Peter advises wives to “be in subjection to your own husbands” and urges these same husbands to give “honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel” (quoted in Fraser, 2002: 1). The nature of this weakness, however, may concern a variety of aspects: moral, spiritual, physical, and intellectual.

According to Antonia Fraser, seventeenth century people had accepted the legacy of the moral inferiority of women for Eve’s behaviour in the Garden of Eden and thus, felt the duty to protect them from temptation and sin. Witchcraft and sorcery represented perhaps the extreme forms of the devils’ attention to womankind. (Fraser, 2002: 2) In this regard, William Perkins wrote in 1608: “the woman being the weaker sex is sooner entangled by the devil’s illusions with this damnable art than the man.” (Quoted in Ibid. 3) Similarly Elizabeth Josceline, laying down precepts for her unborn child in 1622, hypothetically wrote to her: “thou art weaker and thy temptation to this vice [witchcraft] greater” (Ibid. 3).

Women’s spiritual inferiority was rooted in the notion that they were actually born without souls. Though it represented the extreme view, this notion had certainly influenced those who doubted in the equality of the male and female souls. It is the reason why the need to stress the sameness of the soul in the bodies of men and women was significantly felt by the friends of the female cause throughout the seventeenth century. In his 1637 book, William Austin pointed out that in the “soul there is neither hees nor shees” (Ibid. 4). Richard Allestree went a step further and declared that God “gave the feeblest woman as large and capacious a soul as that of the greatest hero”. (Ibid. 5) In spite of the individual initiatives such as that of Austin and Allestree in the defense of women's equality, the assumptions concerning women’s spiritual inferiority remained largely the dominant trend.
Lawrence Stone in *The family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1979), for example, underlined the reinforcement of the pre-existing patriarchal aspects of internal power relationships within the family in seventeenth century England. According to him, this occurred partly because “the nuclear family became more free from interference by the kin” and partly “because of the wider religious, legal and political changes which enhanced the powers of the head of the household” (Stone, 1979: 94).

The shift to Protestantism meant that the family head was the inheritor of much of the authority and many of the powers of the priests. The family and its head thus filled the vacuum left by the decline of the church and its priests as the central institution for moral and religious instruction, and the word of God was to some degree removed from the parish church and transferred to the private home. Man now stood alone before his maker, with nothing but his conscience, the Bible and the preachers to guide him in the moral direction of his household.

Moreover, the rise of the nuclear family to replace the older one which used to include the relatives and all that was covered by the notion of kinship meant a decline in the involvement of the latter in the family affairs and their interference to settle eventual conjugal conflicts. Wives maltreated by their husbands were less able to turn to their kin for support and defense. Therefore, this partial withdrawal of external support and intervention made family life more liable to explosive conflicts between husband and wife.

In such a situation, where women lost the church as a sacred place for the alleviation of their pains and the priest as a confessor, on the one hand, and of the relatives as mediators and supporters against the husband’s abuses on the other, a
pertinent question is worth asking. Where not the conditions of women after the Glorious Revolution worse than they used to be under the hierarchical order?

Stone again believes that the growth of patriarchy was deliberately encouraged by the new Renaissance state on the grounds that the subordination of the family to its head is analogous to the subordination of subjects to the sovereign. There ensues that the theoretical and theological doctrines of the time were insistent upon the subordination of women to men in general, and to their husbands in particular. In 1609, James I informed his subjects that “the state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth”, arguing that “kings are compared to fathers in families” (Stone, 1979:110, Marx, 1972: 111). Some twenty five years later, Sir Robert Filmer (1588-1653) argued the case for absolute monarchy using the same logic: “we find in the Decalogue that the law which enjoys obedience to kings is delivered in the terms of: “honour thy father” (Robert Filmer, Patriarcha, 1642). Filmer wanted to model the system of government in the state on the system of government in the family. He argued that the first family is that of Adam who was the divinely appointed monarch of the world over all his descendants. (http/www.ask.com).

These facts conclusively prove that patriarchy was reinforced by the state in much the same way as that of the authoritarian dominance assumed by the husband and father over the woman and children within the nuclear family.

Similarly, all the magisterial Reformed churches stressed the subordination of wives to the husbands. In this respect, the shift to Protestantism meant the loss by the wife of the control over the domestic rituals of religious practices, as the husband and father became the spiritual as well as the secular head of the household. Among the Anglican theologians of that time, John Milton had very strong views about the subordinate function of women through his rhetorical question: “who can be ignorant
that woman was created for man, and not man for woman?” (Quoted in Stone, 1977: 102) Stone drew the following conclusion from this quotation: “...he (Milton) demanded divorce only when the unfitness lay with the wife, not the husband….Milton thus carried the Protestant concept of holy matrimony about as far as it could go without abandoning the sexual superiority of the male” (Ibid.103)

Besides all the prejudices which derived from customs and traditions, social assumptions and beliefs, the English law reinforced the status of women as inferior beings. Therefore, women suffered as much under social practice as under the resolutions brought by law. Of these was the so-called law of Coverture which referred to women’s legal status after marriage. Legally, upon marriage, the husband and wife were one entity. The identification of husband and wife as one person had placed the former at an advantageous position which allowed him to have complete control over his spouse’s property, a property he could sell or dispose of without her permission. The inequality/inferiority of women in marriage was captured by William Blackstone in one sentence: “the husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one” (quoted in Stone, 1979: 222)

In his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765) the same Blackstone expounds his arguments in the following terms:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated in that of the husband under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything; and is therefore called … a female-covert.

(Blackstone, 1765)

In the spirit of the Laws resolutions, all women were understood to be either married or to be married. But being married or not, women were always handicapped by law. This state seems to have continued for centuries after the Glorious
Revolution in the sense that a century later John Stuart Mill captured the situation of married women as follows:

I am far from pretending that wives are in general no better treated than slaves: but no slave is a slave to the same length, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is. Hardly any slave, except one immediately attached to the master's person, is a slave at all hours and all minutes; in general he has, like a soldier, his fixed task, and when it is done, or when he is off duty, he disposes, within certain limits, of his own time, and has a family life into which the master rarely intrudes… Not so the wife: however brutal a tyrant she may unfortunately be chained to—though she may know that he hates her, though it may be the daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him—he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. While she is held in this worst description of slavery as to her own person, what is her position in regard to the children in whom she and her master have a joint interest? They are by law his children. He alone has any legal rights over them. No one act can she do towards or in relation to them, except by delegation from him. Even after he is dead she is not their legal guardian, unless he by will had made her so. He could even send them away from her, and deprive her of the means of seeing or corresponding with them, until this power was in some degree restricted by Serjeant Talfourd's Act. This is her legal state.

(Mill, 1980: 40)

A wife in the seventeenth century was sought for possession, wealth and a means to reach material advancement. At marriage, a girl brought with her a dowry. But this ‘portion’ as it was termed at that time became her husband’s property. In this concern the Laws of resolutions read: “that which the husband hath is his own, that which the wife hath is the husband's” (Fraser, 2002:13). It follows that young heiresses were hunted as though they were animals. In spite of the young age of the bride, the contract of marriage was made though the consummation of marriage might be postponed. Moreover, as far as consent is concerned, it was not seriously taken into account. The girl might be forced into marriage against her will by parental pressure.
The marriage crisis in the seventeenth century was not limited only to the married women. It touched women out of the marriage bond. Even girls who reached the age of marriage were limited economically and socially. Therefore they found it difficult to realise the aims of economic individualism. Ian Watt documented this aspect in his book entitled *The Rise of the Novel* in which he drew examples from Defoe’s character Roxana who as “‘she-merchant’ [...] realises that the pursuit of money cannot be combined with marriage” since the very nature of the marriage contract was “… nothing but giving up liberty, estate, authority, and everything to the man, and the woman was indeed a mere woman even after– that is to say, a slave.” (Quoted in Watt, Ian, 1957: 142). Watt went on to explain that

To those without Roxana’s peculiar combination of qualities, however, the achievement of economic independence outside marriage was becoming increasingly difficult in the eighteenth century [...]. At the same time women found it much more difficult to find a husband unless they could bring a dowry. There is much evidence to suggest that marriage became a much more commercial matter in the eighteenth century than had previously been the case.

(Ibid.142)

One of the obvious remarks that can be drawn from the quotation above is that the women were bound to seek marriage even if they abhored it. Their restrictions to the domestic sphere were the main cause of their economic destitution. In the words of Defoe’s Moll Flanders, the marriage market had become “‘unfavourable to our [women’s] sex’”. This disadvantage was particularly more acute in the case of very poor women who either lived as spinsters or fell prey to any man. Defoe’s Moll Flanders, one of those unfortunate women, explained:

On the other hand, as the market ran all on the men’s side, I found the women had lost the privilege of saying no; that it is a favour now for a woman to have the question asked, and if any young lady had so much arrogance as to counterfeit a negative, she never had the opportunity of denying twice, much less of recovering that false step, and accepting what she had seemed to decline. The men had such choice everywhere that the case of women was very unhappy; for they seemed to ply at
every door, and if the man was by great chance refused at one house, he was sure to be received at the next.

(Defoe, 1965: 75)

This difficult situation for women helps us to understand why some women adopt celibacy and why men go on fortune hunting. On the other hand, the great number of women in nunneries indicates that women seek solace as religious devotees instead of accepting humiliation.

**Emergence of Female/Feminist Voices**

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the assumption that women belonged to the home as wives and mothers was a deep rooted tradition. This assumption was reinforced by male liberal social theorists and philosophers. Though their theories lay claim to sameness and equality, their discussion of the various subjects overlooked, and in some cases eschewed, the issue of woman. Their neglect of the woman's condition was, however, only not explicit. Within the very line of their argument there transpired—implicitly—some timid plea in favour of the weaker sex. This plea on the part of man in favour of woman was just another way of saying that she could not defend herself and because man being good and just, had pity of her and brought her grievances on the public fore. Yet this was done in a male perspective.

This state of affairs had led to the emergence of bold enough women who have adhered to the motto of the Enlightenment, as Immanuel Kant had it in German, *Sapere Aude*, or “Have courage to use your own reason!” Exacerbated by male arrogance and chauvinism, some Liberal feminist writers broke male tutelage and sought to argue that the feminine class were persons entitled to the same basic rights as men. It is within this context, that Mary Astell (1666-1731) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) are to be considered as defenders of women’s cause in
early modern England, one at the beginning of the eighteenth century and the other at the end of it. The former wrote an essay entitled *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* while the latter published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 
I have stated in the general introduction that John Locke wrote his *Treatises on Government* in particular circumstances, that is, in response to absolutist advocates like Sir Robert Filmer who drew heavily on the Scriptures in support of a monarchy of the divine rights, and Thomas Hobbes whose *Leviathan* charts out an ideal government based on an absolutist sovereign. In this chapter I will turn to the works of the authors to discuss the dialogical relation that they entertain.

My interest in the comparison of Locke’s and Hobbes’s philosophical projects rests on the basis that their conceptions of models of society are contemporary to one another and respond to social circumstances, namely the political disturbances in the English society during the early Stuart Dynasty for Thomas Hobbes who wrote his *Leviathan* in 1651, and during the reign of William of Orange for Locke who published his *Two Treatises on Government* in 1690.

Another justification for my choice can be found in the very conditions under which the two works were produced. The authors, for example, made it known that all the insight that is poured into their respective work derive from a discussion they had had in private with their closest friends while they tried to cogitate on issues dear to them in a period of agitation and political unrest:

Hobbes himself related how he was in a gathering of learned men when the question was asked, “What is sense?” No one appeared to know the answer, but it occurred to Hobbes that, if material things and all of their parts were always at rest or in uniform motion, there could be no distinction of anything and consequently no perception; thus, the cause of all things must lie in diversity of motion. He was therefore driven to geometry to gain insight into the principles of motion.

(Britannica CD 1994-1999)

Locke’s pronouncement on the genesis of his work is worded as follows:
Were it fit to trouble thee with the history of this Essay, I should tell thee, that five or six friends meeting at my chamber, and discoursing on a subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had awhile puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts that we took a wrong course; and that before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed that this should be our first inquiry. Some hasty and undigested thoughts, on a subject I had never before considered, which I set down against our next meeting, gave the first entrance into this Discourse; which having been thus begun by chance, was continued by entreaty; written by incoherent parcels; and after long intervals of neglect, resumed again, as my humour or occasions permitted; and at last, in a retirement where an attendance on my health gave me leisure, it was brought into that order thou now seest it.

(Locke, 1690)

In his Essay on Man, Alexander Pope writes that “that the proper study of mankind is man” (cf. Kramnick, 1995: 255-56). Locke’s and Hobbes’s respective pronouncements indicate that before they ever built their social project, they began with the study of the human element. Hobbes studied human motivations, desires and hate in the first Book of his Leviathan whereas Locke set limits to human understanding in his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.

Both philosophers were adulated and hated at the same time; they were protected (Hobbes by the Cavendish family and Locke by Lord Ashley,) but also compelled to self-exile. These common features of theirs provide a good field of comparison on the dialogical level particularly when it is now established that Hobbes and Locke assumed unconventional postures at times in order to raise controversy or polemic. These postures remind us of those of Socrates. Socrates, it should be observed, was even the cultural model of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment educated men who were in quest of truth. Just like Socrates, Hobbes and Locke wanted to show that their works/ essays arose out of discussion/ dialogue
with a circle of privileged friends. For them, the essay was the ideal replacement for the Platonic dialogue. Their philosophical vein allows debate and an on-going dialogue. I have titled this chapter “Theoretical Foundations of the ‘Myth of State’, a phrase used by Patricia Springborg in the introduction to her book entitled Astell: Theorist of Freedom from Domination (2006) because I think that Hobbes’s Leviathan and Locke’s Second Treatise on Government are foundational texts in political and social contract theory, just like Plato’s Republic and as such they constitute models for a civilized society far from the supposed state of nature.

My approach to Hobbes's and Locke's texts will, therefore, be dialogic, and it is borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin who provides his theory of dialogism for the novel and starts from the assumption (which he later verifies in his study of Dostoievsky) that the novel is dialogic. Bakhtin is quick, from the start, to inform the reader that the dialogic form of the novel applies to the other forms of expression as well. Therefore, Bakhtin excludes any form of monologia and maintains that each and every genre or medium has its own contrepartie:

> It is our conviction that there never was a single strictly straightforward genre, no single type of direct discourse–artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, ordinary everyday—that did not have its own parodying and travestying double, its own comic-ironic contrepartie. What is more, these parodic and laughing reflections of the direct word were, in some cases, just as sanctified by tradition and just as canonized as their elevated models.

(1984: 53)

Bakhtin’s statement suggests that any original text (understood as sacred or conventional) is subject to criticism, that is, it is reliant on its contrepartie. This criticism may be carried out under the form of stylisation, parody, open or hidden polemic. In other words, the truth of this text should not be taken for granted because its worth is revealed only through the process of dialogisation. And parody, stylisation and hidden polemic can be understood as types of this dialogisation.
Bakhtin defines parody as an image of the original text, or “an object of representation or more precisely a representation that is parodied or stylised” (1981:44). Bakhtin goes on to explain that parody appropriates existing discourse and themes to introduce into them an orientation diametrically opposed to their own because the parodist clashes with the other’s voice over the referent or the way it is represented.

Parody and stylisation are integral parts of what Bakhtin calls the dialogic utterance. Bakhtin correlates the dialogic utterance directly with the extra verbal context of reality (situation, setting, history) and the utterances of other speakers. As a link in the chain of speech communication, the utterance has several distinguishing characteristics, the most important of them are: a referentially semantic element (theme), an expressive element (the speaker or the writer’s attitude towards the theme), and, most importantly an element of responsiveness or “addressivity” (its relation to other utterances).

Bakhtin defines dialogism/heteroglossia or double voiced discourse as “another’s speech in another’s language, serving authorial intentions but in a refracted way”. This language “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intentions of the author” (quoted in Riche, 1998:44). According to Bakhtin, works are considered as discursive sites for the dialogic interplay of multiple voices, each of which is not merely a verbal but a social phenomenon. Bakhtin explains that each utterance is implied in such a way as to bring a polemic. He writes:

In hidden polemic the author's discourse is oriented towards its referential object, as any other discourse, but at the same time each assertion about that object is construed in such a way that, besides its referential meaning, the author's discourse brings a polemical attack against another's speech act, another assertion, on the same topic. Here one utterance focused on its referential object clashes with another.
utterance on the ground of the referent itself. That other utterance is not reproduced; it is understood only in its import.

(Quoted in Riche. 1998: 15)

Another aspect in Bakhtin’s dialogism is built on the premise that there is not one possible utterance that is purely personal and even discourse is, in one way or another, based on someone else's. He explains:

[...] language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes “one's own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own”.

(Quoted in Gates, 1988: 1)

What Bakhtin implies in the quotation above is the double voicedness of discourse and the importance of striking a polemical blow at another's discourse by inserting into that discourse a new semantic intention.

What comes out from my consideration of Bakhtin’s dialogism is that Thomas Hobbes’s, John Locke’s, and Mary Astell’s texts offer different world views on the same topic. The views clash over one another because, as Bakhtin says, “a potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages” (quoted in Riche, B. :27)). I intend, in the remaining part of my thesis, to study Locke’s and Hobbes’s, and Astell’s texts according to the criteria of dialogism set by Mikhail Bakhtin in order to highlight the contending world views.

The Hypotheses of “Commonwealth” or “Myth of State”

Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan

Thomas Hobbes’s hypothesis for the “Commonwealth” is formulated in his Leviathan which is composed of four Books. In the first two parts, “Of Man” and “Of
Commonwealth,” he developed his philosophy of man; in the last two, “Of a Christian Commonwealth” and “Of the Kingdom of Darkness,” he discussed the Scriptures and managed a vehement attack on the attempts of papists and Presbyterians to challenge the right of the sovereign. (Cf Britannica CD). His charge against papists and Presbyterians was seized by his opponents as an opportunity to qualify him as an atheist. Yet Hobbes’s overlooking of religious considerations can be seen as a departure from earlier theologically-dominated views of society. In other words, Hobbes’s objective was to give a scientific dimension to his philosophical project on the notion of the social contract.

As mentioned above, Hobbes's reputation as a thinker rests mainly on his contributions to the philosophy of man, in which he advanced an influential egoistic psychology. In moral theory, he is generally regarded as a pioneer of the Utilitarian school. He justified obedience to moral rules on a purely secular basis, as the means to “peaceable, social, and comfortable living.” Yet he also said that the laws of nature were God's commands. (cf. Britannica CD. 1994-1999)

In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes’s version of the “social contract”, delineates a society of self-interested individuals who have no notion of good apart from their own desires. For him, the natural condition of mankind, known as the state of nature, is fraught with fear and violence because people constantly seek to destroy one another. He argued that human beings are desire-driven and self-interested. Therefore this state becomes one of complete disorder because there are no enforceable criteria of right and wrong as every person takes for himself all that he can.

Starting with the premise that humans are self-interested and the world does not provide for all their needs, Hobbes maintained that in the state of nature, without authority, there would be competition between men for wealth, security, and glory.
This would result in a state of war “where every man is Enemy to every man” (Hobbes. T., 1953. I.13:64). Hobbes outlined the consequences as follows:

In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture on Earth, no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continual feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, natsy, brutish, and short.

(Ibid. 64-65)

However, on the other hand, it is also man’s nature to seek peace. This peace can be obtained only if individuals agree mutually to surrender their liberty into the hands of an absolute sovereign power “which is a Common Power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their attention to the Common Benefit.” (Ibid. II.17:89) The sovereign, in return of the citizens’ surrender of whatever power and liberty they have, protects their lives. But a sovereign so established may survive even if all the subjects desire to depose him. The sovereign's right will be as absolute as its power; he is responsible only to God. He cannot be unjust to his subjects, since these have authorized his actions. Nor is he bound by any covenant with the people. Only in this way can the state of nature, which Hobbes equates with a state of war, be ended in favour of the “Leviathan”.

For Hobbes, the construction of such a commonwealth is artificial, and all the individuals of the commonwealth identify themselves, and are identified, in that huge corporate body the “Leviathan”, hence our qualifying it, after Springborg, as ‘the myth of state’. Hobbes detailed his “Leviathan” as follows:

The only way to erect such a Common Power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of Forraiggners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their owne industrie, and by thr fruiites of the Earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is to confer all their power and strength upon one Man, or upon an Assembly of men, that may reduce all their Wills, by plurality
of voices, unto one Will: which is as much to say, to appoint one Man, or Assembly of men, to beare their Person; and every one to owne and acknowledge himselfe to be Author of whatsoever he that so beareth their Person, shall Act, or cause to be Acted, in those things which concern the Common Peace and Safetie; and therein to submit their Wills, every one to his Will, and their judgements, to his judgement. This is more than Consent or Concord; it is a reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same Person [...] This done, the multitude so united in one Person, is called a Common-wealth, in Latine Civitas. This is the Generation of that great Leviathan, or rather ... of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defence.

(Hobbes, 1953: II.17:89)

Hobbes's conferring power and one and indivisible sovereignty to a single monarch reinforced King James I 1610 “Speech in Parliament” (cf. Marx Rolland, 1972: 111) and King Charles I’s reiteration of the same authorial regal power. (Ibid. 113) With the execution of Charles I, the Royalist cause seemed hopelessly lost. Accordingly, at the end of Leviathan, Hobbes attempted to define the circumstances under which submission to a new sovereign becomes legitimate. He had always maintained that a subject had the right to abandon a ruler who could no longer protect him and to transfer his allegiance to one who could; but the statement of this view in Leviathan gave serious offence to Prince Charles's advisers, who concluded that Hobbes was trying to curry favour with the new regime in England in order to facilitate his own return.

**John Locke's Second Treatise on Government**

John Locke came to reputation with the publication of his *Essay on Human Understanding* which is hailed as the manifesto for reason after Descartes. But unlike Descartes, Locke posits that the human being was born to the world without any inborn knowledge. His *tabula Rasa* is, in fact, not new. The concept is originally Aristotelian. The difference between Aristotle was one in kind: Aristotle was looking for truth whereas Locke speculated on the truth that Aristotle seems to have reached.
The *Essay* is divided into four books; the first is a refutation of the doctrine of innate principles and ideas. The second deals with ideas, the third with words, and the fourth with knowledge. In the first book of the *Essay*, on the subject of innate ideas, Locke pointed to the variety of human experiences, and to the difficulty of forming general and abstract ideas, and he ridiculed the view that any such ideas could be antecedent to experience. All the parts of our knowledge, he insisted, have the same rank and the same history regarding their origin in experience.

While Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding* probes the limits of man capacities, the *Second Treatise on Government* offers a detailed account of the origins, aims, and structure of civil government. Adopting a general method similar to that of Hobbes, but different in conception, Locke started with an original state of nature in which individuals rely upon their own strength, then described their escape from this primitive state by entering into a social contract under which the state provides protection to its citizens. Unlike Hobbes, Locke regarded this contract as revocable. Any civil government depends on the consent of those who are governed, which may be withdrawn at any time. In Locke's view, all rights begin in the individual property which is created by an investment of labor. The social structure or commonwealth, then, depends for its formation and furtherance on the express consent of the governed. Majority rule thus becomes the cornerstone of all political order, and dissatisfied citizens’ reserve a lasting right to revolution.

From the outset, Locke openly declared his political theory: in order to preserve the public good, the central function of government must be the protection of private property. (Second *Treatise*, §3) Human social life begins, in a hypothetical state of nature: Each individual is perfectly equal with every other, and all has the absolute liberty to act as he wills, (accoàrding to the law of nature) without interference from
any other. (Second Treatise, §4) What prevents this natural state from being a violent Hobbesian model, according to Locke, is that each individual is endowed with the faculty of reason, so that the actions of every individual—even in the unreconstructed state of nature—are bound by the self-evident laws of nature.

Locke developed, in Two Treatises, a theory of government based on the social contract not from ex nihilo; he formulated it in a polemical negotiation with two precursor texts. Besides the parallel with Hobbes’s Leviathan which is suggested in the above paragraphs, Hobbes first treatise is a response to Sir Robert Fimer's Patriarcha written as early as 1648, but published in 1680. It sustains the tradition of the monarchy of divine rights, “that doctrine in defense of monarchical absolutism which asserts that kings derived their authority from God and could not therefore be held accountable for their actions by any earthly authority such as a parliament.” (Cf. CIE, 1996) Filmer’s argument is that the state was a family and that the king was a father. In his interpretation of the Scriptures, “he pronounces that Adam was the first king and that Charles I ruled England as Adam's eldest heir.” (Cf. Britannica CD, 1994-1999) In other words, the king’s person and authority are sacred and his power is absolute and governed by reason.

While Hobbes’s Leviathan is inscribed within the regal reign of Charles I, the Cromwellian protectorate, and later the Restoration, Locke’s Second Treatise on Government addresses the post Restoration period and argues in favour/justification of a parliamentary government, giving up liberties in exchange of the right to revolt when the rights of the Enlightenment are abused. Locke’s argument clashes with that of his precursor, Thomas Hobbes, and this clash, over the organisation of a commonwealth for the benefit of all, is nourished by the difference in conceptions,
causes, and ends of an ideal state. This will be my concern in the remaining part of this chapter.

**Conception of Human Nature**

It is perhaps important to point out that Hobbes and Locke proposed a theory for civilised society not basically for partisan (political or religious) purposes but rather for the common good of all, that is, a commonwealth wherein peace and property (persons and goods) are protected. But their material is drawn from the political experiences of their time. In this respect my emphasis, once more, on the particular context of their respective works would not be charged with redundancy. In fact the social and political turmoil for Hobbes brings about anarchy, an anarchy that is worst than any absolute government. This is the first postulate that Hobbes posited before he laid down the foundation and purposes of his ideal society which concretise in what he called the “Leviathan”. He wrote,

> So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and relentless desire of Power after power that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.

(Hobbes, 1953: I.11:49-50)

Hobbes started from an assumption of basic human folly, competitiveness, and depravity, and contradicted Aristotle's assumption that man is by nature a “political animal.” All society, according to Hobbes, is only for gain or glory, and the only true equality among men is their power to kill each other:

Nature hath made men so equal, in the faculties of body, and mind; as though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to hismelfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination,
or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe.

(Hobbes. 63)

Hobbes’s conception of human nature suggests that human beings are primarily self-interested and desire-driven. As such they are all vulnerable and incapable of self-rule. This is so because Hobbes thinks that men in the ‘mere state of nature’ who enter in competition with one another to satisfy individual desires have a conception of limitless freedom, that is a freedom from all constraints and laws. For Hobbes a law of nature which cannot be enforced (because of the lack of authority) becomes an uncontrollable right to invade others’ property. This uncontrollable right can be surrendered only if the aggressor is threatened in his life. Hence the right to self preservation (which is the basic law of nature for Hobbes) sets a limit to ambition, desire and lust.

Given these considerations, liberty and freedom in Hobbes are situated outside of civilisation or civilly organised society:

Liberty, or FREEDOM, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition; (by Opposition, I mean externall Impediments of motion ;) and may be applied no lesse to Irrational, and Inanimate creatures, than to Rationall. For whatsoever is so tyed, or environed, as it cannot move, but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some externall body, we say it hath not Liberty to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chayns; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks, or vessels, that otherwise would spread it selfe into a larger space, we use to say, they are not at Liberty, to move in such manner, as without those externall impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion, is in the constitution of the thing it selfe, we use not to say, it wants the Liberty; but the Power to move; as when a stone lyeth still, or a man is fastned to his bed by sickness. And according to this proper, and generally received meaning of the word, A FREE-MAN, is "he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to." [...]

Lastly, from the use of the word Freewill, no liberty can be inferred to the will, desire, or inclination, but the liberty of the man; which consisteth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to doe.

(Ibid. 110)
In short, Hobbes' conception of human nature follows two courses of events: it either enjoys freedom from society and its laws - resulting in chaos; or it gives up this freedom for an authoritarian regime - and enjoys a social order established by force. Hobbes favoured the latter course because he thought that an authoritarian monarch would put restraints on transgressions, by means of awe and fear, for the sake of achieving a measure of social order.

Hobbes believed that “Feare and Liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into the Sea for Feare the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to doe it if he will: It is therefore the action, of one that was Free; so a man sometimes pays his debt, only for Feare of Imprisonment, which because no body hindred him from detaining, was the action of a man at Liberty.” (Ibid. 110)

Arguing with reference to and against Hobbes’s view of human nature, Locke started from the assumption that human beings are driven by both emotions and reason, and they are both self-interested and naturally social or altruistic. Therefore, endowed as they are with reason, men are capable of self-rule. Locke argued that individuals can be trusted to manage their own affairs in ways that are consistent with the interests and well-being of others. He wrote:

To understand political power aright, and derive it from its original, we must consider what estate all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of Nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man. A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another, there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another, without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another,
and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.

(Hobbes, 1690: )

Such formulation of human nature contradicts Hobbes’s. It follows also that Locke’s notion of liberty and freedom is at variance with Hobbes’s. Locke’s Liberty and freedom are conceived as follows:

But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence; though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions, yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are made to last during His, not one another's pleasure. And, being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of Nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us that may authorise us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for ours. Every one as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he as much as he can to preserve the rest of mankind, and not unless it be to do justice on an offender, take away or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another.

(Locke, 1690, II. 6. Emphasis ours)

It is clear that for Locke “tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right” and that government takes the form of trusteeship. As such, it opposes the family/inheritance model: “For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others which cannot be where there is no law: But freedom is not, as we are told [by Hobbes], ‘A liberty for every man to do what he lists’”.

The State of Nature

What is common to Hobbes and Locke in the building of their respective theories of state is their starting point. Both Hobbes and Locke began with the
concept of nature to expound their conception concerning government. They both argued that the state of nature existed prior to the emergence of society and state, and that there was no law or any one that ruled over others in the state of nature. Moreover, there was no security of life, liberty, or property. This is why men enter into an agreement with each other, called the “social contract” to establish society, state, and law. The similarities between Hobbes and Locke end here because each of them had a conception of his own as to why men enter into an agreement to form a government. Each defined notions and set objectives differently from the other.

Apart from the philosophy on man within this state of nature, outlined above, there are other subjects which go consistently with this state of nature. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* is an indictment of the Long Parliament whereas Locke’s essay on civil government is an apologia for a parliamentary government. It follows from this that Hobbes’s issue is to demonstrate how life would be without authority while Locke’s placed emphasis on man’s rights both outside of and under authorial or governmental control. For Locke an actual state of nature exists between independent princes and rulers, and between any subjects of different states (or jurisdictions) who may meet in a place where there is no civilized government. To Hobbes’s assertion, “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man”, Locke responded as follows

It is often asked as a mighty objection, where are, or ever were, there any men in such a state of Nature? To which it may suffice as an answer at present, that since all princes and rulers of "independent" governments all through the world are in a state of Nature, it is plain the world never was, nor never will be, without numbers of men in that state. I have named all governors of "independent" communities, whether they are, or are not, in league with others; for it is not every compact that puts an end to the state of Nature between men, but only this one of agreeing together mutually to enter into one community, and make one body politic; other promises and compacts men may make
one with another, and yet still be in the state of Nature. The promises and bargains for truck, etc., between the two men in Soldania, in or between a Swiss and an Indian, in the woods of America, are binding to them, though they are perfectly in a state of Nature in reference to one another for truth, and keeping of faith belongs to men as men, and not as members of society.

(Locke, 1690: II.14)

Locke’s historical evidence contradicts Hobbes contention that the state of nature is a savage as it is suggested in *Leviathan* and that worst of governments is always more tolerable than the state of nature. For him (Locke), in the state of nature, men mostly keep their promises and honour their obligations. Though insecure, it is peaceful, good, and pleasant. The American frontier and Soldania are examples of people in the state of nature, where property rights and peace exist. Princes are in a state of nature with regard to each other. Rome and Venice were in a state of nature shortly before they were officially founded. In any place where it is socially acceptable to oneself, it is not objectionable to punish wrongdoings done against one’s person. Though such places (on the American frontier, for example) and times are insecure, violent conflicts are often ended by the forcible imposition of a just peace on evil doers, and peace is normal.

**The State of War**

The concept of the state of war is used by both Hobbes and Locke. Yet there is no common point between the two conceptions except their appellations. The state of war as it is used by Hobbes is simply ‘mere nature’ in all itscrudeness and raw instincts of its inhabitants. In *Leviathan* Hobbes used the term “mere nature” to define what he considered the state of his contemporary society to be. The term refers to “a condition of war of every man against every man.” Hobbes went on to characterize the state of civil society under such a condition as being one wherein “there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and
consequently no culture of the earth...; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and
danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”
This justifies, in Hobbes’s view, the need for a powerful, sovereign authority to put
an end to the “continual fear, and danger of death” (cf. Leviathan).

Locke challenged Hobbes from the inception that the state of nature is idyllic
and has never known a state of war. Locke charted out a plan for government as a
preventive measure, that is, to avoid the state of war. Therefore it ensures that Locke
situated the state of war not in the state of nature wherein everyone is sovereign of
himself but within absolutist government. He wrote:

he who attempts to get another man into his absolute power, does...
thereby put himself into a state of war with him; it being to be
understood as a declaration of a design upon his life. For I have reasons
to conclude that, he who would get me into his power without my
consent, would use me as he pleased when he had got me there, and
destroy me too when he had a fancy to it.

(II. 2.17)

Locke further explained, addressing Hobbes obliquely, in the following words

And here we have the plain difference between the state of nature and
the state of war, which, however some men have confounded, are as far
distant as a state of peace, good will, mutual assistance and
preservations, and a state of enmity, malice, violence and mutual
destruction are one from another. Men living together according to
reason, without a common superior on earth with authority to judge
between them, is properly the state of nature.

(II. 2.19)

If Hobbes premised the establishment of the social contract in order to put an
end to the hostilities found in the state of nature (according to Hobbes) and to
preserve the life of the people, Locke set another objective:

The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their
property; and the end while they choose and authorise a legislative is
that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the
properties of all the society, to limit the power and moderate the
dominion of every part and member of the society. For since it can
never be supposed to be the will of the society that the legislative
should have a power to destroy that which every one designs to secure
by entering into society, and for which the people submitted themselves to legislators of their own making.

(II. XIX.22)

Hobbes claimed that once the compact is made between the sovereign and his subjects, there are consequences among which he listed: a) the Subjects cannot change the forme of government, b) Soveraigne Power cannot be forfeited, c) no man can without injustice protest against the Institution of the soveraigne declared by the major part, d) the Soveraigne Actions cannot be justly accused by the Subject (Hobbes, 1953: XXX).

Hobbes opened the eighteenth chapter of Book Two with two introductory paragraphs in which he stated the procedures of instituting a commonwealth. Then he lengthily detailed the consequences of what he called the “Covenant of everyone with everyone” to choose the sovereign. He formulated it in the following terms:

First, because they [the people assembled] Covenant, it is to be understood, they are not obliged by former Covenant to any thing repugnant hereunto. And Consequently they that have already Instituted a Common-wealth, being thereby bound by Covenant, to own the Actions, and Judgements of one, cannot lawfully make a new Covenant, amongst themselves, to be obedient to any other, in any thing whatsoever, without his permission. And therefore, they that are subjects to a Monarch, cannot without his leave cast off Monarchy, and return to the confusion of a disunited Multitude; nor transferre their Person from him that beareth it, to another Man, or other Assembly of men: for they are bound, every man to every man, to Own, and be reputed Author of all, that he that already is their Soveraigne, shall do, and judge fit to be done: so that any one man dissenting, all the rest should break their Covenant made to that man, which is injustice: and they have also every man given the Soveraignty to him that beareth their Person; and therefore if they depose him, they take from him that which is his own, and so again it is injustice.

(Ibid. 90)

Locke, who conditioned the establishment of civil government on the consent of the governed provided that they retain the right to rebellion revocation, responded as follows:
whenever the legislators endeavour to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge which God hath provided for all men against force and violence. Whenever, therefore, the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society, and either by ambition, fear, folly, or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty, and by the establishment of a new legislative (such as they shall think fit), provide for their own safety and security, which is the end for which they are in society.

(II.XIX.222)

My consideration of the “state of war” and “state of nature” as they are used by Hobbes and Locke allows me to say they serve only rhetorically/metaphorically in the elaboration of two different political theories. What they have in common is only their appellations. This is also valid for “law of nature” which, for Hobbes, is transgression to satisfy appetites. In Locke, “law of nature” means wisdom and logical self-imposed restraint.

**Property**

John Locke’s version of the social contract owns him the title of philosopher of liberty. Linked with the natural right to property, this notion of liberty can be understood as a form of economic liberalism which rests on the accumulation of wealth. In chapter Five of his *Second Treatise on Government*, he discussed lengthily the origins of private property in the state of nature. Locke had recourse to what he called “Commands of god” to justify the inviolability of property:

God, when He gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labour […] God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth- i.e., improve it for the benefit of life and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour. He that, in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him.
Against Hobbes’s idea that men fight because of the scarcity of resources in the state of nature, Locke claimed that “God has given us all things richly.” According to Locke, God commands us to use things to our advantage without any encroachment on others’ property. This is possible because “the state of nature”, Locke wrote, “has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions...” (II.V.5)

What Locke had to say about the origin of civil society is also of interest in connection with the concept of property. It is clear that property is very important in Locke's political theory. He said that the law of nature commands one not to harm another's possessions; and added that men enter into society in order to preserve their liberty and property. Thus the right to property is protected both by the law of nature and the civil law. Property originates in the state of nature and extends into civil government. As property, according to Locke, is very closely linked with the individual bodily integrity, one of the reasons for the existence of civil society is the preservation of property. In Chapter Five of his Second Treatise on Government, Locke took up the question of property in detail. He concluded that it is labour which gives the labourer a right to, or property in, what he produces or adds his labour to. He summarized his view as follows:

Though the things of Nature are given in common, man (by being master of himself, and proprietor of his own person, and the actions or labour of it) had still in himself the great foundation of property... Thus labour, in the beginning, gave a right of property, wherever any one was pleased to employ it, upon what was common.

(II.V.44, 45)

Locke started with the inherent property of the individual, that is, body and strength to explain the acquisition of individual ownership in the state of nature. In
this respect, it is convenient to remind the reader that Thomas Hobbes stated that people in the state of nature are equal only in the sense that they have the same power/desire and the same right to destroy one another in their several claims to one thing. Hobbes's statement suggests the impossibility of owning property in the state of nature. For him, men in the state of nature use their physical strength to wrest what other people claim as their own. In Locke, body and bodily strength constitute the postulate of individual property. These are invested into labour in accordance with God’s Command to subdue nature and to enjoy its riches:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a “property” in his own “person.” This nobody has any right to but himself. The “labour” of his body and the “work” of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this “labour” being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.

(II.V.26)

Locke believed that property is common in the state of nature in the sense that everyone has a right to draw subsistence from whatever is offered in nature. He asserted that a man has a natural right to that with which he has mixed the labour of his body. Enclosing and tilling land, for example, entitle one to own the land that is made useful out of the common waste. His argument is that the right to private property arises because by labour a man extends his own personality into the objects produced. By exercising his internal energy upon them, he makes them a part of himself. Generally speaking, their utility depends upon the labour expended upon them. In this respect he wrote:

He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly
appropriated them to himself. Nobody can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask, then, when did they begin to be his? When he digested? Or when he ate? Or when he boiled? Or when he brought them home? Or when he picked them up? And it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labour put a distinction between them and common. That added something to them more than Nature, the common mother of all, had done, and so they became his private right. And will any one say he had no right to those acorns or apples he thus appropriated because he had not the consent of all mankind to make them his? Was it a robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in common? If such a consent as that was necessary, man had starved, notwithstanding the plenty God had given him. We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state Nature leaves it in, which begins the property, without which the common is of no use.

(II.V.27)

From his theory of the origin of private property, Locke concluded that the right to property is prior even to the primitive society which he described as the state of nature. This is a right which each individual brings to civil society in his own person. Therefore, since society does not create the right of property, it cannot regulate it. Nor can it take it for public use. Both society and civil government exist, according to Locke, to protect the prior right to private property.

What can be added here is that Locke erected safeguards and barriers as regards the “Eminent Domain” or the right of government to expropriate private property for public use. Locke expressed this idea in chapter XIX of his Treatise in the following words: “... and the end while they choose and authorise a legislative is that there may be laws made, and rules set, as guards and fences to the properties of all the society, to limit the power and moderate the dominion of every part and member of the society”. (II. XIX. 22) But to better understand the import of Locke’s theory on property, we turn again to Thomas Hobbes. From the outset Hobbes implicitly rejected the idea that property can be a permanent right of the individual in the state of nature because
if two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot boy enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, ... endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another... if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient Seat, others may be probably expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossess, and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of life, or liberty.

(Hobbes, 1965: 63)

John Locke has been singled out as a middle-class property owner and charges have been levelled against his Second Treatise on Government as a defence of the rights not of all men but of “those who have estates to defend, the well-to-do, the upper half of the nation” (cf. Charlot, 1998); in other words, it is this oligarchy who have the right to elect its representatives. Therefore, one can assume that the actors in Locke’s social contract belong to this class whose property is threatened. Locke's defence of private property traces its origins to the English Civil War when the property rights of both large landowners of a semi-feudal character as well as those of the proto capitalists of England had been under attack by organizations such as the Diggers and the Levellers (cf. Marx,1972 : 135-39) In light of the claims that property disadvantaged the larger, non-propertied portion of the population, Locke established a workmanship standard as the foundation for legitimate property rights, where “honest” labour working on its own land would promote the interests of society in general.

According to Locke’s social contract, society is to be composed of property and non-property owners. Property owners who are industrious and hard working are given the right of suffrage. In order to fulfill contracts within society and government, the society contracts an impartial third party to act as the government. This contract as mentioned earlier is sometimes known as the trustee relationship because the government has no other right but to work for the good of the people.
The government is given its power to act by the property owning portion of the population, and not by the society as a whole.

The relation of what has been said above to Hobbes is that the latter conceived only of three possible forms of government, all with absolute power. Those who do not inscribe themselves in this perceptive, are dissenters who are dangerous to the “commonwealth”. Against other forms of government and dissenters, Hobbes had this to say:

There be other names of Government, in the Histories, and books of Policy; as Tyranny, and Oligarchy: But they are not the names of other Formes of Government, but of the same Formes disliked. For they that are discontented under Monarchy, call it Tyranny; and they that are displeased with Aristocracy, called it Oligarchy: so also, they which find themselves grieved under a Democracy, call it Anarchy […] And therefore as it is absurd to, to think that a sovereign Assembly, inviting the People of their Dominion, to send up their deputies, with power to make known their Advice, and Desires… so it is absurd also, to think the same in a Monarchy.

(Hobbes, 1953.II:97)

It is clear from the quote above that Hobbes abhorred those who brandished the Magna Carta, and other petitions as a safeguard to their private rights. Sir Robert Filmer expressed his mind on the issue as follows: “It is the Magna Charta of this kingdom; all other shows or pretexts of liberty are but several degrees of slavery, and a liberty only to destroy liberty” (Filmer, Robert. Patriarcha Or the Natural Power of Kings. http://www.constitution.org/eng/patriarcha.htm)

If in Locke’s social contract people surrender the power to punish transgressors of private property to a legislative assembly which is distinct from the executive, Hobbes subordinated all the rights of the people to one ‘Leviathan’ who assumes both legislative and executive powers, absolutely. The question of property in Hobbes therefore belongs to the commonwealth to dispose of it at will:

The Laws Of Transferring Property Belong Also To The Soveraign
Further, seeing it is not enough to the Sustentation of a Common-
wealth, that every man have a propriety in a portion of Land, or in some few commodities, or a naturall property in some usefull art, and there is no art in the world, but is necessary either for the being, or well being almost of every particular man; it is necessary, that men distribute that which they can spare, and transferre their propriety therein, mutually one to another, by exchange, and mutuall contract. And therefore it belongeth to the Common-wealth, (that is to say, to the Soveraign,) to appoint in what manner, all kinds of contract between Subjects, (as buying, selling, exchanging, borrowing, lending, letting, and taking to hire,) are to bee made; and by what words, and signes they shall be understood for valid. And for the Matter, and Distribution of the Nourishment, to the severall Members of the Common-wealth, thus much (considering the modell of the whole worke) is sufficient.

(Hobbes, 1953: II)

Hobbes’s arguments against rebels and dissenters are then directed to those, like John Locke, who reserved the right to petition government, and ultimately to destitute them. According to Hobbes, the petitions are not meant to secure public good or commonwealth, but primarily to brandish them as barriers for their own interests. These arguments are expounded in chapter XXIX mainly where he stated the various doctrines he called Infirmities. Among these doctrines, figure the fifth and sixth ones, and they concern directly John Locke postulates. Hobbes argued: “A fifth doctrine, that tendeth to the Dissolution of a Commonwealth, is, That every private man has an absolute Propriet in his goods; such as excludeth the Right of the Soveraign”. Part of the sixth doctrine runs “… plainly, and directly against the essence of a Common-wealth; and ‘tis this, That the Soveraign Power may be dived” (Hobbes, 1953. II. 173. Italics in the original).

Locke’s difference from Hobbes’s in terms of the notion of property arise obviously from the different definitions they each give to the key concepts that sustain their political philosophy of the state. If Hobbes’s view of human nature is overly pessimistic, and conveys a bleak picture of an authoritative government, Locke’s is rather optimistic. From Hobbes's picture of civilisation stripped down to its basics, he reconstructed a more viable world view of society which is composed
of self-conscious individuals capable to govern themselves and discern good from evil. His response to Hobbes’s defence of kingly government and indictment of dissenters is formulated in the following passage:

Those who say otherwise speak as if the prince had a distinct and separate interest from the good of the community, and was not made for it; the root and source from which spring almost all those evils and disorders which happen in kingly governments. And indeed, if that be so, the people under his government are not a society of rational creatures, entered into a community for their mutual good, such as have set rulers over themselves, to guard and promote that good; but are to be looked on as a herd of inferior creatures under the dominion of a master, who keeps them and works them for his own pleasure or profit.

(II.XIV.163)

The extent to which Locke’s society may be viable for everybody will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the foregoing chapter I have attempted to show, through a comparative study of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and John Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*, how the political, economic, religious contexts have contributed to the elaboration of political and social contract theories in England.

Hobbes’s theory, an extension of pre-enlightenment vision of the state rests on the postulate that men in the state of nature behave egoistically and rely on coercion to claim more than their due from the commonwealth. In their greed, they encroach on other people’s rights and harm them in their bodies. People behave so in the natural state because there is no enforceable punishment. This is why Hobbes constructed a “Leviathan” whose power and sovereignty are absolute. For Hobbes the end of the institution of the state is self-preservation through fear.

Like Hobbes, Locke found the material for the construction of his theory of government in the natural state. But he challenged Hobbes by pointing out that this state is an ideal one in the sense that people are born free and equal, and entitled to property. Besides freedom, equality, and claim to property, people in the natural state
are endowed with natural law, that is, reason. And people behave according to this law of nature. Consequently ‘these ancestors’ are capable of self-rule. This ability of theirs to govern themselves destroys Hobbes’s argument of unrestrained freedom to do whatever one wills. Hence, the different aims for instituting civil government. For Locke, the function of the civil state is to protect property. Hobbes related it to a will to power.

In the first section I have brought to the fore the differences in the theoretical ground on which the respective ‘myth of the state’ of Hobbes and Locke are built. As Locke’s conception of the commonwealth is meant to subvert Hobbes’s version, I have focused on the on-going polemical dialogue that is established between them. In other words, I have tried to show how, in order to undermine his predecessor, Locke brought his texts close to that of Hobbes only to stress the difference and depart from its line of argument. Therefore, the relation between Hobbes and Locke is of the order of stylisation.

In the remaining parts of my discussion, I have explored the key concepts used by both Hobbes and Locke. Their terminology partakes of moral and political philosophy. Combined together they concretise their respective theory of the state or civil government.

I have also argued that all the insight that is poured into the respective works of Hobbes and Locke is derived from the context of English political and social life of their time and is meant as an initiative to reform abuses. For Hobbes, abuses come from the multitude and diversity of opinions. Locke considered that transgressions result from the concentration of power in one sovereign. Therefore, Hobbes justified his “Leviathan” on the ground of the political turbulence of the 1640s and the reign of parliament under Oliver Cromwell. Locke, on the other hand, found justification
for his *Second Treatise on Government* in the long train of abuses prevalent during the Restoration.

Being a contemporary of Thomas Hobbes, Locke appropriated all the concepts used in *Leviathan* but gives them his own intention. This is why the concepts such as “state of nature”, “state of war”, “freedom”, “natural law” and “social contract” constitute, to use Bakhtin’s words, a “parodic *contrepartie*” in John Locke. Stated otherwise, discourse in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* “is oriented towards its referential object, as any other discourse, but at the same time each assertion about that object is construed in such a way that, besides its referential meaning, the author's discourse brings a polemical attack against another's speech act, another assertion, on the same topic.” (Bakhtin quoted in Riche, 1998:15)

My concluding argument in this chapter is that the central theme in the political history of seventeenth-century England which consists in the defence of divine monarchy of kings and absolutism in general whether in a monarchy or an assembly has come to an end particularly with the inauguration of a new era, the Enlightenment. In my opinion, John Locke has the better argument over Hobbes, not only because he has defended the basic rights of man but also because his work is based on historical evidence. Hobbes’s thesis in *Leviathan* is imaginary, a-historical, and partakes more of utopia even if we understand that it responds to the historical events of his time. Besides, Locke as a seventeenth century precursor of classic liberalism, opened up new hopes for mankind while Hobbes who can be considered as the seventeenth century precursor of modern totalitarianism, pulled society backwards. His ‘Leviathan’ recalls George Orwell’s Big Brother in artificiality as in totalitarianism.
I have reached this conclusion by bringing face to-face the documents mentioned above. As already mentioned, their study shows that they are at variance on several levels, mainly on definitional and theoretical grounds. The next chapter will discuss the feasibility of John Locke’s project. For this purpose I am going to compare with Mary Astell’s Some Reflections Upon Marriage.
CHAPTER SIX
Mary Astell’s Some Reflections upon Marriage: a Feminist Reading of Locke’s Hypothesis

In the previous chapter I have attempted to show that John Locke has won the argument over Thomas Hobbes because of the liberalism/individualism he vehicled in his Second Treatise of Government. This liberalism of the Enlightenment is supposed to open new vistas on human relations. Equality and freedom were redefined in a newly civilised society wherein a balance in powers is welcomed as a guarantee for the basic rights of the individuals. To the latter is added a right to rebellion in case of transgression.

In this chapter, the discussion focuses on the dialogic relationship Mary Astell’s text entertains with the male theorists of the social contract (political world of men and marriage governing the private world of women) in general and John Locke’s Second Treatise on Government in particular. I shall try to bring to the fore the controversial aspects of the texts and, at the same time, show how Astell cogently undermines the ‘myth of state’ described by Locke, a state where there is no place for women except for childbearing, attending to husbands’ whims and will, and subjection. My purpose is to revise partly, through the study of Astell’s essay, the conclusion I have reached in the previous chapter, mainly Locke’s winning argument against Hobbes. This revision is justified because the work of Locke will be conducted in another perspective, that is, it will be addressed in female/feminist terms. Our recourse, from time to time, to feminist criticism then, which is already announced in the introduction, does not conflict with the appropriation of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism as our paradigm. The reason is that feminist theory and criticism— as Bakhtin’s dialogism— subverts and undermines, degrades and lowers all male chauvinism and gender dichotomies as J.A Cuddon says:
Feminism questions the long-standing, dominant, male, phallocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. It attacks male notions of value in literature by offering critiques of male authors and representation... In addition it challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel, act and think, or are supposed to feel, act and think.

(1989:315)

Male ‘Territorial’ Legacy

I shall open the discussion with the following passage excerpted from Patricia Springborg’s *Mary Astell: Theorist of Freedom from Domination* (2006)

Commentators have noted the capacity of seventeenth-century women to live in the interstices of social institutions as novelists, dramatists and political pamphleteers. Astell is a curious case. On the one hand, she undertook a self-conscious critique of the very institutions at the root of female oppression: contemporary education and marriage practices. On the other, she was a High Church Tory pamphleteer, and probably a commissioned one, who in essential aspects defended the existing social order, church and queen. This gives some commentators pause in applying to her the epithet ‘feminist’. But while caution against anachronism is prudent, the belief that Toryism disqualifies women as feminists is anachronism of a different kind. It makes Whiggish assumptions about progressivism as a qualification for feminism that could only be made with post-Enlightenment hindsight.

(Springborg, P., 2006)

Springborg’s quotation helps us understand the double stance Mary Astell assumed in *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*: political pamphleteer and proto feminist. As a political pamphleteer, she works under the double constraint of obedience to the established powers and the will to swift, anonymous, and necessary emergence into the world, the world as shared by men in order that she might participate in the debate of ideas that circulated in her age and which closely concerned the unstable situation of her country. As a proto feminist, Astell oriented her discourse in a subtle way to challenge the authority of man and redefine the morals and mores of marriage. Astell’s message is two-fold: it highlights the usurpation of man and at the same time warns/teaches women how to respond to or do with the custom of marriage. All this, she managed through a philosophical and
political pirouetting (like other essayists) while having in mind the male master works.

John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* was Astell’s first target. The latter opened with the refutations of the premises set by Sir Robert Filmer. This rejection seems to bear on major differences between Filmer and Locke by providing some place in his project for the ‘weaker’ sex whose defence he feigned to take. But in so doing he was but talking to himself because Locke needed woman only for the elaboration of his theory which would apply to society. And society is composed of men and women. Therefore Locke’s unavoidable use of the term ‘woman’ has only a rhetorical significance because the centrality in the association called the family helped Locke to displace the position of the father in the state. His affirmation that “the family is not a commonwealth” (II.7.86) confirms this intention of displacement.

To fully understand the male view on women in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, one must always bear in mind the historical and cultural context of that period. Locke’s views in his *Second Treatise on Government* are responses and reactions to that context. The issues of contract, marriage and family, for example, are the major concerns of controversy of that time because of the different conceptions people have of them. Both the household and the state were described as divinely ordained systems with the husband and monarch, respectively, at the top. At the same time, the language of contract was used to describe both marriage and the relationship between a monarch and his subjects.

A close reading of Locke’s treatise will reveal that he did not break with the tradition. He only completed it by arguing for a) legitimacy of governments, b) the right of people to protection of life, liberty and estate, c) the right to revolt whenever
these governments become abusive, and the exclusion of women from the political arena. Otherwise his intention was to displace two patriarchs (Filmer and Hobbes) by another, that is, himself. This is evidenced in his oblique and sometimes direct references to Filmer and Hobbes (cf. Locke Preface, chapters I, IV, V passim) and his discourse about the equality of women only among women (cf. chapter II, section 4). Moreover he held women as weak creatures dependent on man, and lacking rationality. The latter “weaknesses” deny her access to the public sphere, mainly the field of politics since rationality, according to Locke, is a *sine qua non* condition for participation in public life.

It follows that the Enlightenment liberalism which is based on sameness and equality is subverted by the sort of liberalism practised by Locke. Locke’s liberalism is inconsistent because it claims that people are by nature free and equal, and that inequalities result from agreements or contracts (marriage, for example) into which man and woman enter freely.

Similarly, Locke’s liberalism assumes that some people are more equal than others. Locke believed that “husbands are to be allowed authority over their wives and children”, and although this is not an absolute authority, he did not spell out its limits. He wrote: “[…] the husband and wife, though they have but one common concern, yet having different understandings, will unavoidably sometimes have different wills too; it therefore, being necessary that the last determination, i.e. the rule should be placed somewhere; it naturally falls to the man’s share, as the abler and stronger.” About Locke’s argument that “every male is assumed to be sufficiently rational or ‘naturally to have the capacity to govern a family’” Bennan writes, “in Locke’s theory, it is women who are seen as naturally lacking in
rationality and ‘naturally’ excluded from the status of “free and equal individuals, and so unfit for participation in public life” (quoted Abdelfateh, Imam, 1995: 195)

Locke’s conception of woman does not depart from the early Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras who believed that “there is a good principle, which has created order, light and man and a bad principle, which has created chaos, darkness and woman”, or Aristotle who stated that “the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities: we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness”. Nor did Locke, who seemed to argue against Sir Robert Filmer, distance himself through scriptural convention in his several references to the Bible. Rather, his message partakes of the Scriptures and adheres to the now famous “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Rezé M. and Bowen R., 1998: 231; Emphasis ours).

The male legacy concerning women stereotypes is perhaps better deflated by the twentieth century French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir who sums up the hypocrisy of male paternalism and chauvinism throughout the ages when she writes:

Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers, and scientists have striven to show that subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The religions invented by men reflect this wish for domination. In the legends of Eve and Pandora men have taken up arms against women. They have made use of philosophy and theology, as the quotations from Aristotle and St Thomas have shown, Since ancient times satirists and moralists have delighted in showing up the weaknesses of women.

(Beauvoir, 1949)

And John Locke may as well be one of these philosophers who wanted to extend the male rule of the household to the higher sphere of government.

**Exploring the Male Territory**
As most women of her time Mary Astell felt doubly ‘enslaved’ or submitted by man as the ruler of the household and the sovereign ruler in government. Given this double constraint and the objectives Astell set for herself (and for the English women in general), she singled out the inconsistencies in Locke and took him to task on different subjects he discussed in his treatise. For this purpose she appropriated his discourse and proceeded to defamiliarize it by having it displaced from the realm of politics to the sphere of the household or the domestic arena where he had proved himself mean. This displacement is meant to uncover man’s subterfuges in keeping the woman in ignorance. Throughout her essay she made use of the key concepts dear to Locke only to instil them with an ironic/satiric dimension. This displacement which is at work in Astell’s essay breaks the major arguments of Locke.

Indeed, Astell engaged in the Enlightenment arena of ideas against the so-called liberating conceptions of mankind through reason as they were defined by male liberals, and social contract theorists for the benefit of the “commonwealth” or humanity. In other words, Astell challenged man in his own field, and with his own weapons, in order to ridicule his (ir)rational agenda for the proclaimed good of the “commonwealth”. This intention on the part of Astell is to bring man, (man as represented by the Lockes and the Hobbes and the Filmers) from high to low.

Astell started her essay with a parody of title Some Reflections Upon Marriage echoes John Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) in which he insisted that some minds have a greater intellectual potential than others. Locke also had “an apprehension should daughters be perceived to understand any learned language or be conversant in books, they might be in danger of not finding husband” because men “relish these accomplishments in a lady” (qted in Stone, 1979: 229). Astell responded in the same twisted logic as Locke arguing that
We are all of us sufficiently Vain, and without doubt the Celebrated Name of Author, which most are so fond of, had not been avoided but for very good Reasons: To name but one; *Who will care to pull upon themselves an Hornet's nest?* 'Tis a very great Fault to regard rather who it is that Speaks, than what is Spoken; and either to submit to Authority, when we should only yield to Reason; or if Reason press too hard, to think to ward it off by Personal Objections and Reflections. Bold Truths may pass while the Speaker is *Incognito*, but are not endur'd when he is known; few Minds being strong enough to bear what Contradicts their Principles and Practices without Recriminating when they can. And tho' to tell the Truth be the most Friendly Office, yet whosoever is so hardy as to venture as it, shall be counted an Enemy for so doing.

(Astell, 1700 ttp://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/main.html. text not paginated)

From the start, though Astell made it clear that she did not want to compete with men. She showed that they (women) were as equal and as able, as skilful and as reasonable as men, if not better, in some respects. Astell set a polemical tone for her essay from the beginning. A passage in particular attracts our attention. It reads as follows:

And tho' one had not Piety enough to make a Religious Reflection, yet Civil Prudence would almost enforce them to say, that Man being in Honour has no Understanding, but is compar'd unto the Beasts that perish. He Blesseth his Soul, and thinks himself a happy Man, imagining his House will endure for ever, and that he has establish'd his Name and Family. But how wise soever he may be in other respects, in this he acts no better than the Ignorant and Foolish. For as he carries nothing away with him when he dies, so neither will his Pomp and Glory descend as he intended. Generous and Worthy Actions only can secure him from Oblivion, or what is worse, being remembered with Contempt; so little reason have we to Envy any Man's Wealth and Greatness, but much to Emulate his Wisdom and Vertue (Ibid. text not paginated)

This aggressive stance partakes of polemic which strikes a blow at male self-complacency in his dominion over the household. The polemic shows at the level of the diametrically opposed intention on the same referent. This opposed intention dislodges the male’s discourse.
Questioning the Legacy

Marriage

During the medieval and early modern times in England, the issue of marriage was a family affair. Lawrence Stone defines it as “a private contract between two families concerning property exchange.” (Stone, 1979: 29). Custom has it that the choice of a spouse for women is very limited because Laws, social practices, and economic structures narrowed women’s meaningful roles in society. The limit of choice for women is documented by many authors and writers. George Saville, Marquis of Halifax is one of them. Writing to his daughters, he warns that

It is one of the disadvantages belonging to your Sex, that young Women are seldom permitted to make their own choice; Friends Care and Experience are thought safer guides to them, than their own Fancies; and their Modesty often forbiddeth them to refuse when their Parents recommend, though their inward Consent may not entirely go along with it.

(Quoted in Jones, V. 1990:18)

At the same time women badly need marriage because they are prepared for it from early age. Mores and customs are construed in such a way as to see in marriage the ultimate objective of women. Jones's warning to his daughter is of course construed as an advice, a way of educating and preparing her to this rite of passage. He went on to say,

In this case there remaineth nothing for them to do, but to endeavour to make that easie which falleth to their Lot, and by a wise use of everything they may dislike in a Husband, turn that by degrees to be very supportable, which, if neglected, might in time beget an Aversion

(Ibid. 18)

What comes out from the quotation above is that the issue of marriage, the mores related to it, and the terms of the marriage contract were determined by men, leaving no avenue for women’s opinion. The following examples illustrate well the male dominance over this question. For Milton, the essential object of marriage is
“the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman, to comfort him and refresh him against the solitary life” (qted in Stone, 1979: 102). Milton’s assumption of subordination of women is then very clear, mainly when he rhetorically asked, “Who can be ignorant that woman was created for man, and not man for woman? (Qted in Ibid. 102)

John Locke refuted the theological family model of Sir Robert Filmer and the absolutist form of government in favour of a social contract wherein the governor will be answerable for his action. Within this social contract, he inscribed marriage. Lawrence Stone says, “He [Locke] argued that conjugal society was formed by voluntary contract for the purpose of begetting and rearing children” (Stone, 1979: 178). These two illustrations, among many others, constitute a telling instance of male supremacist thought in marriage.

It is against this established tradition that Mary Astell decided to discuss marriage from a woman’s perspective. Her discussion is at once a philosophical probe a) of human nature, b) of practical questions on women’s education, marriage, inferiority and c) the role assigned to her in society. The way she addressed these subjects catapults her into the status of a rights theorist of the downtrodden half of humanity.

In Some Reflections Upon Marriage, Astell listed the grievances of woman. For her “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” (Stanton E.C., Anthony S.B., and gage M.J. in Morris, 1969. Vol. I: 272-75) The injuries concern the infringement over basic rights as they are listed by the authors of the Seneca Falls Convention or the Declaration of Sentiments, a parody of the American Declaration of Independence which opens as follows:
When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they were accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

(Ibid.; emphasis ours)

My recourse to quoting at length from the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments is doubly justified. First, the Declaration draws inspiration from the basic philosophical and political tenets enunciated by John Locke more than fifty years earlier; secondly, it purports to continue the fight initiated by Astell half a century before.

Astell’s Some Reflections Upon Marriage negotiates Locke’s theory of conjugal life. Against Locke’s idea that marriage is natural and meant to preserve mankind and perpetuate at the same time man’s hegemony through the right of entail by (male) primogeniture, Astell responded that marriage is more than “a contractual relationship giving common interest and property” (cf. Stone, 1999). She went on to argue that marriage is a sacred relationship which she described as “[...] an
institution of Heaven and the only honourable way of continuing mankind”. What Astell implied here is that men did not take marriage seriously since their ultimate object was neither respect nor sanctity, but profit, prestige and power.

This male conception of marriage led Astell to refuse the master-slave relationship as it finds expression in the bonds that tie man and woman in the household. Locke’s natural rights played him false; they were turned against him by Astell who wondered,

If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect Condition of Slavery? and if the Essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a standing Rule to live by? And why is Slavery so much condemn'd and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?

The idea of slavery in married life is expressed by Barbara Caine. According to her, “marriage still carried the marks of barbaric origin, involving the sale and enslavement of women and the binding of them to a man for his personal use and for the procreation of his children” (Cain, 1997: 136). In Astell, the issue of marriage is discussed not in itself alone but in relation to other aspects of life. Among these she associated the political and the natural rights. One of these natural rights is equality

Equality

Astell’s rhetorical question, “If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?” in one the sections of her essay is a bold, daring, reply to Robert Filmer, Thomas Hobbes, and particularly John Locke, her immediate predecessor. The allusion to Filmer is justified by the latter’s argument that “[...] God gave to Adam not only the dominion over the woman and the children that should issue from them, but also over the whole earth to subdue it, and over all the Creatures on it, so that as long as Adam lived, no man could claim or enjoy anything but by
donation”…] (Filmer, R., Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings 1680 at http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/xFil.htm) Against Hobbes, Astell retained that charge against woman that he had derived from the Scriptures:

The Divell to enflame the Ambition of the woman, to whom that fruit already seemed beautifull, told her that by tasting it, they should be as Gods, knowing Good and Evill. Whereupon having both eaten, they did indeed take upon them Gods office, which is Judicature of Good and Evill; but acquired no new ability to distinguish between them aright.

(Hobbes, 1951: II, 4)

It follows from the quotation above that Hobbes, like other male social contract theorists, attributed the Original Sin to woman, a sin that consequently denied her access to competition in the various fields men claimed for themselves. Astell’s questioning of male assumptions in her time transgressed the limits set on women, and by this very transgression, she made forays into a territory that had hitherto remained forbidden.

In an essay on Mary Astell’s writing entitled “De-ciphering women and describing authority” Catherine Sharrock argues that in Astell’s time the women were seen as ‘Cyphers in the World’ but Astell did not endorse completely this assumption because, she said, “(h)er texts embark upon the deciphering of the social codes that authorize the marginalization of the female subject. This de-ciphering moves towards a revision of the ‘cyphered’ female identity, by disrupting the patriarchal discourse through which it is articulated.” (quoted in Grundy &Wiseman, 1992:109). In other words, Astell broke a long-established taboo, and started a profanation process that is otherwise justified because, as Raman Selden says in a chapter of his entitled “Class and Gender”,

Literature as an institution has tended to be an elitist preserve for obvious reasons. The level of literacy, economic independence and access to culture needed for someone to become a ‘great writer’ have been beyond the scope of most individuals until
relatively recently. Historically, the system of education and the structure of communication have privileged certain classes. (Selden, 1996: 519)

The supposed class that is denied access to educational opportunities by men in this quotation is the class of women. This, in Astell’s words, is “nonsense of common sense” of the patriarchs.

If Astell’s Some Reflections Upon Marriage does not spare all male chauvinism, it has a particularly aggressive stand towards John Locke. This aggressive stand partakes of the order of polemic. Her argument is formulated in the following words: “(f)or Covenants betwist Husband and Wife, like Laws in an Arbitrary Government, are of little Force, the Will of the Sovereign is all in all.” (Astell, 1700:15 ttp://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/main.html). This quotation from Astell’s Some Reflections Upon Marriage undermines Locke’s idea of social contract to achieve a commonwealth for the benefit of all, a commonwealth which, in Locke’s wording, is but an extension of male household hegemony into the higher sphere of government. Locke who otherwise abhorred, and argued against arbitrary dominion in the state, seemed to contradict himself while maintaining it in the family.

In discussing equality Locke posited that the state of nature is

A state … of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another, there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another, without subordination or subjection.

(Locke, 1690, II.II.4)

Locke’s equality in the state of nature is partial: on the one hand his project which is premised of equality seems ideal for all beings. On the other hand, are equal only if they belong to the same category. Locke's idea here is that mankind is divided into subspecies: that of men and that of women. And while man is naturally ‘the
abler and strong’ in Locke’s rhetoric, it is also natural for man to be superior because a family is a natural institution based on the natural differences between the two sexes. Therefore, all that Locke said about equality in nature concerns men only. This is made clear in the following statement

A state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another, there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another, without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty.

(II .II.6)

Though Locke believed that some women were, to a certain extent, able to govern their lives and properties by themselves, he thought that the majority of them were really under the sovereignty and government of men. Furthermore, all women, in Locke’s view are put under the difficult conditions of submitting to the authority of men. In her essay, Astell argues that the so-called natural superiority is but a social construct. Therefore she reversed Locke’s argument to demonstrate that his postulate needed reformulation. She writes:

But when a Woman Marrys unequally and beneath herself, there is almost demonstration that the Man is Sordid and Unfair, that instead of loving her he only loves himself, trepans and ruins her to serve his own ends. For if he had not a mighty opinion of himself, (which temper is like to make and admirable Husband,) he cou’d never imagine that their Person and good Qualities should make compensation for all the advantages she quits on his account.

Astell’s statement suggests that women match, through the contract of marriage, with men who are weaker than women in many respects. In this situation, man emerges from his lower state thanks to what woman can provide him in terms of money (dowry, for example) or fortune. Yet man remains ungrateful. For Astell such men do not deserve the enjoyment of conjugal life. On the other hand, Astell seems
to argue that if the sanctity of marriage is subverted by man because he considers marriage in terms of interest one can gain egoistically at the expense of the other half, it is then better for women to lead a life in celibacy. Her argument is— as it is shown in the quote above— that man is so selfish and ungrateful that the women who venture into marriage embark themselves on a sacrificial enterprise.

Astell expressed the belief that women are inherently equal to men and that they deserve the same political, economic and social opportunities. She moved on to project on man all the stereotypical attributes which woman has inherited through the education she has received from male theorists whom she accuses of limiting women’s access to education. The charge against man’s deliberate will not to educate women is rendered as follows:

We never see or perhaps make sport with the ill Effects of a bad Education, till it comes to touch us home in the ill conduct [60] of a Sister, a Daughter, or Wife. Then the Women must be blam’d, their Folly is exclaim’d against, when all this while it was the wise Man’s Fault, who did not set a better Guard on those who according to him stand in so much need of one.

Given Astell’s reflections, the discourse John Locke wants to be dialogic is stripped of this dimension, and as such, its revolutionary spirit is because it excludes half of mankind— women— from participation in the articulation of their concerns on the ground that they lack rationality. Therefore Locke’s discourse retains and claims authorial, patriarchal, hegemony. It reads as a dialogue in disguise, that is one among men. For Astell, John Locke’s endeavours in liberal thought remain monolithic and monologic to that other half of mankind.

**Education**

Education in Astell is given primary importance. She believed that all the nightmarish experiences of women derived from the lack of education. This is why she started her essay with this dimension of women’s life. All her arguments in Some
Reflections Upon Marriage derive from the experiences of one of her female neighbours in Chelsea, the Duchess of Mazarine. Her recourse to a woman’s experience is meant as a rhetorical way of engaging in a polemic with male authors, husbands, in a word, the male species. From the start she set the tone of her essay as follows:

These are great Provocations, but nothing can justify the revenging the Injuries we receive from others, upon our selves: The Italian Proverb shews a much better way; If you would be reveng'd of your Enemies, live well. Had Madam Mazarine's Education made a right Improvement of her Wit and Sense, we should not have found her seeking Relief by such imprudent, not to say scandalous Methods, as the running away in Disguise with a spruce Cavalier, and rambling to so many Courts and Places, nor diverting her self with such Childish, Ridiculous, or Ill-natur'd Amusements, as the greatest part of the Adventures in her Memoirs are made up of. True Wit consists not meerly in doing [5] or saying what is out of the way, but in such surprizing things as are fit and becoming the person from whom they come.


Though Astell’s argument in the passage above does not spare the behaviour of her neighbour, it can be construed as a criticism of the sort of education men impart in women. At the same time, Astell’s polemic serves as advice to her fellow women. She wrote:

We never see or perhaps make sport with the ill Effects of a bad Education, till it comes to touch us home in the ill conduct [60] of a Sister, a Daughter, or Wife. Then the Women must be blam'd, their Folly is exclaim'd against, when all this while it was the wise Man's Fault, who did not set a better Guard on those who according to him stand in so much need of one.

(Ibid. Document not paginated)

Astell was well aware of the handicaps of women in the field of education since there was little concern for improvement either in the home or state institutions. The reduction of women’s education to a bare minimum widens the gap between men’s and women’s chances in the social roles. While the woman is victimised because she is not allowed access to education, she is also guilty of the consequences which arise
from this lack of education. Astell explained the case: “Since her Reason is suppos'd to be less, and her Passions stronger than his, he chou'd not give occasion to call that supposition in Question by his pettish Carriage and needless Provocations” (Ibid.)

The Renaissance humanists’ “vigorous drive for female classical education” as it is expressed by Sir Thomas statement “I do not see why … learning may not equally agree with both sexes” (cf. Stone, 1979: 142) is, by the seventeenth century, “replaced by the traditional feminine accomplishments and graces needed to catch a husband, such as music, singing, dancing, needle work and embroidery, and no more than the basics of reading and writing” (Ibid. 143) so that only very few women can sign their contract of marriage.

This state of affairs is the consequence of man’s supposed natural superiority over women, and the traditional role assigned to the latter. If woman’s place is in the home, it follows that she does not need an academic education to place her on a par with man in the field of the professions or public life. This lack of interest in the education of women is justified (by man) on the ground that the latter lack rationality. John Locke who argued that the state of nature is one of equality and freedom reconsidered his position and reduced it to the following:

Though I have said above (chapter. 2) “That all men by nature are equal,” I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of “equality.” Age or virtue may give men a just precedency: Excellency of parts and merit may place others above the common level. Birth may subject some, and alliance or benefits others, to pay an observance to those to whom Nature, gratitude, or other respects, may have made it due; and yet all this consists with the equality which all men are in respect of jurisdiction or dominion one over another, which was the equality I there spoke of as proper to the business in hand, being that equal right that every man hath to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man.

(II. VI.54)

Granted that Locke’s state of nature is governed by natural law, Astell's statement, “If God had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason, He wou'd
not have given them any, for he does nothing in vain”, is a rational response against
the alleged inferiority of women.

But whoever he be that thus happens to become our master, if he allows
us to be reasonable Creatures, and does not merely Compliment us with
that Title, since no man denies our Readiness to use our Tongues, it
would tend, I should think, to our Master's Advantage, and therefore be
may please to be advised to teach us to improve our Reason. but if
Reason is only allowed us by way of Raillery, and the secret Maxim is,
that we have none, or little more than Brutes, 'tis the best way to
confine us with Chain and Block to the Chimney-Cornet, which, probably, might save the Estates of some Families and the Honor of
others.

Property

In the previous chapter I have discussed Locke’s theory of property in relation
to Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and said it is regarded as the cornerstone of classical
liberalism. Locke’s grounding the right to property in natural law is seen to be
pivotal in asserting the rights of individuals against the state. From the inception,
Locke placed the right to possessions on the same level as the right to life, health,
and liberty. These considerations offer a large spectrum of interpretations as they
relate to Hobbes’s (man’ property but they are certainly not the same if we come to
consider their impact and import on women). In other words, my discussion of
property in Astell (in relation to Locke) will indicate another facet of private
ownership.

I shall argue in this chapter that Locke’s theory of property is a defence of
economic inequality. According to MacPherson, Locke's major achievement in his
theory of property was “to base the property right on natural rights and natural law,
and then to remove all the natural law limits from the property right” He believes
that Locke wanted to justify unlimited right to property in order to ground the
primary feature of capitalist society, unequal ownership of property, in natural law.
In other words, according to MacPherson, Locke envisioned a society divided into
two classes with the capitalists on top and the downtrodden workers. (cf. Vaughn, 2004). MasPherson’s argument is of course based on Locke’s statement that

> [It is plain, that Men have agreed to disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth, they having by a tacit and voluntary consent found out a way, how a man may fairly possess more land than he himself can use the product of, by receiving in exchange for the overplus, Gold and Silver, which may be hoarded up without injury to any one, these metalls not spoiling or decaying in the hands of the possessor. This partage of things, in an inequality of private possessions, men have made practicable out of the bounds of Societie, and without compact, only by putting a value on gold and silver and tacitly agreeing in the use of Money.](II.)

According to Locke, the most basic property is the most personal: every man has a property in his own person. This very basic assumption in Locke’s theory of property constitutes the point of Astell’s departure in her criticism of property.

Mary Astell did not use the term property. She rather mentions the word ‘estate’. The reason is that the word property as it is used in Locke is given a political dimension. As proto feminists, Astell understood well enough that she had not to challenge man openly where law and tradition proved him right. This does not mean, however, that Astell did not question the politico-economic theory of John Locke. She simply employed the political nature of husband-wife relationship to show its negative aspect on women. Since a wife is a citizen within the domestic sphere rather the public life, she cannot attack her exclusion from public life without first demolishing subjection to her husband.

Astell’s contention in her essay is to claim title to the natural rights of the individual. In so doing she obliquely deflated the idea developed by Locke that “man is the abler and stronger” on whom authority is conferred. Astell believed that women have the ability to manage their own affairs. She wrote,

> But there are few Women whose Understandings are worth the Management; their Estates are much more capable of Improvement. No
Woman, much less a Woman of Fortune, is ever fit to be her own Mistress, and he who has not the Vanity to think what much finer things he could perform had he the Management of her Fortune; or so much Partiality and Self-love, as to fancy it can't be better bestow'd than in making his; will yet be so honest and humble as to think that 'tis fit she should take his Assistance, as Steward at least. For the Good Man aspires no further, he would only take the Trouble of her Affairs off her Hand; and the Sense of her Condescension and his great Obligation, will for ever secure him against acting like a Lord and Master!

(Astell, 1700; document not paginated)

The downtrodden we have spoken of above relate more to women than the other category of male exploited. This is so because the woman is, from the start believed to be subjected not only to her husband and master but to all men. She argued her point in the following way:

Only let me beg to be informed, to whom we poor Fatherless Maids, and Widows who have lost their Masters, owe Subjection? It can't be to all Men in general, unless all Men were agreed to give the same Commands; Do we then fall as Strays, to the first who finds us? By the Maxims of some Men, and the Conduct of some Women one would think so.

(Ibid.)

Here, in these rhetorical questions, Astell made more than one statement, but our purpose at hand is to show how husband and wife, man and woman relate to each other as far as property is concerned. John Locke premised his theory of property as an extension of the individual’s, bodily strength (body is already understood by him as property). From these postulates, Locke explained the beginning of property in the state of nature as follows:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a "property" in his own "person." This nobody has any right to but himself. The "labour" of his body and the "work" of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this "labour" being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right
to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as
good left in common for others.

(II.V.26)

At this point it is important to recall the Lockean condition that lies at the
foundation of his defence of private property: the appropriation of property by some
must not be at the expense of others. Private property is socially (and morally)
acceptable only if it advances the social welfare of the whole community without
harming or prejudicing any particular member. Yet we must not also lose sight of
what Locke said of the conjugal family. For him a family is not a commonwealth.
This implies that the wife loses the protection of positive laws and as such, she is not
removed from the bonds that tie her to her husband/master. Therefore Locke’s social
contract maintains the hegemony of the husband in conjugal life while it rejects it in
the government.

It follows that in the contract of marriage, men, according to Astell

 Term, Civil Husbands; when we have taken the number of your giddy
Lovers, who are not more violent in the Passion than they are certain to
Repent of it; when to these you have added such as Marry without any
Thought at all, further than that it is the Custom of the World, what
look no further than the making of their Fortune, as they call it; who
don't so much as propose to themselves any satisfaction in the Woman
to whom they Plight their Faith, seeking only to be Masters of her
Estate, that so they may have Money enough to indulge all their
irregular Appetites; who think they are as good as can be expected, if
they are but according to the fashionable others have done before them,
that the Family must be kept up, the ancient Race preserv'd, and
therefore their kind Parents and Guardians chuse as they think
convenient, without ever consulting the Young ones Inclinations, who
must be satisfied or pretend so at least, upon pain of their displeasure,
and that heavy consequence of it, forfeiture of their Estate: These set
aside, I fear there will be but a small remainder to Marry out of better
considerations, and even amongst the few that do, not one in a hundred
takes care to deserve his Choice.

Evelyne Pisier and Eleni Varikas have studied the “invisibility of gender” in the
political theory of John Locke and have reached the conclusion that “[Locke] définit
le marriage comme une association contractuelle entre individus libres et égaux.
Mais pour les femmes, cette liberté n’est qu’une liberté de s’assujettir une bonne fois pour toutes à la puissance conjugale qui revient à l’homme comme étant naturellement le plus capable et le plus fort. Fondé en nature le pouvoir conjugal devient le garant de la société civile du droit naturel d’accumulation de la propriété et de sa transmission aux héritiers légitimes, [mâles] (Pisier et Varikas, 2002)

Few Men have so much Goodness as to bring themselves to a liking of what they loath'd, meerly because it is their Duty to like; on the contrary, when they Marry with an indifferency, to please their Friends or encrease [sic] their Fortune, the indifferency proceeds to an aversion, and perhaps even the kindness and complaisance of the poor abus'd Wife shall only serve to encrease it. What follows then? There is no content at home, so it is sought elsewhere, and the Fortune so unjustly got, is as carelessly squander'd. The Man takes a loose, what shou'd hinder him? He has all in his hands, and Custom has almost taken off that small Restraint Reputation us'd to lay. The Wife finds too late what was the Idol the Man adored] which her Vanity perhaps, or it may be the Commands and importunities of Relations, wou'd not let her see before; and now he has got that into his possession, she must make court to him for a little sorry Alimony out of her own Estate.

This is what MacPherson calls “possessive individualism,” the assumptions that people relate to each other primarily as owners, that individual freedom is the function of the possessions of individuals and that society is nothing but the sum of the “relations of exchange between proprietors.” What is responsible for such interest-driven society according to MacPherson is the very concept of self-ownership wherein the individual himself is seen as a property and not as a whole.

While it is clear that Locke posited political equality, in the state of nature, he never assumed there would be equality of possessions. A wife is considered herself as property not to speak about the possessions she may have. Astell reading of the contract of marriage as seen by men is reduced to its tangible aspect. Astell made the point that upon marriage the wife loses liberty, wealth and the heritage of her own possession upon the death of her husband. The right of entail by primogeniture seriously handicaps daughters, wives and widows.
Finally, one may say that Astell is as a theorist of women’s rights in the home as Locke is one in the state. Locke’s abhorrence of political hegemony in the state and his insistence on its perpetuation in the home reduces his liberal enlightenment project to a male limited view of freedom, education and property. Astell’s argument in favour of sameness and title to the natural rights sets limits to Locke’s political theory.

My analysis of John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* and Mary Astell’s *Some Reflections on Marriage* allows me to reassess John Locke’s theory in terms of Enlightenment thought which is premised on equality and freedom. While John Locke’s defence of individual rights has inaugurated a new conception of civil government which is answerable before the citizens who have erected it, it remains that the terms of the contract established between governors and governed are conducted in a male frame of reference. The latter frame of reference has instigated Mary Astell to negotiate the issue of marriage, equality, education, and property tradition in woman’s terms.

I have said that laws, customs and mores have codified the female behaviour and choice in Astell’s time. The narrowing down of women’s education to the elementary skills of reading and writing widens the gap between men’s and women’s opportunities when it comes to enter the public life. This male reductionist policy finds its justification in the supposed natural superiority of man whose most (in)famous exponent is John Locke.

The legacy of men as it relates to marriage, equality, education and property is explored by Mary Astell. She questioned this legacy by arguing that the fairer sex has been victimized by society merely because of gender divisions, gender divisions which are socially constructed by men. Astell reads Locke’s political contract as one
which is based on an unbridled accumulation of wealth. She argued that men marry, not for love, but for depriving women of whatever they possess. Therefore, the dialogic relation between Astell and Locke is of the order of polemics. Astell's discourse “clashes” with Locke over the issue of women's freedom.
Conclusion

I conclude this part by summarising the main points that I have discussed. In the first chapter I have argued that Hobbes’s and Locke’s works bear a direct relevance to their immediate historical contexts. I have, accordingly, outlined the salient aspects which have presided over the overall transformation in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Hobbes’s and Locke’s contributions to this early modern era are attempts to redefine the civilisation of their country. It is important here to point out to the secular aspect of the authors’ worldviews. This is possible because Hobbes and Locke have given scientific dimension to the field of politics which has been for a long time influenced by the church. Hobbes’s and Locke’s befriending of rationalist thinkers like Descartes, Galileo, and Newton, explains the scientific method of their approach in the building of their respective theories.

In the second chapter, I have attempted a comparison between Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*. I have tried to demonstrate that the political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke are similar in some aspects but quite different in many others. Both Hobbes and Locke began their writings in the state of nature though they offer quite different representations of it. It is agreed on both parts that the state of nature consists of natural laws and equally propose that a government should be created through a “social contract”.

From this common point there are many similarities and differences between their interpretations of Human Nature and Government. Both Hobbes and Locke viewed political philosophy from scientific standpoints; for Hobbes it was geometry and for Locke it was Empiricism. Neither Hobbes nor Locke wanted to rely on the divine right of kings in the justification of political authority. The published writings
of both Hobbes and Locke results in their exile from England. Hobbes creates a very bleak picture of the state of nature, consisting of selfish egoistic individuals, as opposed to Locke’s who are social and altruistic. While Hobbes aimed to create a government with an absolute sovereign government, Locke advocated government upon voluntarily consent.

The major difference between Hobbes and Locke, however, rests on the reasons why people in the natural state agree, by consent, to form a civil government, hence arises the difference in the role of government. My concluding argument in this chapter is that John Locke’s proposition of social contract is more congenial to the Age of reason as Locke assumed the position of the philosopher of individual liberty and integrity.

The third chapter attempts to revise the argument I have reached in the previous one. This is so because the Enlightenment advocates of individualism and limited government have been dominantly male. While they abhorred tyranny in the state they maintain in the household. All their discourse is male-oriented and aims to maintained and perpetuate, through law, mores and customs, man’s supremacy in society.

The revision of my argument is made possible with the comparison of Mary Astell’ Some Reflections Upon Marriage and John Locke’s Second Treatise on Government. My study of Astell’s work shows the limits one can set to Locke’s discourse mainly when this discourse is grounded in the Enlightenment thought of equality and freedom. Set against Astell’s essay, Locke’s Treatise on Government proves to be the extension of patriarchal paternalism. What Locke’s social contract implicitly says about women is to quit celibacy and surrender self, property and liberty to enter in a contract with a “monarch for life.” William Blackstone captures
best our idea in his fifteenth chapter from *Commentary on the laws of England* when he stated that

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a feme-covert; is said to be covert-baron, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. Upon this principle, of an union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage…

The husband also (by the old law) might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehaviour, the law thought it reasonable to entrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his servants or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer.

These are the chief legal effects of marriage during the coverture; upon which we may observe, that even the disabilities, which the wife lies under, are for the most part intended for her protection and benefit. So great a favourite is the female sex of the laws of England…

(Blackstone, 1765. Html document. not paginated)

Mary Astell addressed Locke’s writings through dialogisation. By ‘dialogisation’, I mean the bringing together of male and female texts, addressing one another, on the same referent, but differently. She singled out the flaw in Locke’s discourse and striped it of its revolutionary spirit. In other words, Locke addresses male authority and pleads for the rights of man, not the generic man which means mankind, i.e., men and women, but the specific male species. (cf. Donovan, 1992)

In the light of the comparison I have drawn between Astell and John Locke, I share the opinion of the Enlightenment critics who argue that Immanuel Kant, Adorno and Horkeimer considered the Enlightenment as a failure. Kant “regard[s] the Enlightenment as a linear process” (Macey, 2000:111). In relation to John Locke’s essay, the linearity shows itself in its disregard of women and its male monolgia. For
Adorno and Horkeimer the Enlightenment can produce monsters of its own, with contradictory and sometimes dangerous effects (Ibid. 111).

Thus I am of the opinion that the Enlightenment (as its essence is captured in Locke) has failed to achieve its objective because it excludes women from full participation in life right from the beginning. It is a “grand narrative”, an expression used by François Lyotard to refer to “narratives which make forms of knowledge legitimate by supplying them with a validating philosophy” (Ibid. 167). Locke’s “grand narrative” is not only an oppressive one but also a failure in some respects because it has fallen victim of its own principles. Yet Locke’s efforts are not vain because “the high optimism that marked much of Enlightenment thought survived as one of the movement’s most enduring legacies: the belief that human history is a record of general progress.” (Britannica CD.1994-1999). And this optimism is revived in Astell’s Some Reflections Upon Marriage.
PART THREE
Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Gender in Eighteenth Century England

Introduction

The second part of this dissertation has closed with a chapter investigating Astell’s appropriation of Locke’s discourse of human emancipation on behalf of women. Parallels between absolute monarchy and patriarchy are established with the purpose of underlining the paradox and injustice of maintaining tyranny at the domestic level while civil/political society has moved to constitutional monarchy. The analogy between tyrannical kings and husbands is sustained by a sense of political outrage that women as wives and citizens are excluded from the new political kingdom wherein English man’s rights are denied to women because of supposed gender differences. In this third part, I shall first investigate the construction of femininity in the eighteenth century with the aim of containing claims for democratic power relations between men and women like those made by Astell at the end of the seventeenth century. In the second chapter, I shall move to the analysis of the way women like Mary Wollstonecraft undertook the emancipatory project of deconstructing the feminine ideology of political and social containment in the domestic sphere.

Nearly a century separates Astell from Wollstonecraft, but the contexts that enabled them to produce their pamphlets on behalf of women are marked by a similar change of world order signaled by the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the American and French Revolutions, respectively in 1776 and 1789. The significant difference between them, which largely explains the difference in degree in their commitment to their emancipatory projects, is that the eighteenth-century witnessed not only the construction and consolidation of femininity by a middle class committed to some form of gendered representational government in England, but also a large diffusion across Europe of new, mostly secular, ideas about freedom, progress, human perfectibility, justice and equality that the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant put under the umbrella word “the Enlightenment.” These cosmopolitan ideas largely
contributed to what Benedict Anderson refers to as the “imagining of national communities” in republican form both across the Atlantic in America and across the Channel in France. I shall argue that it is at the crossroads of this double historical movement towards national building and celebration of national character and the cosmopolitan dimension of the Enlightenment project that Wollstonecraft’s deconstruction of femininity has to be explored to capture its full complexity.

This part like the first one shall close with the investigation of the manner in which women’s discontent with abusive gender power relations swerve into the development of an orientalist discourse. I shall argue that if this collapse of one discourse upon another is initiated in Wollstonecraft’s works, it is in the play by the British-born author Susanna Haswell Rowson that the analogy of oriental despotism towards women is mostly fully deployed in defence of women’s civil and political rights. The supposedly oriental tyrannical regime over women is employed as a foil to remind the new political regime in the newly independent America that it is not far removed from the Regency of Algiers which at the time the play was produced held many American males in captivity.
CHAPTER SEVEN
The Patriarchal Image of Women in the Augustan Press and Eighteenth Century Conduct Manuals

Introduction

“The sober code of manners under which we still live today, is in some important degree a legacy from the Tatler and The Spectator.” This single sentence quote by first-half-of-twentieth century cultural C.S. Lewis highlights the crucial role that these periodicals played in the redefinition of the English national character and the establishment of normative rules of social behaviour in the first and second decades of the eighteenth century to which cultural historians refer as the Augustan Age because of its suggestion of the social prosperity that had prevailed in imperial Rome during the reign of Emperor Augustus. For us cultural critics of the twentieth-first century, Lewis’s remark speaks about the importance of not losing sight that discursive statements such as that are phlegmatic and that they have reserved or sober manners cannot be simply made in the name of innateness or nature, because character and manners can also be a matter of cultural construction and deconstruction. Moreover, Lewis’s comment reminds us that the two periodicals contributed to a radical shift from one mode of being, feeling, reflecting, and behaving to another mode. Such a revolutionary shift can be elucidated by the interplay of the tempered idealism of Steele and Addison and the historical conditions that offered the congenial social, cultural, political ground for their ideals of social behaviour to take deep roots. A change in mentality and manners, as profound as the one Lewis points to, could not have taken place if early eighteenth-century English society had not the historical readiness to accept that change.

This chapter seeks to explain how and in what historical circumstances The Tatler and The Spectator contributed to the reshuffling of the cultural norms for their contemporaries. More particularly, it investigates the way it has set the normative rules for conduct across gender lines, and the tone of discourse for the construction of femininity across generic lines in the
course of the eighteenth century. So, the discussion of the construction of femininity in the
two periodicals will be followed up by an analysis of how this gendered construction of
British identity is further elaborated in other genres like manuals of conduct and sermons with
focus on four major themes: conduct, sexuality, education and writing. The discussion as a
whole will serve as a background for the investigation of Wollstonecraft’s and Rowson’s
peculiar feminist modes of deconstructing the eighteenth-century idea of femininity.

_The Tatler and The Spectator: The Establishment of the Public and Private Spheres_ 

The prominence accorded to _The Tatler_ and _The Spectator_ in the history of the British press
cannot be accounted for in terms of their precedence or originality. Both of them were
preceded in the market press by much ancient periodicals like _The Gentleman’s Journal_, _The
British Apolo_, _The Post-Angel_, and _The Diverting Post_. Neither can we explain their eminence
in terms of uniqueness in the way it combines fiction, poems and essays in some sort of
miscellanies. As the name of a contemporary journal, _The Monthly Miscellany_, there were
other journals which are even more specialized in those terms. So, if we have to look for their
distinguishing marks among other journals of the time, arguably we have to listen to
contemporary essayists say about these two periodicals: “Whoever wishes to attain an English
style, familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the
volumes of Addison, (1959:399)” advises Samuel Johnson. So, what marks off these journals
is the degree of refinement in the style of the essays in the periodicals that set up, as Leslie
Stephen tells us,

the model for at least three generations of writers. The number of imitations is
countless: Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith, and many men of less fame tried to repeat
the success, persons of quality, such as Chesterfield and Horace Walpole,
condescended to write papers for the world… Even in the nineteenth century Hazlitt
and Leigh Hunt carried on the form; as indeed, in the modified shape, many later
essayists have aimed at a substantially similar achievement (70-71).
Stephen’s above quote confirms the high status accorded to Addison’s and Steele’s journals by both eighteenth and nineteenth century essayists, but he does not attempt to explain why an essayist style suddenly became an issue that assumed a national consensus.

I shall argue that the appreciation of this style is mostly due to the cultural context in which the periodicals were published. Style became part and parcel of a larger issue that is cultural nationalism. It has to be observed that the two periodicals were circulated during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), preceded by the Nine Years War (1692-1705). In both wars, the British were pitted against the French, who threatened the interests of the newly established regime that had issued from the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The Glorious Revolution witnessed the bloodless dethronement and French exile of James II, who left behind him nostalgic Stuart claimants to the throne referred to as Jacobists in British history. Jacobism relates to the political sympathy that a faction of the Tories brought in support of King James II at the time of dethronement on the basis of what the majority of Whigs considered as the incompatibility of his Catholic Religion with his function as head of the Anglican Church. These political sympathies gave rise to rebellions for the second restoration of the Stuart Dynasty to the throne in 1715 and 1745, which in turn fostered a climate of suspicion towards the Tories for nearly half a century after the Glorious Revolution.

Though circulated in a war period, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, unlike the other war periodicals of its time, did not give themselves to news of current events related to the vicissitudes of war or to rumours about what took place in European courts as a consequence of these wars. Nor did they give themselves to the reporting of scandals aimed at ad hominem attacks. Supposedly raised above party lines, the editorial line of the Tatler, for example, tells us that its “general purpose… to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cunning, Vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, Discourse, and our Behaviour. (47)” This implies that the periodicals’ goal is social and
cultural reform through a change of public opinion about the condemnable and recommendable aspects of life. However, looking deeply at the editorial claims, we can see that if the two newspapers kept clear of what was happening at the war front, they have in them a war-like impulse directed towards the reformation of the social mores and mentality that the generation of the Glorious Revolution had inherited from the Restoration period:

    The State of Conversation and Business in this Town having been long perplexed with Pretenders in both Kinds, in order to open Men’s Eyes against such Abuses, it appeared no unprofitable Undertaking to publish a paper which should observe upon the Manners of the Pleasurable, as well as the Busie Part of Mankind. (47)

Such editorial lines speak about a disguised cultural defensive war against what Raymond Williams calls “residual ideology” that survived the political demise of the Restoration. To paraphrase again Williams, I can say that these editorial lines play up the “emerging ideology” of the financial and commercial interests advised to trim off its behaviour, dress and discourse, to assume its identity and identification as a middle class before imposing its hegemony over the national community. In brief, the financial and commercial interests are told that unless they raise a cultural capital by changing their “habitus,” and spending their money usefully, they could not achieve social distinction among other classes and nations.

Unsurprisingly, this process of class and national identification and self-definition, undertaken in time of war against French cultural influence exacerbated gender anxieties about dress, behaviour and discourse. In his introduction to The Man of Mode, John Barnard claims that gender anxieties about these matters existed even in Restoration comedy of manners to which George Etherege’s comedy belongs. Without fully contesting this claim, I would argue that it was the wars pursued after the Glorious Revolution that made them assume their full seriousness. Indeed, if there are anxieties about gender crossing in matters of dress, behaviour and conversation, the attack that The Tatler and The Spectator launched against Etherege’s play suggests that the issue of gender crossing was not addressed with the required seriousness since it still endangers the masculine identity of the nation and the class.
that is supposed to lead it against internal and external enemies. In contexts like this one, women’s attempts to cross gender boundaries are considered as troublesome and harmful to public peace.

Arguably, no other essay speaks for the national urgency of gender separation of duties than the essay that Addison published on June 2, 1711 under the title of “Party Patches.” This essay recounts the observation that Spectator, the persona of the paper, about the women’s involvement in party politics. Spectator tells us that “about the middle of Winter, he went to see an Opera at the Theatre in the Hay Market, where he could not but take notice of two Parties of very Fine Women, that had placed themselves in the opposite Side-Boxes (p.509).” What draws his attention on this occasion is that these fashionable women were wearing patches, small rounds of silk used as make-up marks, on opposite sides of the face to distinguish themselves according to party lines, Whig or Tory. These two groups were throwing hostile glances at each other through another group of women patched indifferently seated in the middle-boxes. On close observation, Mr Spectator realized that the number of Whig and Tory spotted women varied according to humour and fancy for the fashionable man of the day. In line with his argument, Mr Spectator compares the woman to the tigress in the way patches unexpectedly appear on her skin when she is seized they anger regardless of her political affiliation. Women’s irrational way of exercising politics is regarded as whimsical as the world of fashion. In their hands, politics becomes “Party Rage… as it serves to aggravate the Hatreds and Animosities that reign among Men, and in a great measure deprive the Fair sex of those peculiar Charms with which Nature has endowed them. (p.511)”

Thus disqualified by nature for the game of politics, Spectator recommends “British Ladies, at a time when their Country is torn with so many unnatural Divisions” should follow the example of Roman women who with tears and entreaties interposed between the war factions and managed to “unite them together in a firm and lasting Peace. (Ibid)”
recommendation is that since English women surpass women of other nations in beauty, it is in this domain that they should try to outshine them by developing accomplishments proper to their sex. Patriotic motherhood demands that women should “distinguish themselves as tender Mothers and faithful wives, rather than as furious Partizans. (p.511)” This recommendation is followed up by the claim that “female Virtues are of a Domestic turn (and that) the family is the proper Province for private women to shine in. (pp. (pp.511-12)”

In essays like the “Party Patches,” women as a whole social group are satirically dismissed from what Habermas calls the public sphere of civil society on the grounds of biological difference and historical/mythological examples of patriotic motherhood. Biological differences are elevated into natural essences assigning normative gender roles and a poetics of space that can be transgressed only at the peril of collapse of the nation. While English men and women are told that they excel other nations in terms of virtues, it is recommended for each gender group to outshine other nations in those virtues that are proper to their sex. So regardless of the class or nationality to which they belong, gender separation remains the one norm that has to be observed in order to safeguard the political body.

Apart from the exclusion of women from participation in the political Kingdom, The Tatler and The Spectator seek to tame the body through the control of style dress. The anxiety about cross-dressing that characterized the Augustan Age appears most in several essays. One of them appeared on July 19, 1712 on the “Equestrian Costume.” This essay exposes those “Ladies who dress themselves in a Hat and Feather, a Riding-Coat and a Perriwig, or at least tie up their Hair in a Bag or Ribbond, in imitation of the smart Part of the opposite Sex. (p.539)” It starts with drawing a parallel between cross-dressing and “the mixture of the two sexes in one Commonwealth,” and continues by dismissing the fashion as immodest before calling the women who cross-dress disguised highwaymen infesting the countryside in the manner of “female cavaliers.” Apart from the reference to the French origin of the dress mode
or fashion, the word “cavalier” is the ancestral name for the Tories suspected at the time of Jacobism. The political tone of the comparison cannot be missed if placed in the context of the wars between the French and the English.

Mr Spectator follows up his remarks by recounting an experience that he had at his “Friend Sir Roger de Coverley’s,” an experience which reads like a comedy of errors of bad taste wherein our hero and his entourage mistake an Equestrian Lady approaching the knight’s house for a horseman. The “mixture of the two sexes in one person” is such that Mr Spectator arranges her among hybrid and monstrous beings, which if it had appeared in the Roman period would have been called a hermaphrodite and would have surely invited the satiric arrows of Juvenal. However, Mr Spectator interested more in reform than in scandalizing refrains from ad hominem attack and uses “the most gentle Methods to bring them off from any little Extravagance into which (women) are unwarily fallen.” So instead of character-killing satire in the manner of Alexander Pope, Mr Spectator just delivers his opinion, hoping that the ladies would take heed of it and he would never hear of such travesty on the part of the ladies in the future: “I think that it however necessary absolutely necessary to keep up the Partition between the two sexes, and to take Notice of the smallest Encroachment which the one makes upon the other. (p.540)”

In order to reinforce further the necessity for distinguishing between the sexes in matters of dress style, the author observes that it is a cultural importation from a nation with which England was at war. “I must observe that this fashion was first of all brought to us from France, a Country which has Infected all the Nations of Europe with its Levity. (p.541)” The blurring of sexual identities in France might be compatible with the French temperament, but that could not be the case in England because of its essentially different national character and that of its women. It is implied that the acceptance of the mixing of gendered traits through dress is equivalent to a treachery of the masculine identity of the English as a heroic species,
and breach of the natural laws that has dictated differences between men and women. So if women want really to fulfill their national duty, they should stop imitating the French and try instead to excel the French women in those virtues with which nature has invested them. The patriotism and heroism of the English men and women have to be manifested in gender marked grounds, respectively heroic valour and modesty. Doing otherwise on the part of the English ladies is equivalent to both national and gender treachery.

The drive towards gender-marked differentiation in dress is not made with a similar urgency when it concerns men. Admittedly, male dress reform is also recommended for men who affect femininity in dress attire, but the recommendation is formulated in a less urgent tone.

So in one essay, Mr Spectator tells us what follows:

I have receiv’d a Letter, desiring me to be very satirical upon the little Muff that is now in fashion; another informs me of a Pair of silver Garters buckled below the Knee, that have been lately seen at the Rainbow Coffee-house in Fleet-Street; a third sends me an heavy Complaint against fringed Gloves. To be brief, there is scare an Ornament of either Sex which one or other of my Corresponds has not inveighed against with some Bitterness, and recommended to my Observation.

Obviously, the anxiety of cross-dressing became a widespread social phenomenon in the Augustan Age. However, Mr Spectator’s response to this concern is more indulgent since he reminds his correspondents that it is not his “intention to sink the Dignity of this Paper with reflections upon Red-hells or Top-knots. (p.495)” And yet, the newspaper has not hesitated to descend to that indignity when it concerns women’s masculine attire.

One wonders whether this higher level of anxiety about women’s masculine attire was not due in part to the symbolic value that the English at the time attached to it as a women’s refusal of man’s dictate to maintain them in the domestic sphere of activities. A gendered code of dress gives or refuses access to certain spaces and the activities linked to those spaces. This interpretation gains in pertinence if we set it in the context of the general dress reform undertaken by The Tatler and The Spectator. Women’s “weakness for dress,” their love for “shows and appearances” are some of the motifs that recur in the essays of the two
periodicals. To all evidence, women, unlike men are, are ontologically inferior to women. The latter’s hollowness, excess contrast sharply with the former’s plenitude and measure. What mitigates this ontological judgment is that this supposed “inborn vice” is amenable to reform. The driving force of this reform is natural simplicity in dress and ornament. What is condemned is the artificiality that deforms and disfigures women into “picts” and monstrous beings dressed in gigantic “hoop skirt” that made it impossible for its owner to enter the court of justice in order to be judged for its infringement of the dress code. So if The Tatler issue of March 28, 1710 affirms that “nothing touches our (that of men) so much as a beautiful Woman in a plain Dress (p.487), the January 5 issue of the same year makes a concession to women’s weakness for dress and ornament by advocating more natural means to satisfy their whims:

I consider Woman as a beautiful Romantic Animal, that may be adorned with Furs and Feathers, Pearls and diamonds, Ores and Silks. The Lynx shall cast its skin at her feet to make her a Tippet, the Peacock, Parrot, and Swan, shall pay contributions to her Muff; the Sea shall be searched for shells, and the Rocks for Gems; and every Part of Nature furnish out its Share towards the Embellishment of a creature that is the most consummate Work of it. All this I shall indulge them in; but as for the Petticoat I have been speaking of, I neither can, nor will allow it. (p.485)

It is taken for granted that women dress to please men, so unless women takes this remark seriously they would appear to them as artificial because it does not respond to the admitted taste and aesthetic sense.

In the quotes above, there emerges a contradiction at the heart of this double affirmation for simplicity and adornment that can be resolved only if seen from the view of political economy. On the one hand, there is a moral or ethic concern about simplicity in dress in its signification of chastity and modesty. On the other, there is recognition that the love for dress and ornament is natural, that beauty is the one virtue that women can employ to please man and to fructify the human species. If it cannot be totally repressed, it can be re-channeled for the benefit of the national economy. What stands most in the account of the dress reform in The Tatler and The Spectator is that of women as both consumers of national products and
imperial goods and objects of consumption in man’s economy of desire working in such way as to procure pleasure and children according to simple norms fixed by man. In other words, women were driven from the sites of economic production just as they were chased from the political sphere, with the liberal ideological injunction to conform to aesthetic and ethical normative rules of bourgeois political economy and economy of desire.

There are many illustrative examples that can be adduced from the Tatler and the Spectator to illustrate the exclusion of women from the public sphere of economic activity. One of them occurs in August 28, 1711 issue of The Spectator dealing with “women proprietors of Coffeehouses and Shops.” In this essay, a woman correspondent owner of a coffeehouse writes to Mr Spectator to complain about the negative effect that his qualification of women as “idols”, objects that offer themselves for man’s admiration and sale had on public opinion. “I suffered a good deal of Raillery upon that Occasion; but shall heartily forgive you, who were the cause of it, if you will do me justice in another point. (p.213)” Before I go on with what this female correspondent complains about, I have to observe that she is the possessor of a coffeehouse, the public space in which newspapers like The Tatler and The Spectator were read and commented with return feedback in response. In her correspondence, the female complainant feels outraged by the male patrons’ moral and sexual harassment citing the indecent and impudent gestures, looks and lewd conversation with which they addressed her. After exposing her outrage, she appeals to him to correct his opinion about “that of the fair Sex, whose Lot in Life it is to be of any Trade or publick way of life,” in order to spare them man’s taunts. “Good Mr. SPECTATOR, persuade Gentlemen that this is out of all Decency. Say it is possible a Woman may be modest, and yet keep a publick House. (p.214) Obviously, this desperate entreaty denotes the extent to which the public opinion of civil society is determined to drive women out of the productive economic spaces. A woman cannot enter the bourgeois economic circuit without losing her reputation as a decent woman.
In his response to the female correspondent, Mr. Spectator expresses his indignation in tongue-and-cheek. He first reminds the readers that he has received similar complaints from other women working at the Royal and New Exchange. While he admits that real gentlemen could not be involved in outrageous behaviour towards the “fair sex,” he seems to blame the women for having looked for the problem by occupying a space that is not suitable to their female nature. The analogy of the man as hunter and the woman as a sexual prey is invoked to explain and legitimate the perversion of the market economy and mercantile laws. When the woman enters the world of the market, she herself becomes an object of exchange in another parallel system of exchange, that of the economy of sexual desire. His conclusion to his argument for the necessity of women to desert the public sites of economic activity deserves to be quoted extensively:

If one might be serious on this prevailing Folly, one might observe that it is a melancholy thing, when the World is mercenary even to the buying and selling of very Persons, that young Women, tho’ they have never so great Attractions from Nature, are never nearer being happily disposed of in Marriage; I say it is very hard under this Necessity, it shall not be possible for them to go into a Way of Trade for their Maintenance, but their very Excellencies and personal Perfections shall be a Disadvantage to them, and subject them to be treated as if they stood there to sell their Persons to Prostitution. (p.215)

Clearly, Mr. Spectator does not recant his previous opinion that the economic freedom, on which the liberal bourgeois system is built, is reserved to the sole use of men. Women continue to function in the older economic system of exchange which is marriage where they are supposed to barter their beauty for social and economic advancement in the form of a rich husband. Women are warned that if they dare to bring their wares to the bourgeois market, they are likely to turn their persons into sexual objects. The only object that women can offer for exchange in this economy of desires is beauty and pleasure.

Women’s expulsion from the economic sphere of activity includes both the activities related to the mind and aesthetics. I should not here that the coffee-house owner above is not listened to. Her opinions and complaints are less weighty than those of her fellow men in the affiliated
public spaces of the coffee-house and the periodicals. The female complainant does not
mention the existence of women in her coffee-house, as if female patrons have already
accepted spatial and discursive discrimination. The same-sex atmosphere of the coffee-house
in *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* sharply contrasts with the mixed-sex atmosphere of the
description of the same public space found in an anonymous character sketch from the
Restoration period. (pp.137-143) Though the Tatler claims that one of the purposes of the
paper is to provide “something which may be of Entertainment to the Fair Sex,” and that its
title (*The Tatler*) is meant as a compliment to them, women are not given the voice in the
emergent bourgeois market of public opinion and the world of letters. Obviously, the
compliment is a backhanded one because “women’s” supposed gossiping, however useful for
the periodical as a discursive strategy to expose vice in the Augustan period, retains its
pejorative connotations in terms of the value that can be accorded to women’s discourse.
Expelled from the coffee-houses, and unable to voice their opinion in *The Tatler*, women
created the Female Tattler in response, but even then they spoke like ventriloquists of their
male counterparts. The experience was a short-lived one because *The Female Tatler* was
considered by the readership as a counterfeit of the original. In the failure of the Female
Tatler, we can see the failure of another type of female business venture, this one related to
the commercial circulation of ideas in the market of public opinion.

*The Tatler* and *The Spectator* have a very low opinion of women’s conversation in
comparison with that of males. In the coffee-houses, men talk mostly of the “useful way” of
making and spending money, whereas in the private spaces reserved for women the talk turns
upon artificial things. As such women cannot be entrusted with the role of “cultural critic,” or
a censor, that person judged to be “more absolutely necessary” in a “Nation of Liberty.” The
Tatler tells us among other things that “the usual Conversation of ordinary Women very much
cherishes this Natural Weakness of being taken with the Outside and Appearance. … Mention
the Name of an absent Lady, and it is ten to one but you will learn something of her Gown and Petticoat. … A Ball is a great Help to Discourse, and a Birthday-Day furnishes Conversation for a Twelve-month.” (p.492) Implied in such discursive statement is the natural division of labour across gender lines that exclude women from the activity of cultural production. Some types of gendered labour are confined to equally gendered spaces as the following quote indicates:

How many Ladies distinguish themselves by the Education of their Children, Care of their Families, and Love of their Husbands, which are the great Qualities and Achievements of Womankind: As the making of War, the carrying on of Traffick, the Administration of Justice, are those by which Men grow famous, and get themselves a Name. (p.506)

Thus the ideal woman for *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* is the wife and mother who do not cross the male fixed gender boundaries by taking counterfeited masculine identities and trespassing upon the public sphere of activities. In other words, the ideal woman is the woman who shows a good femininity by conforming to a modest and simple dress code peculiar to her gender and devotes herself to the provision of unpaid services in the home. Contrary to the good femininity and domesticity, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* provides illustrative examples of a bad femininity embodied in the “coquet,” the “female rake,” “the idol,” the “pict,” and the “women of mode” in general. With the good femininity on one side and the bad one on the other side, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* range women on a constructed continuum of female representation that opposes “the Angel of light” to the prostitute or fallen woman. In this emergent bourgeois ideology of male fellowship and camaraderie, this binary imposes epistemological and discursive restraints that maintained women under “the male gaze” in the course of the eighteenth-century and beyond.

However, *The Tatler*’s and *The Spectator*’s doubly oppositional if not adversarial representation of women against men, and the “good sort of femininity” against the “bad sort,” is not all that negative if compared to Pope’s declaration that “most women have no Characters at all. (p.568)” The idea of reform that sustains the two periodicals’ gendered
discourse suggests the possibility of educating women to assume good domestic femininity and reject the bad one. Like all ideologies, that of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* is doubly geared. It simultaneously delineates women as naturally destined to fulfill roles in definite spaces and in accordance with the feminine qualities or virtues that nature placed in her, and proposes to improve that gendered natural character by nurture or culture. Thus, the Enlightenment ideal of perfectibility is not altogether denied to women in spite of those rare moments of serious doubt in which *The Tatler and The Spectator* speak about the possibility that the “soul has a sex”.

So the next issue to be addressed here is the type of education that *The Tatler and The Spectator* propose to bring out the reform of women’s character, their conduct and manners and to what extent their project for the construction of a good sort of feminine domesticity was taken over by other writers, male and female, in the course of the eighteenth century. In the 66th issue of *The Spectator*, a female correspondent writes Mr. Spectator to ask for advice to help to educate a “young Country Kinswoman” of hers who was put in her “hands just as Nature left her, half finish’d, and without any acquir’d Improvements” (p.502). Another male reader of the periodical writes to pray Mr. Spectator to give him his “Opinion of this fine thing called Fine Breeding” and its difference from that “plain thing called Good Breeding. (p.503)” His wife and he disagree over the meaning of these notions. Though the questions are concerned with female education, Mr. Spectator starts with a comment that applies as much to the female as the male sex: “The general Mistake among us in the educating our Children, is, That in our Daughters we take Care of their Persons and neglect their Minds; in our Sons, we are intent upon adorning their Minds, that we wholly neglect their Bodies. (p.503)” This statement seems to retrace women’s excessive concern with superficial external appearances exposed throughout the two periodicals to an inappropriate gendered education. The consequence of this obsessive concern with the lady’s person at an early age when the
mind cannot grasp why she is required to attain physical accomplishment is the development of the inclination to seek man’s admiration. Mr. Spectator is outraged a girl still in the hands of their nursemaids is “delivered to the Hands of her Dancing-master; and with a Collar round her neck, the pretty wild thing is taught a fantastical Gravity of Behaviour, a particular way of holding her head, heaving her Breast, and moving with her whole body. (p.504)” He is particularly shocked at the way they were threatened of never “having a husband if she steps, looks, or moves awry. (Ibid)” Continuing his criticism of parental mission, Mr. Spectator questions the validity of an education whose sole purpose is to make a girl child grow into an agreeable person. He tells his correspondents that to this “general Folly of Parents we owe our present numerous Race of Coquets. (Ibid.)” Mr. Spectator’s criticism is echoed nearly in the same words 80 years later in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft.

The Tatler and The Spectator do not expand further on education in the manner of John Locke who wrote two treatises on the topic: Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) and Of the Conduct of the Understanding (1706). But to paraphrase Northrope Frye in another context, behind the “militant irony” of the character sketches that they deliver to us, we read a model of education against which what they call the “Folly of Parents” is measured and dismissed. As I have said earlier, the two papers have as one of their major goals the reform or the education of public opinion by appealing to their readers’ rational faculties. At the time of their circulation, it has to be noted, there were many reforming societies such as the Society for the Reformation of Manners and Morals, which campaigned for stricter enforcement of moral legislation by magistrates in matters of sexual transgression, drunkenness, shoplifting and other such vices. The Tatler and The Spectator like these societies had the same objective as the reforming societies, but they were significantly different in terms of audience, method and affiliation. The former addressed themselves to the emergent middle class by appealing to their reason whereas the latter aimed to prescribe a model of behaviour, and “discipline and
punish” the potential offenders (Foucault, 1991). On the contrary, the two periodicals were self-supporting business ventures affiliated to the coffee-houses. Together they constitute what is called the “public sphere of civil society.” As part and parcel of this sphere, the two periodicals seek to persuade its constituency by an appeal to reason, and not moral repression by the resort to law, and takes care of that class of gentlemen and ladies and not the poor, for, as John Locke says it so well, “if those of that rank are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest into order. (1996:8)”

The major problem of education that The Tatler and The Spectator raise through their character sketches of the coquet, the beau, the rake and so on is that of self-government, self-restrain in a world dominated by fashion. In this regard, these two papers take their cue from John Locke’s treatises on education mentioned previously. Locke starts his Some Thoughts Concerning Education with the following maxim and comment: “A Sound mind in a Sound body is a short but full description of a happy state in this world: he that has these two has little more to wish for and he that wants either of them will be little the better for anything else. (p.10)” The same maxim seems to lie at the centre at the satire that The Tatler and The Spectator level against the kind of education that parents provide to their children. If some species of men and women are not up to the required standards of gentleman and gentlewoman, it is because in one gender group, the cultivation of the mind is neglected, and in the other gender group, the body.

Locke proposes that parents should pay close attention to the care of their children’s constitutions by avoiding too much “cockering” and “tenderness” and submitting them from infancy to an exercise and diet regimen comprising the exposure of the body to natural elements like heat and cold, shunning strait-laced clothes and hard bodices. Such regimen is recommended in order to “keep the body in strength and vigor so that it may be able and execute the orders of the mind. (p.25)” In order to “set the mind right, that on all occasions it
may be disposed to consent to nothing but what may be suitable to the dignity and excellency of a rational creature, (Ibid)” Locke suggests methods of education that emphasize the importance of avoiding the policy of the rod and the carrot and the development of a strong sense of self-esteem, disgrace and shame as potential regulators of conduct instead. In the course of his arguments, Locke drops in the remark that his “discourse is how a young gentleman should be brought up from his infancy, which, in all things, will not so perfectly suit the education of daughters; though where the difference of sex requires different treatment, it will be no hard matter to distinguish. (p.12)”

Now if we look closely at the fashionable male types that *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* satirize, it is easy to see Locke’s ideas at work in the background. The least that can be said of the picture that they give us of fashionable male types like the Beau is that they have neither the vigour nor the strength of the body and mind of a gentleman as Locke conceives him. Speaking in the language of the clinic, a type of discourse that will assume an increasing importance in the discourse about gender differences in the course of the eighteenth century, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* provide us in January 15, 1712, an anatomy of a Beau’s brain. Mr. Spectator recounts that upon an attendance in an “Assembly of Virtuoso’s”, a set of amateur enthusiasts concerned with the “Anatomy of the Human Body. (p.528)” He was so impressed that at night he dreamed that he was “invited …to the Dissection of a Beau’s Head, and of Coquet’s heart.” When the operator and he applied their glasses to the beau’s brain, they made the “odd discovery… that the Brain of the beau is not a real brain, but only something like it. (p.529)” Thus, the Pineal Gland supposed by the philosophers of the time to be the seat of the soul strangely is encompassed in a horny substance “cut into a thousand little Faces or Mirrors,” and containing a strong smelling essence and Orange-Flower Water. The Cavity in the Sinciput “was filled with Ribbons, Lace and Embroidery, wrought in a curious Piece of Network.” Another cavity was “stuffed with invisible Billet-Doux, love-
letters, pricked Dances, and other Trumpery of the same nature. (p.529)” Mr. Spectator goes on detailing all the oddities that the operator and he discovered in the other cavities of the brain. It is not necessary to go into them here to see how far removed the beau is from the ideal of the vigorous and strong-minded gentleman that Locke had in mind when he wrote his educational treatises. The Beau belongs to that kind of species that Mr. Spectator calls the “women’s man” because of his affectation of women’s manners and conduct.

Mr. Spectator’s description of the anatomy of the coquette’s heart is no less corrupted than the Beau’s brain. Among other things, we learn that its “little Hollows were stuffed with innumerable sorts of Trifles… [with] the impression of Multitudes of Faces among the several Plaites and Foldings of the heart. (p.534)” On close observation with the microscope, Mr. Spectator discovers that in the centre sits impressed the face of the Beau whose brain he has described earlier. The explanation is that the lady whose heart is portrayed was in love with the beau at one moment in her life. The operator and Mr. Spectator undertook an experiment to determine the exact nature of the heart’s substance, which from the outside “differed in so many Particulars from that at of the heart in other Females. (p.534)” On being put in a pan of burning coals, they discovered that it was capable of “living in the midst of Fire and Flame, without being consum’d or so much as sindged. (p.534)” The implication is that the coquette and the beau are heads and tails of the same strange coin in circulation in the social geography of Augustan Britain. Just as Beau was not master of that seat of rational faculties in man, the coquette has lost command over her heart by giving it up to “impulses of licentious love. (p. 536)” Following the methods of education suggested by Locke, The Spectator exposes these “asocial” male and female types to ridicule while showing the self-esteem and the reputation that gentlemen like wealthy merchants and gentlewoman “the angels of the home” enjoyed in the public opinion. The character sketches of what The Spectator calls the “good man” (pp.541-542) and the “good woman” (pp.535-539) are made
in terms that recall those that John Locke employs in the emphasis they place upon praise and commendation as educational tools for the cultivation of the male virtues of the mind in men and the female virtues of the heart in women.

The successful marriage, as it was imagined by the Spectator, can be “contracted” only by the “good man” and the “good woman,” seen as embodiments of “gravity” and “vivacity.” Contrary to other species, they are joined together as counterparts for life. Nature has distributed the roles inside the family in such a way that the main burden falls on man while the woman assumes the “little Arts of soothing and blandishment… that she may cheer [sic.] and animate her Companion in a constant and assiduous application. (p.516)” So the successful marriage, for The Spectator, is what in British culture, is named the Companionate Marriage. It is towards this ideal that British women in the eighteenth century were educated.

However, as companions, the husband and wife do not share the same degree of moral responsibility in the marriage contract. It is up to the wife to adorn herself with “those inward Ornaments which are not to be defaced by Time and Sickness, (p.508)” otherwise, her fate will be similar to that of the idolized women who are dethroned as soon as their husbands pull off their superficial disguises and old age decays their artificial beauty. After marriage, it is also for women to accept a double moral standard by overlooking the mistakes and errors of straying husbands, and trying to change their manners by what are called “passive virtues” or “passive womanhood.” The reward of passive virtue, as all sentimental and conduct literature of the eighteenth century shows, is the contracting or maintenance of a successful marriage. The following example about the ideal bourgeois wife in The Spectator illustrates well the importance of passive virtue as an asset or cultural capital. The example is delivered to us in the form of a lasting parable of how a woman of virtue named Emilia, won her husband, Bromius, over to “the Government of his Reason” after a long period of debauchery by her prudent conduct. As a conclusion to this parable, Mr. Spectator tells us what would remain as
one of the most recurrent motifs in the portrayal of the successful marriage in the Enlightenment period:

Her [Emilia’s] good Sense readily instructed her, that a silent Example, and an easy unrepining Behaviour, will always be more perswasive [Sic.] than the Severity of Lectures and Admonitions; and that there is so much Pride interwoven into the Make of Humane Nature, that an obstinate Man must only take the Hint from another, and then be left and correct himself. (p.538)

This means that the sole means of resistance to abusive gender power relations is silence that is theorized into a passive virtue in the conduct literature of the period.

**The Construction of Femininity in Conduct Manuals, Literature of Sexuality and Anti-Female satire**

What follows continues the analysis of the construction of domestic femininity in eighteenth-century conduct manuals addressed to women. The analysis will be carried with references to lengthy abstracts from representative manuals spanning the whole century that Vivien Jones collected in her *Women of the Eighteenth Century*. The emphasis will be placed on the principles of conduct that women as daughters and wives were advised to observe in order to confirm to the patriarchal image of the good woman first in their fathers’ and then in their husbands’ homes. It has to be observed that some of these manuals like *The Lady’s New Year’s Gift; or Advice to a Daughter* published by George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, also the architect of that Protestant Settlement in 1688 were reprinted several times in the course of the eighteenth century. I shall argue that conduct manuals constitute a tradition of their own or what Foucault in his *Order of the Things* calls a discourse. This discourse, made of repetitive statements about the nature of women and the propriety conduct expected of them, is so widespread that it crosses generic boundaries of non-fiction and fiction to determine the gendered views of individual authors.

I have already suggested above that already by the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the gendered separation of the public sphere of activities from the private had been settled in the public opinion or the world of letters in which *The Tatler and The Spectator*
were the most prominent contributors. This settlement like the political one was dictated by the emergent bourgeois class quest for self-identity at a time marked by great social mobility, national or patriotic affirmation against the residual social, cultural and political elements inherited from the Restoration period, and the wars waged against France in defence of the new regime that issued from the Glorious Revolution, a regime dominated by a coalition of a wealthy landed aristocracy and an equally wealthy class of bourgeois merchants and financiers. Not surprisingly, therefore, the emergent class took masculinity as a marker of a social and national identity that it set up against the residual ideology of the Restoration period and the threatening influence of the French across the Channel, both of which considered as cultural and social monstrosities because of the leeway they gave to gender mixing. Naturally, what was then considered as knowledge of human nature was enlisted to legitimate the spatial discrimination against women by their exclusion from the public sphere and their confinement in the private or domestic sphere.

Once this gender issue was settled in the early decades of the eighteenth century, discourse about women as it was carried out in the conduct manuals, most often circulated in the form of letters, concentrated on advice or rules of conduct that women had to heed in order to guarantee their domestic felicity. Arguably, the most outstanding characteristic of this didactic literature is that it was written mostly by fathers to their daughters to advise them about what men desired and hated most in women, what social types of men could be trusted and mistrusted, what rules to observe in courtship, in public company, in the intercourse with their husbands, above all to urge them to consent to the patriarchal system as the most suitable for the domestic sphere. So, we find the Whig aristocrat Halifax who engineered the political settlement of 1688 advising his daughter to listen to him and consent to the authority that the institution of marriage accorded to the husband over his wife. "You must lay it down for a Foundation in general. [Sic.] That there is Inequality in the Sexes, and that for the better
Oeconomy of the World, the Men, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of reason bestow’d them,” he sermonizes what looks like a rebelling daughter. (Quoted in Jones Vivien)

What follows up reads as a twisted Hegelian master-slave dialectic wherein Halifax tells his daughter that female “compliance” or rather servitude turns the male master into a male slave and the female slave into a mistress. There is no need for Halifax’s daughter to rage against the dictates of nature because nature is “far from being unjust to you, that it is partial to you. (Ibid, p. 18)” Halifax adds that gender power relations can be easily reversed if women can only use those female virtues that nature has invested her with: “You have it in your power not only to free your selves, but to subdue your Masters, and without violence throw both their Natural and Legal Authority at your feet. (Ibid.) Halifax wonders why his daughter persists in her rejection of a marital institution sanctioned by religion, required by public interest and imposed by authority of customs and laws when she can turn it to her advantage by deploying soft virtues of nature like “tears” and “looks” and observing rules of conduct that he is ready to hand her as a gift from a loving father anxious for the domestic felicity and happiness of his daughter.

Among other pieces of rules of conduct, Lord Halifax urges his daughter to accept the moral double standards of “making that in the utmost degree Criminal in the Woman, which in a Man Passeth under a much gentler Censure. (p.20)” This double moral standards, he explains, may seem to be partial at first consideration, but looking closely at it, it has its legitimacy in the public interest of preserving families from possible “mixture” and “blemishes.” The elevation of the wife as a trustee of the “honour of families” makes ample amends to the greater penalty that she can receive in case of sexual transgression on her part. While wishing his daughter a “Wise husband,” he advises her to adopt a “prudent conduct,” “discretion” and “silence” in case a not so good husband does not fall to her lot. To be
socially desirable women, he recommends, that she attends seriously to “the government of
your House, Family and children, which …is the Province allotted to your Sex,” and to avoid
the superfluities of fashionable ladies. (p.20)

Conduct manuals like that of Lord Halifax most often read as cautionary tales to daughters
and wives. All of them nearly follow the same rhetorical pattern showing women sometimes
flying from sexual temptation and sometimes converting wayward males to good morality
through her passive virtues as in Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s Letters Moral and Entertaining, in
Prose and Verse (1728, 1735). Moral principles like chastity as in Wentehall Wilkes’s A
Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to the Young Lady (1740, 8th edn, 1766) and modesty in
John Gregory’s A Father’s Legacy to his Daughter (1774) are disserted on to plunge them
into women’s minds. Above all, it is the dire consequences of not observing the proffered
principles of conduct in premarital and marital life that are the most prominent in conduct
manuals. The overall image that emerges from reading them is that of woman as prey to
sexual temptations. The heroic woman is the one who manages to sublimate her sexual desires
even in the domestic sphere, and to fully assume the guardianship of morality and to preserve
social stability.

Balancing this ideal picture of woman as a factor of social stability is another picture of
woman as a potential factor of social disorder. Though Michel Foucault (1984) retraces the
birth of modern discourse of sexuality to the early decades of the nineteenth century,
intimations of it can be seen in the literature about women’s sexuality in the eighteenth
century. What is remarkable about this literature is that it associates this sexuality with
deviance suggesting themes like hysteria that Sigmund Freud will develop further in the
twentieth century. Woman’s propensity to sexual deviance was treated among other writers by
Bernard Mandeville in an article called “A Modest Defense of Public Stews: or, an Essay
upon Whoring (1724, 1740).” For Mandeville, the modesty, chastity and other passive virtues
for which conduct manuals has made a big case constitute just a thin veneer, a sham, a pretence that hide the real sexual drives of woman. In Mandeville’s scheme, women are required by the primary function of procreation to be sexually active in the same proportion as if not more than their male counterparts. Since neither moral values like chastity, nor the repression of law can withstand sexual violence, our author proposes to establish “stews”, prostitution houses to evacuate it from the body politic in the same natural matter that personal bodies expel digested foods and menstrual blood. The analogy deployed is borrowed from Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. To conclude his argument for the installation of stews, Mandeville has this irony at the expense of women as sexually active beings:

> For every Woman that is debauch’d more than is barely necessary, only brings so much additional Credit and Reputation to the Stews, and in some Measure atones for the Loss of her Chastity, by being a Means to preserve that of others; so that whenever the Tide of Private Lewdness runs too high, and exceeds the just and ordinary Bounds, it must of Course, by encouraging the Publick Stews [Sic], immediately suffer a proportionable Ebb. (1724, 1740:68).

At work in Mandeville’s essay is a sexual politics, the main concern of which is the protection of the private sphere from what he calls “private whoring.”

Daniel Defoe, author of that classical novel entitled *Moll Flanders*, also contributed to the debate as to the appropriate sexual politics needed to remedy for the vice of prostitution that he regarded as a social disease. After discounting the argument that prostitution was due to the unequal number of the sexes, which was not true according to all calculations, he retraced it to the “Neglect of Matrimony which the Morals of the present Age inspire Men into (p.69),” the immediate cause of which is the mercenary or economic view of marriage that pushes men to contract for considerations of fortune. One consequence of this mercenary view of matrimony is the disturbance of the marriage market into which a greater number of women arrive at puberty without finding a bidder, which perversion in its turns leads women and men to make sex out of wedlock.
Instead of repressive laws like “whippings” and “work houses” or more libertarian schemes like that of Mandeville, Defoe proposes a change in laws to encourage matrimony. Among other solutions, he suggests immunities and “Exemptions from taxes” for those who entered the married state and “entitling the Parents of three or more Children to certain Privileges” in the manner of the “old Roman law (1726: 69)” In addition to these legal measures, inequality in marriage in terms of age or social rank as well as marriage beyond childbearing age should be banned. They are seen as the major “causes of shocking Rabble of Harlots, which infest our Publick Ways (Ibid., p.70” Inequality of age leads to the dislike of old wives and puts younger husbands on the path of seducing younger women while infertility in old women has the consequences of “los[ing] to the World the Produce of one Man.” Prostitution had to be attended to because it did not only imperil the social and moral fabric of the nation, but could sap its vitality at its roots by checking its demography and not renewing its male stock at a time of imperial expansion. So while continuing to support the repressive measures of the “Whipping-Post, Work-House and Transportation,” Defoe recommends to the legislators, the introduction of “gentler Allurements to Virtue. (Ibid., p.70)”

This politics aiming at the containment of sexual energies and the encouragement of demography, as can be expected, was concerned mostly with the control of the woman’s body and sexuality. As the writer of The State of Matrimony; or the Real Causes of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages (1739), tells his contemporaries “women are more inclined to Criminal Excesses of that Kind, than Men, when they are left without restraint. (p.80)” Female sexuality is a deviant sexuality and it has to be controlled by appropriate laws. Otherwise, “the great Use of Women in a Community, [which] is to supply it with Members that may be serviceable, and keep up a Succession,” will be forfeited. The image of the women which emerges from such discursive statement is that of a breeder of her species, and as such a chattel or property that has to be guarded not for her own sake but that of her
possessor mindful to transmit his material property to his male progeny. If a wife’s sexual transgression is more criminal, it is because she can “make a Foreigner Heir to his Estate; depriving sometimes his own children begotten afterwards, of their just Inheritance. (1739:78) So, the sexual deviance of women is condemnable on the grounds of those sacred property rights and the rights to succession that constitute the major inalienable rights celebrated in Locke’s treatises on government.

One consequence of this anxiety over the supposed active sexuality of women in the eighteenth century is the passage of Hardwicke’s Marriage Act in 1753. This act made the publishing of banns and a properly conducted church wedding a necessary legal procedure. Its aim was to stop both the propagation of instant irresponsible weddings made in the name of love, but in fact often for other unscrupulous reasons, and the premarital sexual relations sanctioned by the custom of accepting betrothal as legally binding. With this marriage act, law came to the rescue of virginal and conjugal chastity threatened by the craze for love stories, which undermined the conduct-literature sublimation of sexual desire in women by playing up a more permissive sexuality, a sexuality linked not to procreation but to pleasure. So in spite of the contradictions that one may notice between conduct-books and the literature of sexuality, both of them worked for the control of the economy of woman’s desire for the benefit of man.

For a better control of women, female sexuality became a field of knowledge in the eighteenth century. As the century advanced, it increasingly became an area of interest for physicians, midwives and other health personnel attached to dispensaries. Foucault has amply explained that the birth of the clinic, the prison, the asylum and other such public institutions was essentially political in nature. Their aim was to put science at the service of the emergent bourgeois ideology for the normalization of the different aspects of social and individual life at a time when old customary authority was losing ground. It is what I have observed in the
study of the literature about sexuality written by anonymous physicians and midwives in the second half of the eighteenth century. For example, in an Essay Concerning Human Generation (1740), we come across an anonymous physician raising objections against some other fellow physicians who “maintained that Women were hotter than Men because they are sooner ripe for Business. (1740:81)”

The unwary reader can be easily misled by this contesting statement about the supposed sexual hyperactivity of women. First, he brings to the reader the evidence mustered by contemporary physicians in support of the statement. The greater quantity of blood in the female body, the early growth of hair in their “Privities”, their short lives, their resistance to the “coldness of blood” are mentioned to corroborate their thesis, but our anonymous physician, far from being convinced by the evidence, begs to disagree without contesting the central claim. For him, if women are sexually hyperactive, it is not because of the great quantity of blood but because of its mediocrity. If they “engender and grow old sooner, it shows the weakness of that heat. (1740: 82)” Excess of love or sexual activity is traced to the “Inconstancy of their Imagination.” The contention or controversy, therefore, does not question the popular and “scientific” orthodoxy about women’s hyperactive sexuality but its explanation as a phenomenon.

Our anonymous pseudo physician was not alone in his attempt to understand the supposed female sexual hyperactivity. The anonymous author of The Ladies Dispensatory; or, Every Woman her Own Physician (1740) offers the readership the same pseudoscience in defense of maternity and the necessity of gentlewomen to breast-feed their babies. The first main argument updated the traditional idea of a woman as a “weaker vessel”. We are told that the “delicate Texture of a Woman’s Constitution … subjects her to an infinite Number of Maladies to which Man is an utter Stranger (1740: 83).” The second argument develops the idea that every gentlewoman can be her own physician on the condition that they “nurse their
own Offspring.” Our author moves from nursing and breastfeeding as a moral duty to nursing and breast-feeding as the “most likely Means to preserve their own health, and prevent many of the diseases to which they often subject. (p.84)” Following the argument, she rages against the gentlewomen who give their children to hired maids to breastfeed them, not knowing that milk is “the blood in the breasts tho’ altered by Heat in Colour. (p.84)” Our author continues her diatribe by underlining their responsibility in spreading social disorder through their abandonment of the principles of motherhood: “What Madness is it then to leave a Body and a Mind, formed upon noble and generous Principles, to be corrupted by the base Mixture and allay of a Stranger’s Milk, especially if your nurse (which frequently happens) should prove dishonest, intemperate, or lewd? (p. 84)

Hysteria, as Freud has shown in his writings, is not a disease peculiar to women. Yet in the eighteenth century, as R. M.D James’s *A Medicinal Dictionary* (1743) develops the point, if “not all Women are not equally subject to this disorder … it more particularly seizes virgins, before their first menstrual Discharge, such as marriageable, Young Widows, and Wives, especially if they are full of Blood and Moisture, and have not borne children. (p.86)” In this quote, we can easily deduce the sort of cure that James will suggest. It is matrimony. We understand that hysteria as a psychosomatic disease is due to sexual deviance. It hits those women who do not confirm to the ideal of motherhood, women who refuse procreative sexuality, in other words women that the anti-female satire of the eighteenth century qualified as “female rakes” of which Joseph Dorman gives the portrait in *The Female Rake; or, Modern Fine Lady: An Epistle from Libertina to Sylvia*. (1736) A female rake is a masculine sort of woman who in total ignorance of the rules of modesty behaves like a rake in her quest for sexual conquests.
Conclusion

It follows from the above that the construction of femininity in the eighteenth century was one major aspect of the political project that issued out of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Much has been about the separation of the private from the public spheres of life. Yet, as the conduct manuals show, this separation of the spheres is far from being as watertight as the name separation suggests, because the latter sphere impinges on the former by trying to impose man’s opinions on it. Every reasonable man is supposed to be the social equal of his fellows in the public sphere of opinion, but man as “head” and “lord” of the domestic sphere complies with the moral ideas circulated in the world of letters that constitute the sphere of public opinion.

In the world of culture as our discussion of the theme of fashion in *The Tatler and The Spectator* makes it, this public opinion influenced the politics of culture in the premium it puts on the differentiation of sexes in garb, their necessary spatial separation, their tastes, and activities. This politics of culture is explained in terms of an emergent bourgeois class fighting against the residual ideology of the previous restoration period in its quest of an identity defined in terms of binary oppositions, men versus women, English character versus French character, good femininity versus bad femininity and so on. This politics of culture is underlined by a politics of economy wherein women, through public opinion, were recruited essentially as procreators for the perpetuation of the family and of an expanding imperial nation, and also as consumers of goods and desires produced by men. Even morality of the kind developed in the conduct manuals did not escape the firm hold of politics in its celebration of passive virtue and the elevation women as angels of the house, guardians of morality and social stability. The literature of sexuality puts into relief a sexual politics that describes women as sexually hyperactive, hysterics, and potential sexual criminals who need man’s control in order not to disturb social stability. These seemingly contradictory images
did not work at cross-purposes but in concurrence in a divide-and-rule sort of strategy for the construction and consolidation of a patriarchal bourgeois ideology of femininity.

If as it is implied the public sphere of opinion in the eighteenth century was dominated by bourgeois males, did women accept its prescriptions by accepting their confinement to the domestic realm of activity? In other words, did women in the eighteenth century after Mary Asttel develop counter-public spheres or discourses blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres in the same manner as their male counterparts in order to deconstruct the feminine ideology? If women were progressively excluded from the public sphere of economic, cultural and political activity, how did they manage to come back to the floor of political debate at the end of the eighteenth century? And finally, on what grounds and in what areas did they seek to reverse the masculine hegemonic order of things? These are some of the questions that I shall attempt to answer in the next chapter devoted mostly to Mary Wollstonecraft’s feminism.
I have turned over various books written on the subject of education, and patiently observed the conduct of parents and the management of schools; but what has been the result? A profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion. (1993:71)

Thus Mary Wollstonecraft opens her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790). An emphasis on education in a work that purports to defend the right of women might seem at first sight a contradiction between the contents and the title. However, as I shall argue, this stress is to the point since as Vivien Jones writes, “women’s education was fiercely debated in the eighteenth century. (p.98)” It is alongside philosophical rationalism, the nature of political power, one of the conceptual bases from which women tried dismantle the ideology of femininity. The conceptual basis was laid down by John Locke in his educational theory developed in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, where he affirms that the brain is a tabula rasa and that education is mostly a question of the formation of appropriate habits.

Out of the political discussion about education, there emerged a consensus to offer an education to women, but the issue was about the kind of education that would be suitable to their nature. Just as in the case of the laboring classes, the emergent bourgeois class and the landed aristocracy were afraid that schooling women would unfit them for the fixed gendered roles in the newly constructed political kingdom. Its effect could be a social displacement. What was looked for, therefore, was an education that would adjust women in the domestic sphere without losing their value in the marriage market. Because Locke had not thought over the education of women, in 1687 Reverend T.F. Dibidin translated François de Salignac de la Mohe-Fénélon’s major educational work under the title of *Treatise on the Education of Daughters*. Moderation is the master word in this treatise. While it claims the necessity of an education for women according to “the occupations of the female sex (p.103),” he reminds
parents to observe moderation. This master word moderation became a watchword in the
course of the eighteenth century, but how far was far became a controversy especially as new
ideas of utility developed by thinkers like Adam Smith became widespread, and boarding
schools with all types of curricula were proposed for the education of girls.

However, as I have already suggested, education as the conceptual basis laid down by John
Locke opened up possibilities for the development of counter-discursive statements against
the ideology of femininity. If the nature of political power defined always by Locke allowed
women to question arbitrary power in the household, the new conceptual basis of the human
mind and education as habit formation and reinforcement made it possible for them to
question the notion of natural identity as culturally determined, and therefore amenable just as
that of man to change to perfectibility. Women as various as Mary Astell in her A Serious
Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest (1694) and
other anonymous women authors of books like An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (1696)
and the Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives (1735) took men to task for not
having interested the intellectual growth of women by submitting them to their arbitrary rule.
However, on the whole, the education books that circulated in the course of the eighteenth
century by both men and women writers under the hegemonic power of the former were
deployed to “reinforce rather undermine obtaining gender definitions (Jones Vivien,
2003:101” Even Wollstonecraft’s Thoughts on Education of Daughters: with Reflections on
Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life (1788) in spite of the emphasis it put
on environment as a shaping force on identity participated in the reinforcement of gendered
identities because of its allowance for innate qualities, its strain of compensatory piety, and
the typical slippage between text and author making Wollstonecraft the governess stand for
the ideal of a free educated woman.
Questions come to mind at this stage as to the conditions that made Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* depart from her timid approach to education as a means of self-emancipation. In this chapter, I shall argue that the French Revolution and the debate it generated among the liberal circles and particularly among radicals like Joseph Price, Joseph Johnson, Thomas Paine and William Godwin contributed to the radicalization of her views about education by giving it a political turn. The French Revolution opened the possibility for the re-emergence in the public sphere of similar but more audible issues of freedom, equality and fraternity that the Glorious Revolution had first put on the stage and that were in part adulterated by their historical accommodation to the customs and traditionalism that characterize the English in their celebration of the English Man’s Rights. Nature’s abstract reason as the principle of conduct in all walks of life and in the exercise of political authority and the education of children as future citizens was used against as an argument for completing man’s emancipation. So just as Astell seized the prevalent libertarian discourse of the Glorious Revolution in defence of women’s emancipation, Wollstonecraft deployed the conceptual bases of the French Revolution to dislodge the separation of the private from the public sphere at the core of the bourgeois patriarchal order. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, the personal and the political as well as the educational and the political and the social discourses cannot be separated in Wollstonecraft’s writings. More importantly, these intersected discourses reshuffled according to the fast changing social and political environment brought out by the French Revolution at the century’s end. So instead of concentrating solely on the feminist discourse in her *A Vindication of Rights of Woman*, I shall refer to other writings of hers like *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* and *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. 
A Vindication of the Rights of Man: The Medium as the Feminist Message

Arguably, the best way to start speaking about Wollstonecraft’s feminism is an engagement with the principles or conceptual bases from which she tried to dismantle female sensibility as an ideology of femininity. This engagement, as I shall argue, is best revealed in A Vindication of the Rights of Man, published in the form of serialized letters in Joseph Johnson’s Analytical Review in the last months of 1790 before being published anonymously in December of the same year. It was written in prompt response to Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France that appeared on 1 November 1790. Wollstonecraft’s immediate rejoinder to Burke’s essay was followed up by Paine’s The Rights of Man (1791) and Godwin’s Political Justice (1793). The publication of these essays sometimes in several reprints and their wide circulation reveal the climate of heated debate triggered by the French Revolution among political circles with various political affiliations concerned with the nature and the directions that the revolution taking place, close at home, across the Channel could take. Most of the debate turned around whether the French Revolution was similar to the Glorious Revolution, whether it was a historical completion of it. Belonging to the old Whig Party, Edmund Burke, who had already supported the American Revolution in the name of the English Man’s Rights and traditional English liberties, took his pen to denounce the political confusion between the two revolutions.

Burke targeted Dr Price, the man who best embodied the claim that the French Revolution was a continuation of the Glorious Revolution. A dissenter, Dr Price, under whose tutorship Wollstonecraft placed herself, saw the French Revolution as part and parcel of a providential history and plan for the completion of the freedom or human emancipation project left unfinished by the Glorious Revolution. In his various interventions on the French Revolution Price as a rightful submission of the priesthood, hereditary power and civil authority to the rule of reason, which had made to wear the mantle of custom by the political establishment in

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post-revolutionary England. Opposed to this providential interpretation of the history of revolution, Burke denounced in very harsh terms both Price for mixing genres and the French revolutionaries for the abstract principles on which they had based their revolution. The denunciation was carried in the name of the British constitution and prescriptive rights, both fashioned by a long historical development culminating in the moderate political settlement of the Glorious Revolution.

For Burke, Price’s providential history smacks of a leveling tendency that makes him kith and kin with both those French preaching aberrant “abstractions” about liberty, equality and freedom, and the ancestral “Roundheads” who had beheaded Charles I during the English Civil War in the 1640s. There was no comparison to be made between the political and social situation in Britain and the one prevailing in France in the last decade of the eighteenth century because they were at significantly different stages of their historical development. The Abuses of rank and status of the old regime the French were rebelling against had been righted peacefully two centuries earlier through the imposition of a system of rights and duties. Through an astute misreading of British history, Burke elevates the Monarchy and the Anglican Church, whose status quo Price wanted to undermine, into national symbols of Englishness. The belonging to the English nation, Burke suggests, is largely determined by the degree of reverence shown to these symbols, hence the implication that radicals like Price do not deserve to belong because of his affiliation with the French.

In the light of the separate spheres that prevailed at the century’s end, it was remarkable that Wollstonecraft was the first person to respond to Burke in defence of political rationalism and rational morality that he sought to undermine by his critique of the French Revolution. Contrary to what might be thought, the French Revolution did not put an end to the gendered separation of spheres of activities imposed during the whole course of the eighteenth century. I would argue that the French Revolution, even more than the wars against the French in the
earlier decades of the century, exacerbated the nationalist feelings of the English into chauvinism. In the editor’s introduction, “Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, Homi K. Bhabha defines nationalism as “an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation (1990: 1).” In the same introduction he adds that “the ‘locality’ of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is outside or beyond it. (p.4)” What Bhabha calls attention to is that othering happens simultaneously inside and outside the national boundaries with the imagining of the national community, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, as a masculine character and the other inside and outside as feminine.

Nationalism “engenders” more than it dislodges gender, and that largely explains that women were deeply divided as to the position they must observe towards the French Revolution. While some of them like Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay Graham, and H. M. Williams transgressed gender boundaries in voicing their own opinion in favour of human emancipation, others like Laeticia Matilda Hawkins sought to consolidate the political establishment. Hawkins’s admonishment to Williams who wrote letters from France in defence of the Revolution are quite illustrative of the point I want to make:

> But the points of ‘A King or No King A Nobility or no Nobility?’ [a title of one of her letters] are not those, my dear madam, which I mean to discuss with you. I would rather convince you that they are points neither you nor I can discuss with propriety or success; that there is but one side a female can take in politics, without injuring the feminine character. (Quoted in Jones Vivien, p.117)

For Hawkins, politics is beyond women’s ken, and it would be pretentious and injurious for her femininity to enter the public sphere of politics. Interwoven in this discourse is the traditional division between the good and the bad sort of femininity.

Wollstonecraft did not only intrude into the public sphere of political activity but dared to argue with one of the most distinguishable British statesmen of the time. Her feminism is a militant feminism in the sense that she did not write for an academic audience as most feminists today are prone to do, but for the public at large to fashion their opinion as to the
importance of the rights of men that Burke tried to stifle in the name of the political establishment. So what are the major arguments that she leveled against the conservative Burke, and in what style she made them? In addressing her *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* directly to Burke, Wollstonecraft disregarded one of the most important foundations of the ideology of femininity in the eighteenth century, which is modesty. Written in the epistolary mode, the book gives the impression that Wollstonecraft is a rebelling daughter who has decided to speak the truth to a conservative father of the nation who stands as an obstacle to the advance of the rights of men.

The ideal of ‘masculinity’ or rather ‘manliness’ is blatantly assumed by Wollstonecraft in the plural form of the noun “man” in the title of her book. In her first argument, she tells this father of the nation that “she has not learned to twist her periods (p.5)” nor to indulge in innuendoes in expressing her argument, putting herself outside the boundaries of traditional womanhood for whom such outspokenness was synonymous with impudence. No sooner than this concession was made than Wollstonecraft launched her attacks on Burke by mustering such hurtful epithets as “vain,” “doubtful integrity,” “self-interest”, “false wit”, “lively imagination” against his character. The major militant irony in her preliminary remarks is that Burke in his critique of the philosophical rationalism and rational morality on the grounds of which the French Revolution was launched did not “separate the public from the private. (p.5)” His total disregard of self-government in the public sphere, Wollstonecraft tells Burke, paradoxically, makes his discourse sound as the discourse that he attributed to women in diverse writings of his. The lack of sincerity, irrelevance, and sentimentality are of some of its hallmarks. The idea is that Burke has involved himself in a gender switch with full knowledge, hence the liberty of tone that Wollstonecraft has taken with him in her assumption of manly attitudes in her discourse. This implied message in the medium of this discourse of
gender permutations traverses the whole of the epistolary essay, investing Wollstonecraft with the authority to speak in the public sphere of politics.

Wollstonecraft’s public authority expresses itself in the way she rewrites British constitutional history to deconstruct the hereditary rights that Burke elevated into rules of conduct at both the domestic and public spheres in total contempt of the abstract or natural rights of men based on reason. The major thread of her argument is that this constitutional history was driven not by the quest for freedom, as Burke tells us, but by the quest for hereditary property and hereditary honours related to it. Wollstonecraft starts her history with a paraphrased reminder from John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* to the effect that “the birthright of man… is such a degree of liberty, civil or religious, as is compatible with the liberty of every other individual with whom he is united in a social compact, and the continued existence of that compact. (p.7)” She follows up by saying that contrary to Burke’s affirmation as to its realization in Britain, this idea of freedom still remains an ideal since it had not yet taken shape in the various governments known to man until then. Following in the footsteps of Jean Jacques Rousseau who considers property as the bane of freedom, she in her turn claims that “the demon of property has ever been at hand to encroach on the sacred rights of men, and to fence round with awful pomp laws that war with justice. (p.7)” For Wollstonecraft, this claim was true as far as one can go back in the history of civilization. The outrageous tone in which Wollstonecraft makes this claim seems to indicate the extent to which women were always regarded as property to be fenced off in the manner of landed property. In this sense, Wollstonecraft announces what Frederick Engels would demonstrate later in the nineteenth century in his study of the origin of the family.

As if to lay bare the textuality of Burke’s constitutional history and dispel the aura of sanctity with which he surrounded some of the British institutions by invoked custom as practical reason against abstract reason, Wollstonecraft asks the following rhetorical question:
“Will Mr Burke be at the trouble to inform us, how far we go back to discover the rights of men, since the light of reason is such a fallacious guide that none but fools trust to its cold investigation? (p.9)” Following this, she takes the example of British constitutional history to illustrate the distortion to which Burke has submitted it in defence of customs. These customs do not deserve to be objects of reverence or principles of conduct on the same part as understanding or reason, because at their basis is a history of compromises and political deals between the British Royalty, the Barons, and the Commons for the preservation of power and property at the expense of justice for the overtaxed people. Developed in the ages of ignorance, constitutional documents like Magna Charta are nothing more than naked power disguised as right sometimes in favour of the King, and at some other times in favour of Parliament and the Clergy. In defending customs, instead of abstract reason, Burke shows himself as a “champion of property [and] the adorer of the golden image which power has set up. (pp.11-12)”

In his Discourse on Inequality, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes that “The true founder of civil society was the first man, who, having enclosed a piece of land, thought of saying, ‘This is mine, and came across people simple enough to believe him. (1999: 53)” Arguably, the portrayal that Wollstonecraft draws of Burke puts him in the category of these simpler-minded people. Even more so, he champions property and in the manner of the Jews of the Exodus, he renounces to the faith in freedom by becoming the adorer of the golden cow. In the same book Rousseau follows up the quote above with the following words that describe the posture that Wollstonecraft adopted in her A Vindications of the Rights of Man: “How many crimes, wars, murders and how much misery and horror the human race might have been spared if someone had pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch, and cried out to his fellows: ‘Beware of listening to this charlatan.’ (p.53)” In its emphasis on crime, murders, wars, the text of Wollstonecraft’s British history seems to have largely been shaped by
Rousseau’s view about the importance that inherited property assumed in human relationship in civil society. Her hard line against this kind of property sounds as if a manly “someone” at last in Britain had pulled up the stakes and cried out to his fellows: “Beware of listening to this Charlatan [Burke].” Rousseau’s negative view of inherited property seems also to offer a philosophical foundation for Wollstonecraft’s denunciation of the enclosures of the common lands at the end of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, enclosures, which in her view, caused so much misery for a large proportion of British people.

The feminism of Wollstonecraft appears in her pulling up the stakes from the public sphere of political activity and engaging a debate on whether property rights supersede other rights such the preservation of life, protection by law and so on. In this polemic debate with Burke, Wollstonecraft opposes inherited property and the acquired type of property. While the former is identified as being at the source of all the corruptions that undermine civil society by its encouragement of vices like luxury, idleness and softness, the latter was valued positively as it was the result of physical and intellectual exertion. Wollstonecraft is incensed that Burke belittles the acquired material property of the bourgeois class and the acquired intellectual property of such men as Dr Price, who even in France would have been elevated to the status of gentlemen, while he makes such a big case of the honours that inherited property confers on the nobility and the ecclesiastical orders. Apart from Rousseau, two philosophical sources are drawn on in this evaluation of property: John Locke and William Godwin. While Wollstonecraft aligns herself with Locke in her claim that it is physical and intellectual work that confers value to property, she evokes Edward Gibbon’s of *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in her emphasis on the moral decadence of the British nation or empire brought out by inherited property.

By re-writing the constitutional history of Britain in the manner of Rousseau’s *Discourse of Inequality*, Wollstonecraft does not solely seek to undermine Burke’s disavowal of the
Enlightenment ideals of progress, perfectibility of men’s rational capacities and the enlargement of freedom and human emancipation on which the French Revolution was launched. To paraphrase Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser’s paraphrase of Virginia Woolf (1988), she also writes a history of her own. In interweaving her own personal history with her account of British constitutional history, Wollstonecraft prefigures twentieth century’s radical feminists’ slogan that the personal is political and the political is personal. I would argue that if Wollstonecraft is particularly sharp on inherited property and privileges, it is because she herself deeply suffered from the feudal law of primogeniture that made the eldest son the sole inheritor of the father’s estate, thus excluding senior daughters and junior brothers from inheritance.

This short life story can help explain the intersection of the personal with the political, or rather the slippage from communal history text to familial or private history. Mary Wollstonecraft was born on the 27th of April 1759 in Spitalfields outside of London to a “dissipated and unthrifty” father who wasted his fortune by heavy drinking. According to Cracium Adriana (2002), still in her infancy, Wollstonecraft was deeply hurt by the favours piled on her junior brother Ned who as the eldest son was looked on as the sole heir to a dwindling family fortune out of which her two sisters and her were excluded on the basis of their sex. The feudal law of primogeniture was the gendered law that threw her on the road at the age of 19 in search for a means of livelihood to support herself and her dying mother. She moved all the way to Ireland, Portugal as a paid companion. When she came back home she established a school that turned out not to be a viable project. In the course of this eventful and hectic life she came across Richard Price, a dissenting minister and liberal intellectual and fellow of the Royal Society who advocated political and economic reform. Price not only nurtured her idealism but he also catered for the lack of a good parental or fatherly figure and
in a way bequeathed her an intellectual legacy that she invested with a good return by working for Johnson’s *Analytical Review*.

As if in echo of her family and personal history, Wollstonecraft expostulates as follows: “Who can recount the unnatural crimes which the *laudable interesting* desire of perpetuating a name has produced? (p.21) *Emphasis in the text*” After which she lists the misery of younger children sacrificed on the altar of the eldest children, and exiled, or “confined in convents, that they might not encroach on what was called, with shameful falsehood, the family estate.” The perpetuation of property or family estates as a block, considered some political economists, as the basis for the start of capitalism, becomes an ideological site for contesting Burke’s natural morality, by which he affirms that morality is but “inbred exalted instinct” in which reason plays no significant role. Wollstonecraft shows that with such morality, parental love becomes an artificial affection and self-love since the concern is to perpetuate a name, the son’s liberty is stifled by fear of the father’s curse and replaced by dubious homage to the father for his transference of property, and marriage turns into what Daniel Defoe calls “legal prostitution” (p.21). Natural morality is opposed to rational morality, wherein reason and understanding, concepts borrowed from John Locke, are the sole principles of conduct in a truly liberal society.

For Wollstonecraft, “the character of a master, a husband, and a father, forms the citizen imperceptibly, by producing a sober manliness of thought, and orderly behaviour, but from the lax morals and depraved affections of the libertine, what results? (p.22)” Arbitrary power in the patriarchal system is denounced as a moral violation of that God-given faculty through which manliness (men and women) can elevate itself above the brutish state of animals, and cultivate those noble virtues as citizens concerned with the affairs of both the earthly and celestial city. Contrary to the natural morality founded more on the observation of decorum and the respect of the sanctity of “antiquity”, rational morality is liable to improvement and
perfection as each individual and generation exerts its reason for self-government and the just
government of the city. Taking natural morality as a contesting site over inherited property
and the vices it generates, Wollstonecraft tells Burke that “property should be fluctuating…and
equally divided among the children of the family. (p.23)” And if his major concern is to
safeguard it, he has to learn that “the only security of property that nature authorizes and
reason sanctions is, the right a man has to enjoy the acquisition which his talents and industry
have acquired; and to bequeath them to whom he chooses. (p.23)” Wollstonecraft castigates
that the middle class category of people “apeing the manners of the great,” instead of
promoting the ethic of work and the proprietary consciousness peculiar to their own class. The
critique is double-pronged since it is meant to hit both Burke and her father who betrayed
their own class.

Wollstonecraft’s feminist critique of the family is similar to her critique of the British civil
society as a whole. As she describes it, it is not as perfect as Burke makes it look like, because
the same hereditary property and privileges undermine it from within. The monarchy cannot
be really called Constitutional since in his refutation of Price, Burke tells us that “the
succession of the King of Great Britain [does] not depend on the choice of the people.
(p.19)” This is another way of saying that power is the sole inherited property of the King.
This power, fallaciously disguised as a hereditary right, corrupts courtly life and the social
fabric. Representational democracy became a sham as elections were rigged, political merit
was demeaned, nepotism was encouraged and true faith or religion was sold out by the clergy,
in the name of hereditary rights and honorary privileges. This picture that Wollstonecraft
gives of Britain in response to Burke’s idealization of the British Constitution does not differ
much from the one drawn by French enlightenment philosophers of the French ancient
regime of the three states. The implication is that Britain needed the same radical economic
and political reforms undertaken in France in spite of Burke’s claim that Britain was past the
age of revolution and reformation. Notwithstanding the “horselaugh” that Wollstonecraft imagines to hear from Burke in uttering this claim, she develops the idea that the new political rationalism guiding the discussion of the new French Assembly is much better than the antiquarianism of the British political system based on “exalted instinct” instead of reason.

As I noted earlier, the form or style of Wollstonecraft’s essay constitutes the major feminist message. Unless the ideology of form is attended to, the way our author “ungenders” or dislodges gender will be missed. As one reads through the essay, one can notice that the author reproaches Burke his Gothicism, or medievalism, which is part and parcel of the antiquarian movement that rose as a response to the Industrial Revolution. As a result of this Industrial Revolution, there arose nostalgia for the medieval or gothic period out of which Burke creates a usable sacred past to weather out the political disturbance caused by the French Revolution. It has to be observed that Burke is also the author A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and the Beautiful meant as a “theory of passions.” In this theory, he placed under two broad categories, passions related to self-preservation and those related to society, the latter being subdivided into the passions belonging to the society of sex and those of society in general. Burke’s theory of passions is underlined by a well-marked gender politics since he tells us that while the passions of self-preservation are most male passions those belonging to the society of sex are female. The former are associated with pain and danger whereas the latter are linked to love and procreation. In terms of aesthetics, the sublime and the beautiful are properties of represented objects and ideas transmitted by the five senses through various artistic modes. So, “what is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (13)”. The properties that excite the feeling of greatness or sublime are vastness, infinity, obscurity,
darkness, privation, interrupted succession or non-uniformity, magnificence, each of them attached to one of the senses. On the contrary, the beautiful is a “social quality” that emanates from objects, which excites the pleasure of love by properties such as smallness or littleness, smoothness, sweetness, sentimentality, light, and so on. If beauty is defined as a “social quality” it is because it has no link with physical fitness, perfection, proportion, nor with qualities of the mind like courage and fortitude.

The sublime and the beautiful, Burke tells, can be linked to virtues, but these virtues are gender marked as soft and heroic. The soft virtues are feminine and the heroic ones are masculine. It is this gendered and binary aesthetics that Wollstonecraft overturns in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. Among other reproaches, she takes Burke to task for giving up to that the sentimental language that he has himself assigned to women in his description of the British political and religious establishment. He grows tragically tearful over the deposed Queen Mary Antoinette just because her person was mobbing women belonging to the vulgar. Burke does not know that the injustice that the Queen shares with them a refined vulgarity. In short instead of appreciating the sublime in the historical text written by the French Revolution and welcoming the reform of abuses promised by that Revolution as the majority of his contemporary fellow intellectuals and politicians like Edward Gibbon and Richard Price did, Burke abandoned himself to the sentimental and beautiful for the simple pleasure of appearing an exception to the rule. Wollstonecraft wonders whether Burke would not have done the contrary, had the majority of British people not taken a positive view of the French Revolution.

To the beautiful feminine properties of Burke’s discourse in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Wollstonecraft opposes the sublime counter-discourse of her *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. The sublime feelings are elicited by a strong commitment to confronting courageously the danger of political innovation and not escaping the pain that political change
can bring out. For Wollstonecraft, the Revolution in France puts on stage ideas like justice, equality and fraternity whose properties inspire similar sublime feelings and reasoning as those that Burke describes in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. By engaging Burke on the grounds of his own politics of aesthetics, Wollstonecraft does not solely puts into relief his own intertextual and intratextual inconsistencies but also shames him as those beautiful scribbling women of her time who adulterated the political rationalism of essay writing by giving free rein to the play of imagination characteristic of fanciful romances. Burke emerges out of her text as a quixotic pathetic “hero,” who enamoured of feudal gothic antiquities, became unable to follow the march of historical progress that the Revolution in France foreshadowed.

In her *Gothic Feminism* (1998), Diane Long Hoeveler, sees in Wollstonecraft as the one woman essayist who, by her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) laid down the aesthetic theory for the writing of women’s gothic fiction such as the one produced by Anne Radcliff and the Brontes. I would argue that if I agree with Hoeveler as to the influence that Wollstonecraft exerted on the writing of women’s gothic fiction, this influence cannot be located solely in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* but also in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. It is in this latter work that the principles of Gothic feminism were formulated to be later refined and revised in its sequel *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* according to the historical evolution of politics in France and England. If gothic feminism, as Hoeveler claims, is marked by a struggle between aggressive heroines and tyrannical fathers and decadent aristocratic and priestly figures, who are symbolically wounded and humanized before readmitted as friendly companions to women, I have already given many examples from the *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* to support it.

Indeed, Wollstonecraft’s personal drama played up against the background of the controversial debate over the French Revolution in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*
resembles in many respects the dramas developed in gothic fictions by Anne Radcliff’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. The verbal thrusts that Wollstonecraft directs at Burke the surrogate father in the domestic sphere (home and country) announces both the two gun shots that the gothic villain, Valencourt, receives in the Radcliff’s fiction, and the blinding and amputation that Rochester underwent in Bronte’s novel. Moreover, just as in gothic fiction, the heroine-author Wollstonecraft while involved in a symbolic character assassination of the bad fatherly excessively sentimental and emotional figure, Burke makes Richard Price appear as the wished-for feminized, civilized or tamed father that she herself had not had. Just as gothic heroines of Radcliff and Charlotte Bronte, Wollstonecraft proceeds to the purging of the bourgeois ethos and morality of aristocratic vices.

However, in Wollstonecraft’s essay, the heroine-author does not behave as a victim, the other side that Hoeveler identifies as another characteristic of the gothic heroine. Of the latter, Hoeveler writes that “by presenting herself as an innocent and suffering victim, by masquerading as the beleaguered heroine, the gothic feminist actually positions herself for the assault, shielded, of course, from the charge or even the impression that she is the aggressor. (1998:14)” It is rather of the assault on Burke that we read in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Her personal drama, in which indeed she appears as a victim, transpires only as an implicit background that the reader has to fetch from auto/biographical information outside her “gothic” essay. On the other hand, as I have already suggested, we can see at work a wished-for construction of bourgeois family type at whose head is the feminized, civilized Richard Price. Metaphorically, the latter has put an end to the gendered economic disfranchisement by leaving an intellectual legacy to his adopted daughter (Wollstonecraft), thus metaphorically erasing the primogeniture law and patrimonialism (inheritance through the male) and patrinearity (naming practices). If Burke is chastened, it is
because his attack against Price in defence of a dying aristocratic system has turned into character assassination of a wished-for civilized bourgeois father and a reshaped bourgeois family shorn off the excesses of the aristocratic order.

Wollstonecraft’s very aggressive and self-righteous prose pushes Burke to Gothic self-destruction by exposing his excessively aristocratic inconsistencies like his dueling with Price just for obtaining “satisfaction.” Wollstonecraft pays him back in his coin in order to rehabilitate a new political and economic system defended by Price, a system based not on aristocratic blood privileges but on bourgeois merits. So contrary to what happens in Gothic fiction, the Gothic heroine Wollstonecraft does not seek the rehabilitation of a mother victimized by the aristocratic patriarchal system, but that of a fantasized civilized father unjustly suspected about his patriotism by a rear-guard conservative (Burke) who has come to the rescue of a residual ideology that makes Britain look the France of the Old Regime. For the rescue of the good mother from oblivion, the heroine posing as a victim, and other such formal characteristics that Hoeveler identifies as characteristic of Gothic feminism, one has to look for them in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It is in this sequel to *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, that her ideological deconstruction and reconstruction of eighteenth-century femininity takes its full shape as gothic feminism.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as a Feminist Critique of Civilization

Unlike the first essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was not written in response to a resented fellow British author, but as a plea to the attention of “M. Talleyrand-Périgord, late of Autun,” also an influential French political figure in the new regime, to express her disappointment that “the rights of women and national education” were not included in the newly approved French Constitution. In the preface addressed to Talleyrand, she explains that she “pleads for her sex – not for myself [and out of] affection for the whole human race. (p.65)” She hopes that Talleyrand and some other “enlarged minds who formed your
constitution” will accept to amend that constitution once they understand that educated women “would advance, instead of retarding the progress of those principles that give a substance to morality. (p.65)” While recognizing that France was at the time in advance over other European nations in terms of knowledge she reminds Talleyrand that Revolutionary France remains behind England by not trying to change the sensually marked relationship between French women and men. The latter are remnants of a residual aristocratic ideology of gender relationship that stands as a flagrant contradiction to the emancipation project that legitimate the new French regime. In other words, Wollstonecraft elevates rational morality for both women and men as the prerequisite for the realization of political ideals sustained by philosophical rationalism. It is implied that rational morality cannot be obtained without allowing women the right to exercise their reason and achieve that autonomy necessary for proper conduct in the domestic and public spheres. Everything in this preface to Talleyrand reads as if Wollstonecraft had carried out her moral revolution at home in Britain through her A Vindications of the Rights of Man standing ready to export her own feminist ideology across the channel. In the process, she emerges as a cool-headed cultural British heroine who wants to diffuse her homegrown feminist ideas abroad.

Arguably, the master word in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is that of civilization. It is with the discussion of this concept in the first chapter entitled “The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered” that Wollstonecraft starts her essay. For the definition of the principles on which civilization rises and falls, she asks three rhetorical questions. The first question is related to reason as a distinguishing mark that makes for the preeminence of civilized and rational men over brutes. The second question concerns the criterion of excellence among people, which she identifies as the acquisition of virtue. The third question is linked to the reason why God has “implanted passions” in man, which she answers by saying that experience shows that they are there to be struggled with so that they can “attain a
degree of knowledge denied to the brutes. (p.76)” It is in light of these principles that Wollstonecraft seeks to assess the state of civilization in the Enlightenment period. Her main conclusion is that the “civilization of the bulk of the people of Europe is very partial. (p.77)” In this civilization, reason is prostituted by being employed to rationalize imbibed or acquired prejudices instead of acting as a principle for the “conduct of understanding.” “Intellectual cowardice” has made people shrink from the task of rooting prejudice, “or only do it by half. (p.77)” Its principles are sacrificed at the altar of expediency to such an extent that “truth is lost in the mist of words, virtue in forms, [and] knowledge rendered as sounding nothing.” Through prescription this corrupted civilization has “deprived men (or women) of their natural rights. (Ibid.)”

However, in spite of her cultural critique of European civilization, Wollstonecraft does not completely lose hope of improving it. In this, she resembles her contemporary historian Edward Gibbon in his indirect cultural criticism of the state of British civilization in his *The History of Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* where he identifies moral decline and the loss of freedom, virtue and honour as the main causes of the fall of Rome, to teach his contemporaries the lesson of not letting the same decadence catch upon them. We can observe here that while Gibbon’s book received a flow of praise at its publication, it is not spared adverse criticism because of what was considered then as blasphemy and immorality in the two chapters devoted to the close link between the decay of Roman greatness and the rise of Christianity, whose spread was retraced to “natural” instead of “miraculous means.” Religion, which until then had been the sole preserve of theology and theologians, was made a subject of historical discourse or historiography. What was even more hurtful to the religious sensibilities of the time, Gibbon put on the same footing the earlier persecution of Christians by pagans and the later persecution of pagans and heretics by Christians because of their intolerant zeal. Following in the footsteps of Voltaire, Gibbon was harshly critical of
prejudice, superstition as well as the abuse of power not based on reason. The following remark and similar ones spread throughout Gibbon’s book show the extent to which Wollstonecraft might have been influenced in the diagnosis of the ills of European civilization and the cure she proposes to salvage it: “The freedom of the mind, the source of every generous and rational statement, was destroyed by the habits of credulity and submission; and the monk, contracting the vices of a slave, devoutly followed the faith and passions of his ecclesiastical tyrant.”

Wollstonecraft’s allegiance to Gibbon’s optimistic view of about mankind’s capacity to save civilization from fall into barbarism through the deployment of philosophical rationalism and a rational morality contrasts sharply with her rejection of Rousseau’s cheap swapping of European civilization for primitivism or the primitive state of nature. She tells us that Rousseau’s ideal was flawed in its hypotheses that the world was originally created as perfect, that man was a solitary being, that God or nature’s god is beyond good and evil, and that knowledge is a Promethean theft, and so on. These hypotheses do not square with the three principles or pillars that constitute her idea of society and civilization: reason, virtue and knowledge as god’s gifts through which mankind can “rise above the state in which sensation produced brutal ease. (p.79)” For her, civilization and civilized societies were not a “curse” but a “blessing.” The problem with Rousseau, she suggests, is that he has let his reason to be warped by giving way to popular prejudice and “intellectual cowardice” instead of rationally confronting the civilization problems of his day. Rousseau prefers flight to nature rather than sober reflection on the way to make men and women feel at home in an improved civilization. She goes on to say that if only Rousseau had thought more deeply about the state of civilization, he would have discovered that the major problem that it confronted was a remnant, a “vestige” of the barbarism that was a hallmark of the primitive state of nature he was so fond of.
Wollstonecraft closes her debate with Rousseau about the state of civilization by sorting out three main positions: “Rousseau exerts himself that all was right originally; a crowd of others that all is right now; and I, that all will be right. (p.79)” Hence, what she proposes for salvaging civilization is a project of a future enlightened society propped by a rational political system and a rational morality based on a well-reflect educational system. Rousseau is of the Enlightenment philosophers who laid down the ideological basis of the Revolution in France, so indirectly Wollstonecraft’s critique of his political philosophy is also meant as a constructive critique of Revolutionary France in its constitutional discrimination against women. That’s why after having settled accounts with Rousseau over the issue of civilization versus the primitive state of nature, she turns to the issue of education with a main emphasis on the French’s author’s educational prejudices against women. One of the major arguments in Wollstonecraft’s arsenal is that character taken in the large sense of selfhood, subjectivity or identity is the result of nurture and culture rather nature. In other words, character is a cultural construct largely determined by the political, social, economic and cultural environment. Wollstonecraft’s deconstruction and re/construction of character was thought over mostly in an analogical manner intersecting public politics and the politics of sexuality.

In exposing the “vestiges of barbarism” in Western societies or civilization, Wollstonecraft puts all its institutions and professions on the same footing. Absolute power whether exercised by monarchs or husbands sacks both individual character and the social fabric of society by fostering artificiality and the sophistication of manner instead of solid virtues. Sexual oppression just like political oppression is the congenial ground for cultivating obedience, idiotism and servility. Wollstonecraft carries out this embedding discursive strategy by stating her “firm persuasion that every profession, in which great subordination of rank constitutes its power, is highly injurious to morality. (p.81)” Taking stock of the British
prejudice against a standing army, she tells us that this profession is inimical to freedom because discipline and punishment constitute its backbones. To paraphrase Spivak in another context, the subalterns in a military institution, like women in the home cannot speak their minds. They must obey the command of officers at the risk of incurring punishment for the breach of discipline. Because these subalterns are taught at an early age to obey and not to listen to their reason, and to be careful about their uniforms (Wollstonecraft dismisses them as “badges of slavery”), they are “prejudicial to the morals of the inhabitants of a country towns. (p.81)”

The many analogies that Wollstonecraft establishes between institutions and professions progressively leads her to ask the question whether the servile attitudes of courtiers, soldiers and other such lower social ranks can be denied the rational faculty that men’s prejudice disallows for women. If this cannot be done, the author implies that a country that has already dismantled the oppressing institutions of the old regime and made legal provisions for the rights and education of its male citizens cannot stop at that without actually renouncing to its ideals of equality and justice. The persistence in the erection of barriers against the participation of women in the public sphere after their dismantlement in terms of class is a vestigial form of “otherness” that impedes civilization in its progress towards virtue. Women cannot simply be fixed in an economy of desire to cater for the pleasure of men since their supposed weakness is an outgrowth of sexual oppression. It is suggested that a regime that is based on sexual oppression is ultimately as unstable as a regime propped up by political oppression because it is in the home that the democratizing project of society has its source. Sexual oppression, Wollstonecraft argues, makes the domestic sphere a site of conflict wherein wives pretend to be slaves to their husbands while actually acting like “petty cunning tyrants.” In the process, women as nurturing mothers transmit to their children a private sphere ideology that run at cross-purposes with the public sphere ideology because of a
fundamental disjunction between the two separate spheres. It follows that the same education must be provided for men and women in order to develop virtues most likely to make them cooperate in the advance of civilization.

Wollstonecraft takes Rousseau and other philosophers of education like “Dr Gregory” to task for the ideological construction of femininity that runs counter to the enlightenment project of building a new civilization. The first thing that she reproaches Rousseau is that he differentiates between the education that must be provided to women and men according to the supposed differences in their nature. For Wollstonecraft, “The mother who wishes to give true dignity of character to her daughter, must, regardless of the sneers of ignorance, proceed on a plan diametrically opposite to that which Rousseau had recommended with all the deluding charms of eloquence. (p.108)” In his Emile, ou de l’éducation and Emile et Sophie les solitaires, Rousseau recommends a gendered education on the basis of what is supposed to be an observation of the behaviour of boys and girls. For example, in an anecdotic style, he relates the story of a girl who at an early age took it to her head to write the letter “O” with her needle until one day she happened to see herself in the mirror in the constrained attitude of a scribbler, and decided to throw out her pen in order to attend to her beauty. Her brother took an aversion, but this aversion was directed against confinement that restricted the growth of his body. In refutation of such prejudiced ideas, Wollstonecraft affirms that her own observations contradict Rousseau’s supposition that a “girl is naturally a coquette and that a desire connected with the impulse of nature to propagate the species, should appear even before an improper education has, by heating the imagination, called it forth prematurely. (p.109)” Experience has shown her that the “fair defects” (e.g., gossip, liveliness, admiration for dress, beauty, weakness, modesty, etc.) attributed to “the fair sex” are a consequence of an imposed confinement and “miseducation” wherein girls during infancy unwittingly imitate and educated in the manners of the women within their confined purview.
Wollstonecraft’s ire is raised against Rousseau and other fellow writers like Milton, Pope, and Dryden for having either denied character for women or differentiate it on the basis of sex. Human character as well as the moral standard for its measurement are so one, so it is an aberration to speak of sexual character, which proceeds from an error of reasoning. To restore women to their dignity, the one thing needed is to cease making them satellites turning around the orbit of men’s reason, and looking at them as a “feathered race,” and to allow them to see the world through the own ideas, and fly out of their “gilded cages.” Just as for men, reason has to be their sole authority, and just like men they must be given the chance to use in various employments in order to cultivate virtues and the necessary knowledge to differentiate between vice and good. The argument is at once religious and secular, and aims to demonstrate the necessity not to contradict god’s plan and the enlightenment project of human emancipation from prejudice and superstition. “Folly” and “civilization” are the two most prominent words in this discourse against prejudice and superstition. Just as Michel Foucault develops it in his *Madness and Civilization*, Wollstonecraft dismisses everything as folly that does not square with the norm of reason.

In parallel to the language of “folly” and “civilization,” she also deploys the language of prison, the clinic, and sexuality that Foucault has also amply documented. She is particularly harsh with those who seek to imprison women in their own bodies by urging them to care much more about personal accomplishment than the development of virtues that will ensure the immortality of their souls: “Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. (p.112)” Appealing to the idealist philosophy, Wollstonecraft reminds women’s jailors that women, just like men, are constituted of body and soul, and that the former is just a temporary home for the latter. Unless the soul is given enough elbow room by enlarging its moral and intellectual perspectives and making provisions for the natural growth of her body, the soul is
condemned to shrink to insignificance. Indeed, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* reads as
a judicial discourse in defence of women as victims unjustly prosecuted and imprisoned on
the flimsy evidence of a supposed difference in their sexual character. In her plea, she has not
ceded repeating that there is no such thing as a sexual character and that women and men
share a basic humanity which makes the imprisonment of the latter a mere abuse of physical
power. In her hands nearly all male mentors turn into tormentors and jailors unaware that their
victimization/imprisonment of women has a boomeranging effect on the public sphere of
political activity that they seek to preserve from the so-called female irrationality.

In addition to the discourse of prison, Wollstonecraft also deploys the language of the
clinic. For her, the health of civilization is at peril because of the prevalent Epicureanism and
the *carpe diem* philosophy that makes men in general and women in particular live for the
enjoyment of the pleasures of the day without thinking about what will advent tomorrow.
Modern existentialist like Jean Paul Sartre will call this a “fall” because this mode of social
life does not involve a choice of a project of life. In Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the
Rights of Woman*, women are not “condemned to be free” (the words are Sartre’s) as they are
accustomed to living under the man’s “gaze.” The latter’s preference for weakness
aestheticized as a criterion of beauty, is seen as the source of physical and social illnesses
such as indigestion, indolence, adultery, prostitution, masochism, sadism, etc. Epicure’s male
and female, Wollstonecraft suggests, cannot build a viable civilization since they are diseased
at their very core. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by talking about the Epicurean
disease undermining civilization, Wollstonecraft seems to be involved in what Freud would
later call the “talking cure.”

The discourse of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is also interwoven with a discourse
about sexuality. The recurrence of the word “pleasure” associated with sex shows to what
extent Wollstonecraft is concerned with what Foucault refers to as “the usage of the
pleasures.” The sexuality that Wollstonecraft speaks about in her text borrows its major paradigms from Christian morality and Greek philosophy. It is well-known that Christian morality associates sexual abstinence or continence with access to spiritual truth and secular wisdom. Wollstonecraft suggests the extent to which modern civilization as defined by men has diverged from the search of that truth and wisdom by encouraging the relaxation in the “practice of pleasures” through the promotion of Epicurean ideals. Women in particular are left as slaves to their passions, incapable of “transforming themselves into moral subjects of their own conduct (Foucault, 1954: 39)” because of their subjugation to a flawed reasoning developed by a segregated type of education. The suggestion is that her contemporary male fellows will be accountable before God and the future generations because they are responsible for putting women’s souls as well as civilization in peril.

This Christian morality of sex is sustained by what looks like paradigms of thought about sexuality or love borrowed from Greek philosophy. The theme of love is so recurrent in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman that one has the impression that one is reading such works by Socrates as the Phaedrus and the Banquet. In the manner of Plato in The Republic, Wollstonecraft brings male and female novelists and poets and other merchants of romantic love for vitiating the imagination of their audience by nourishing illusions about the most ephemeral passion that is love. For her, romantic love cannot constitute a basis for stable households because it is largely a passion that is insatiable and as evanescent as the physical beauty that nourishes it. Because of the dangers and risks that accompany it, Wollstonecraft advises women to observe what Foucault calls “the diet of pleasure.” It is understood that as long as men do not accord women the right to an appropriate education, women cannot undertake this ethical work on themselves. The Romantic or physical love peculiar to the youth cannot be transformed at adult age into that permanent and more subtle relation Wollstonecraft calls friendship and that Socrates refers to as Philia, or into its more subtle
form the *Agape*, the love and respect for the soul sister. She repeatedly affirms that only “a revolution in female manners (p.113)” through a moral education of both sexes can lead to the purification of sexual passions, the elevation of the soul above its material condition, and the erection of mutual respect as a fundamnet principle for the regulation of conduct between men and women.

In the second volume to his *Histoire de la sexuality*, Foucault writes that “sexual austerity relates to an axis of experience and a complex set of concrete relationships: relationships with the body, itself linked to the issue of health, and behind it the play with life and death; relationship to the other sex… (p.34)” He closes the long list of relationships by underlining the “problem of adjustment between social roles and sexual roles; [and] finally the relationship to truth wherein is posed the question about the spiritual conditions that allow access to wisdom. (p.35) Trans. mine” I have already tried to illustrate how Wollstonecraft criticizes the way that the prevalent education weakens women’s bodies in order to make them meet the aesthetic requirement that associates beauty with weakness. As female physical beauty is short-lived, the sexual power that women hold over their male counterparts does not last long, since it is not sustained by an internal intellectual beauty. The attitude to age differs according to gender. Wollstonecraft is outraged over the way the male-dominated cultural and aesthetic norms of the time accord men the privilege to look for younger women for the satisfaction of their sexual pleasures while they bring aged women to contempt because of the loss of physical beauty and grace.

Foucault argues that the morality of sex is primarily a morality made, thought over men and addressed to free men. It is a virile morality wherein women appear only as sexual objects. This might explain the vociferous critique that contemporary conservative women authors like Hannah Moore addresses to Wollstonecraft for meddling in men’s business by writing about the politics of sex. Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is
harsh with men for the wasteful expenditure of their sexual energies that has undermined the moral fiber of the nation. Whether in France or in England this cannot fail to hit the point since, as I have already noted, nationalism is partly on gender othering. Nationalism holds effeminacy in abhorrence since it destroys the national character and exposes the nation to both internal and external forces. Among other sociological and ethnological evidence which Wollstonecraft musters in support of a sexual hygiene is polygamy that she takes as an example of wasteful sexual expenditure. According to the sources that she cites, one of the harmful consequences of polygamy in Africa is that the birth of girls outnumbers that of boys. Obviously, unless sex is normalized through an appropriate national education, France or for that matter Britain are most likely to turn to effeminate nations. France, particularly, will thus confirm the British clichéd view as a nation of perverse effeminates because of its sexual deviance.

The word character is arguably the most recurrent in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. However, as we read the latter, one has the impression that Wollstonecraft is interested not only in character as a sociological and psychological reality but also in characterization as character formation and representation. She is particularly concerned with the use and abuse of representation in gender power relationships. One of her major claims is that there is no gender in sex just as virtue and the soul do not know sex. In other terms, sex or gender just as the linguistic sign is the result of an arbitrary cultural system with no outside reference in nature to explain its binary oppositions. Her deconstruction of sexual characterization as an ideological representation through which men seek to impose their masculine rule leads her to posit the existence of one human nature peculiar to both men and women. Following in the footsteps of David Hume, she tries hard to show that the gendered differentiation in character just as differentiation in national character is not natural but acquired, in other words due to moral causes such as “the nature of government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty
or penury in which people live. (Hume David, 1963:203)” This explains why an education focused on a rational morality is advocated in replacement of an education devoted to artificial manners.

As I have already said above *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* completes *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* in the work of ideological deconstruction of femininity. If the latter chastens the aristocratic figure of Burke and celebrates in Price the surrogate tamed or civilized father that Wollstonecraft had never had, the former gives ample room to the mother envisaged both as a human figure (an immanence) and a metaphysical representation of freedom (transcendence). So I shall argue that looked at from the perspective of the two works together, Wollstonecraft’s Gothic feminism, contrary to Hoeveler’s conclusion, is not concerned with the “gendering of the civilization process.” What emerges from the two works is that European civilization can be redeemed only if gender inequality is dislodged. The slippage from text to author in both works gives the picture of a redefined civilized family wherein sexual and sociological roles are adjusted according to the rules of reason and rational morality.

I also differ with Hoeveler in her affirmation that Wollstonecraft laid down the agenda for the “gendering of victimization” characteristic of Gothic fiction. While it is true that women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are characterized as victims, it is also true that both men and women are shown as being victimized by skewed institutions. Consequently, I would argue that what stands out most in this epistolary essay is the cultural critique of gendered institutions that retard the progress of civilization. It is not the mantle of gothic heroine that Wollstonecraft wears in this work but that of a cultural critic mindful about the harmful consequences of a gendered civilization. I would further argue that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a critical or theoretical essay concentrated on the analysis of the interplay of characterization and setting in that universal drama staged by men and women in their
strife for the improvement of civilization. By staking a claim in the field of cultural production and cultural criticism, Wollstonecraft entered one of the professions, which until then was denied to women by the gender boundaries set by the ideology of separate spheres.

**The De/Construction of Nationalism as a Homologous Discourse of Gender**

Wollstonecraft theorized not only about the ways and means to cross or blur gender boundaries, but also those constructed by nationalism around national character. In the previous chapter, I noted how the burgeoning English nationalism in the early eighteenth-century caused by the several Franco-English wars had led such periodicals as *The Spectator* and *The Tattler* which manifested itself in the deployment of the discursive strategy of gendered national characterization. I also noted that this discursive strategy was not without consequences on the fashioning of gender relationships. Indeed, such discourses as nationalism and gender have much in common as both rely on similar binaries. Nationals behave towards other nationals especially national rivals in the same manner as men tend to behave towards women. Both nationalism and gender are sustained by a virility complex demeaning the national and genderized Other as weak, soft, easily penetrated and so on. Moreover, the ideology of nationalism is often so powerful that even women can easily stumble into its pitfalls by celebrating the “manhood” or “masculinity” of their virile nation in return for the recognition of their patriotic motherhood, the fact of having given birth and educated male children capable of responding in a manly manner to the danger of other national rivals. Nira Yuval Davis is one among many other scholars who has studied the connections between nationalism and gender. He tells us that the “constructions of nationhood usually involves specific notions of both ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood.’ (1997:1)”

I have previously argued that the British attitude to French Revolution at least in its initial stages was positive. People, as various as Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Radicals like William Godwin and Richard Price applauded it
as the dawn of a new world order wherein reason and justice will reign supreme. Burke looked like the exception to this movement of sympathy that pushed the British to share in the bliss caused by the Revolution. And as I have shown Burke’s critique of the Revolution in France did not fail to trigger a salvo of admonishment for his throwing a clout on the shared joy, with Wollstonecraft being the first to fire. However, this feeling of sympathy and bliss was soon supplanted by disenchantment best captured in Wordsworth’s immortality ode, when the Revolution took the turn of terror, nearly three years after its start on 14 July, 1789, with the September massacres of 1792 and the execution of the King Louis XVI in January 1793. A counter-revolutionary feeling in Britain increasingly took the place of revolutionary enthusiasm as France moved from constitutional monarchy to a republican form of government.

It is in this historical context of change of attitude towards revolution in France that the characterization of the French nationals as effeminate and the English as manly were redeployed and further sharpened with the declaration of war between the two countries in 1793, a war that lasted up to 1815. On both sides of the Atlantic, character assassination was resumed as part of a psychological war for inflating nationalistic or rather nationalitarian feelings by denying manly virtues to the rival nation. So to the traditional French verbal attack of Britain as “Perfidious Albion,” the British responded with an equally gendered discourse that invested the British with manly or heroic virtues of strength, bravery, honour, seriousness, enterprise, etc stripping off in the same process the French of these attributes by allocating them the bad sort of feminine character such as effusiveness, lightheartedness, shallowness, changeableness, artfulness, and slavishness. The good sort of the British feminine character as opposed to the bad sort of French femininity was best represented by the contemporary caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson in his caricature of 1793 suggestively called The Contrast. The latter contrasts English liberty represented by the time-honoured
sober dame figure of justice with the French one characterized as a blood-thirsty Gorgon trampling on the bodies of slaughtered citizens.

In 1792 Wollstonecraft crossed the Channel to live in France for the whole duration of what the French historians call the Terror, a terror that lasted from 10 August, 1792 to 28 July 1794. During her stay in France, she became the lover of the American adventurer businessman Gilbert Imlay to whom she bore a girl baby named Fanny. Her being the companion of an American spared her the persecution and imprisonment that other English expatriates like Helen Maria Williams. It was during her stay in France that she wrote the famous “Letter Introductory” to Joseph Johnson, her publisher, and the editor and owner of the *Analytic Review* and *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* wherein she further develops what she wrote about the French national character in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. I have already noted how in the latter work, Wollstonecraft shows how arbitrary political systems can influence the growth of character in a negative direction, drawing parallels between the effeminate effects of oppression on both woman’s character and national character. I would argue that this paradigm of thought enables Wollstonecraft to negotiate the exacerbated nationalist feelings of her contemporaries against the “effeminate” French and to continue to write about the French Revolution to a news-hungry British audience grown averse to it without reneging on her ideal of a common humanity across gender and national lines.

In “Letter Introductory,” Wollstonecraft first deploys this paradigm of thought to meet the expectation of a British readership swayed by nationalist propaganda. Superficiality, artificiality, cloying sweetness, frivolity, and other negative characteristics are attached to Frenchness contrasting it with her Englishness associated with the “positive” values of sobriety, solidity and depth. Though she avows that she was at first captivated by the polish, gaiety, and the civility of French manners, she recovered her sense of the English self as soon
as first impressions wore thin. Paris is declared as the location wherein “the soul of Epicurus has long been at work to root out the simple emotions of the heart, which being natural, are always moral. (p.444)” The French or Parisians are “ever on the wing, they are always sipping the sparkling joy on the brim of the cup, leaving satiety in the bottom for those who venture to drink deep. (p.443)” Seemingly, disgusted with their quest for pleasure, she continues her characterization of the French “epicures” by saying that “[t]hey play before me like motes in a sunbeam, enjoying the passing ray; whilst an English head, searching for more solid happiness, loses, in the analysis of pleasure the volatile sweets of the moment. (p.443)” This literary contrast between the English character as represented by herself and the national lack of character by the French is drawn in strangely similar terms as the one in Rowlandson’s caricature.

In her article “Blurring the Borders of Nation and Gender: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Character (R)evolution,” Jan Wellington (2001) following in the footsteps of theorists of acculturation attributes Wollstonecraft’s negative representation or characterization to a culture shock to which all travelers are liable when they move from one culture to another. For Wellington, Wollstonecraft’s attitude to France and the French is one marked by the euphoria preceding her departure and the first months of her stay in France. Among other things, Wellington cites a 1788 correspondence of Wollstonecraft with her sister Everina wherein the former expressed her long dated wish to visit France. Indeed, in her “Letter Introductory” Wollstonecraft herself expresses the euphoria that accompanied her first cultural contact with France, and indeed, just as Wellington argues we feel that her negative characterization has something to do with culture shock and the disphoria that is usually associated with it. However, I consider that the strict application of this acculturation pattern can make us lose sight of the paradigm of thought wherein I have located the double-voiced discourse that Wollstonecraft develops about France and its lack of national character in her
As my analysis of *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft did not go to France with an ideal picture of France and the French since even in these works they are put on a par on with women because they are submitted to the same arbitrary system as the latter. So it might well be the case that cultural estrangement has exacerbated the negative characterization of the French, but that cannot explain the whole thing except if we consider her as being involved in the same apostasy towards the French Revolution as male Romantic poets like Wordsworth.

In short Wellington has not attended to the authorial ideology in her over-emphasis on acculturation as a determining factor in her representation of the French. Nor has she focused on the way Wollstonecraft in her “Letter Introductory” subverts the general ideology of her British readership about the French by a kind of Rogerian discourse that makes concessions the better to mark a point (Eagleton Terry, 2002). As I have already said, Radicals like Wollstonecraft could not afford the same political radicalism before and after the terror regime in France without running risk of not being suspected of treachery to the nation and so put out of literary circulation. It is rhetoric questions like this one that one can see where Wollstonecraft really stands in terms of the effeminacy of the French and their lack of a national character: “what can render the heart so hard, or so effectually stifle every moral emotion, as the refinements of sensuality. (p.444)” The author’s interest does not concentrate so much on the symptoms of moral degeneracy as on the diagnosis of their immediate and remote causes. In the same letter, Wollstonecraft makes the observation that the French have been “emasculated by pleasure” and this emasculation as the name indicates is not a natural mark but the effect of a biased cultural system. The blame is shifted from the French as human beings to the arbitrary political system that fashioned them in the same manner as women. Wollstonecraft cannot be said to have moved all of sudden from the feminist position to that sort of British post-feminism of her contemporary counterrevolutionary Hannah More
who in response to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* dismisses its author as being “ridiculous” claiming that “I am sure that I have as much liberty as I can make good use of, now I am an old maid, and when I was a young one, I dare say, more than was good for me. (Quoted in Keane Angela, 2001:112)” Wollstonecraft’s feminism, although tone down, is still there in the ironical twist that she gives to her discourse in her deployment of the rhetoric of eighteenth-century anti-female satire in representing the French as suffering from a lack of a national character.

In *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* to which the “Letter Introductory” served as a Preface, Wollstonecraft in an echo to Pope’s declaration that “Women have no character”, concludes her overview of the history of French culture and morality up to the Revolution with what follows:

Thus a Frenchman, like most women, may be said to have no character distinguishable from that of the nation, unless little shades and casual lights, be allowed to constitute an essential characteristic. What then could have been expected, when their ambition was mostly confined to dancing gracefully, entering a room with easy assurance, and smiling on and complimenting the very persons whom they meant to ridicule at the next fashionable assembly? (p.365)

The above quote reads as an exoneration of women and the French of the responsibility for lack of individual and national character. If French nationals and women are not up to standards of British nationalism it is not because of some inborn defective essential characteristic but because of the type of culture and civilization in which they were brought up. Her cultural or civilization analysis, carried out in the same way as in the previous works makes her observe that French culture is fundamentally a civilization based not on reason but on taste and the cultivation of courtly manners heightened under the rule of Louis XIV and his successors. It is of the same type and species as the Greek and Roman civilizations, and like them it was fated, to use Gibbon’s words, to decline and fall because of the same excesses. However, she adds the caveat to those “superficial reasoners … [who like Gibbon] think that there is only a certain degree of civilization to which men are capable of attaining, without
receding back to a state of barbarism. (p.330)” Such organic conception of Roman civilization does not apply to the modern European civilization as it is ushered by the French Revolution because of the large diffusion of knowledge and “the discovery of useful truths. (p.331)” Sticking to the gospel of man’s perpetual perfectibility, Wollstonecraft allays the fears born out of the unleashing of terror in Revolutionary France.

In her critique of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft uses the same material as Burke, but her interpretation of this shared material is significantly different in the emphasis that it gives to the remote and immediate causes rather the effects of its major events as in the case of Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Adopting a comparative and contrasting method, Wollstonecraft illustrates how France lagged behind Britain in undertaking reforms in the political, economic, social, agricultural, and cultural fields. The exogamous social system that allowed the British bourgeois and aristocratic classes to commerce together (in the sense of economic and sexual reinvigoration) is contrasted to the promiscuous endogamous system of the French aristocracy that wanted to preserve the “purity of their families.” The propensity of the French to theatricality and show in times of peace and war stands as a background to the sobriety of the British. Feudal tenures in France blocked the development of a modern agriculture while their elimination in Britain made for an agricultural revolution that permitted her to feed its population. Britain put an end to the wasteful expenditure, the censure of the press and other such negative factors while France indulged in them. Wollstonecraft concludes the enumeration of these French drawbacks that taxed the French character with the following: “After these cursory observations, it is not going too far to advance, that the French were in some respects the most unqualified of any people in Europe to undertake the important work in which they are embarked. (p.366)”

However, one notes that Wollstonecraft does not repudiate the Revolution in France. What she does is to attenuate the harsh criticism leveled against it because of the violence unleashed
during the terror regime by listing its causes. Because national character like women’s character is the product of institutions, and because it is liable to change with the change of those institutions, Wollstonecraft remains hopeful that the Revolution in France would survive its first birth pangs as a new breed of humanity in France was educated to the task of improving civilization. In her attempt to exonerate the French for having unleashed a temporary violence because of their unpreparedness, Wollstonecraft expresses through understatements her wistful regrets that Britain the best prepared nation in Europe has failed to undertake the task in its stead. The blame for the Terror in France is laid at the door of contemporary Britain for not having assumed the universal duty of advancing the progress of civilization. The reasons for this moral failure are put in a nutshell in the following quote:

Englishmen were then, with reason, proud of their constitution; and, if this noble pride have (sic) degenerated into arrogance, when the cause became less conspicuous, it is only a venial lapse of human nature; to be lamented merely as it stops the progress of civilization, and leads the people to imagine, that their ancestors have done everything possible to secure the happiness of society, and meliorate the condition of man, because they have done much. (p.288)

The British nationalist rhetoric is punctured by Wollstonecraft’s underlining that intellectual arrogance, pretentiousness, and national complacency make her contemporaries think that they had already reached the last stage in the growth of civilization. It is the gospel of perpetual perfectibility so prominent in the Enlightenment emancipation project that the contemporary generation transgressed in letting older generations fix for them the limits of freedom, happiness and growth of civilization. The strength of national character on which the British built all their aggressive nationalist rhetoric against France founders with such appreciative remarks.

Wollstonecraft does not let the question of gender drop into the background as she unravels the historical and moral sources for the French lack of national character. Arguably, the most important discussion of French women’s character occurs in Book V, Chapter II which covers a crucial episode in the French Revolution. This episode witnessed the storming
of the Chateau de Versailles by a “mob” of Parisian women in October 1789 to express their grievances against the scarcity of bread. It is on this same episode that Burke bases his attacks on the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* foregrounding the mistreatment that the royal family especially Queen Marie Antoinette received at the hands of the Parisian/French women qualified by Burke as a band of furies who are below the state of animals. In revisiting this historical episode, Wollstonecraft, for a second time, sets her accounts right with Burke by underlining the Queen’s responsibility for the tragic events that followed the fall of the Bastille. She particularly highlights the Queen’s “machinations” to backpedal the advance of the revolution after having sown its seeds through her wasteful expenditure and dilapidation of the national sources. In Wollstonecraft’s portrayal of the Queen, we do not see so much that royal beauty whose desecration has moved Burke. It is rather her moral ugliness, deformity, or monstrosity that comes to the foreground. On the contrary, the Parisian women are exonerated of their supposed offense to royalty.

Where Burke sees women’s fury, Wollstonecraft sees freedom of action that some designing men exploited to realize their hidden goals. She tells us that

> From the enjoyment of more freedom than the women of other parts of the world, those of France have acquired more independence of spirit than any others; it has therefore, been the scheme of designing men very often since the revolution, to lurk behind them as a kind of safeguard, working them up to some desperate act, and then terming it a folly, because merely the rage of women, who were supposed to be actuated only by the emotions of the moment. (p.343)

This amounts to the rehabilitation of the French women and their courageous participation in the French Revolution that politicians like Burke had tried to disqualify as the work of unreflecting furies. Wollstonecraft ends the portrayal of women’s demonstration at the Chateau de Versailles with the illustration of their sense of political responsibility in making petition and negotiation rather violence as major means for advancing their claims. In rehabilitating the image of French women as responsible political agents, Wollstonecraft
indirectly dismantles the lack of national character attributed to the French by undermining the gender ideological support characteristic of British nationalism.

Wollstonecraft goes so far as to rank French women far above those British women made as paragons of virtue by nationalistic propaganda. She observed that in “France, the women have not those factitious, supercilious manners, common to the English; and acting more freely, they have more decision of character, and even more generosity. […] Their coquetry is not only more agreeable, but more natural: and not left a prey to unsatisfied sensations, they were less romantic than the English; yet many of them possessed delicacy.” One has the impression here that the exacerbated English nationalism in the name of which women’s emancipation in Britain was bracketed is turned upside down by drawing the gender carpet on which it seated. In taking such a stand for French women, we can also note the familiar slippage from text to author wherein Wollstonecraft sees herself in the French women’s faces. Wollstonecraft stayed long enough in France to wear thin her feeling of homelessness and overturn the judgments that she uttered about the French character in her “Letter Introductory.” If, as she says the social and moral environment determines character, then her life history can be considered as a perfect illustration since the prevailing morality of revolutionary France seems to have liberated her sexually by taking the decision to get involved with the American adventurous businessman Gilbert Imlay, and to give birth to a daughter called Fanny. So what she was not able to do in Britain with the painter Henry Fuselli, who spurned her love, became possible in the new moral environment. It is in the legitimatization of this type of consented sexuality outside the institution of marriage and single motherhood that the radicalism of Wollstonecraft shows itself most for contemporary Western readers.

In 1795 Wollstonecraft crossed the Scandinavian borders with her daughter and her French nursemaid on a shipping business transaction for her American partner. During her travel she
continued to record her reflections on the intersection of national and genderized character in the form of private letters sent to Imlay. The latter made them public in a collection entitled *Letters Written during A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. What is remarkable about these letters is the shift in the positive characterization of the French in comparison of the British and their kin and kith with the Scandinavians. There is no need to give a lot of evidence from this travelogue to illustrate the change of tone towards the French. It is enough to quote the following exculpating admission inserted at the end of the collection: “I believe I should have been less severe in the remarks I have made on the vanity and depravity of the French, had I travelled towards the North before I visited France. (p.326)”

This admission is preceded by a correction of the representation of the French national character made earlier in her works emphasizing as she does so that nationalism and gender twists representation in the direction of essentialism and dogmatic assertions that shift with the shift in the location of one’s culture.

I agree with Jan Wellington’s statement that Wollstonecraft’s change in the portrayal of the French in *Letters Written during A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* is partly due to her sexual experience in France and partly to her apprehension about her homecoming with an illegitimate daughter to a country not yet ready then to accept her wayward sexuality. However, I would argue that the cultural shock in terms of which Wellington tries to explain Wollstonecraft’s “severity” in the representation of the French in *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* is also applicable in the letters. The acculturation process works both ways at the time of departure from one’s culture and the time of reintegration, so that even without that sexual experience we wonder whether Wollstonecraft could envisage her homecoming without a certain degree of uneasiness especially when we know that while Britain retrenched herself into a reactionary cultural conservatism, Wollstonecraft, in her contact with another culture, had
evolved in her paradigms of thought. In other words, her French acculturation made her look at her native British culture with a more critical or alternative eye in order to challenge the imperialism of gender and nationalist categories.

I would further argue that if Wollstonecraft challenges more openly Englishness in these letters, it is because they were initially supposed to be private matter. Therefore, there was no need for her to mitigate or tone down her criticism through the strategy of the double-discourse or double-entendre as in An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution which is destined for publication and commercialization right from the beginning. In the discursive space of private letters even if designed to be leaked on purpose, Wollstonecraft could say what she really thinks about the state of British culture without being accused of washing her dirty linen in public, or accused of treachery to her own nationals and sex. The British saying that “travel broadens the mind” seems to have been used by Wollstonecraft as the following extensive quote shows as a pretext to escape from the strictures of nationalism and gender in characterization:

> Travellers who require that every nation should resemble their native country, had better stay at home. It is, for example, absurd to blame a people for not having that degree of personal cleanliness and elegance of manners which only refinement of taste produces, and will produce everywhere in proportion as society attains a general polish. The most essential service, I presume, that authors could render to society, would be to promote inquiry and discussion, instead of those dogmatical assertions which only appear calculated to gird the human mind round with imaginary circles, like the paper globe which represents the one he inhabits. (p.266)

In the above quote Wollstonecraft seems to have come to the point of cultural relativism that admits of temporary cultural differences.

However, this cultural relativism is sustained by an evolutionary theory placing societies and cultures at different stages of cultural development. In the final analysis, she returns to her belief in the exercise of reason as the one duty that authors should assume to enable people to break away from the imprisoning location or localization of women and other nationals by their native culture or world of letters. The paradox is that the broad lines in which she
sketches her plan for a universal human prison-break are ultimately as imprisoning as the narrow imaginary circles of localized patches of the world, even if they are extended to the dimensions of the latitudinal and longitudinal lines of the globe. The universalism, cosmopolitanism, and civic humanism for which Wollstonecraft is militating seems to be holding true only for Europe since it is in European countries (Portugal, Ireland, France, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark) that she travelled. It follows that her reflections on national and gender characterization and the necessity to deconstruct them are circumscribed by the geographical boundaries of her European travel experiences. These are the limits of Wollstonecraft’s liberal feminist dismantlement of gender and national borders. Her recurrent troping of the Orient as a foil for tyranny on women in European countries in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* remains unrevised as she broadens the human circumference of her “paper globe.” As I shall try to demonstrate in the next chapter, Wollstonecraft bequeathed this trope to her younger contemporary British turned American playwright Susanna Haswell Rowson to build out of it a racial brand of liberal feminism.
CHAPTER NINE
Mary Wolstonecraft’s and Susanna Haswell Rowson’s Liberal Feminism and
Orientalism

Introduction

The previous chapter has hopefully shown that Mary Wollstonecraft prefaced her *Letters Written during A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* with a recommendation for the reconsideration of nationalist and gender characterisation in order to realize an ideal of humanity transcending the strictures of gender and nation. I have also argued that her travel and cultural experiences limit the reach of her claims to Europe as a cultural area, hence excluding the rest of the world, particularly the Orient, from her suggested mode of representation for the strengthening of European or Western character. The recurrent metaphor of the Orient as a foil to European societies like Britain and France, deployed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, and particularly in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in order to shame her fellow Europeans for exercising the same tyranny on their women at home as those oriental regimes that they criticized, did not fall on fallow literary ground. Its seeds, as I shall attempt to illustrate in this chapter, germinated and flowered in Susanna Haswell Rowson’s play *Slaves in Algiers, or a Struggle for Freedom* (1794).

Wollstonecraft’s Orientalism

Before moving to the analysis of Rowson’s play, two or three quotes from *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* are in order to show the firm hold of orientalism on Wollstonecraft’s liberal feminism. For example, in her attempt to undo the grip of orthodoxy in thinking about the rights of men in the former work, she resorts to the Medieval Christian idea of Islam as a heresy and a religion propagated by the sword to explain the danger of repressing the freedom of thought: “We should be aware of confining all moral excellence to one channel, however capacious, or if we are as narrow minded, we should not forget how much we owe to chance that our inheritance was not Mahometism.”
She continues her argument for the promotion of the freedom of thought along the same line by saying that the British should not forget that they owe it to the same chance “that the iron hand of destiny, in the shape of deeply rooted authority, has not suspended the sword of destruction over our heads. (pp.18-19)”

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* the orientalist discourse becomes a sort of subtext propping up the whole argument of the essay. Right from start, Wollstonecraft dismisses the manuals of conduct written by men because they “have had the same tendency as more frivolous productions; and that, in the true style of Mahometanism, they [women] are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as part of the human species. (p.71)” She musters the same analogical reasoning when she takes to task Milton for his characterization of Eve as soft, sweet and attractive and other such soft virtues in contrast to the heroic virtues that he attributes to Adam. Overlooking the fact that Milton’s imagery and representation has its source in the Bible, Wollstonecraft does not hesitate to bring in the name of the Prophet Mohamed and Islam into her discourse to heighten the effect on the Christian readership: “I cannot comprehend his [Milton’s] meaning unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he [Milton] meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man.... (p.84)” This all sounds, as if Wollstonecraft’s reasoning were caught in the cobwebs of the widespread medieval misconception or misrepresentation that Islam denies that women have souls.

Wollstonecraft’s outrage at double moral standards is expressed in similar analogy. Qualifying a moral philosopher, if her readers are really true Christian, she wonders why they continue to separate between a man’s and a woman’s morality: “I there be but one criterion of morals, but one archetype of man, women appear to be suspended by destiny, according to the vulgar tale of Mahomet’s coffin, they have neither the unerring instincts of brutes, nor are allowed to fix the idea on a perfect model. (p.100)” The suggestion here is that if her readers
hold such belief that women are neither fully human nor fully brutes but some sorts of hybrid monsters, then nothing distinguishes from those Muslims who believe that the Prophet’s coffin is magically suspended in the centre of his tomb. Obviously, if this kind of analogical reasoning is used by Wollstonecraft, it is because of its unavoidable effect on an audience brought up on Orientalism.

Wollstonecraft brings to task the women who use their beauty as a tool to temporarily subjugate men by deploying the same orientalist tropes. So in the following quote, we catch her comparing the power of these women to the delusive and short-lived power that Turkish officials exercised before their dethronement: “Women deluded by these sentiments, sometimes boast of their weakness, cunningly obtaining power by playing on the weakness of men; and they may glory in their illicit sway, for like Turkish bashaws (sic), they have more real power than their masters: but virtue is sacrificed to temporary gratifications, and the respectability of life in the triumph of an hour. (p.107)” It has to be observed that the Orientalist literature about Turkish politics at the time indulges in the exaggeration about the instability and unpredictability of political power in an Ottoman Empire that was in decline. For Wollstonecraft a gender empire built on the power of women’s beauty is as transitory as the power usurped by the political machinations of Turkish officials since it is not built on solid virtues such as those obtained by the exercise of reason and democracy. The idea of the Ottoman Empire as a sick man is transferred to the empire of women’s beauty.

Wollstonecraft continues to dismiss the women who deploy their “fair defects” that is beauty and weak to seduce and subdue their men as the cruelest despots on earth as harmful force not only to themselves but to their countries and countrymen. The despotism of women’s beauty exercised by cunning is compared to the despotic rule of some Roman emperors. However she qualifies the comparison by fetching her now usual discursive strategy built on orientalist analogy:
Yes, since kings have been more under the restraint of law, and the curb, however weak, of honour, the records of [Roman] history are not filled with such unnatural instances of folly and cruelty, nor does the despotism that kills virtue and genius in the bud, hover over Europe with the destructive blast which desolates Turkey, and renders the men, as well as the soil, unfruitful. (p.111)

The orientalist scare that Wollstonecraft arises in the quote is meant to operate at several levels. For one thing, the idealisation of women as things of beauty will be a political blast for France and Britain. Its effects are similar to the fierce wind of the simoom sweeping across the African and Asiatic deserts in spring and summer. The “sick” Ottoman Empire is seized as a fresh example to illustrate the negative effect of unbridled despotism when women use weakness, beauty and cunning and other strategies characteristic of the powerless. No less scaring then the skewed game politics is the suggested idea that the celebration of soft virtues can only lead to the emasculation and infertility of the nation. Obviously, Wollstonecraft was aware of the major Orientalist ideas circulated during her time, and she did not hesitate to retool them because of the tremendous effect that they could have on the reader. It goes without saying that in preferring this analogizing orientalist discourse to deductive or inductive reasoning, even if it serves her communication purposes, undermines its sincerity since this relies on sentiments and emotions rather than reason for persuading her audience.

Regardless of class in oriental societies, Wollstonecraft associates the European sensual women with “Eastern princes” (p.114) shut up in the Seraglio. She even imagines them as being brought up in a “torrid zone, with the meridian sun of pleasure darting upon them...[unable] to sufficiently brace their minds to discharge the duties of life, or even to relish the affections that carry them out of themselves. (p.124)”

Wollstonecraft is particularly harsh on those male educationists like Rousseau for proposing oriental women as models to be imitated by European women. She inserts the following quote from Rousseau to express her outrage: “For my part, I would have a young Englishman cultivate her agreeable talents, in order to please her future husband, with as much care and assiduity as a young Circassian cultivates her’s (sic.), to fit her for the Haram
of an Eastern bashaw. (Rousseau, quoted on p. 159)” Wollstonecrat does not question the truth of Rousseau’s orientalist statement but the wrongheadedness to transpose a system of education from a cultural area that she regards as backward on all counts to a civilized Europe. For her Rousseau abdicates the reason peculiar to the European for an oriental sensibility when he says that a “girl should be educated for her husband with the same care as for an eastern haram. (p.164)” There is no need to go further in supplying other examples from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman to realise that Wollstonecraft is blaming her European contemporaries for having orientalised their countries and culture.

In Letters Written during A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, Wollstonecraft advises European male authors not to “gird the human mind with imaginary circles, like the paper globe which represents the one he inhabits. (p.266)” In the sample of quotes above, we can see that she does just that in agreeing to the “imaginative geography” of the Orient that her male contemporaries were circulating about the Orient (Said Edward, 1978). She is even critical of those male authors who tried to confuse the attitudinal and longitudinal lines of the globe by attempting to transplant and raise an Orientalised species of European women without due regard to the compatibility of geographical zone or environment with character. If, as I argued in the previous chapter, Wollstonecraft is critical of characterization or representation, and that her feminism is marked by Gothicism, here I shall add that her feminist Gothicism is oriental. In Orientalism, Said argues that Orientalism feeds on all the types of discourse that come to hand. This is the case of Wollstonecraft’s feminist discourse and that of Rowson as the summary of her Mentoria below shows.

There once lived a shepherd’s daughter in an unidentified yet bountiful eastern region. Her name is Fatima. Fatima’s head was turned wrong by the wealth and luxury of the Vizier’s palace wherein a concubine called Semira lived. Fatima was frantic of envy for Semira who spent her days resting on a bed of roses “clad in all the pomp of eastern magnificence, while
two slaves were fanning her.” She cherished the wish for splendour, slaves, and a downy bed to replace her labour and her hard couch. A fairy by name of Urganda grants her wish turning her into a lovely virgin who raises the Vizier’s lust at first sight. But instead of ease and luxury, Fatima finds only unhappiness:

Fatima was now thought herself the happiest among the happy; but the Vizier was passionate, capricious, jealous, and extremely cruel, and it was not long before the disappointed Fatima discovered that to be a favourite to the grand Vizier, was to live only in splendid slavery.

(XXVII)

As you may have guessed, this story entitled *Mentoria* does not come from the *Arabian Nights*. It is a summary of an oriental tale from a collection of stories by Susanna Haswell Rowson first published in a 1794 *Young Ladies Guide* under the title of *Mentoria, or the Young Ladies’ Friend*. This oriental tale is followed up by another tale always about Fatima who seems not to have yet learned the lesson that wealth does not necessarily equate with happiness. And so she starts dreaming of becoming Empress of the East to realise her happiness. Her dream soon turns into a nightmare and becomes more miserable with her new lord than the old one. The former turns out to be deformed and morose.

Quite apart from the fact of indicating Rowson’s commitment to the women’s cause, these cautionary tales also betray the feminist agenda with which her only extant play *Slaves in Algiers, or a Struggle for Freedom* was written. This play was performed and published in 1794, the same year as her collection of short stories. Though it appeared at a climatic period in the American-Algerian crisis that started eleven years earlier in 1783 when the Algerian reis had captured two American ships, its circumstantial character is not really as its author wanted it to be at the time of its first performance and publication. In the preface wherein the author apologises for errors in her text, Rowson tells us that the “play was hastily conceived, and as hastily executed; it being not more than two months, from the first starting of the idea, to the time of its being performed (1794: 5).” Purportedly produced as part of a nation-wide fundraising campaign to ransom the American prisoners in Algiers, the play dramatises a
captive narrative related more to the marginalised fate of women in the West in general and in America in particular. Indeed, the play is remotely linked to the historical reality of American imprisonment in Algiers which mentions no American woman among the prisoners.

However, one of its narrative strains seems to have been woven with the same narrative thread as the oriental tales contained in her 1794 short story collection. In the first scene of the first act of the play, the dramatist lets us privy to a discussion between Fetnah and Selima in an apartment at the Dey’s palace. Fetnah is the daughter of a converted English Jew to Islam called Ben Hassan who keeps an American woman Rebecca Constant prisoner for ransom in his house. It is this Rebecca who brought up Fetnah on the American ideal of freedom. From the discussion of the two women, Selima envies Fetnah for being “chosen favourite of the Dey (1794:13)” and reproaches her for complaining about her condition. In response, Fetnah tells her that what she cherishes for are not frivolous things such as vast and pretty gardens, fine clothes, or delicious food but liberty. At the close of her rejoinder, Fetnah speaks about material possessions as constituting the “splendid house of bondage,” echoing the narrator’s comment on the “splendid slavery” of Fatima in Mentouria. Put together, this scene reads as a follow-up to this oriental tale in portraying an oriental female character (Fatima-Fetnah) who has at last learned from her American female mentor the lesson that freedom is not synonymous with the material possession that a husband can afford her.

Life, Liberty and Happiness

When we put Slaves in Algiers within the larger context of Rowson’s literary production, it is easy to see that Algiers and the American-Algerian crisis are just a foil for reflecting on the conditions of women in post-colonial America. Rowson is not alone in this use of Algiers as a foil for debate on domestic concerns. The letter to the reader published by Benjamin Franklin on his deathbed in 1790 during the American-Algerian crisis is a case in
point. In this letter, Franklin imagines a letter written by Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, a fictional member of the Divan of Algiers in response to a petition for the emancipation of Christian slaves presented by a religious sect known as Erica. Printed in the Federal Gazette of March 23rd, 1790, this fictitious letter in fact parodies Andrew Jackson’s speech before Congress against interference with the system of slavery in America. Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim rejects the petition for the abolition of Christian slavery taking back the same economic, political, social and religious arguments that Jackson used in his speech to explain why he wishes the enslavement of white Christians (Americans) in Algiers to continue. It follows that both Franklin and Howson use analogical discourse made relevant by the American-Algerian crisis to speak for those people, black slaves and women respectively, left out of the commitment of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to life, liberty and happiness.

The feminist dimension of Howson’s work has recently received considerable attention. Linda K. Kerber K., (1986) Amile Howe Kritzer (1996), and Jennifer Margulis and Karen Poremski (2000) have placed it in the context of writings by early American feminists like Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren, and Hannah Webster Foster. This placement within an early American feminist tradition is arguably to the point. However, it remains problematic as long as it does not specify what feminist tradition it exactly belongs to and what enabled Howson to make use of that particular feminist discourse. Western feminism in general or American feminism in particular, as Josphine Donavan (1992) has demonstrated it, has many interwoven traditions including liberal feminism, cultural feminism, Marxist feminism, Freudian Feminism, Existential feminism, and radical feminism. Clearly, Western feminism has many ideological faces, and it is certainly worth investigating from an Algerian perspective the feminist face(s) that Rowson puts on in her play Slaves in Algiers. I shall argue that Rowson’s feminist standpoint is essentially liberal and inspired from the same Enlightenment ideas that shaped the writing of the Declaration of Independence and that of
Constitution. What makes Rowson’s liberal feminism highly problematic is its propulsion by a nascent imperialist ideology or popular orientalism, which after the wake of September 11 made possible the birth of such strange feminist figures as Lynndie England featuring in US military garb having in each one Iraqi prisoner in the Abu Gharib jail while another has his genitals exposed for the female tormentor to shoot at. From the feminist mentor of Rowson’s fictitious Algiers, we have moved into the feminist tormentor of Abu Ghraib in real conquered Iraq.

To fully appreciate the ideological bearings of Rowson, we need to take into account her life, times and influence. Susanna Haswell Rowson was born in England in 1762 and died in America in 1828. She lived half through the American Revolution, and at the age of sixteen in 1778 she was compelled to travel back to Britain with her loyalist father. Fifteen years later in 1793 after having witnessed the French Revolution from British shores, and having made a name as author with the publication of *Victoria* (1786) and *Mary; or the Test of Honour* (1789) she went back to America where she settled permanently. She earned her living through writing and acting. Though she wrote in many genres, today’s literary cannon remembers us mostly as the author of the novel of seduction carrying the title of *Charlotte Temple* that she also published in England in 1791. What is remarkable about Rowson’s times is the fact that they are marked by two revolutions that dramatically changed man’s and woman’s conception of government. Quite significantly, these revolutions were not mere spontaneous reactions to tyranny as was the case in the medieval peasant revolts. On the contrary, they came as result of an ongoing political process of thought that went back to the Renaissance all through the Enlightenment. This political thought is part and parcel of scientific progress which starting with Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* (1687) and even earlier with Roger Bacon and Descartes affirms that the universe is governed by a few simple immutable and rational laws, among which we can mention the law of gravity. From
here there was a short step from the hard sciences to the political science which through John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* of 1690 spells out the gospel of the natural rights doctrine. Barely two years after the Glorious Revolution in 1688, Locke consecrated constitutional monarchy by announcing that “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind which will but consult, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possession (II.6) p4).”

Locke’s contractual view of society and man’s right to be governed by consent and not by absolute divine rule of the King are some of the political ingredients that Thomas Jefferson used in his formulation of the *Declaration of Independence*. In the manner of Locke, Jefferson starts the declaration by the eloquent statement of “truth” “that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This political premise is followed by the statement of grievances to justify the American Revolution and forced separation from British government blamed for breaching the contract that linked the Thirteen Colonies to the mother country. When the United States came to endow itself with a new constitution some twenty years later, following the averred weaknesses of the Confederacy Articles, the Founding Fathers under the lead of John Adams resorted to the political translation of the Newtonian law of gravity into the constitutional law of separating government branches and that of checks and balances to regulate government and avoid abuses. Scarcely a year after its ratification in 1789, as if in an afterthought about the inalienable rights of the individual, a Bill of Rights in the form of the first ten amendments was added to the Constitution. The French Revolution is not all that different from the American one in the sense that it has its roots in another vein of the Enlightenment political philosophy advocated, among many
others, by Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and which found its best expression in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789).

It can be rightly stated that Rowson wrote her *Slaves of Algiers* not simply in immediate response to the American-Algerian crisis, but also to the huge tide of revolutionary fervour that were sweeping the Western world during her times. Arguably, Rowson, in spite of the loyalist position of her father, could not have turned deaf and blind to the liberal feminist discourse and movement made possible by the shift of paradigms of thought brought out by the Enlightenment and put into practice successively by the English Revolution, the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Ideas, as Frederich Nietzsche has it, are timely or not. So is the liberal feminist idea whose timeliness is the result of the Enlightenment which allowed women to enter the public space to claim the same natural rights as men, whose majority paradoxically theorised about gender differences with the aim of barring women from the public sphere and confining them in the private sphere of the home. Notwithstanding this idea of separate spheres, many women managed to circulate their ideas because the historical conditions were favourable. So on January 3, 1792, we had the case of Mary Wollstonecraft publishing the first major work of liberal feminist theory in Western history under the significant title of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In the manner of Mary Astell, who nearly one hundred years earlier had dedicated and addressed an essay letter to the Queen to urge her to extend the application of the natural rights’ doctrine to the home, Wollstonecraft dedicated her work to French minister Talleyrand reminding him that unless women’s rights were included in the new constitution, revolutionary France would remain a tyranny.

A year before Wollstonecraft published her work, arguably in response to both the French Declaration of the Rights of Man not explicitly committed to the cause of women, Olympe de Gouges circulated a street pamphlet in Paris demanding the recognition of *Les
Droits de la Femme (The Rights of Women in English). Most probably because of this pamphlet, Gouge did not escape execution at the guillotine in the wave of terror that swept the country, and during which women were suspected of collaborating with the foreign enemy in undermining the social fabric and morale of the new republic or nation. American women did not drag behind English and French contemporary counterparts in demanding that women’s political and civil rights should not be overlooked in the new political dispensation. So during the course of the revolution, Abigail Adams, the wife of the most ardent advocate for independence, urged her husband John to think about giving “voice or representation” for women in the laws of the future nation. In 1790, just a year after the installation of the new constitutional government, Judith Sargent Murray published her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes,” to denounce the injustice of leaving out women on the margins of political life on the pretext of gender differences. Obviously, liberal feminist thought was too much in vogue in Rowson’s times to leave her writings without easily recognisable gender marks.

Another no less significant enabling condition for the emergence of liberal feminist thought in America is the climate created by the long-lasting American-Algerian crisis (1785-1896). As Lawrence A. Peskin (2009) has argued the point, this crisis has a far reaching impact on the American psyche, constitutional life and future directions in foreign and domestic policy. It happened, as Peskin tells us, “simultaneously with the development of the late-Enlightenment public sphere (p.3).” Peskin adds that “The new nation was a product of the very Enlightenment-era liberalism that Jürgen Habermas found so necessary for the development of what he termed the “bourgeois,” or liberal, public sphere.” This sphere provides “an arena of political discussion (whether in print or in face-to-face contact) that was novel because it was not controlled by the state and therefore stimulated more and freer communications” (Ibid.). Peskin borrows from Benedict Anderson the concept of “imagined community” to remind us that new nations like America and Revolutionary France are not
defined by “traditional notions of lineage, ethnicity, or group history” as much as the “mass media” that shaped public opinion. As they struggled with the liberation of the prisoners in Algiers, the Americans realised the weakness of the Confederation to defend itself against enemies at home and abroad. As a result, they dissolved the confederation dubbed as “a rope of sand” by George Washington and replaced it with a new Constitution investing the federal government with strong political power. Concurrently, as the new nation was caught in its birth pangs, it gave birth to the two-party system the Federalist Party and Anti-Federalist, or Democratic - Republican Party, the navy and most significantly the consolidation of the public sphere where issues of the day like the nature of liberty were hotly debated.

Of relevance to our topic of discussion is the debate that Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* triggered between William Cobbett and John Swanick. The former was a British native with a strong sympathy for the Federalist Party who at the time favoured a rapprochement with Britain while the latter was an Anti-Federalist or Democratic-Republic member of the House of Representatives. Truthful to the Federalist fear of the emergence of what Washington called the problem of “self-created societies” intervening in the affairs of government, Cobbett was harshly critical of Rowson’s play for its insistence on the rights of women for participation in the public sphere. In this regard, he writes the following ironical words:

I do not know how it is, but I have strange misgivings hanging about my mind, that the whole moral as well as political world is going to experience a revolution. Who knows but our present House of Representatives, for instance may be succeeded by members of the other sex? What information might not the democrats and grog-shop politicians expect from their loquacity. I’ll engage there would be no secrets then. If the speaker should happen to be with child that would be nothing odd to us, who have so long been accustomed to the fight; and if he should lie in during the sessions, her place might be supplied by her aunt or grandmother.

These words by Cobbett, known for his ambivalent attitude to black slavery, reproduce all the gender prejudices towards women as being incapable of holding political positions because of their supposedly irrational and loquacious natures and the wrong idea that biology is destiny.
At the same time that he dismisses women’s struggle for political and civil rights that he associates with revolution, Cobbett thrusts at the Democratic-Republican or Anti-Federalist Party by drawing a derogatory analogy between Rowson’s venture into the public space through her play and the Democratic-Republican open debate about government policy in “grog-shops”. The derogatory reference to “grogshop politicians” is in line with the Federalist reaction to the emergence of the Democratic-Republican societies that signalled the birth of a two-party system and a politicised public sphere. What is reproached for the Democratic-Republican politicians through the shameful women analogy is their lack of secrecy and their exaggerated loquacity in discussions of issues like the redemption of the slaves of Algiers.

Not surprisingly, given his initial political affiliation to the Democratic-Republican Party before his conversion to the Federalist Party, Philadelphia Representative John Swanick strongly objects to Cobbett’s attack against Rowson’s play and the dismissive association that he makes between women and the Democrat-Republicans. Being committed to the 1794 public drive for collecting funds for the redemption of the American prisoners in Algiers, the overt purpose for which Rowson produced her play, Swanick makes public his response to Cobbett’s accusation through the publication of an article entitled A Rub from Snub. For Swanick, Cobbett suffers from a “mental sterility” that makes Porcucipe (Cobbett’s pen-name) interpret the play literally and “extol his work in proportion to the vacuities of [his] belly.” The press debate between Cobbett and Swanick over Rowson’s play is interesting not simply by the fact that the latter has managed to draw the attention of two male public figures, with a divergent political orientation as to whether “male” secrecy or “female” indiscretion should prevail in foreign diplomacy. Its interest rather resides in the way Rowson uses the American-Algerian crisis to step into the American public sphere at a crucial stage of its definition and to break male consensus about women. As Federalists and Anti-Federalists or
Democrat-Republicans struggle over the definition of the public sphere, Rowson seizes the opportunity to politicize the gender issue against captivity at home (private households and America) by exposing it to public opinion in order to influence male public authority and legislation in favour of women. Following Habermas, Peskin tells us that the public sphere of coffee houses, salons and the press stands as an intermediary between the “world of private world of the household and the state-controlled ‘sphere of public authority (p.57).’” Rowson’s play fulfils the same function because it tries to accomplish a mediation between the public masculine affair of the prisoners in Algiers and household, gender concerns by drawing parallels between female captives at home (in the American Republic) and male captives abroad.

The captivity narrative that Rowson dramatizes for her audience involves an American love story or family romance that shipwrecks on the rocks of the American Revolution. The Constant family is caught in the turmoil of the Revolution that separated the husband, a British soldier by name of Frederick, from his wife Rebecca, whose father is seemingly an American patriot. Though she has a strong sympathy for the American Revolution, Rebecca follows her British lover much to the regret of her father who has spurned her as a result of this for four long years. With time at his deathbed, the father grows lenient and calls back the stray daughter to pardon her. Unfortunately, during her absence, the British army clashes with the American revolutionaries and her husband is wrongly reported dead in the battlefield. Later Rebecca hears through rumour that Frederick is still alive and that he is living with their daughter Olivia in England, she decides to go there with their four-old son to join the rest of the family. Fate has it that during the voyage, the Algerian reis captures the ship. Mother and son land instead in Algiers and auctioned off to different masters, the mother to an English Jewish renegade called Ben Hassan and the son to an unnamed African master.
The play dramatises Rebecca Constant’s captivity recounting how she resists to Ben Hassan sexual advances and how she has brought up his daughter Fetnah on the ideal of American freedom. We hear about Rebecca before she appears on the stage when Fetnah expresses her refusal to enter Dey Moloch’s harem. She tells Selima, one of the Dey’s concubines, that an American foster mother referring to Rebecca has taught her to value freedom over material enslavement. The other strain of the story concerns the fate of Rebecca’s husband and daughter Olivia. We learn at the end of the play through the husband’s mouth that after his recovery from injury in that fateful battle that has separated them, he hears that Rebecca has died of grief over his supposed loss. The war with America being over, the husband-soldier responds again to the call of duty by embarking with his daughter for India whence he “returns with a ruined constitution (p.71).” Father, daughter and her fiancé (Henry) are captured by Algerian corsairs on their way to Lisbon whose air is recommended for the sick father. Thus, through an ironical turn of events, they find themselves prisoners in the same “land of captivity (71)” as the rest of the family without knowing that they are sharing the same fate. The play dramatises this other strain of the family romance by showing the resistance of Olivia to Dey Moloch’s sexual advances and the conversion of the Dey’s daughter Zoriana to Christianity and her love for a Christian prisoner who turns out to be no one else but Olivia’s fiancé, Henry. The two strains of this captivity narrative are brought together at the end of the play in a scene showing a Christian slave rebellion toppling down the Algerian regime. The American family reunion takes place against Dey Moloch’s gratitude for his “generous conquerors” and his renunciation to “all power but such as my united friends shall think me incapable of abusing (p.74).”

Right from the beginning of the play in the prologue, Rowson announces that her primary purpose in writing the play is to have her audience look at the condition of women in America through the unsettling mirror of American captivity in Algiers. She avails herself of
the freedom of speech and the emerging public sphere to engage a dialogue about freedom and the rights of man. After appealing to the generosity of the audience to redeem the American captivities, reminding them of the commitment of America or Columbia to guarantee freedom for her “sons” at home and “where’er they breathe in the world (p.8),” she tells them that “Tonight, our author boldly dares to chuse,/ This glorious subject [freedom] for her humble muse;/ Tho’ tyrants check the genius which they fear,/ She dreads no check, nor persecution here;/ Where safe asylums every virtue guard,/ And every talent meets its just reward (p.8).” With such an announcement, the American captivity in Algiers turns out to be just a pretext for engaging discussion on the philosophical topic of freedom which is usually regarded as a male province.

Rowson breaks at least two male-imposed taboos in “daring” to interfere in the public sphere. One of them is the breach of the social convention that imposes silence on women in public places. Silence is a kind of social decorum that the honourable women of the time were supposed to wear to show their modesty. The second taboo is related to the transgression of the convention of gender cross-dressing in the theatre. Women characters are generally represented by disguised boys. In the performed play, Rowson appears in person in the prologue to announce the theme of the play and then assumes the role of Olivia in the drama proper before appearing again in person in the epilogue. The third taboo is her female “pretension” to her treatment of such weighty theme as freedom in a comic genre that generally deals with less serious topics. In regard to her breach of this last taboo, she informs the audience of the following: “Some say- the Comic muse, with watchful eye,/ Should catch the reigning vices as they fly,/ Our author boldly has revers’d that plan,/ The reigning virtues she has dar’d to scan,/ And tho’ a woman, plead the Rights of Man (pp.8-9).”

By invoking “the Rights of Man,” Rowson inscribes the philosophy of the play within the Enlightenment debate on the nature of freedom and the function of government, mostly
notably developed by John Locke in his *Treatise of Government* (1691) and Thomas Paine in *The Rights of Man* (1791). Both Locke and Paine defend the political view that if women have consented to exchange natural freedom for the political freedom of civil society, it is in order to protect their individual rights. Revolution or revolt is declared to be legitimate when a government violates this social contract. As already noted, these were principles appropriated by the major American constitutional documents such as the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution*. Rowson seems to have patterned her play on the former. Its prologue, like the preamble of the *Declaration of Independence*, exposes the reasons why the author has chosen to address the theme of freedom reminding the public of both the imprisonment of the Americans in Algiers and the universal character of their commitment to freedom. What is more, it emphasises the strength of American character or “virtuous heart” that no material condition of tyranny can bend deeply nourished as it is on the fertile ground of freedom sanctified by the American Revolution. A citizen of the new nation, Rowson affirms the “boldness” and “daring” of her character, two “manly” (in the sense of mankind) traits that the institutional climate of the freedom in America has permitted to flourish.

With the statement of commitment to freedom made on behalf of women in the prologue, Rowson makes another discourse move in the play proper which resembles the body of the *Declaration of Independence* in its portrayal of the “tyrannical” rule of Algiers. However, unlike the captivity narratives that flourished during her times, Rowson does not dwell on oriental tyranny in the public sphere. For this purpose, she has included in the published version of her play a map or frontispiece from the Mathew Carey’s *A Short Account of Algiers* (1794) which appeared in Philadelphia at the same time as her *Slaves in Algiers*. Carey’s account, as Peskin puts it, plunders British and other European oriental sources emphasising their worst aspects through omission or deletion of caveats and through exaggerated addition or insertion of details about the tyranny of the Algerian government,
customs and manners of the Algerian population. Rowson’s insertion of a frontispiece from the most popular account of Algiers at the time functions as some sort of a cross-reference and a supplement for her play dedicated to another aspect not fully covered by her contemporary, and which is related to woman subjection in the Dey’s harem. This established link with Carey’s account provides an explicit link between political and sexual oppression which in her play are embodied in the figure of the Dey as ruler of a tyrannical state and as monarch in a harem. In a way, by referring to women subjection in Algiers, Rowson brings back the embarrassing detail about women subjection that Carey has left out in his account of Algiers because of parallels that may be established between Algiers and America in terms of gender oppression.

**Liberal Feminist Metaphor**

Gender oppression in Algiers, and by extension, in America, Rowson tells us, robs women of the education and independence essential for active virtue and morals, i.e., strength of character. So we find in the first scene of the play, a concubine called Selima wondering why Fetnah is complaining about her condition of favourite in Dey Moloch’s harem wrongly thinking that happiness relates to material wealth and marriage with successful men. Selima is the only female character in the play not exposed to a Western source of education. Confined to the harem, she represents alienated women of the kind of Fatima in Rowson’s Mentoria.

By opposition, Fetnah is brought up by Rebecca Constant on the ideal of freedom. In metaphors that seem to come straight from Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, uttered with the same harsh tone, Fetnah chides Selima for her confusion of material well-being under the yoke of a tyrannical master with the ideal of freedom:

> Why do you talk of my being a favourite; is the poor bird that is confined in a cage (because a favourite with its enslaver) consoled for the loss of freedom. No! tho’ its prison is of golden wire, its food delicious, and it is overwhelm’d with caresses, its little heart still pants for liberty: gladly would it seek the fields of air, and ever perched upon a naked bough, exulting, carol forth its, nor once regret the splendid house of bondage (13).
The bird-in-the-cage metaphor is a classic metaphor in liberal feminist literature. Wollstonecraft employs it to castigate the frivolous lives of upper-class leisured women who in her words are “confined… in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themes (1789:146).”

By invoking the liberal feminist central metaphor of the “feathered race,” Rowson also invokes all the constellation of satellite metaphors and critical points that Wollstonecraft associates with it. So, for both Wollstonecraft and Rowson, the “feathered race” do not deserve respect because they have “resigned the natural rights which the exercise of reason might have procured them, and have chosen rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality (145).” Together with her British contemporary, Rowson shares the Enlightenment liberal feminist view of man and woman as divided between reason and senses with distinct and differently valued spheres of expression. The former gives access to the political kingdom of citizenship while the latter stands against it as an obstacle that confines women to a vegetative life. As can be expected from a play committed to the women cause, it is women with high critical faculties and not the “feathered race” that predominate in Rowson’s Slaves of Algiers. Like Wollstonecraft and other liberal feminists, Rowson links the development of critical faculties to education. In the second scene, in Ben Hassan’s house, we “discover” the American matron Rebecca reading from a book of poetry pausing to reflect on one of the stanzas on the immortality of the soul as follows: “Oh! blessed hope, I feel within myself, that spark of intellectual heavenly fire, that bids me soar above this mortal world, all its pains or pleasures (p.18).” The implication of this linkage is that men and women are intellectually the same in the sense that they share a divine spark or conscience which allows them to differentiate between good and evil. They are also ontologically similar. The soul is sexless, Rowson tells us through her heroine Rebecca. Against those male liberal thinkers, like Jean Jacques Rousseau who affirm, that
men and women think differently, Rowson argues that any epistemic difference exists between them; it is due to a gender gap in education.

It follows that Rowson’s feminist thought belongs in that liberal Enlightenment philosophical tradition that establishes a moral cause-effect relationship between cultural institutions and the development of human character (Hume David, 1963). Captivity narratives set in Algiers generally emphasise both the physical causes such as climate and geography and institutional factors for the formation of character. Rowson makes short shrift of climate and geography in her play by including a simple made, emphasising instead cultural institutions like the nature of government, religion, customs and manners as over-determining factors in the formation of moral character. Doing otherwise would have led her to a contradiction related to the existence of a natural character peculiar to women. In other words, the parallel that Rowson seeks to establish between the captive condition of women in Algiers whether these are American or not and that of women in America in spite of geographical distance, demand that cultural institutions like conjugal tyranny and religious idiosyncrasies be signalled. It is these and not physical factors which bend women towards either the affirmation of the self or freedom or to the development of slavish traits. Male defects such Ben Hassan’s greediness and the Dey’s tyrannical tendency and licentious life of the Dey are traced to their religion. The former is portrayed as having sold out his daughter (Fetnah) to the Dey for the love of money, and Dey Moloch is represented as a long-whiskered tyrant carrying a scimitar, a reference to Islam qualified as the religion of the sword in the West. Political terror and sexual terror have the same religious origin and they combine in the tyrannical person of the Dey in Rowson’s play.

Against what is considered as the religious tyranny of Judaism and Islam, Rowson sets Christian rationalism whose main tenet is that moral growth and the immortality of the soul depend on reason defined by Christian rationalists like Thomas Aquinas and Saint
Augustine as a power to distinguish between good and evil. Like her fellow liberal feminists, Rowson has made her own the portrayal of Christian rational women in grip with males who have taken hold of Muslim or Jewish “laws” to subjugate their women. Muslim and Jewish males are pitted against Christian rational women. While the former give up themselves to various passions (greed, sensuality, fits of violence, etc), women demonstrate a remarkable self-control and self-restrain. The dialogue between Rebecca and Ben Hassen in the first scene is illustrative of this point. For example, Ben Hassan tries to persuade Rebecca to marry him by arguing that Islam to which he has converted allows him to have several wives. For him, Rebecca belongs to a country which like Algiers cherishes “liberty in love”. So, logically she needs not feel any qualms since in marrying him she just avails herself of that Constitutional freedom. Contrary to Ben Hassen, Rebecca sets rational limits to the concept of the “liberty in love” which if pushed too far on the other side as in their case turns into its moral opposite: “Hold, Hassan; prostitute not the sacred word [liberty] by applying it to licentiousness, the sons and daughters of liberty, take justice, truth, and mercy for their leaders, when they list under her glorious banners (21).” It is in such refined rational distinctions as the one over the nature of freedom that distinguishes the female Christian characters from the male Muslim ones.

Islam and Christianity are distinguished on the basis of the rational principle. The former gives free reign to unlawful passions while the latter restraints them. Christianity preserves even males from behaving slaves towards their desires. At the end of the play, when Dey Muley charges his palace guard Mustapha to take the Constant family to torture thinking that they are responsible for the escape of his daughter Zoriana from the “haram,” Henry responds to him as follows:

Hold off – we know that we must die, and we are prepared to meet our fate, like men; impotent vain boaster, call us not slaves; - you are a slave indeed, to rude ungoverned passion; to pride, to avarice and lawless love; - exhaust your
cruelty in finding tortures for us, and we will smiling tell you, the blow that ends our lives, strikes off our chains, and sets our souls at liberty.

(p.64)

Henry throws back the term of “slave” that the Dey applies to the Christian captives by making a similar distinction as the one Rebecca makes between the “false” “objective” freedom of what is called in the play the “Moorish religion” and the “true” subjective freedom of Christianity that transcends material conditions of enslavement. If female native characters seek either to escape from Algiers and/or marry Western males, it is mainly because Christian countries and males are, institutionally speaking, more amenable to finer nuances of freedom than Muslim ones. Thus, the parallel that Rowson establishes between early national America and the Regency of Algiers reads as an oblique accusation of apostasy directed at male Americans at home who have forsaken rational Christianity for the enslaving passions of Islam in their dealing with American women.

All in all, then, Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* borrows its philosophy from a nascent liberal feminist tradition. For example, the affirmation that “woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man; [And that] nature made us [women] equal with [men], and gave us the power to render ourselves superior (p.16)” reminds us of similar declarations by Wollstonecraft in *The Vindications of the Rights of Woman*. To such liberal feminist affirmations can be added other ones like “virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority (p.17). This affirmation amounts to a denunciation of moral double standards for males and females in their judging of character, a denunciation often found in liberal feminist writings of the time. What makes for gender differences are not differences in nature but cultural differences arising from a deficient cultural system that deprives women of education and puts them under male tyranny at home and in the public sphere. The political implication of the grievances that Rowsons launches in the face of male-dominated American government through comparison with the government of Algiers is that American women are not ruled by
a government to which they have given their consent. Through this political implication, Rowson not only links her play to the *Declaration of Independence* but announces the *Declaration of Sentiments* that Elizabethan Cady Stanton, another American liberation feminist, issued in Seneca Falls some 50 years later in July 19-20, 1848, during the revolutionary turmoil in Europe. Certainly, Rowson’s encroachment into the male public sphere is timid, but it remains one of the stepping stones for the women’s movement in the nineteenth century.

The contemporary reader coming from what is called the “Orient” cannot stop at the above illustration of Rowson’s particular brand of liberal feminism without dwelling on the contemporary Islamism that it harbours. In imagining an “orientalised America” by looking at the enslaving condition of American women through Algerian eyes, Rowson also comfortably accommodates with the popular Orientalism of her time. Said compares Orientalism to the theatrical stage in offering confined tableaux vivants or visions of what is supposed to be the orient. Orientalism, Said also tells us, stands for a discursive tradition against which individual authors exercise and affirm their talents as authorities in the field of oriental studies. Rowson’s play complies with both definitions of Orientalism. It puts on the stage a gendered vision of Algiers as representative of the whole Orient against which she seeks to define America. Algiers is all that America should try not to resemble if it does not want to betray the ideals of human rights on which it is founded. It also plunders in the same manner as her contemporary popular Orientalists the Western sources of Orientalism. In the preface to *Slaves in Algiers* she tells us that “Some part of the play is taken from the Story of the Captive, related by Cervantes, in his inimitable Romance of Don Quixote, the rest is entirely the offspring of fancy (p.6).” This pronouncement on Rowson’s part admits that the Orientalist discourse of her play, just as Orientalism in general, makes a small case of the geographical and political referent or reality that is Algiers.
What counts for Rowson are the intertextual relations that her play weaves with Cervantes’ Story of North African Captivity narrative in *Don Quixote*. Zoriada’s conversion to Islam through a Christian woman slave retains in the home of Sheikh Murad, her father; the jewels and money that she passes through the lattice window to a Christian slave in an adjoining bagnio in order to buy his freedom; her ardent wish to escape from Algiers and live in the Christian land of “Leila Meriem” with a Christian husband, etc are some of the easily recognisable ingredients borrowed by Rowson from *Don Quixote* to concoct her Orientalist play. Even the name of her Algerian Princess Zoriada sounds the same as that of her Spanish orientalist precursor, Zoriana. However, these surface parallels are not as important as the ideological implications of the genre which has served as a narrative template for their recounting Christian captivity in North Africa. Cervantes’ epic novel is not all that dismissive towards the genre of chivalric medieval romance when it comes to the representation of the relation between Christian male captives and Moorish women. In his hand, it sublimates the real relation of power obtaining between the Muslim countries and the Christian ones by imagining the conversion or assimilation of female Muslims into Christianity. In doing so, Cervantes puts into literary practice that policy of containment that his country at the time was incapable of imposing on North African countries in reality. If Rowson has used Cervantes’ romance as a narrative model it is because it responds to the same need of containing the Algerian threat to the fledgling republic.

What is interesting to note in the theatrical adaptation that Rowson makes of Cervantes’s Spanish-Algerian romance is that both American males and females are involved in the process of converting Algerians either through conviction as is the case of women characters like Zoriana and Fetnah or through the use of power in the case of male characters like Dey Muley. Through the force of American arms, the latter is brought at the end of the play to admit his “fear [that] from following the steps of my ancestors, I have greatly erred:
teach me, then who so well know how to practice what is right, how to amend my faults (p.74).” In response to this request, Constant the head of the reunited American family, instructs him to keep: “Open your prison doors; give freedom to your people; sink the name of subject in the endearing epithet of fellow-citizen- then you will be loved and reverenced – then will you find, in promoting the happiness of others, you have secured your own (Ibid).”

Dey Muley acquiesces to the new American political order by saying: “Henceforward, then, I will reject all power but such as my united friends shall think me incapable of abusing. Hassan, you are free (Ibid).” In portraying such politically tamed male oriental figures, Rowson prefigures today’s barely veiled political domination over most of Arab States.

The last two rejoinders to Dey Muley’s asking his “generous conquerors (italics mine) what he can say [to them] allies Rowson’s popular orientalism with the “operational orientalism” that President George Whashington wanted to put into practice by the creation of what is called the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMNE). To Dey Muley’s question, Henry the future English son-law of the Constants answers in a tone strangely reminiscent of today’s Washington hawks in their advertising of warlike America as the protector of democracy and freedom against “oriental terror”:

Nothing, but let your future conduct prove how much you value freedom the welfare of your fellow-creatures- tomorrow, we shall leave your capital, and return to our native land, where liberty has established her court- where the warlike Eagle extends his glittering pinions in the sunshine of prosperity. (p.74)

Olivia, Henry’s future wife, closes the play with a patriotic prayer: “Long, long, may that prosperity continue- may Freedom spread her benign influence thro’ every nation, till the bright Eagle, united with the dove and olive-branch, waves high, the acknowledged standard of the world (p.75).”

In conclusion, Rowson’s liberal feminism loses its cosmopolitan character with the end-of-the play affirmation of the exceptional American national character. The critique of gender as a natural category and the critique of national character that she gives in the first
scenes through the Algerian-American parallels are superseded by a blatant adumbration of an American empire of freedom in the “Orient”. Feminist resistance to American patriarchy gives place to an American gender negotiation wherein the Orient as political and domestic tyranny is used as an absolute cross-gender oppositional figure for the definition of an American exceptionalism in men and women power relations. Rowson’s way of “covering Islam,” to use the title of one Said’s books about the aggressive attitude of the Western media towards this religion, makes her “liberal” feminism as dubious as those brands of today’s feminisms that look at Islam and the Orient with imperial eyes/I’s. More than one hundred years earlier than Natan Sharansky that Russian dissident turned Israeli politician published *The Case for Democracy, The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror* (2004) in the Orient, Rowson makes a similar case against Algiers, which in the play is represented, to use a title of a book about Sadam Hussein’s Iraq by Samir Al-Khalil (1990), as a “Republic of Fear.”
Conclusion

In this third and last part, I have realized that British femininity in the eighteenth century is the product of the world of letters that fashioned public opinion and separated the private from the public spheres. Relying on *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* as well as on anthologized conduct manuals and on literature about sexuality, I argued for three factors that deeply shaped and fashioned the discourse about gender and femininity in eighteenth-century Britain. One of these factors is the emergence of a nationalist discourse in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Britain had lived under the increasing influence of French culture since the Restoration in 1660. The Glorious Revolution in 1688 chased the Frenchified Stuart King James II from the throne, but this revolution in politics did not change the English culture that remained essentially of French inspiration in manners, in mode, and in thinking. Hence a cultural revolution to change the English mentality was put under way, this time as a result of the internal Jacobite threat and the menace of the wars against France. This largely explains the anxiety that *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* show in their attempt to fashion a new English man and a new English woman by pulling off their inherited French livery and affected manner and make them wear an English identity defined in opposition to the national enemy across the channel. In this context of war and construction of nationhood, I argued that *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* as part and parcel of the larger world of letters were involved in a cultural war that pitted the manliness of the English man and the good femininity of the English woman against the bad sort of effeminacy that characterized the French national character and the French woman.

The second factor is related to the influence of class rather emergent nationalism on gender representation. In this regard, my argument is that the Glorious Revolution is mostly the work of an emergent bourgeois class of merchants allied to a fraction of landed aristocracy. The emergence of this class speaks of a social mobility that created a class anxiety about the loss
of social hierarchy. To assuage this anxiety, the bourgeois world of letters resorted to the construction of a gender hierarchy often couched in the language of complementary feminine and masculine natures in order to smooth out its ideological contradictions with the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and equality. The feminization of bourgeois women was effected by a discriminating gender discourse that confined woman in the home by investing her with soft virtues.

The third and last factor is economic. British women in the eighteenth century, as I argued, are caught in a secondary system of exchange. The cash-sex nexus made British women the consumers of goods some of them imported from the empire and some of them manufactured in Britain in exchange for sex and the breeding of a race of empire builders. As eighteenth-century Britain developed culturally and expanded overseas often in opposition to other foreign nations, there arose an anxiety over the growing effeminate nature of its male population and the infertility of its women. The conduct manuals and the literature of sexuality were partly written to socialize the British men and women to their social roles to function appropriately in this cash-nexus economy of desire.

In this third part, I also argued that political Radicalism that had resulted from the French Revolution in 1789, more than ever before, expanded the bourgeois world of letters and enabled woman authors like Wollstonecraft to fully enter the public sphere of activities. The gist of my argument is that Wollstonecraft’s protest against gender inequality, unlike that of Mary Astell at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, was marked by radicalism in its adoption of the creed of the Enlightenment. Wollstonecraft’s professionalism as a cultural critic contrasts sharply with Astell’s amateurism. However, in her attempt to dismantle gender and national categories that stand as major impediments for the realization of the Enlightenment emancipation project, Wollstonecraft indulges herself in the deployment of an orientalist discourse. Following in her footsteps, Rowson re-tools the
same discursive strategy of orientalisation to defend her liberal feminist agenda. From reason as a means to improve civilization and the condition of women, we move to what Sarte calls the “imperialism of reason” and that Said later renamed the “imperialism of culture”, he means European culture. The orient became an imaginative space, a theatre in which British and American women staged their feminist concerns by deconstructing feminine and Western nationalist representations and reconstructing them along racial lines.
General Conclusion

It is by the first of these passions that we enter into the concerns; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost anything which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in a good measure as he is affected (p.21).

This quote about “sympathy” from Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* can be taken as a summary of his overall attitude to gender domination in his plays. In other words, I qualify his brand of liberal feminism as a feminism of sympathy because he did not remain an indifferent spectator to what was happening in the social, political, and cultural spheres of his time, nor did he turn a blind eye to women’s suffering as a result of the prevailing relations of gender domination. The substitution of the male for female actors and characters, i.e., female actors in male skins and disguise on the stage and cross-gender switching between characters in the plays themselves, indicate the extent to which Shakespeare wanted to put himself in a cross-gender or in-between space to register for us the suffering engendering by this system of domination.

In my argument I have shown that Shakespeare steers the middle course between what Norbet Elias in *The History of Manners* describes as the *homo clausus*, that highly gendered and mannered Renaissance or pre-modern individual capable of biological self-control engendered by the penetration of the court culture by the bourgeois culture of humanism, and the “carnivalesque” or grotesque body as portrayed in Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World*. It is in his ironical portrayal of these two bodies and the overturning of the authority of the first by the second that Shakespeare shows the shallowness of the gendered representation of publicness or publicity of the *homo clausus* i.e., the Renaissance man. Whether in tragedies or comedies, Shakespeare manipulates the form of his plays in such a way that female
characters in the manner of characters from popular festive appear to be subverting the bourgeois humanist values and manners that constrain them.

However, as I have also tried to suggest, in his challenge to the bourgeois humanist values absorbed by the aristocratic class that resulted in an increasing privatized body and body politic through the cultivation of values like chastity, shame, embarrassment and so on, Shakespeare creates what Germain Tillon, in *Le Harem et les cousins*, calls the republic of brothers and sisters through his celebration of the British empire and Europe as an endogamous cultural area. His subservience to empire and to western culture at the behest of James I, reduces the ambit of his feminist sympathy to women by reserving it only to European women or those who converted to his Christianity.

The transition from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment was accompanied by revolution in various fields, among which political science is arguably the most relevant to my topic of discussion. I have taken Hobbes and Locke as the two most important figures in the theorisation of political power and its exercise. They are also the ones who directly or indirectly theorized about the idea of private and public spaces and the place of police opinion in government. Whatever the differences that can be established between Locke and Hobbes, I have suggested that both contributed to the emergence of what Habermas the “public sphere in the political realm.” Locke and Hobbes, no matter their political allegiances, were also private people who decided to make their political opinions about public authority represented by the State and Court known in “the public sphere in the world of letters” and market of political culture. Indeed, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* were widely acclaimed at the time of their publication that
they became as highly saleable commodities in the civil society that Habermas defines as the “realm of commodity exchange and social labour. (2010:30)”

I have identified the literary dialogue about government, the nature of man, the idea of civil society and other such concepts as political contract into which Hobbes and Locke entered as the location of the political culture from which Astell wrote her work. It is their debate and the political and social ferment that the Glorious Revolution created that enabled Astell to write on behalf of women by deploying the same paradigms of thought or conceptual vocabulary as those of Hobbes and Locke. The philosophical rationalism and the new science about the political authority provided by these thinkers became means for attacking the exclusion of women from the public sphere of the new political Kingdom, the upshot of the Glorious Revolution.

What made Astell’s critique of the theorised maintenance of an absolutist patriarchal regime in the home or the “conjugal family’s internal space” (the words are Habermas’s) particularly sharp towards male holders of power in the post-revolutionary Whig regime was her Jacobite/Tory allegiance. As she negotiated her allegiances to the old regime and the rights of women, I have tried to show an Astell in the process of the denunciation of the political hypocrisy of the new Whig regime working at cross-purposes by democratising political power in the public sphere and maintaining arbitrary power in the home in the name of differentiation of the sexes on the basis of what was supposed to be a difference in nature between them. The liberal ideology in the name of which the Glorious Revolution was legitimated assigned reason to man and emotion to woman, and since the former was supposed to be of higher value than the latter, the conclusion is that woman had to live under the protection of her man.
I would argue that Astell’s feminism can be qualified as a defensive type of liberal feminism. It is defensive in the double sense that it deploys the same political, philosophical, and social arguments to defend woman’s right to the same emancipation as her male counterpart. Her liberal feminism is also defensive in the sense that it puts the new male holders of power on the defensive by shaming them to be truthful to their political principles through extension of democracy in the exercise of power to the home. Astell’s work, I tried to suggest in my analysis, reads as an accusation of usurpation of Kingly power by males over females in the protected royal domain of the conjugal family. Hence, the Glorious Revolution was just a male pretext for the hijacking of royal power, which instead of having one head, now had many heads. Hence, the suggestion that the state of British women was worse than it had been before the Glorious Revolution.

The third part of the thesis retraces the consolidation of the ideological construction of femininity in the course of the eighteenth century and Wollstonecraft’s and Rowson’s attempt to dismantle it at the century’s turn. In the first chapter of this part, I emphasized the role that *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* played in fashioning public opinion about gender relation at the beginning of the eighteenth century. My choice of the first and last decades of the eighteenth century for the discussion of British feminism is deliberate since it is in these decades that the main debate about gender relations took place as the result of the Glorious Revolution and the French and American Revolutions. So in the first chapter, I showed that in their waging of a cultural war against France and the Jacobites in the first decades, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* constructed national and gender boundaries through the development of an oppositional discourse between British women and British men on the one hand, and the French and the English on the other
hand in defence of an emerging bourgeois identity and nationalism. I argued that *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* are constitutive of that bourgeois public sphere which alongside coffee-houses laid the ideological ground for the construction of femininity continued in the course of the eighteenth century through the circulation of conduct manuals, anti-female satire and the literature about sexuality.

I suggested that with Wollstonecraft and Rowson, British feminism, which until then was more defensive, entered in its offensive phase because of the political radicalism that resulted from the influence of the French and American Revolution on British politics. Astell was not the sole author who employed against the language of political libertarianism to defend the rights of women. I can mention works by anonymous female authors as *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696) *Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735) “Sofia,” and “Woman not Inferior to Man (1739)” from *Beauty’s Triumph; or The Superiority of the Fair Sex Invincibly Proved* (1759) as cases in point. However, their feminism, like that of Astell, remains of the defensive type. It is Wollstonecraft who, under the impulse of British political radicalism, gave a new tone to British feminism by questioning the validity of the perpetuation of the contract set up after the Glorious Revolution.

Availing herself of the intellectual legacy of eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft decided to go on a feminist offensive against those political thinkers who, like Edmund Burke, wanted to maintain the status quo as it was elaborated in the political settlement following the Glorious Revolution. The expansion of the bourgeois public sphere in the world of letters and its division into camps as the result of the French revolution enabled Wollstonecraft to enter the debate on the side of those who defended the gospel of perfectibility and civilization progress. Male radicals like Godwin and Price were interested in the re-negotiation of the abiding
social and political contract to advance civilization on the principle that each generation knows what is best for itself. Wollstonecraft seized on this generation conflict or gap in the interpretation of British politics as a political occasion or opportunity to take the offensive on the side of the radicals for the expansion of the rights of men across gender lines. Wollstonecraft’s feminism is offensive not only in the sense of the use of radical offensive strategies, but also in the sense that it really offended the sensibilities of some of the audience of the time, like Horace Walpole and Hannah More who refused to read her books because of what is supposed to be their scandalous sexuality.

As I tried to suggest in the body of the thesis, Wollstonecraft’s deconstruction of eighteenth-century ideology of femininity shows in the counter-discourse of gender equality that she develops against discourse of gender hierarchy and complementary circulated by authors like Rousseau. In her hands, gender character is collapsed in the name of a shared androgynous humanity. Moreover, gender character like national character is taken as the cultural product of institutional or moral education. It is not fixed once for one all by nature as an essence, since it is subject to the law of cultural evolution propelled by improved institutional systems. However, as I argued Wollstonecraft’s offensive type feminism is not without its contradictions since it underwrites instead of rewriting the discourse of orientalism. In collapsing the gender and national boundaries that have abusively divided humanity into distinctive gender and national species in the European cultural area, Wollstonecraft redraws human boundaries or frontiers on a more global scale by consenting to the major prejudices of orientalist discourse.

Wollstonecraft’s orientalist tropes found their way to Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers, or a Struggle for Freedom*, a play written during the Algerian-American war in the
early years of American independence when America was involved in the constitutional struggle at home between the federalists and anti-federalists. Like Wollstonecraft, Rowson took the opportunity of the political radicalism that prevailed between the two emerging political parties with regard to the best strategies to liberate the American male “slaves” from Algerian captivity as an occasion to go on a discursive offensive for the emancipation of American/British women at home. The radical party politics played against the Algerian-American crisis expanded the bourgeois public sphere and enabled women like Rowson to stake the claim for the liberation of women. However, as I argued, Rowson’s offensive liberal feminism, even more than that of Rowson, assumes an orientalist hue because its claims are made from the location of the cross-Atlantic imperial culture of Orientalism.

In the final analysis, this thesis does not pretend to have exhausted the research on the origin and evolution of liberal feminism and its contradictions. I realize as I come to the end of it that I could have given space to the relations between Astell and Wollstonecraft to highlight the radicalisation of liberal feminism. I am fully aware that Astell’s works such *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1697) and *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, a work studied in this thesis might well have been the source from which Wollstonecraft have drawn her counter-discourse and major tropes, but as I stated it in the introduction I am more interested in the shift of paradigms of thought and discourse about the place of gender in the public sphere than the continuities of a literary feminist tradition in the eighteenth-century. The issue of eighteenth-century feminist tradition, like the controversy that Astell’s and Wollstonecraft’s arouse among male and female authors of their time are quite challenging, but I prefer to leave them for
other fellow researchers in the field of feminist scholarship. Hopefully, this thesis will serve them as a stepping stone.
Notes and references

General introduction


Chapter One


**Chapter Two**


Chapter Three


Chapter Four


Chapter Five


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**Chapter Seven**


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**Chapter Eight**


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**Chapter nine**


Hume David, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, London: Oxford University Press, 1963. Hume objects to the physical explanation of national character, arguing that “moral” causes such as “the nature of government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which the people live (203)” are more important.


**General conclusion**


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