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The eighteenth-century 'female philosopher' against gender models: Mary Hays and her fictional heroines

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the eighteenth century was an unsteady era in which contrasting ideas on a wide range of topics circulated in various forms. The search for knowledge promoted by the Enlightenment eventually led to juxtaposing its ideals of rationality, justice and generosity with the existing social order that appeared to contradict these principles. Thus, the necessity emerged to review the corrupt system through innovative modes of expression that were more suitable for the time.

In France, class friction eventually led to the Revolution, whose motto, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité", and events split the intellectual debate in Britain. While the Revolution appeared as a threat to conservatives, religious Dissenters and liberal thinkers welcomed its example as proof of the necessity to improve mankind and institutions. Among the various movements of social reform, including the abolition of slavery and prison reform, the feminist cause gained much prominence.

In fact, the outset of the feminist movement can be traced to those years. In the 1792 pamphlet *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) argued that since women's activities were essential in the education of male heirs and in the household, it was necessary to provide intellectual training for girls, too. Thus, women would not only defy their objectification as primarily creators of male progeny, but would also be granted an essential human right to become companions and not servants to their husbands. Even though conservative female writers also stated the need for the implementation of female education, Wollstonecraft's ideas were much debated because of her scandalous reputation.

Similarly, Wollstonecraft's disciple Mary Hays (1759-1843) had a bad reputation that endured long past her lifetime. Indeed, her modern biographer Gina Luria Walker confesses the difficulties she encountered in retrieving information on the lady writer. Not only was Walker dejected by the multitude of hostile commentaries she found on Hays, but she also deducted that Hays' female heirs, who inherited and edited her letters, probably "suppressed evidence [on the author's life and thoughts] perhaps from a reflexive impulse we might call" "female misogyny" (Walker, 2018b, pp. 126, 136).

The aversion towards Hays' writing signals the revolutionary impact of her works, which was still controversial until some decades ago. Hays wrote candidly about herself, her feelings, and her thoughts without filters and recorded their discrepancies due to the mutable nature of the self in the course of time. Walker claims that the female writer was an "unquiet spirit" who felt "angry, self-pitying, narcissistic, [and was] filled with resentment and yearning" (Ibid., p. 128). Indeed, Hays generated uneasiness in her readers in that she voiced the vexed part in herself, a secret and intimate part that people conventionally concealed for politeness and decorum. The fiery expression of her whole self regardless of social customs is what makes her work so emotionally powerful.

Hays' main interest was the formation of the rational female self, the 'female philosopher', which could feminise the intellectual discourse that was otherwise in the male domain. In her whole lifetime, she committed to learning at all ages and argued for the cause of female education. Indeed, through better intellectual training, women could understand their place in society as subordinated beings dependent on men and, subsequently, take action to achieve gender equality and independence.

Hays escaped the docile female model and its objectification. Even if at a young age she wished to marry, this prospect was precluded to her firstly by the premature death of her betrothed and secondly by her romantic rejection. In her papers, we can detect her complexity as a writer, educator, philosopher, rational Dissenter and sensitive woman. Even while she encouraged the guide of rationality, her works advocate for the right to feel. Indeed, she emphasised the necessity of the coexistence of the human rational and sensitive part. Moreover, her sincerity, suffering and writing skills allowed her to create extremely modern psychological depictions even before Freud's theory of psychoanalysis.

This dissertation explores Hays as a multifaceted individual and the similar characterisation of the heroines of her two novels *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). The two novels are analysed in their entirety to transmit the idea of the complexity of Hays' thought, who was concerned with numerous social topics. This work is divided into four chapters that explore the social and cultural context, Hays' biography, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice*.

As Hays was an author deeply involved in social critique, the first chapter is committed to the social and cultural context. It is arranged in four sections that explore the rise of the middle class, the reception of the French Revolution in Britain, the English Jacobin writers, and gender roles and women writers.

I investigate the emergence of the middle class as a self-aware entity with proper characteristics and mindset. While the family became the central unity of the nation, it also imposed gender roles that assigned sociability and rationality to men and domesticity and sensibility to women. However, sentimental fiction, which appeared in the 1770s, destabilised this dichotomy through the introduction of the type of the man of feeling. While the man of feeling acquired empathy and sensibility, women became equivocal as their traditional characterisation was applied to men now.

The middle rank benefited from a better education that improved the literacy levels among the population. This fact favoured the development of new printed texts, including novels that were read for entertainment. The formation of intellectual groups, which were primarily male, favoured the lively exchange of ideas. On the other hand, women were generally concerned with social problems and philanthropy.

In the 1790s, the British intellectual debate was split by the French Revolution, which offered the occasion to reflect upon the social order in Britain. While the revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality were generally welcomed by dissenting religious groups, conservatives condemned the Revolution in its entirety because it was feared that it would destabilise the British status quo. However, after the bloodshed of the Terror, British radicals felt a sense of failure and wondered how egalitarian and liberal principles could result in physical violence. On the other hand, the government accentuated political repression and censure.

Many British liberal intellectuals belonged to the group of Jacobin writers. They were influenced by the revolutionary ideals of the French Revolution and aimed to reform society into a more equal and just institution. They often transmitted their ideas through novels that granted a broader public reach. Indeed, their fictional works were designed to encourage an intellectual revelation through an empathic response and rational argumentation. As their message would not be welcomed by their contemporaries, they transmitted their hope to a general posterity.

In the last part of the first chapter, I introduce women writers. The increasing number of female authors was a natural consequence of the fact that women were central in fiction: in many cases, female protagonists recounted their stories and also functioned as narrators, as, for instance, in *Pamela* or *Clarissa*. Even if the socially accepted topics for women were limited because of the assumption about their cognitive inferiority and conduct impropriety, some writers explored subjects that were reserved for male investigation.

The second chapter illustrates Hays' biography to demonstrate how she became a 'female philosopher'. Even in her relationship with her beloved as a young girl, she showed an early interest in knowledge that she maintained after his death through her participation in religious debates and the reading of contemporary essays. Gradually, she got to know many academics and joined William Godwin's intellectual circle. Encouraged by the rationalist philosopher, Hays published her first novel based on her aching feeling of love rejection. She became an author who wrote diverse kinds of publications and contributed to social debates where she advocated for women's rights. Even though she was looked at as an annoying and pedant spinster, the criticism that dejected her, she was proud of herself. She embodied an alternative kind of femininity that diverged from the traditional gender roles and maintained her revolutionary attitude during her whole life. The chapter analyses her development through the stages of an enamoured girl, a dissenting learner, a novice writer, an English Jacobin author and revolutionary thinker, a biographer and 'female philosopher', and a children's author and educator.

The third and fourth chapters are devoted to Hays' novels: respectively *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). The protagonists Emma Courtney and Mary Raymond resemble the author in that they show their aversion to the pleasing and opportunistic attitude common in society.

The third chapter deals with *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* which is known for its emotional strength and the protagonist's pervasive subjectivity. Emma Courtney is an extremely sensible woman who, however, cannot control her emotions because of her incomplete education. She has an enterprising spirit and expresses her opinions but is ignored by her addressees. She rationalises every aspect of her life: from her love for

Augustus Harley to the romantic rejection and subsequent suffering that she is unable to overcome. She is enclosed in a "magic circle" designed for women by male dominance that does not envisage a vocation for women other than marriage. Since Emma's strong energies and emotions are wasted and not channelled into a useful activity, they destroy the protagonist's health, who laments her agony in her letters.

The formal aspects of the work and the interrelation between the author and the main character open the third chapter. Then, Emma's unregulated education is associated with the development of her personality. I analyse how women's confinement in the "magic circle" limits the protagonist's desires and aspirations. Then, in describing the rage, disappointment, and sadness conveyed by her letters, I examine the duplicity of Emma's self, which reveals itself to be split and contradictory. Her dismay and loneliness doom her to a harmful repetition of behaviour that may induce her to mental and physical destruction. However, I demonstrate how the expected individual path is fallacious too, because every family in the novel is dysfunctional. In the last section, I connect the first generation with the second, in which hope is laid for future social change in the organisation of society.

The fourth chapter introduces *The Victim of Prejudice*'s broad and committed social critique especially on the issue of prostitution. The words "victim" and "prejudice" make clear the social clash between two distinct groups: the poor and vulnerable and the wealthy and powerful. This dichotomy is maintained throughout the novel, which describes the struggle of Mary Raymond, the orphaned daughter of a prostitute, against intolerance and ostracism. Mary's illegitimate birth constitutes a discriminatory mark that will determine her fall into poverty and her sexual violation.

Following the analysis of the formal aspects of *The Victim of Prejudice*, I analyse the protagonist's Bildung to show how a confident and learned female self is formed in an ideal and protective environment. Then, I introduce the contrast between the protagonist's honesty and generosity with the aristocracy's concealment, opportunism and materialism. Mary's unconventional mindset and insistence on telling her story in the name of justice is contrasted to men's encouragement of silence. I proceed to describe how Mary's behaviour and social stance are punished through violation,

ostracism and imprisonment. Finally, I emphasise the protagonist's adherence to virtue and sincerity and proclamation of moral integrity.

CHAPTER 1
Social and cultural context

1.1. The emergence of the middle class, print culture, and the novel

The last decade of the eighteenth century in England saw an unprecedented vivid cultural debate about political, social, religious, philosophical and ideological topics and a series of changes in the constitution of society which clashed against traditional structures and beliefs. In addition, political history started to be seen as a conflict between the classes (Speck, 2016, p. 339). This tension would eventually be epitomised by the French Revolution and its subsequent violent and shocking developments, which complicated ideological positions in Britain.

These changes are the result of a process which started earlier in that century, which can be ascribed to two main events: the emergence of the middle class as a self-conscious category with its own ideology, culture and professional activity and the development of print culture. The middle-class members would gradually start to assert their own identity in contrast to the upper classes, whose behaviour was seen as corrupt and immoral, and to the lower classes, which were considered illiterate and base. The middle class specialised professionally and refined itself by degrees, paradoxically acquiring characteristics generally associated with the upper classes and providing a kind of education more and more similar to the aristocratic model. Eventually, middle-class education often included the Grand Tour, a coming-of-age trip to the continent for young men aiming at learning different cultures and languages.

The family became the central unit of society. Its cornerstone was ‘respectability’, which provided different models of behaviour according to social class and gender. The polite culture required refinement of taste, knowledge of current scientific discoveries and of ongoing political debates as well as a sentimental attitude, introduced by the sentimental novel. Gender models gave prominence to men, picturing them as the masters of their houses, who would earn money to support the family. At the same time, women were the ‘angels of the house’ who would take care of the housework and the children (Ibid, pp. 341-342), and please their husbands through their gracefulness and

refinement. The ideal wife was described by many conservative authors, including female ones. An example is Hannah More's 1809 novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, whose eponymous protagonist meets different women and finally chooses a gentle, clever, silent, modest woman. Reformist writers attacked this epitome of femininity because the ideal wife appears like an object with no possibility of decision and her silent attitude was not an indicator of her intellectual faculties. However, these models were hardly literally applied and reality was significantly different.

Generally confined to the domestic sphere, wives usually helped their husbands in their professions and thus got access to some professional knowledge and craftsmanship. Despite its low consideration, women's work was vital for the survival of the households and some of them, especially aristocratic women, made relevant contributions in different fields of knowledge, such as botany or medicine, and of culture and literature, where women achieved the most progress (Rogers, 2016, p. 49). Women did not have access to education in a structured way. However, some women were able to educate themselves by using books or forming friendships with men or middle-class female teachers. These women also participated in cultural, social and scientific discussions, offering different viewpoints. Even if it was uncommon, some women enjoyed an amount of money on their own. Some of them were even able to start a business on their own, obviously with the consent of their husbands, whom they had to obey despite the gradual shift towards a companionate model of marriage, in which the emotional aspect was preferred to the financial one (Ibid).

In this respect, widows and unmarried women enjoyed more freedom. Indeed, women lost some legal restrictions after the death of their husbands. In some cases, they could continue their professional activity, and they sometimes could receive the inheritance. On the contrary, unmarried women could shape their lives according to their wishes, usually looking for usefulness and deciding to keep their nubile status instead of a loveless convenience marriage (Ibid). However, society criticised them for choosing to remain unmarried, and called them "spinsters" with disdain.

Finally, at the bottom of the female social scale were fallen women who had been abandoned after being seduced and ruined. Since they could no longer restore their reputation and virtue, they were despised and rejected. While low-class women had

more job opportunities than middle-class women, for both finding a job was hard because women were commonly considered “eternal amateurs” (Speck, 2016, p. 346) at work due to the frequent absences caused by high childbirth rates, which also meant a lesser pay than that of men.

The rise of the middle class is closely linked to writing and the press. According to Gary Kelly, “literature became the cultural property and ideological weapon of the middle classes” (1993, p. vi). In fact, writing forms consciousness (in this case, class consciousness) while print favours the rapid circulation of ideas and promotes their internalisation, thus shaping a ground of shared beliefs among a group of people with common interests. In addition, the growth of urban centres and the distribution of local newspapers and periodicals encouraged the exchange of ideas and the creation of clubs and societies on a wide range of subjects. These groups were predominantly male, thus women rarely participated although sociability was viewed as a feminine trait (Keane, 2000, p. 53). There were women who formed intellectual and sometimes political groups, such as the Bluestockings, but more commonly they sought gratification in “useful” activities and thus generally occupied themselves in philanthropic and religious associations, which aimed at helping fragile people, and were a signal of the growing social concern for the less fortunate.

Better middle-class education led to remarkable literacy improvement and a subsequent broadening of the reading public, which influenced the literary market according to “the demands of popular taste and current fashion” (Feather, 2016, p. 297). As a consequence, various types of materials were produced that required different levels of mental effort. Public libraries and periodicals also made the written word more accessible to everyone. Furthermore, books became popular as decorative items in the homes of the growing middle class, who wanted to showcase their education.

Although fiction was not the best-selling genre, the increasing presence of the novel in the editorial market in the years 1750-1820 played a significant role in forming the new class consciousness. Kelly emphasises the role of Samuel Richardson’s works and their enduring success as “the expression and promoter of a popular—here, middle-class—culture, ethos and will” (2016, p. 507). Richardson wrote domestic fiction in the epistolary form, and his female protagonists, who were the narrators of the stories,

represented the typical struggling virtuous woman in a corrupt world. During the eighteenth century, Richardson and the classical authors of British fiction such as Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett were widely read both in private and public contexts and praised for providing high moral models. Nevertheless, there was also interest in contemporary authors and works. The book market flourished with new literary products, especially in the late eighteenth century: memoirs, fictional autobiographies, oriental tales, epistolary novels, sentimental narratives, supernatural romances and many translated works, primarily from France, were very popular. These new works were mostly created for entertainment purposes, in contrast to the educational focus of earlier authors. Some people expressed concern that these newer works might have a negative influence on women and lead to immoral behaviour.

Meanwhile, both reviews and histories about prose fiction asserted the growing importance of the novel. 1749, the first magazine specialised in reviews, Ralph Griffith's *Monthly Review*, started and was followed by other periodicals, such as Joseph Johnson's *Analytical Review* (1783) and John Gifford's *Anti-Jacobin Review* (1798). Reviews provided more information about literary works than titles and frontispieces. Therefore, they functioned as guides to readers to a more variegated and more complex literary panorama. Many novels were criticised and ultimately dismissed because they were thought to be directed at an idle entertainment-seeking public, distinguished from the erudite readership. Nevertheless, this fact only confirms the novel's growing cultural presence and its appeal to a wider public.

Furthermore, histories about prose fiction were a later phenomenon but not less important. Their first example is *The British Novelists* (1810) by the prominent female intellectual Anna Laetitia Barbauld who collected twenty-eight novels by British authors and also included female writers. In contrast to nobler prose works which were clearly less read, Barbauld emphasised the ubiquity of the novel despite its frequent condemnations and expressed herself favourably for the new genre as a "benign, unsystematic form of cultural cohesion" (Keane, 2000, p. 159). Barbauld concluded that "modern-novel reading produce[d] the meritorious bourgeois subject for both everyday life and national leadership" (Kelly, 2016, p. 507), providing, apart from entertainment and education, models of behaviour. In novels, readers would find an authentication of their own experience, validating their material needs and desires (Ibid, p. 519), thus

creating a cohesive community. As a result, society mirrored the novel and, in turn, the novel mirrored society, witnessing its history and bearing its changes. Towards the end of the century, novels became a significant signal of a changing society. They carried an increasing amount of anxiety about female subjectivity due to their growing cultural presence (Benedict, 2016, pp. 356-357).

1.2. The French Revolution and its ideological reception in Britain

The French Revolution exacerbated Britain's political and cultural debate, creating two distinct positions towards it and its meanings. The issues it aroused were related to the reception of authors of the French Enlightenment, such as Rousseau and Helvétius, and how they understood French and British nationalities. British thinkers tended to isolate the Revolution "as an essentially French phenomenon", thus distancing it from the British situation in order to invalidate the universal avowals claimed by the French (Deane, 1988, p. 1).

Generally, religious Dissenters and cultural revolutionaries welcomed the French Revolution, viewing it as a step forward to the correct application of justice and an equal society. This position was expressed by the dissenting leader Richard Price, in his *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), in which he urged British people to recall the ideals of political and religious freedom of the Glorious Revolution (1688), stressing the need to resist tyranny (Kelly, 1993, p. 14). He exalted the French National Assembly's *Declaration of the Rights of Men and of the Citizen* as an exemplary cry for freedom and he used it to support his discourse.

While many intellectuals shared Paine's enthusiastic position, others were worried about the violence and turmoil the Revolution caused. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was a crucial pamphlet expressing conservative concerns about the meaning of the Revolution. It strongly influenced public opinion for a decade. Burke defended the ancient regime, the traditional family, and their values, which were endangered by French philosophers and the revolutionary mob. According to Burke, the radical philosophers were anti-social and contentious people whose purpose was to throw the state into chaos and whose ideas had originated the

Revolution. He accused French rational thinkers such as Voltaire and Helvétius of developing systems and theories detached from reality and generated by the "sin of pride, the belief that the world and human existence [were] amenable to the force of reason" (Deane, 1988, p. 9). Those philosophers believed their systems were objectively true and asked society to conform. Therefore, Burke concluded that those philosophers acted against religion and against civil order.

Nevertheless, Burke also considered the modish and extravagant emotional subjectivity introduced by Rousseau to be a threat. In indulging in his solitude and individual experience, Burke continued, Rousseau "created a new theory of sentiment, or, more accurately, found a novel way of corrupting normal human feeling" (Ibid, p. 8), that took mankind out of its social context and directed it exclusively towards the self, flattered by vanity. Fostering unsocial independence, Rousseau opposed upper culture and lower culture.

Indeed, both extreme rationalism and extreme emotionality were dangerous for the equilibrium of the ancient regime, which contained the seeds of its own decline at that point. Burke refers to the revolutionary mob as a group composed of people who did not deserve to be part of society inasmuch as they did not observe the sacredness of the family. In an elaborate style rich in cultural references, opposite to the straightforward tone of reformers, Burke condemned the outrageous and criminal intrusion of the revolutionaries into the intimate chambers of the French royal family, focusing on the suffering of Marie Antoinette and her struggle to maintain her virtue unspoilt (Ibid, pp. 6-7). He emphasised the queen's position because women were central to the conservative ideology of domesticity, which was at the basis of a nation. Thus, Burke defended the chivalric values, with both feminine and masculine connotations, which justified the prominence of aristocracy through history (Kelly, 1993, p. 16). As Claudia Johnson asserts, not only did Burke condemn the Revolution, but he was ultimately denouncing a crisis of sentimentality and of gender: he lamented the degradation of male manners and the disappearing male inclination to be sensitive towards female suffering in depicting a tearful scene that would fit a sentimental novel (Johnson, 1995, p. 3). Yet his idea of chivalrous "natural feelings" revealed itself outdated because French men did not behave as expected and did not conform to his concept of how men should feel.

Unsurprisingly, Burke's *Reflections* provoked many responses in pamphlets and articles by many intellectuals who adhered either to the conservative side or to the revolutionary one. Burke's allies condemned the Revolution as illegitimate and scandalous, asserting the sacredness of the political order. At the same time, his adversaries expressed their hopes that the Revolution would enact a change towards a more virtuous, enlightened, just and free society. Nevertheless, Burke's celebration of Marie Antoinette was criticised by both conservatives and revolutionaries because it seemed exaggerated, over-servile and embarrassing. In November, a woman published the most remarkable response to Burke: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. An early advocate for women's rights influenced by Dissenter intellectuals and French culture, Wollstonecraft attacked the whole political system Burke had defended. She accused him of being too susceptible to the superficial and seductive court culture that caused him to prioritise emotion over logic and clouded his judgement (Kelly, 1993, p. 17). She emphasised the importance of reason, practised it in her response, and envisioned that the Revolution would lead to universal freedom.

The Revolution took a violent turn in 1792 with Robespierre's Reign of Terror. This event was seen as the failure of the Revolution, and many people changed further their ideological position, distancing themselves from it. Those who still supported the Revolution and believed in its ideals took a more pessimistic tone and started to question the causes of this violent collapse and what modifications could be made to accomplish success through more peaceful means, also considering their potential benefits and drawbacks. On the contrary, those who endorsed a completely conservative position simply provided reasons for the maintenance of the ancient regime, failing to see its contradictions, and proving their point of view limited in contrast to the more complex and overarching revolutionary analysis (Deane, 1988, p. 3). Politically, Britain's constitution remained unchanged, but political repression and censure were increased to prevent a similar outcome in Britain. Being the French Revolution the result of a degrading process, Burke described a similar decaying process in his nation, which began with religious non-conformity and Jacobin writers, who were influenced by French philosophers and who wanted to enact changes in the structure of society (Ibid, pp. 13-14).

1.3. The English Jacobin writers

The labelling of the group as "Jacobin" connects itself to a reformist and revolutionary French background that is related to issues of atheism and republicanism. Used by counter-revolutionaries, this definition oversimplifies the views of British radical thinkers of the 1790s, "but speaks to the difficulty of maintaining any position critical of the status quo in the febrile atmosphere of literary culture after 1792" (Mee, 2015, p. 201). More precisely, "Jacobin" referred to three groups of people: firstly, to French republicans who gathered in the Parisian convent of St. James; secondly, to British people who sympathised with the French revolutionary agenda; and thirdly, to a group of British intellectuals whose aim was to reform British society (Lynch, 2016, p. 442). They are the topic of this chapter.

Active in the early years of the 1790s, the English Jacobins were not a structured organisation, even though many of them knew each other because of their frequent religious dissenting background and their participation in intellectual circles, in particular around the publisher Joseph Johnson. Gary Kelly quotes Carl B. Cone when he suggests that Jacobinism was "a state of mind, a cluster of indignant sensibilities, a faith in reason, a vision of the future" (1976, p. 2). The Jacobins had a variety of viewpoints, aims and methods that were so contrasting that they stood out. Prominent figures were the radical political thinker William Godwin, his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, her disciple Mary Hays, the dramatist Thomas Holcroft, the novelists Robert Bage, Elizabeth Inchbald, Eliza Fenwick and Mary Robinson. These authors observed the world with a critical gaze and wrote novels trying to "provide readers with thrillingly absorptive experiences", often through the first-person narrator, thus encouraging character identification (Lynch, 2016, p. 441). They explicitly denounced injustice and tyranny and wished their works would enact a transformation through reason and discussion in their readers' minds. They hoped that this individual gain of consciousness would lead to future changes in society. Even though Jacobin writers expressed themselves extensively in other genres (such as political and theoretical essays and pamphlets), the novel was popular with them because it could reach a large audience from all social classes. In these years, the novel had not yet solidified itself into a definitive formal structure, and, as a consequence, there was room for experimentation and much variability in the fictional forms, producing interesting though not exceptional

works, which, as a consequence, were not included in the British literary canon (Kelly, 1976, p. 1). Jacobin writers composed their novels according to the principle of artistic unity, seeking to produce a perfect harmonic whole and trying to convey the impression of reproducing reality.

Since the primal purpose was changing society, the Jacobin novel was imbued with philosophy to support its own arguments. Influenced by the events in France and by French and British philosophers, some of whom Burke had condemned, Jacobin writers had extreme confidence in the powers of the mind over external physical reality. They believed that society should be ruled by reason and enlightened principles granting justice and rewards for virtue. Through the exercise of reason and discussion with other enlightened philosophers, Jacobin writers believed in the perfectibility of the human mind. Accordingly, their fictional main characters act as philosophers, delivering their ideas and their feelings to the readers and promoting, as Thomas Holcroft wrote in his novel *Anna St. Ives*, "the progress of knowledge, the destruction of error and the spreading of universal truth" (Lynch, 2016, p. 446). In fact, free exploration of every field of inquiry was supported, and censorship was abhorred.

Moreover, the novel's main focus on the subject aligned with Jacobins' emphasis on personal identity and its formation. Their interest in analysing human emotions and passions would lead to an actual philosophy of man. In fact, the emphasis on characters rather than on the plot revealed itself as the focal point of Jacobin novels, which turned out to be generally predictable (Kelly, 1976, p. 16). Fictional characters were shaped by their circumstances, as maintained in Godwin's doctrine of necessity, with education being a key factor in the development of their individuality. Furthermore, novels and reading have a remarkable educational potential in affecting people's "manners, sentiments and passions", as Thomas Holcroft asserted, thus novels should be esteemed as "a very essential branch of literature" (Forster, 2016, p. 386). The Jacobins' attempted psychological realism owed a debt to the previous literary tradition, especially to Richardson, Rousseau and the epistolary novel (which had privileged access to the inner self), while introducing a different intent: that of creating "real" characters, endowed with complex emotions, and not ideal models of virtue, as Clarissa or Sir Charles Grandison were (Kelly, 1976, pp. 17-18). However, moral distinctions in

Jacobin novels tended to be sharply defined; thus they ran the risk of recreating an allegoric subtext.

The fictional Jacobin protagonists found themselves in a conflict between their own beliefs and society's norms, which did not share their values, and had to navigate this clash. The most popular Jacobin novel, Godwin's *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, published in 1794, exemplifies the typical political and social critique of these years, explicitly and categorically rejecting "Burke's belief in the benevolence and goodness of the country squire" (Ty, 1993, p. 11). The low-born eponymous hero of the story was forced to lead an erratic and precarious life following the discovery of the murder committed by his wealthy employer Ferdinando Falkland. In fact, Falkland was abusing his power to persecute Caleb, fearing that Caleb might reveal his secret, thus staining his falsely candid reputation. Godwin expressed Caleb's disappointment in his search for help from those in power and understanding from common people (Mee, 2015, p. 206). This revealed the flaws and dishonesty within the political system, which showed favouritism towards the most affluent classes and hinted at a lack of kindness within society itself. At the end of the novel, Caleb remains an outcast and a victim.

Jacobins saw the establishment of late eighteenth-century institutions as the result of the historical predominance of wealth and power, built upon error and prejudice and not on virtue and sincerity (Kelly, 1976, p. 7). Honest sincerity and truth were core Jacobin values that were juxtaposed with secrecy regarded as suspicious and venomous. In his 1793 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, Godwin underlined the necessity of being sincere towards oneself and others, eventually leading to the cancellation of social distinctions. If organised, the inherent benevolence of men would become the new basis for a righteous society, governed by enlightened philosophers according to principles of reason and knowledge (Deane, 1988, pp. 73, 75).

Accordingly, Jacobin writers saw themselves as philosophers whose work was the starting point for the reformation of human society. However, recognising the unlikelihood of a forthcoming change, they addressed their ideas for the future, to somebody who would undertake the reforming process. In fact, Caleb addresses his

story to ‘a posterity’ that, having internalised the necessity for a renovation, might do him justice, and Hays’ Emma Courtney addresses her memoirs to her adopted son Augustus (Lynch, 2016, p. 455). Moreover, Jacobin writers predominantly worked upon their theories in their private informal associations and consequently, except for some reactionary positions endorsed by woman intellectuals, never demonstrated an urgent interest in changing the order of the “things as they are” (Kelly, 1976, p. 5).

However, later writers did not embrace the Jacobin message and the following generation was Anti-Jacobin, which implied the acceptance of the traditional order. They castigated Jacobin writers for trying to instil political positions through fiction, poisoning novels with abstruse philosophy, and ridiculed the “new philosopher” figure, at times even sharply, showing the discrepancies between theory and reality.

1.4. Gender models and women writers

The eighteenth-century cultural revolution brought women to a controversial centrality in the intellectual debate that was particularly rich in feminine topics, ranging from education to female roles and marriage, from sexuality to conduct and manners (Ty, 1993, p. 14). From the first specimens in prose fiction, novels abounded with female main characters who told their own story and expressed their hopes and fears, voicing their own distresses and misfortunes, and many examples can be found in the literary production of the major authors Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. These fictional women revealed an astounding psychological complexity through strictly personal written forms such as memoirs or letters (Ty, 1993, pp. xiii-xiv). They disclosed their intimate thoughts and their own “sexual vulnerability” but never questioned their submission to men (Ibid.). Clearly, these early “femiocentric novels”, as Nancy Miller calls them, pointed at maintaining the social order while committing to educate both men and women and aiming at reforming vice for a better society, especially in the case of Richardson’s works (Ibid, p. xiii).

As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, eighteenth-century women were subordinate to male figures: married women to their husbands and unmarried women to their fathers. Their confinement to the domestic sphere went along with the repression

of the passions and the preservation of chastity, which had a paramount role in the social order. Indeed, the female capacity of sexual reproduction was the only means of transferring property from one family to another. In the past, that creative function was considered an irrational kind of work, a low labour, involving the working of passions, a chaotic force which had to be controlled (Keane, 2000, p. 109). As a consequence, women were thought to have inferior reasoning capacity than men, and they were excluded from intellectual, professional, public and political life, which, on the contrary, required the stability that only reason could grant. In fact, women were believed to have a strong tendency towards emotions and romance, causing them to dwell on their feelings and become disconnected from reality (Benedict, 2016, p. 363). This was allegedly exacerbated by the free time women spent in reading novels, fostering their sensibility and supposedly neglecting their domestic duties. Nevertheless, while conservative thinkers condemned novel reading, others asserted the importance of the genre as one of the few sources of education available for girls.

Sentimental literature, which focused on the sensitive side of humanity, was a popular genre between the 1770s and 1780s. It was a direct consequence of the optimistic philosophy of the innate benevolence of mankind. It was so influential as to create a real "culture of sensibility", as G. J. Barker-Benfield calls it, which enacted changes in male and female models through the introduction of the types of the man of feeling and the woman of feeling. The man of feeling was interested in the heartbreaking stories of other people, to which he responded with tears, displaying sensibility and gentleness of character. Moving stories were widely read, and the characteristics of the man of feeling who spoke his heart out, behaved according to it and expressed his sensibility through physical responses became essential features for the model of a proper gentleman.

However, this display of sensibility revealed itself to be rather hollow because the man of feeling was not personally involved in the unhappy narratives he listened to. He did not try to enact a change in the distressed situations he got acquainted with, but instead merely focused on himself and on his reaction to the stories in a passive way. He was proud of his sensibility and believed himself superior to unfeeling people. Ultimately, his self-absorption detached him from the world, revealing excessive focus on feeling inadequate. Johnson hints at Wollstonecraft in suggesting that while

displaying concern for less fortunate people, men of feelings remained "conservative types, country gentlemen who resisted needed change, who had an aversion to newfangled social ideas, and who exemplified the gallant ways of Old England" (Johnson, 1995, p. 8). Even Burke proved to be like that in defending past chivalric values by describing Marie Antoinette's suffering and refusing to accept the changes the passing of time brings. At least, some social problems became visible to all social classes for the first time, even though the possibility of a structural change was most improbable. Those who criticised sentimentality were in turn condemned for being insensitive and applying reason too systematically.

The sentimental approach was combined with a general willingness to refine manners through conversation and bonding between men and women, who started to share artistic and sentimental feelings, knowledge, and physical goods (Ibid, p. 13). Such an approach did not eliminate gender differences, but instead added more inconsistencies to the status of women. In fact, "only men [had] legitimate access to the discourse of the heart, and of course only certain men at that": the reformed male sensibility included attributes which were traditionally connected to the feminine self, leaving female identity either "equivocal" or accentuated (Ibid., pp. 12, 14). Therefore, the woman of feeling was either a virtuous ideal model of kindness and restraint or a pitiable figure, falling prey to her own sensibilities. Women expressing their own feelings were considered inopportune and scandalous and were reproached for being unnatural.

The flourishing print culture encouraged women to participate in the public discourse through reading and writing while remaining in their domestic sphere (Kelly, 1993, p. 9). Although the figure of the female writer began to gain authority and respectability thanks to successful writing female protagonists, such as Pamela, many enduring obstacles still hindered women's possibility of expressing themselves in print culture. The biggest problem was the gendering of the written discourse, which impeded women from engaging in certain genres such as scientific or political treatises and severe "male" topics but instead encouraged them to contribute to lighter genres such as novels or poetry, dealing mainly with female education and female areas of expertise. At first women writers discussed sensibility and humanitarianism, and then, after the beginning of the Revolution, they started to denounce court culture and debased

aristocratic women (Kelly, 1993, p. 22). Moreover, being the printing industry male-dominated, women had to know the right acquaintances to be published.

At any rate, women were reprimanded because their entrance into the public sphere through printing was considered not appropriate for them, and were believed to be lacking the necessary rhetorical training due to their traditional association with narrativity and orality (Ibid, p. 10). Even though women surely did not enjoy the rigorous education men had, they still could write grammatically and sensibly, because they practised writing in informal and private contexts. They were used to adopt a personal and authentic voice quite that was quite in accord with sentimental culture. However, many women expressed themselves in topics typically reserved for men and, in order to escape censure, had to explore new indirect ways of talking about "masculine subjects", while apparently adhering to female issues and genres. Some female writers published anonymously or under a pen name to avoid direct attacks, as Mary Hays did the first time she responded to a written intellectual debate about public religious practices and on other occasions when she endorsed radical positions. The rising number of critiques against women writers revealed an urge to defend the traditional order, which recognised the increasing presence of women in the intellectual debate as a potential danger.

In 1792, Wollstonecraft's influential early feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* was published. Wollstonecraft attacked gender hierarchies in claiming that women's inferiority was unjustly caused by outmoded assumptions about female reasoning capacity and the absence of proper education. In fact, if ever present, female education aimed at shaping an obedient and polished female subject through the practice of arts and music in order to be agreeable to the future husband. Wollstonecraft, instead, believed that women should receive the same education as men, which included studying subjects like history and science. She also emphasised the importance of developing rational thinking skills to help women to better manage their emotions. Thus, women would acquire the means to render themselves useful and independent. In addition, complete education for girls would allow men to find in wives equal intellectual companions, able to engage themselves in interesting conversations about philosophical or political matters. The capacity for discussion should also promote women's participation in social debates.

Moreover, Wollstonecraft advocated not only for intellectual gender equality but also for sexual equality, and her position was enforced by her own eccentric affair with the American entrepreneur Gilbert Imlay, by whom she had a daughter outside wedlock, and her adulterous love interest for the painter Henri Fuseli. Wollstonecraft was strongly attacked for her ahead-of-her-time position and even her biography written by her husband William Godwin, who wanted to rehabilitate her in social opinion, ended up portraying her in an ambiguous way, as a sort of "female mutation of a *male* hero", making her persona even more controversial (Johnson, 995, p. 12).

Conservative critics were strict and sometimes brutal in condemning women writers who explicitly trespassed the confines of the feminine sphere, as Wollstonecraft had done. Among them, Richard Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females, a Poem* (1798) provided a remarkable criticism of radical female thinkers because of its brutality and satirical precision in quotations, notes, and descriptions. In his poem, Polwhele condemned several female writers and intellectuals who acted in contrast to their nature and were scandalous to society. He labelled them "unsexed" not because of their aspiration to become men, as Lady Macbeth desired, but because of their explicit and licentious sexuality (Ibid, p. 9). Indeed, Polwhele recognised in Wollstonecraft the most dangerous of revolutionary women and accused of sexual perversion even her introduction of new subjects, such as botany, in female education. Wollstonecraft refused to conform to the delicate and amiable virtuous model of femininity, embodied perfectly by the conservative moralist Hannah More, who, in fact, was praised by Polwhele, along with Ann Radcliffe and Fanny Burney. Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley and other revolutionary female thinkers represented unacceptable models of femininity reputed detrimental to society.

Wollstonecraft influenced many intellectuals, despite being highly condemned for her revolutionary positions. However, the need to reform female education was widely felt even on the counter-revolutionary side. Representing Wollstonecraft's opposite female model, the conservative author Hannah More believed that women, especially mothers, were central in the nation because domestic education was fundamental to "the ideological and cultural reproduction that is the basis of the state" and that would have a considerable role in healing corruption in local aristocracy (Kelly, 1993, p. 29).

Moreover, a proper education and religious doctrine should prevent excesses of sentimentality caused by novels. Thus, the female mind should be formed through logic, philosophy, and the sciences: Wollstonecraft arrived at the same conclusion (Keane, 2000, pp. 146-147). However, while Wollstonecraft wished for social change and female empowerment, More's interest in education was functional at maintaining the status quo through the internalisation of religious and moral principles that would dispel vice and corruption. Accordingly, More participated in female literary circles and engaged in humanitarian activities, including the establishment of Sunday schools for poor girls from the lower classes.

In conclusion, there were multiple opinions on female subjectivity. Most revolutionary thinkers resisted the feminine model imposed by tradition and attempted to define themselves in their own ways, looking for a more authentic subjectivity originating from female discourse. As Ty argues, historically both sexes acquired different characteristics through a process of cultural "engenderment" based on traditional beliefs, social structures and physical differences, defined by men (1993, p. xiv). In conforming to the ideal model and male language, women became objects without personality and, according to Wollstonecraft, became miserable and imprisoned through marriage or motherhood (Keane, 2000, pp. 121-122). As outcasts rejecting the patriarchal order, women writers provided alternative perspectives on female subjectivity, struggling to find an appropriate form and voice. Indeed, the wide range of female attitudes emerging in those years demonstrates a general uneasiness with the traditional model of society and with gender roles which create a troubled kind of female subjectivity, which expressed itself at times more meekly, mainly in counter-revolutionaries' works, and at times disclosing the disruptive potential of female sensibility, as in the case of revolutionary thinkers and, for example, of Mary Hays' novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*.

CHAPTER 2
Mary Hays's biography and works

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, women writers produced a vast amount of literary works of different genres. The most audacious experiments were devised by radical writers, who, nowadays, are generally considered minor authors. Lesser known than Mary Wollstonecraft, but pushing forward her embryonic feminism, Mary Hays produced one of the clearest, most assertive and rational analyses of the female condition of the end of the century. Her strength derived from her personal experience and her independent cultural studies.

2.1. "A little romantic girl"

Mary Hays was born on 4th May 1759 in a large middle-class family in Southwark, London. She was the third child of the seven children that John Hays and Elizabeth Judge Hays had. The dissenting faith of her family encouraged Mary Hays and her siblings to develop the capacity to think autonomously and not to accept dogmas, generally abided rules, or social conventions in a passive way. Unfortunately, her father died at the age of 40 in the 1770s, leaving his wife as the head of the house. In his will, John Hays granted his daughter Mary an annuity of £70 in case of marriage.

In the same years, Mary Hays probably met John Eccles at the Baptist Church in their neighbourhood, and they fell in love with each other. Born in 1755, Eccles had a similar background to Hays', but he was in a condition of economic dependence. He confided to her in his letter of 18th October 1779 that he was unsure of which profession to undertake. However, he was determined not to work with his father because of their contrasting attitudes: his father was humble and shy whereas John Eccles was ambitious (Eccles, 1779 in Whelan). Since Eccles was considered a bad match, their families did not approve of their union and forbade the young couple from meeting.

However, animated by sincere love, they started to correspond secretly through the help of Hays' sister Elizabeth, nicknamed "Betsy". In their letters, Hays and Eccles gave voice to their unhappiness and lamented the fate that had separated them. They wrote to each other in an "unreserved manner", transferring their thoughts directly on paper with freedom (Walker, 2006, p. 50). Since they valued sincerity and love above all, they kept no secrets to each other. They felt equal and believed their relationship was unique. Hays invited Eccles to regard her not only as a lover, but also as a friend, a sister, and a confidant, and she asked him to become her "guardian and adviser – as a tender friend, and [she will] regard [him] with a sisterly affection" (Hays, 1779 in Whelan).

Hays was genuinely curious and keen on learning. Thus, she entreated her beloved to suggest her readings and give her lessons in philosophy. For example, Eccles gave Hays Dr. Watt's *Lyrick Poems* and the sentimental novel *The Fatal Friendship* by a Lady, of which they shared their impressions. In their letters, there are many references to numerous literary works: James Thomson's *The Seasons*, Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*, Matthew Prior's *Henry and Emma*, Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, among others. Both Hays and Eccles admired the type of man of feeling, whose sensibility enabled him to have a deep appreciation of the beauty of the world. However, it also enhanced his sorrows. They often identified Eccles as a man of feeling.

Apart from occasional trivial conversations, they discussed worldly and practical issues raised from their everyday experience. Those topics included the difference between the sexes, the pursuit of knowledge, behaviour, decorum, and marriage. However, they also dealt with abstract and metaphysical themes such as religion and providence, the nature of love and of happiness, the gender and the immortality of the soul. Hays' ambivalence about society emerged from her pervasive concern about conduct and honour. On the one hand, she accused society of superficiality and insensitivity. She stated the need to escape from it and find shelter in virtue, honesty and love. Indeed, Hays and Eccles juxtaposed their sincere attachment to the empty, flattering and vain manners of the social world. On the other hand, Hays hinted at the need to conform to the rules of the community, even while disallowing them.

Through paper the couple arranged secret meetings, remarkably in the country estate Lark Hall. Moreover, since both lived in Gainsford Street, Hays and Eccles could see their beloved's room through the windows of their private rooms. They often left signals in view and imagined the other's routine and well-being. They sometimes took advantage of social occasions to see each other, during visits to neighbours and friends, and at the church service on Sunday, where they had to conceal their sentiments.

After they had secretly corresponded for a year, the families consented to their marriage in the summer of 1780. Finally, the couple shared some happy moments together, which were sometimes spoilt by Eccles' increasingly frequent headaches and fevers. As time passed, it became clear that he would not recover from his illness, which was probably typhus, for which there was not an effective cure at that time (Hays, 1780, n. 2 in Whelan). Eccles died on 23rd August 1780 during the journey to his place of origin Fordingbridge, that was recommended by his physician for an alleged beneficial change of air. Hays was utterly devastated by his decease and became inconsolable. Her dreams shattered, she took the mourning dress and wrote amply in her private letters how life had become unappealing to her and wished only retirement from the world.

Nevertheless, she slowly began to recover through faith, religion and the sympathy her friends showed her. Hays went through a period of deep personal introspection and found relief in writing. She began to work on the epistolary exchange between herself and Eccles to shape a two-volume book after the model of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. *The Love-Letters of Mary Hays (1779-1780)* will be posthumously published in 1925. The work witnessed Eccles' and Hays' pure affection, which was a source of pride for the young woman. In this collection, Hays appears as a dreamy and lively young woman, "a little romantic girl", who aspired to become the wife of the man she loved (Walker, 2006, p. 42). Hays had even promised Eccles not to marry any other man. Therefore, after his death, she could no longer plan to become a wife. Hays had to create an alternative identity for herself to move on with her life, overcome her grief, and not to remain stuck in the past.

2.2. Enthusiast dissenting learner

Hays had always been animated by the desire for knowledge. She started to exercise her mind in the Baptist meeting house, where she first got familiar with learned forms of thought by listening to sermons and discussions. She took the invitation to independent individual thinking and developed her own ideas on various subjects. In addition to novel reading, which was the common way through which women educated themselves at that time, Hays sought the guidance of various erudite men who would assist her in her pursuit of knowledge through their correspondence. These mentors would give Hays access to "texts that, without university and professional venues, were otherwise inaccessible to her" (Walker, 2018a, p. 35). Fulfilling her curiosity, she studied philosophy, religion, history and politics.

One of Hays' major correspondents was Reverend Robert Robinson, a leading dissenting figure who made preaching tours and wrote controversial religious texts on social and moral topics in a direct and simple style. He was influenced by French philosophers and translated the works of the Huguenots Jacques Saurin and Jean Claude. He created a form of "non-sectarian "Dissent" as a new and fluid identity" in that he professed to adhere only to his own ideas, which were widely considered subversive (Walker, 2006, p. 95). Robinson strictly believed in universal toleration as the most important quality for a virtuous life. He attacked slavery as a system of exploitation of human beings that was antithetical to religious doctrines. He questioned the requisites of morality and trusted in mankind's free potential of agency (Walker, 2018a, p. 39). Furthermore, Robinson allowed his daughters to have the same education as his sons and encouraged them to raise doubts and attempt to solve them.

Encouraged by his generosity and straightforwardness, Hays addressed Robinson in part to seek consolation after Eccles's death and in part to be guided in her search for knowledge. Robinson responded to her doubts, encouraged her to learn, and also provided her with his published works. He studied as an autodidact and got access to academic books through friends, as Hays would do later. He invited her to treat him as an equal and exhorted her not to flatter him, unsuccessfully cautioning her "of the danger of idealizing men" (Ibid., p. 38).

Hays started to develop her thoughts on morality and women's rights based on Robinson's egalitarianism. She suggested that toleration should be extended to women, and questioned the social importance of chastity while she emphasised women's oppressing physical condition that was undeniable. Walker highlights Robinson's crucial influence on Hays' intellectual method: "Hays had become his spiritual daughter, assuming nothing, doubting everything, yet like Robinson, believing in the ongoing transformation of this world in the anticipation of the next" (Ibid., p. 43). Moreover, her friendship with Robinson allowed her to meet other dissenting intellectuals.

In the meantime, the female student started to publish some poems and prose pieces in magazines. In 1786, her short story about the dangers of excessive passion, *The Hermit: An Oriental Tale*, appeared in the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*. Her work, which conformed to the popular interest of those years, was generally praised. Nevertheless, she yearned to express her position on the social, pedagogical, and ethical topics of which she heard discussions in the meeting hall (Ibid., p. 35). Indeed, Hays probably started to compose the *Appeal* during these years but stopped because of the publication of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and Major Alexander Jardine's *Letters from Barbary, France, Spain, Portugal, &c. By an English Officer*, which analysed the same topic.

After Robinson's death in June 1790, Hays established some intellectual correspondences with other dissenting figures: Joseph Priestley and George Dyer, among others. In these exchanges Hays posed herself as an equal and turned the gender difference into a philosophical discourse, exactly as she did with Eccles and Robinson (Kelly, 1993, p. 82). Moreover, Hays converted to Unitarianism and started to attend New College, where she got in contact with the tutor in Classics and Logic Hugh Worthington, who encouraged her to write and publish.

Hays' new intellectual connections and her deep personal knowledge of the subject gave her enough confidence to enter the public debate when she responded to Gilbert Wakefield's pamphlet *An Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1791). In this work, Wakefield denied the usefulness and aptness of dissenting public religious practices that he contrasted to the primal importance of individual worship. He raised his concerns over the danger of corruption, fanaticism and

hypocrisy arising from communal forms of devotion. Expectedly, Wakefield's position attracted much criticism from prominent dissenting intellectuals, including Joseph Priestley, John Disney and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

Walker suggests that Hays may have understood the pamphlet as an attack on her own experience of communal worship that had allowed her some knowledge on theology and politics (2018a, pp. 45-46). Therefore, Hays responded to Wakefield, but she used the pseudonym Eusebia, the Greek word for "piety" and a literary reference to a religious pious woman interested in self-improvement. She began her *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield* with an apology for her unfavoured position as a woman to avert the sharpest critiques. Her tone was submissive, yet she was convinced of her ideas. She addressed the central points of her argument in a straightforward manner, adopted a practical and tolerant approach, and avoided the display of knowledge that characterised Wakefield's attack. She kept to the behaviour a woman was expected to have and referenced appropriate female readings, especially Rousseau.

Stating the issue of class difference, Hays argued that common people need communal support in practising their spirituality because they generally lack the perseverance and rigorous education of the affluent upper ranks. Thus, Hays claimed that "the world is not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative" because equal possibilities are not available for everyone (Walker, 2006, p. 121). Then, she highlighted the beneficial effects of the community on domestic affections. She underlined the importance of justice, peace, mercy, and love, which contrasts with Wakefield's abstract claims. While Hays' values tended to produce unions, Wakefield's erudition produced only needless divisions. Finally, Hays concluded her defence by voicing her faith in progress and true philosophers. In fact, they also need to have feminine qualities too.

Wakefield believed Eusebia to be a man who was trying to defend himself and escape criticism through a false female name. Therefore, in his response to Eusebia, he dismissed her position out of gender prejudices by asserting women's intellectual inferiority to men in a brutal misogynistic manner. Hays, disappointed and offended by his unjust reply, noticed that he had not addressed the contents of her pamphlet. Instead,

he had just focused on her gender to discredit her opinion. Hays' discouragement led her to abandon the argument.

On the contrary, Hays's contribution to religious debate was welcomed and praised by reviews and intellectuals, including William Frend, the mathematician and Unitarian whose subversive ideas would cost him his tutorship at Jesus College in Cambridge. Frend, who knew Eusebia's identity thanks to mutual friendships, wrote privately to Wakefield in Hays' defence. Then, he addressed the female thinker to praise her rebuttal of Wakefield's *Enquiry* and encouraged her to continue to participate in intellectual debates. In addition, as he recognised the similarity between his religious beliefs and those of Hays, he invited her to explain to him her views on specific articles of faith. Frend was also intrigued by Rousseau's influence on her thought, and noted that Rousseau's principal message was that "excesses of sensibility must be controlled by reason" (Walker, 2018a, p. 53). However, the academic addressed Hays in courtly language and, thus, he stated the gender difference, differently from Hays' other correspondents. Unfortunately, Hays misunderstood his intentions and started to develop a romantic interest in him.

2.3. Novice female writer

In June 1792, George Dyer gave Hays a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, guessing her interest in its topic. Indeed, the author and her sister Elizabeth avidly read the treatise, whose ideas pushed them to compose a work of various pieces together. Having relatively few educational possibilities as females, the Hays sisters educated themselves independently and "developed their own domestic method of study and enquiry" (Kelly, 1993, p. 84). Mary Hays' enthusiasm led her to contact Wollstonecraft to request some advice on professional writing. She also sent her a copy of the *Cursory Remarks*. The expert writer Wollstonecraft acknowledged the uncommon female quality of Hays' work and appreciated the topic of the pamphlet. Nevertheless, she noticed a lack of clarity, which, she assured her, would be solved through practice (Walker, 2018a, p. 64).

Subsequently, Hays sent Wollstonecraft the manuscript of *Letters and Essays*, the work she was compiling with her sister, and enquired about the possibility of being published by Joseph Johnson. On that occasion, Wollstonecraft's criticism was sharper. She attacked her attitude of female submission and dependence on men's support, and exhorted her to "rest, on yourself—if your essays have merit they will stand alone" (Kelly, 1993, p. 85). In addition, Wollstonecraft noticed Hays' contradictory attitude: while she wished to be pleasing, she was also ambitious and longing for knowledge. Finally, *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* was published in 1793 by Thomas Knott, the same publisher of *Cursory Remarks*. Mary Hays wrote most of the pieces, and only her name appeared on the frontispiece.

Hays' intent in her new publication was to introduce an innovative curriculum of study for women: she wanted to adapt university subjects to women's interests and lives. In the Preface, Hays apologised for the weakness and faultiness of the work, which she admitted was the result of the general oppression of women. Over Wollstonecraft's influence, she hoped that female circumstances would change thanks to a "larger revolution" already begun. Hays stressed the significance of education in that it would advance the community (Walker, 2018a, p. 72).

Hays utilised literary forms generally associated with the feminine (letters, fiction, and miscellaneous writing) to write on philosophical and social "male" topics, such as rhetoric. Thus, she wished that women could become socially and politically involved. For example, Hays introduced the dissenting debate around the formation of the self. The doctrine of necessity envisages that everything is connected through a series of causes and effects. However, extreme materialism reveals itself as problematic because it seems to imply that individuals do not have free will. Hays accepted the doctrine of necessity, and ascribed the absence of free will to a devout and pious submission to God. She believed that each person was endowed with a particular kind of sensibility which, modified by external circumstances, would lead to the formation of the self (Kelly, 1993, p. 86). Thus, Hays' rational beliefs accorded with her religious faith.

Then, following Wollstonecraft, the novice writer developed her thoughts on female education and domesticity. She was favourable to novel reading because it would spark the curiosity that would lead women to read more serious genres, and

search for truth in different areas. Finally, the fictional pieces were philosophical explanations of the power of love and rational religion against vice and obstacles and on the danger of excessive sensibility.

Mary Hays' pieces are more numerous than Elizabeth Hays'; they also contrast in tone. While Mary adopts a revolutionary and optimistic stance, Elizabeth is more conservative, didactic, and moralistic. *Letters and Essays* was welcomed by Unitarians and by the *Analytical Review*, but it was criticised by conservative reviews. They considered it a dangerous and absurd work imbued with dissenting theories which dismissed domestic female activities in favour of an inconceivable opinion that women might have the same capacities as men and that the mind has no gender.

2.4. English Jacobin writer and revolutionary feminist

In 1793, William Godwin published his controversial political treatise *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Captivated by her friends' recommendations and the reviews, Hays wrote directly to the author explaining her interest in the work. She asked Godwin if she could borrow his book, candidly admitting that she could not afford to buy it (Ibid., p. 91). He assented, lent her one volume at a time, and questioned her thoughts about his work. Gradually, they established a profound friendship based on the sincere "collision of mind with mind" in which Godwin positioned himself differently than Hays' correspondents so far (Walker, 2018a, p. 119). Instead of acknowledging the gender difference, treating her as a woman and respecting social conventions, he took an unreserved approach (Ibid.). They discussed personal and philosophical subjects. Echoing Wollstonecraft, Hays asked Godwin to exchange views on gender issues, too. Thus, Hays stated the need to review women's position in society.

Hays wrote long letters to Godwin, to which he responded in person, unequally reserving for himself more time to meditate on his answer. Later, she would ask him to bring her own letters during their meetings so that she too could consult them. Hays disclosed her mind to Godwin, expressing her hopes and fears, her uncertainties, her despair, and her anger. Their conversations were similar to a psychoanalytical process in which "Hays revealed herself, healed herself and somewhat in telling her story, and

strengthened cognitively through the mental gymnastics" (Ibid., p. 120). She expressed her innate sensibility and her fear of receiving additional disappointments. She believed in the power of passion as a source of desire while she also maintained that reason must learn to govern one's emotions. Moreover, she voiced her conviction that truth must be found in personal experience. On his part, Godwin responded to her with impartiality and objectiveness. Hays admired him and called him her "genius in the moon" (Walker, 2006, p. 301).

Hays' connection to Godwin made her closer to the English Jacobin circle and she joined the group of radical London thinkers, in which William Frend also participated. In 1795, after having secured an income through writing for *The Critical Review*, Hays moved on her own on Kirby Street, Hatton Garden, to become independent from her family and to be able to invite some friends. In her 13th October letter to Godwin, she described the anxiety that had kept her from living on her own. However, she felt the need for a change of situation despite the dangers it implied. She expressed her excitement and

> a kind of, I know not what, satisfaction in the idea of being free, a wish to break by the necessity of greater exertions, (I acknowledge the weakness which this implies) & even by local change, certain fatal, connected, trains of thinking, a desire of strengthening my mind by standing alone, & of relieving the relations I love of the burthen of my wayward fancies, also, I will own, a latent hope of enjoying, occasionally, more of the intercourse & conversation that pleases me (Ibid., pp. 201-202).

Thus, Hays put herself in a position open to intellectual engagement and, she hoped, of sexual experimentation. Her main concern was to employ her intellectual faculties to earn a living, whether through writing or translating.

Moreover, Hays and Wollstonecraft became intimate friends and shared their private stories. Wollstonecraft had just survived a second attempt of suicide provoked by the discovery of her former partner's infidelity. Hays promptly comforted and supported her friend, and probably read Wollstonecraft's desperate letters to Imlay. On her behalf, Hays was curious about her friend's love affair and also hoped to develop a romantic relationship with Frend. Thanks to Wollstonecraft, Hays also learnt the desperate condition of fallen women (Walker, 2018a, pp. 123-124). However, Hays'

friendship with the feminist writer damaged Hays's reputation: she defended her associate in social discussions, and, consequently, Hays herself was soon believed to be a libertine amoral woman.

On 8th January 1796, Hays invited Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Thomas Holcroft to tea at her house. At this meeting, Godwin changed his opinion of Wollstonecraft and he started to develop a romantic interest in her. In the interim, Hays confessed her love to Frend and got rejected. She described her desperate sensations in long letters to Godwin, in which she tried to analyse philosophically the nature of her feelings and the causes that had led to her rejection. She expressed her exasperation for her unhappy condition, which she compared to the blissful situation of married women. Indeed, Hays could not totally escape the conventional female models despite her convictions. She analysed her feelings rationally and gave voice to her ambition to surpass women's common achievements. Moreover, she recognised that the confined female condition "gave women knowledge of the psychology of love unavailable to 'philosophers'" (Kelly, 1993, p. 94). Thus, women had an exclusive insight into emotional matters.

Hays lamented women's inability to direct their strong feelings to a socially acceptable object. Instead, they had to subjugate their emotional force. After she had reasoned about her unfortunate love interest for some months, Hays, accompanied by Wollstonecraft, visited Frend in March to ask for forgiveness in a tone that she will adopt in her first novel. She assured him that her "hopes have now, entirely ceased, and with them, some illusions appear to be losing their force—my mind seems regaining a firmer tone—it is no longer convulsed with uncertainty" (Walker, 2006, p. 196).

Eventually, Godwin, who had already appreciated Hays' capacity to describe how philosophy works in individual experience, encouraged her to produce a philosophical novel after the model of those written by himself and by Thomas Holcroft (Kelly, 1993, p. 93). She accepted his suggestion on the condition that he revised her work. Hence, Hays worked on a sort of fictional autobiography drawing from her personal letters and experiences. The result was *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, which was published in November 1796 and had a mild reception. Reviewers approved the subject of the danger caused by over-sensibility and put the work in the same tradition of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Hays' intellectual capacity and profound insight into female

experience were also praised. However, some critics recognised the disruptive potential of the work for which some years later her first novel would be condemned. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* made Hays famous and made her earn some money.

Hays continued to publish anonymously and without pay in magazines, participating in debates on female condition, happiness, virtue and sensibility, and endorsing a "Revolutionary feminism more 'philosophical' than Wollstonecraft's" (Ibid., p. 109). Through the help of her female mentor, Hays began to write reviews for the *Analytical Review*, securing herself an income.

However, she progressively started to feel the rift between her conception of independent enlightened female philosopher and her life, and that produced a sense of failure. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, through which she had naively exposed herself, started to be labelled as a dangerous and scandalous work, and was accused of immorality and atheism. She began to be marginalised and was caricatured as the annoying stereotype of the learned woman. Her friendship with Wollstonecraft gave her strength, but it also accentuated the difference between the two women: Wollstonecraft was charming, confident and beautiful while Hays was socially awkward, shy and unattractive. Hays preferred the company of men, and her ambition prevented her from establishing meaningful connections with female authors in her similar situation. She tended to compete with them, instead of uniting forces. Moreover, she argued with her sister Elizabeth, who noticed that Mary often behaved selfishly because of her self-absorption. At that point, Hays was torn between "her growing sense of authority and the absence of any validation of this sense in the larger world" (Walker, 2018a, p. 161). She felt unsatisfied and dejected. Furthermore, her continuous and stubborn adherence to revolutionary ideas contributed to isolating her from the world.

When, in March 1797, Godwin and Wollstonecraft married to avert social condemnations after the discovery of Wollstonecraft's pregnancy, Hays, who was part of their intellectual circle and saw them frequently, felt lonelier. However, in September, Wollstonecraft faced some complications during childbirth and tragically died due to an infection some days after the birth of her daughter Mary. Godwin did not admit Hays to attend her friend's sickbed, stating that her presence was not necessary and that everybody who was close to Wollstonecraft was already there. Thus, Hays got enraged

at him. It was the writer Eliza Fenwick who kept the lady writer up to date with Wollstonecraft's state of health and eventually let her know the day of the funeral.

Hays anonymously published Wollstonecraft's death notice in the *Monthly Magazine* where she described her version of Wollstonecraft as a complex human being, endowed with feminine sensibility and masculine intellect. Hays praised Wollstonecraft's work in favour of female independence. Meanwhile, Godwin himself was working on his late wife's biography, which came out the following year. His intent was to rehabilitate Wollstonecraft in public opinion, but, in giving some controversial insights into her life, he had the opposite effect.

Regardless of her resentment, Hays requested Godwin to return the letters she had written to him and Wollstonecraft, and pleaded with him not to read those addressed to his wife. The philosopher sent her only those addressed to Wollstonecraft. Probably, he excluded those delivered to himself to "penalize her for having breached the sociable contract of writing between 'persons of generous soul'" when she included his letters in *Emma Courtney* (Barbour, 2002, p. 171). Thus, Godwin did not observe the polite custom of acquiescing to a woman's demand, but, after all, Hays herself had not respected conduct norms when she wrote to him the first time.

Furthermore, Godwin peevishly alluded to his previous knowledge of the contents of Hays' letters to Wollstonecraft due to matrimonial intimacy. He accentuated the difference in the relationship between the living and the dead, between people of the same sex, and between men and women, and he declared that his behaviour was a consequence of these differences. Indeed, Barbour suggests that Godwin tended to maintain a position of power for himself and subjugate women, even while he advocated for women's right, supported their intellectual enquiry and sympathised with them (Ibid., p. 172). This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that Godwin read his wife's letters and excluded Hays from his his circle. Lastly, Godwin accused Hays of having damaged their friendship because of her arrogance, selfishness, sensibility and mistrust (Walker, 2018a, pp. 190-191).

After Wollstonecraft's death, Hays had to stand alone. She felt the urge to defend her friend's ideas and, consequently, she was less disposed to compromise. She continued to support her revolutionary beliefs on feminine empowerment with

pioneering writings despite the climate of aggravating repression towards non-conformity that led to fines, incarcerations, trials, and exiles.

As to call attention to the feminist cause again, *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain on Behalf of Women* was published anonymously in 1798, and it was probably by Hays. This was the work Hays had composed earlier, but she did not release it. The author put herself in the position of a good advisor to contribute to the eighteenth-century gender debates, criticising social customs and the male tyranny to which women were subjected. The author advocated for female freedom, education and gender equality and supported her argument on women's ability by providing examples of clever and distinguished women of the past. The progressive reviewers appreciated the topic of the *Appeal*, even though a few noticed some faults and its unoriginality. On the contrary, conservative criticism complained that the work aroused a worthless discussion and linked its contents to those of the English Jacobins. Traditionalists castigated its faulty style and absurd thesis.

Although Godwin had told Hays never to write to him again, Hays asked him to review the manuscript of her new fictional work. Hays believed the philosopher would be interested in her work because it responded to *Caleb Williams* in that it developed the story of a minor character. Moreover, Wollstonecraft was the inspiration for the protagonist because Hays wanted to demonstrate how society punishes the will to live freely. Her concerns were the readmission of fallen women into the community, the over-consideration of chastity, and male oppression on female lives. At first, Godwin refused her request, but, finally, read the manuscript. Hays' request served to restore a mild friendship based on mutual esteem.

Less experimental than her earlier novel but more rigorously constructed and with a gloomier tone, *The Victim of Prejudice* was published in 1799. By explicitly accusing social injustice, this new novel did not find many favourable opinions, and the reviewers associated it with earlier Jacobin texts. However, Hays' ability to present realistically the characters' psychology was praised, along with her writing style. Clearly, conservative critics attacked Hays' rejection of the obedient female model.

At the turn of the century, Hays was quite isolated, in part because of her exclusion from Godwin's circle and also because of the reputation her two novels

established. Due to her militant position and her social awkwardness, Hays met the "danger of being misread and misrepresented, textually and personally" and was ridiculed and laughed at several times (Kelly, 1993, p. 125). She did not feel at ease on social occasions, and preferred private meetings with intimate friends.

By 1800, her contact with Godwin had disappeared, and she started to develop some friendships with younger radicals and romantics. However, some of her new connections proved to be untrustworthy. That was the case of the poet Charles Lloyd, who spread the false gossip that Hays was in love with him and that she had made some sexual advances to him. In truth, Hays, in tears, had confided to him the causes of her unhappiness. In addition, she was attacked along with other nonconformist women in Polwhele's *The Unsex'd Females*. By that time, the reception of *Emma Courtney* had changed its tone and emphasised the shameless sexually provocative aspect.

Then, Hays quarrelled with the satiric writer Elizabeth Hamilton. The feminist author had reviewed quite unfavourably Hamilton's novel *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). During a meeting, Hamilton asked Hays whether she had written the review, and Hays denied it. However, some months later Hays confessed that it was her the reviewer. Hamilton, now offended, accused Hays of being a terrible friend and a liar. She repented of having shown sympathy towards Hays' confessions of distress for the difficulties of being a female author.

Eventually, Hamilton took her revenge in her successful Anti-Jacobin novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), in which she brutally satirised Godwin's circle. Hamilton parodied Hays in the character of Bridgetina Boterhim, a comical woman who sometimes voiced some passages from *Emma Courtney*, talked indiscreetly, and wrote about her emotions and personal life in an incoherent manner. Bridgetina also lectured on sexual equality and mimicked the philosophy of Mr. Myope, the character modelled after Godwin. Bridgetina did not know how to live properly in the real world because of her naivety, selfishness, and inability to apply her ideals. According to Hamilton, Bridgetina is an absurd model of female intellectual in that she violates both feminine models and morality (Hutton, 2008, p. 412).

2.5. Female biographer and philosopher

In the new century, the conservative political climate was inflexible towards radical positions. Thus, Hays changed her approach to the feminist cause. She employed herself in compiling the lives of intellectual women of the past, as biography was an acceptable writing category for women writers. She contributed to this genre with considerable advancements both in form and research. Moreover, the focus on middle-class subjectivity and enduring interest in women's roles had made biographies particularly successful.

Hays' first biographical work was an account of the life of her deceased friend Mary Wollstonecraft that appeared in *The Annual Necrology* in 1800. She relied on her knowledge of Wollstonecraft and meticulously consulted Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *The Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Not only did she compile a precise bibliography which also included personal documents, but she also analysed her friend's life in relation to the social context. The author emphasised her friend's understanding and integrity, but she also noticed the obstacles Wollstonecraft had to face because of the restrictions imposed on women.

Wollstonecraft's problematic family situation pushed her to seek independence. She undertook various jobs and pursued knowledge not academically, but through the means available to her. Hays explained that Wollstonecraft was guided by her strong sensibility, a typical feminine characteristic. However, she trained a masculine intellect, too, overthrowing "specific cultural assumptions about male and female", and behaving according to her ideas (Walker, 2018a, p. 218). She believed gender to be a cultural construction established to maintain order in society, while, on the contrary, human beings did not naturally have a gender. As a consequence, Wollstonecraft refused to conform to traditional gender roles and "suffered for attempting to live freely" caused by the criticism directed towards herself and her troubled romantic experiences (Ibid., p. 219).

Hays referred to Wollstonecraft's depression as the impossibility of fulfilling her desires and ambitions completely because of the existent systematic obstacles to women's aspirations. In fact, she ascribed the lack of female achievements to the strict

male intellectual tradition and the isolation of female thinkers, who should unite forces instead. In this respect, the creation of a female learned tradition would play a vital role in changing society's perception of women.

Through Wollstonecraft, presented as an uncommon "genius" of moral and intellectual superiority, Hays criticised every woman's confined condition in society. She highlighted the female struggle to gain independence and autonomy. She affirmed the possibility of self-determination through the decision to refuse to marry and voice personal romantic desires (Ibid., pp. 221-222). Hays wished for a future change, stressing Wollstonecraft's message and its significance to the female cause:

> Her own sex have lost, in the premature fate of this extraordinary woman, an able champion; yet she has not laboured in vain: the spirit of reform is silently pursuing its course. Who can mark its limits? (Walker, 2006, p. 261).

Then, following the model of her biography of Wollstonecraft, Hays proceeded to write the stories of exceptional women of the past. Thus, she provided a female version of the existing histories on virtuous men. Her *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries* appeared in 1803 in six volumes that contained the biographies of 288 women belonging to different nationalities and historical moments. Hays arranged her entries in alphabetical order, choosing women "renowned for their erudition, their adventures, their political influence, their infamy and their piety" (Walker, 2018a, p. 224). She unevenly distributed her work: she dedicated more pages to prominent examples such as Catherine II or Queen Elizabeth I, and only a few lines to less famous ones. She relied on various sources, ranging from classical biographers and historians such as Tacitus or Plutarch to general works of historiography, from secret court histories to earlier compendiums and dictionaries, from scholarly archives to personal autobiographies and memoirs. She had access to many of those materials thanks to the Unitarian William Tooke the Elder (Ibid., p. 223).

The Preface addressed the work to a female audience, and specifically to young women, given that Hays intended to provide valuable models for them. Indeed, she wrote: "I have at heart the happiness of my sex, and their advancement in the grand scale of rational and social existence" (Walker, 2006, p. 265).

Hays continued to maintain the need for a rigorous female education and equality between the sexes. She affirmed that the condition of submission in which women were kept interfered with their real possibilities for distinguishing themselves in any intellectual field. She gave as evidence the fact that history abounded with many esteemed men while lacking highly regarded women.

Moreover, Hays attacked the glorification of court culture, which envisaged women as corrupted by vain physical vices. Hays contrasted this characterisation to the intellectual liberation that truth and reason offer instead. The enduring prejudices about the irreconcilability between vivacious intellect and virtuous domestic life hindered women's potentiality of obtaining notable academic or political achievements, which, however, were undervalued, if ever gained. For example, Catherine Macaulay Graham contributed excellently to the study of history. But, since her erudition could not be disputed, her appearance was incoherently snipped at (Ibid., p. 271).

Hays singled out Queen Elizabeth I as a magnificent woman who balanced perfectly her femininity with the capacity of righteously governing a land. The biographer proposed her reign, where women were favoured in reconciling the domestic aspect with the intellectual one, as a model of inspiration for the unstable modern England (Kelly, 1993, p. 243). Hays acknowledged that "learned women are confronted with the same female dilemmas as less educated women" and, accordingly, her aim was to "inspire educated women to unusual courage and fortitude" (Walker, 2018a, 225). She exhorted her readers to overcome prejudices, follow curiosity in learning, respect truth and virtue and accept one's own situation. The domestic, intellectual, principled, imaginative woman must have a role in society.

Hays' tone is mature. She provides life stories, which sometimes have fictional details to make the reading more enjoyable, with original social commentary. *Female Biography* was generally found interesting and engaging. It was published in multiple editions in the eighteenth century, both in Britain and in the United States. Hays was praised for her rigorous and remarkable work, but she was also reprehended for having included vicious examples of femininity, which were normally excluded from previous similar works. Even though Hays' enduring bad reputation affected the reviews of her time, her contribution to the genre was revolutionary.

Due to the success of *Female Biography*, the publishers T. and J. Allman entrusted Hays with the job of writing a biography of queens in 1820. Their request was a response to the recent "Caroline affair": King George IV, who had notably libertine behaviour, wanted to divorce his estranged wife Queen Caroline of Brunswick on the false charge of indecorous behaviour. This event had an enormous resonance in the population, and people from all classes defended the queen, whose talents and dignity were evident.

Hays' *Memoirs of Queens Illustrious and Celebrated* appeared in 1821. It included the lives of 65 alphabetically-ordered female rulers from the past and her contemporaneity, 38 of which were already present in *Female Biography*, and some of the new additions were non-European. In the Preface, Hays argued in favour of women's competence and ability. She brought as evidence the existence of competent female monarchs, who, despite their social position and achievements, faced hindrances and difficulties because of their sex (Walker, 2006, p. 290). Hays advocated for a universal moral standard. She reversed the common assumption that women provoked dissoluteness in courts, and, on the contrary, maintained that it was the glamour of court culture that caused the corruption of aristocratic women, as in the case of Marie Antoinette. Moreover, she accused female education that

> is for adornment rather than for use; for exhibition, rather than for moral and mental improvement; for the delights of the harem rather than to render her the friend, the companion, the assistant, the counselor of men (Ibid.).

Hays hoped that, being happiness, knowledge, and virtue inseparable and tending towards moral and intellectual refinement, gender equality would be gained in the future for the benefit of society as a whole.

Hays adopted a proto-journalistic style: she presented the events impartially and, then, added a commentary. However, she admitted that not expressing an opinion regarding contemporary women and situations was arduous, as in the case of Queen Caroline (Walker, 2006, p. 291). Thanks to women's common condition of oppression, Hays managed to portray the queens' lives effectively and inspire sympathy towards them. In addition, Hays' inferior social class and different experiences enabled her to notice the limits of the female monarchs' situations and overcome them in her analysis

(Kelly, 1993, p. 263). For example, she hinted at a general truth regarding every woman through Queen Caroline's biography: the mismarriage and the abandonment by the husband compromised wives' social existence. Thus, Hays becomes a "female philosopher" who is above the ruling class because of her broad critical gaze (Ibid.). She believed that the female philosopher would reorganise the social structure thanks to her ability to analyse the world (Ibid.).

Despite her covered revolutionary intent, Hays arranges a cautious critique, similar to Hannah More's style. While she acknowledges that women are the most happy and useful in the familial context, she does not disregard female abilities in ruling a land. In addition, she points out that the crowd's support for Queen Caroline demonstrated the need for a change in society. She denounced that a corrupted government would infect society as if it were poison (Ibid., p. 259). Lastly, Hays invites her readers to accept the inevitable mutations of things as they are and learn to endure suffering (Walker, 2006, p. 296). In *Memoirs of Queens*, which will be her last work published, Hays's voice is wise, reflective and philosophical.

2.6. Children's literature author and educator

Like many former Jacobin writers, Hays employed herself in children's literature, starting with an abridged adaptation of Henry Brooke's popular *The Fool of Quality* as *Harry Clinton: A Tale for Youth*, published by Joseph Johnson in 1804. Hays tried to accord gentry values with bourgeois ones and exhorted young people to moderate their affections (Kelly, 1993, p. 248).

Later, Hays composed two works that were more conservative in tone, similar to the didactic fiction of Hannah More (Kelly, 1993, p. 254). She directed them to the most fragile part of the population. In 1815, *The Brothers; or, Consequences: A Story of What Happens Every Day; Addressed to that Most Useful Part of the Community, the Labouring Poor* was published. It was a story that recounted how two brothers can have a completely different life because of their dissimilar life choices. Hays encouraged her young readers to prefer reason, prudence and thoughtfulness to rash and inconsiderate decisions. This work had a second edition, too, differently from Hays' most productions.

Two years later, *Family Annals; or, The Sisters*, a story about two daughters who follow distinct paths in life because of their different education, appeared. These two books shared the same aim. Specifically, *The Sisters* considered "self-discipline as the best defence against poverty and social ruin" (Ibid., p. 255). It also focused on the importance of economy, generosity and self-denial. Thus, the work aligned with conservative positions.

Then, Hays renewed her interest in history in accepting to compose the last volume of Charlotte Smith's 1806 *The History of England, from the Earliest Records to the Peace of Amiens; in a Series of Letters to a Young Lady at School*, published in three volumes by Richard Philips. On the frontispiece, only Charlotte Smith's name appeared. However, Smith asked Hays to finish the work which had revealed itself much longer than it should have been at its conceptualisation. The style of *The History of England* is quite simple and direct and tries to provide an objective perspective of history.

Obviously, Hays' volume is divergent from Smith's volumes. While Smith presented the subject didactically and focused on social culture, class distinctions, mores, and customs, Hays preferred a different perspective and was more open to vivid cultural exchanges. In fact, she was more attentive to the progress of the sciences, the arts and the manufacturing. On the whole, the book aimed at rendering history accessible to young girls, who would educate themself and thus become aware of their social position.

Hays was so engrossed in this activity that she eventually produced her own work on history for young people, *Historical Dialogues for Young Persons* (1806-1808). She wrote it in the form of a domestic dialogue: it features an aunt who recounts the historical events to her nephews and nieces with social commentary in an entertaining way. Thus, Hays adapted her feminist social critique to the more traditional and acceptable image of a clash between virtue and corruption. As Kelly writes, "*Historical Dialogues* is designed to contribute to the formation of autonomous subjectivity in women" (1993, p. 251).

In those years, Hays managed to buy a "little cabin" thanks to the income of *Female Biography*. She lived isolated after having received many attacks for her revolutionary ideas. She confided to William Tooke her dejection caused by Lloyd's

gossip: “the manner in which the present attack has affected my health & spirits convinces me that I am a *woman*” (Walker, 2006, p. 280). Despite her radical beliefs, Hays was conscious of the limitations her sex caused. One of these was the difficulty in finding employment, for which she often appealed to her male correspondents. Hays developed a cordial friendship with Eliza Fenwick and engaged in a correspondence with the lawyer Henry Crabb Robinson, to whom she unloaded her distress through a deep introspection. She also described to him her continuous interest in reading, especially the works of contemporary British and German romantic writers.

When her oldest sister died, Hays occupied herself in the education of her three nieces and opened a school for girls in Islington. This offered Hays a greater perspective on her social mission and renewed her hope for the future generations. Later, she would work again as an educator and a boarder. In the last years of her life, she dedicated herself to her family and close friends.

In her letter of 14th February 1806, she reflected on her life and confessed to Robinson:

> Few persons, perhaps, possess a perfectly sane mind; a disordered imagination has, from my youth upward, been the bane of my tranquillity, & the destroyer of my prospects in life. I imbibed, almost from my childhood, the poison of romance & chivalry, so seductive to tender & elevated minds; &, viewing objects & things through a distempered medium, I sought & made to myself an extraordinary destiny (Hays, 1806 in Whelan).

Like Emma Courtney, Hays’ sensibility was fostered by reading romances and her imagination. Her intense reactions of torment and estrangement from the world were also accompanied by atypical ambition (Walker, 2018a, p. 230). Indeed, Hays was conscious that her distorted perception of reality had pushed her to leave the usual female vocation behind and live her life in a unique manner. Despite her contemptible reputation in society, her self-esteem remained high and intact.

When Godwin died in 1836, Hays wrote to his second wife and his daughter to express her condolences. Finally, she had her letters to Godwin returned, but she grieved that some materials might be missing. Hays knew that Mary Shelley, the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, was to write his memoirs. Therefore, Hays included an

account of the relationship between herself and Godwin in the letter addressed to Shelley, hoping to provide her with interesting material. Hays also sought contacts with other intellectuals and Unitarians of the younger generations, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, who was already a publishing author, and Harriet Martineau. Thus, she hoped to be remembered in the future.

A note by Henry Crabb Robinson reported Hays's death on 22nd February 1843. Just a few people attended her funeral: Robinson himself and Hays' brother John. Mary Hays recognised in her will her papers as her most important attainment, and she passed them to her favourite niece.

2.7. Brief analysis

Hays dedicated her long life to the feminist cause, and committed to working and writing for the benefit of women. Since very few changes could be enacted during her lifetime, she addressed her work to the future and hoped that her message would be embraced by future generations. In fact, her involvement in education, especially in the later years of her life, is pivotal. Hays adopted different roles during her life: a romantic enamoured youth, a vivacious disciple in religious matters, an aspiring author, an English Jacobin writer, an early feminist, a female philosopher, a woman biographer, a female historian and an educator. Walker states that:

> Hays continued to invent the older self she represented [in her letters to Henry Crabb Robinson], as she had "saucy" "Maria" to John Eccles, female autodidact to Robert Robinson, and fierce woman intellectual to Godwin and Frend (Walker, 2006, p. 285).

Hays conveyed her whole self in her works, and for this reason it is hard to enclose her production and person in specific definitions because, as Ty suggests, for Hays there are no boundaries (Ty, 1996, p. vii). The force of her emotional life and absolute faith in reason are present in her works. Because of Hays' integral presence in her texts, her two novels' fictional protagonists are inseparably connected to their author. In fact, while the bond between Emma Courtney and Hays is deeper in being the former an alter ego of the latter, Mary Raymond's subjectivity is the product of Hays'

ideas on education and feminism. Nevertheless, the three women are constricted by society, and they suffer because of their social position as women. In the fictional realm, Hays discloses her innermost thoughts and emotions. She experiments with the genre of the novel and produces uncommon fictional pieces endowed with psychological profundity. In analysing Emma and Mary, we can improve our understanding of the author.

CHAPTER 3

The fictional female self: *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*

3.1. Plot, structure, and genre

Hays wrote her first novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* after Godwin's suggestion to transform her emotional crisis caused by Frend's love rejection into fiction. From her despairing private letters, she wove the life of Emma Courtney and her unrequited love for Augustus Harley.

Hays asked Godwin to revise her manuscript and he complied with her request. Generally, Godwin advised her to make some corrections so that the work would fit the novelistic conventions of the time. He observed the weakness of the plot development, its frequent repetitions, the characters' dubious credibility and the over-philosophical nature of the text. Yet, according to him, the main fault of the book remained the pervasiveness of the heroine whose predominant perspective silenced other characters and tended to stifle the reader (Walker, 2018a, p. 139). On her part, Hays was not willing to apply such modifications. The need to guard her work against Godwin's criticism made her highly self-aware of the reasons why she wrote the story in that manner (Ibid., p. 133). She was conscious of making a "hazardous experiment" both in content and form (Hays, 2009, p. 4). The existent genres were inadequate to her intent; thus, Hays created a hybrid work. She mixed features of different genres but did not adhere to any in particular.

In the Preface of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays states her interest in the workings of the human mind: "The most interesting, and the most useful, fictions, are, perhaps, such, as delineating the progress, and tracing the consequences, of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice" (Ibid., p. 3). She declares her intent on doing something different from ordinary fiction that creates ideal characters and situations. Clearly, the author juxtaposes Emma Courtney with fictional models of virtue such as Richardson's Clarissa. Indeed, Hays "meant to represent [Emma Courtney], as a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion, liable to the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature. […] the errors of [her] heroine were the offspring of sensibility" (Ibid., p. 4).

Emma Courtney's life is not to be an example, but a warning of the actual danger imagination and inactivity entail in women's lives. Hays applies the following quote by Rousseau to women's lives and demonstrates its reliability. She places it at the beginning of the book:

> The perceptions of persons in retirement are very different from those of people in the great world: their passions, being differently modified, are differently expressed; their imaginations, constantly impressed by the same objects, are more violently affected. The same small number of images continually return, mix with every idea, and create those strange and false notions, so remarkable in people who spend their lives in solitude (Ibid., p. 1).

Then, Hays affirms that the reality of the narrated events is not as important as their possibility of actualisation in specific conditions ordered in a chain of events. Finally, she invites her audience to receive her tale with an emphatic attitude and reason upon the story under the guidance of truth and reason. Believing in the import of sincerity, free thinking and free speaking, she hopes to affect her readers' minds to the point that they would mobilise to change "things as they are".

The novel begins with Emma's address to her adoptive son Augustus Harley, who bears the exact name of his father, the man Emma loved. She consigns her memoirs to him to teach him why he should not follow passion but prefer reason instead.

Since her mother died in childbirth, Emma grew up with her uncle and her aunt, the Melmoths, who adopted and raised her as if she were their own child. Emma's affectionate foster family encourages both her sensibility and will to knowledge. The heroine soon learns to read and becomes especially enthusiastic about fiction. She attends boarding school against her will.

When Mr Melmoth dies prematurely, the heroine's father Mr Courtney visits the family to express his condolences. On this occasion, he notices Emma's spoilt character and desultory learning. Thus, he decides to give the child the means to correct her didactic omissions. Emma begins to visit her father whose "superior education […] not of rational, but, of social man" will superficially introduce her to more serious topics: history, religion and philosophy (Ibid., p. 30). In his house, Emma also takes part in a sociable life for the first time and gets to know some gentlemen.

However, when Emma turns eighteen, both her father and her aunt die within a short time. Emma is received by Mr Courtney's brother Mr Morton. The heroine does not feel at ease at Morton Park because she is neither loved nor supported. During her stay she meets the philosopher Mr Francis and the emotional young man Mr Montague. Emma also gets to know a neighbour, the widowed Mrs Harley, with whom she spends much time and soon develops an intimate friendship. Mrs Harley often expresses in lively terms how she misses her eldest son Augustus, and Emma is sympathetic to her sorrow. Later, when the protagonist learns that she has skipped the chance of meeting Augustus, she bursts into tears. Mrs Harley worries about having lauded her son too much and becomes guarded in not speaking frequently of him. In turn, Emma starts examining her emotions and realises that she has fallen in love with a man she has never seen.

Some months later, Emma and Mr Montague have a carriage accident while travelling to see Mrs Harley, who had been ill. Mr Montague is injured and sent to his father's house. Also, a stranger who helped them to stop the carriage is wounded. Emma and the stranger, who shortly after turns out to be Augustus, get to an inn in a nearby village for medical assistance. After some days, Augustus feels better, and Mrs Harley reaches them. Then, the trio spends some days together at the house of the elderly woman. Since Emma is not admitted to Morton Park anymore due to some scandalous rumours Mrs Morton has spread, Emma remains with her friends. Augustus assists the protagonist in studying and they have walks and short trips together.

When Augustus sets off for London, Emma gives him the first of a series of love letters addressed to him. She waves between hope, disappointment, resentment, and anxiety because her beloved does not reply promptly to her epistles. His behaviour becomes colder and more critical towards Emma. He evades her answers; his replies are superficial, blundering and hasty. However, they continue to meet in an intermittent way, even during Emma's residence at her cousin Mrs Denbeigh's.

As time passes, Emma becomes so depressed that her health is affected. She reflects upon happiness, truth, virtue, and vice. She cannot really relinquish her passion and still entertains contrasting emotions and thoughts. She writes to Augustus to explain how she feels and what she thinks about it. The protagonist lists why Augustus should

reject her and, finally, desperately offers herself to him: "*My friend—I would give myself to you*—the gift is not worthless" (Ibid., p. 124). She addresses him urgently, asking for an explicit and direct reply. Nevertheless, she receives just a concise note telling of a prior attachment. Emma writes two more letters to calm her spirits down. She starts accusing him of breaking her heart even while wishing him happiness. Augustus reproaches her because she is adding even more vexation to an already painful situation. In fact, shortly after Emma learns from a letter from Mrs Harley that Augustus had secretly and imprudently married a woman he met while travelling. Emma is shocked at the news and feels guilty about having pursued an engaged man.

Informed of Emma's declining health, Mrs Harley invites her spiritual daughter to her house, hoping that friendship will help her to recover. However, Mrs Harley's well-being too is fragile, and soon gets critical. On her deathbed, she wishes Emma and Augustus to behave like siblings and to support each other. Then, Emma and Augustus casually meet in the library, and argue again about Augustus' romantic situation.

Benumbed and undecided on where to live, Emma sets off for London. During her journey she meets Mr Montague, who helps her to find accommodation in the metropolis. Emma gets dejected for her unsuccessful search for occupation. Her situation becomes desperate when she loses all the money that she had entrusted to a bank for a life annuity. Mr Montague, who in the meantime has been visiting her to cheer her up, insistently asks her to marry him to save her from financial issues. Emma tries to persuade him to desist his proposal, but, finally, she complies with his wish on the condition that he listenes to the whole story of her infatuation with Augustus. Mr Montague and Emma marry and have a daughter who is also called Emma. Now the protagonist enjoys a comfortable life: she meets new people and studies science, especially medicine, to help her husband in his profession.

One day, Augustus has a grave accident in front of Mr Montague's residence and is transported inside for medical assistance. Being the master of the house from home, Emma has to cure the patient, who is in critical condition. In his last conscious moments, Augustus confesses that he had always loved Emma but could not reciprocate her feelings because of societal norms. Emma grants his last wish to provide for his only surviving son. Augustus dies and Emma becomes desperate. For some days she is

unconscious and delirious and calls repeatedly for her beloved. Mr Montague, who had always been jealous of Emma's former love for Augustus, becomes coyer and colder towards his wife. On the contrary, Emma behaves lovingly, patiently and hopes to win back her husband's love and esteem.

For vengeance, Mr Montague seduces the servant Rachel, who gets pregnant. After having unsuccessfully tried every possible means to procure an abortive birth, Mr Montague kills the newborn baby and then commits suicide. He admits his guilt in a letter to Emma. At last, Emma decides to accommodate Rachel in her house and raise the little Emma and Augustus together. However, in her teenage years little Emma dies, shattering the protagonist' dreams of a serene domesticity and a brighter future.

The title *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* signals that the work is a memoir, a popular kind of reading in the eighteenth century. The senior voice of the heroine recounts the events of her past life to show the extent to which her passions have been destructive to her peace of mind. She addresses her tale to her adoptive son Augustus Harley to persuade him to follow his reason rather than his passions. In fact, Augustus is in a problematic amorous situation, similar to the one Emma has lived: he is in love with a woman who does not reciprocate his feelings. Emma wants him not to suffer like she has done and not to repeat her mistakes. She addresses the young man through letters that provide the framework of the narration. Indeed, there are two letters at the beginning of the first volume, a short one at the beginning of the second volume, and one last letter at the book's conclusion. These interruptions of the story allow the narrator to comment upon the events and guide the interpretation for Augustus and the actual audience of the memoirs.

Indeed, the epistolary component is crucial in the work. Besides the letters addressed to her adopted son, Emma's memoirs include many other letters: there are epistles Emma wrote to Augustus Harley and to Mr Francis, Mr Francis' replies to Emma, some short replies from Augustus (even though their content is mostly reported by Emma), and Mr Montague's suicide note (Rajan, 2010, p. 86). Letters are an important part of the conception of the novel, since Hays began to shape the story from her private letters.

During the narration, we learn that the memoirs were already, at least partially, written for the perusal of Mr Francis so that he could understand Emma's dejection in the middle section of the work. Then, Emma completes her account and delivers it to the young Augustus. Since the narration recounts Emma's life from infancy to adulthood, the work can also be seen as a Bildungsroman in that it tells how the narrated Emma has become the female philosopher she is at the end of her life (and the narrator). The Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, describes the progress of a young man or woman in society. It includes the description of the education the main character and significant life events that lead to a personal transformation. At the end of the novel, the protagonist is an adult who has found his or her identity and place in the world.

Nevertheless, Emma Courtney does not follow this traditional path. In fact, her interests are not conventional for an eighteenth-century woman. Firstly, she is moved by her enthusiasm for knowledge and then by her love for Augustus. She wishes for something more that women normally did not achieve at that time. Emma outlives her husband, her daughter, and the man she loves, and she is left alone with her beloved's son. The conclusion of her story does not confirm the traditional order. On the contrary, it interrogates whether in the eighteenth century it was possible for a woman to be a satisfied, accomplished human being without having a spouse (Ty, 1996, p. xxiii).

Lastly, Hays was influenced by the sentimental novel, in which she deploys some characteristics. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* resumes the typical sentimental themes of the danger of an indulged sensibility and the juxtaposition of reason and passions. The main character is a distressed woman, who struggles with her intense sensibility and rational mind. Reading much sentimental fiction led Emma to adopt the role of the "suffering female victim" (Ty, 1993, p. 53). Moreover, some secondary figures seem to embody some stock characters of sentimental fiction. For example, Mr Pemberton is the embodiment of vanity, Mr Montague is a man prey to his passions who sometimes acts incoherently, and the wife of the younger Mr Melmoth the vain unintelligent coquette.

In the novel various unhappy events happen: Emma has financial problems, some people she loves die, accidents occur, and there are diverse separations. These episodes that provoke affecting responses are described through the typical lexicon of sentimental fiction. For example, Mrs Harley's death is a characteristic sentimental

scene. After having informed her family of the imminent death, Mrs Harley "sighed deeply" and delivers her final speech:

> I shall soon close my eyes, for ever, upon all worldly cares—still cherish, in your pure and ingenuous mind, a friendship for my Augustus—the darling of my soul! He may, in future, stand in need of consolation. I had formed hopes—vain hopes! —in which you and he were equally concerned. […] He has disappointed me, and I have lost the desire of living (Hays, 2009, p. 153).

Then, "she sunk upon her pillow—[Emma] answered her only with [her] tears" (Ibid.). Augustus comes into the room, and Mrs Harley expresses her last wish:

> '[…] Farewel, my children! Love and assist each other—Augustus, where is your hand?—my sight fails me—God bless you and your little ones—*God bless you all!* My last sigh—my last prayer—is yours.'
>
> Exhausted by these efforts, she fainted—Augustus uttered a deep groan, and raised her in his arms—but life was fled (Ibid, p. 154).

In her death moment, Mrs Harley expresses her disappointment with her actual life that does not correspond to her worldview and her wishes. Even though life is not appealing to her anymore, she encourages her beloved ones to solidarity, and voices her admiration for purity and clarity, embodied by Emma. In this scene, there are many words that describe an emotional or physical state in the semantic field of tears, lament, happiness and hope. In addition, the use of dashes accentuates the distress and tries to replicate the strenuousness in articulating sentiments. Hays attempts to represent emotions through the description of their physical effect.

However, Hays depicts Emma not just as a woman of feeling, but as a more complex character. In fact, not only does the protagonist feel much, but she also reasons much and her memoirs are quite cerebral. Both reason and passion are important for her characterisation. Hays decides to analyse the depths of suffering thus revealing an unprecedented psychological complexity in fiction.

3.2. Hays and Emma: “auto-narration”

Hays wanted to focus on her heroine to explain the psychological causes and consequences in forming the female character. Emma’s workings of the mind are explicitly reported, and her principles remain constant in determining her actions. As already stated in the Preface, Hays announces that Emma is a real, plausible human being. Thus, she has both positive qualities, the interest in knowledge, the love of truth, virtue, sincerity, but also negative ones, such as stubbornness and self-centredness. Hays demonstrates how Emma is the result of a set of external circumstances.

The author deploys different methods to give prominence to Emma and her strong self-consciousness. To accentuate the sense of reality in the depiction of the heroine, not only did Hays deploy the epistolary form, but she used her personal letters as reference for Emma’s correspondences. In fact, the author noticed that letters written on purpose for the novel carried less emotional force than those originating from her life (Walker, 2018a, pp. 138-139). Thus, the author decided to rework her original correspondences to convey a more powerful sense of self, emotional force, and sense of urgency.

Indeed, this piece of fiction contains much of real life. The truth of the letters accentuates the emotional part and renders it authentic. Hays’ novel is remarkable for its unprecedented emotional power that emerges from a tumultuous inner reality shared between the author and the heroine. Even if they experience different situations, Hays and Emma feel in the same way. Hays confessed privately to Godwin that she was inseparable from Emma even though she refused to admit it publicly to avoid unnecessary rumours (Ibid., p. 149).

Tilottama Rajan explored the relationship between Hays and Emma through the Romanticism-influenced auto-narration, “a genre characterized by the way the text is filled, penetrated by the affect of the author’s life” (2010, p. 93). Hays had multiple reasons to rewrite her life in the fictional realm. Firstly, she managed to overcome the grief over the rejection of love and go on with her life (Ty, 1996, p. xv). Then, she validated her position as a suffering woman. She exposed a personal reality unknown to men but that women might have share and generally hid. Even a rebellious author like Wollstonecraft detached her fictional heroines from their sorrow. She conveyed their anguish in a romantic melancholic contemplation and did not analyse the depths of

suffering. On the contrary, Hays meticulously described the workings of her mind and the swings of her emotional states that entail changeability and inner chaos. Hays involved her readers in her experience, sharing her thoughts and emotions (Rajan, 2010, p. 83).

The use of the first person pronoun enforces the link between Hays and Emma. The heroine tells her memoirs as a first-hand experience, commenting upon the events and the chain of consequences that had determined her life. In that, she assumes a rational tone that reveals knowledge of scientific topics and the human soul. Just like Hays, Emma is influenced by philosophers such as Godwin, Helvétius and Rousseau. Both women utilised these thinkers' doctrines to analyse themselves. However, Hays "was not a systematic thinker": she applied her heterogeneous knowledge specifically to explain the female self in the best manner she could even though she was not always coherent (Walker, 2018a, p. 136).

The author and the heroine expose the obstacles women have to endure because of their gender. In fact, Hays deploys fiction to illustrate the eighteenth-century female condition. Fiction is especially effective because it deals with emotions and could eventually touch its readership. In accord with Jacobin fiction, Hays' ambition was to provoke an inner transformation that would lead to an external change.

Auto-narration is a form of self-writing that is positioned between autobiography and fiction. It mixes both forms but does not coincide with either of them (Rajan, 2010, p. 96). While Hays maintained some elements of her life, she changed others in accordance with her intent, which is exposed in the Preface. Also, Emma's initial letter to the younger Augustus Harley shows us her interest in the deliverance of her life writing:

> Rash young man!—why do you tear from my heart the affecting narrative, which I had hoped no cruel necessity would ever have forced me to review?—why do you oblige me to recall the bitterness of my past life, and to renew images, the remembrance of which, even at this distant period, harrows up my soul with inconceivable misery?—But your happiness is at stake, and every selfish consideration vanishes.—Dear and sacred deposit of an adored and lost friend!—for whose sake I have consented to hold down, with struggling, suffocating

> reluctance, the loathed and bitter portion of existence;—shall I expose your ardent mind to the incessant conflict between truth and error—shall I practise the disingenuousness, by which my peace has been blasted—shall I suffer you to run the wild career of passion—shall I keep back the recital, written upon my own mind in characters of blood, which may preserve the child of my affections from destruction? (Hays, 2009, p. 7).

Through this address, Emma introduces the necessity of writing her memoirs. Even though she affirms the distance between her present self and her past self, the remembrance of her past suffering still afflicts her. Thus, a distinction between two Emmas appears: the one who narrates from the future, and the one who is narrated and whose life is still in progress in the course of the novel. The voice of the narrated Emma emerges in the reported correspondences with Mr Francis and Augustus Harley. At the end of the book, the two figures eventually coincide.

Emma the narrator explains that she had to repress her antecedent emotions to survive. However, she is willing to sacrifice her hard-achieved peace of mind for the benefit of her adoptive son, just like a mother would thoughtfully do. Therefore, she selects the meaningful events of her life to include in her memoirs to prevent Augustus from repeating her own errors and spare him from unnecessary suffering. Moreover, she is also aware that narratives are more effective than received or rational principles. She exhorts him:

> Learn, then, from the incidents of my life, entangled with those of his whom you owe your existence, a more striking and affecting lesson than abstract philosophy can ever afford (Hays, 2009, p. 9).

Emma the narrator is positioned at the end of the series of incidents that are recounted from a future perspective. Thus, she is able to comment on the narrated events and link them causally. She gives them a particular connotation according to their outcome. The narrator distances herself from the narrated Emma and her errors that she places in the past, a dynamic, hopeful, and naive time that contrasts with her doomed adulthood. The use of both letters and memoirs allows the rebellious adolescence of the main character to coexist with her mature years (Rajan, 2010, p. 86).

Emma's intent corresponds to Hays': both narrate a story in order to teach a lesson leaning on the emphatic capacity of the readers. Hays prepares the audience to receive the work by suggesting the appropriate interpretation for her design. The voice of Emma the narrator is remarkably close to that of Hays. Both intend the story as a warning and an invitation to learn from past errors.

Hays and Emma are similar in many respects. Both women belong to the eighteenth-century middle class. While Hays has a numerous family, Emma is the only daughter the Courtneys had. However, soon Emma becomes an orphan and her adoptive family is large and loving. The heroine's parentless state accentuates the struggle she has to endure to provide for herself and generates a sense of helplessness. In not belonging to a family, orphans are outcasts also from society. However, this lonely position allows an external critical gaze to be introduced. On her part, the author is not an orphan, but she is an outcast regardless because she does not marry and chooses to live on her own in her twenties.

Then, both women hunger for knowledge and get access to it by any means available to them. Significantly, they search for male support. As Hays corresponded mainly with Robinson and Godwin, Emma becomes acquainted with Mr Francis, who is modelled after Godwin, and is taught by Augustus. Furthermore, Hays' and Emma's uncommon education also contributes to isolate them in that they are too learned for the societal and professional position they are expected to cover. Thus, both women are not satisfied with their actual situation. Clearly, both Hays and Emma are not interested in the traditional female role, because they aspire to something more instead.

Yet, the differences between the two women and their stories are what is important. The gaps between the two lives are "zones of possibility" that allow different perspectives to be introduced and suggest an unconventional retelling of the story (Ibid., pp. xx, 109). Obviously, the most striking divergence why the man refused the woman's love. However, the consequences are the same: both Hays and Emma go through deep introspection and emotional havoc.

As Hays wrote to Godwin, Frend rejected her categorically for economic reasons, either for the maintenance of his stipend at Jesus College or for not having enough money to live decently with a wife (Walker, 2018a, p. 145). Hays was irritated by his

hypocrisy: their joint income would have been sufficient to allow them a quite satisfactory life (Ibid.). She accused him of choosing money over humanity. Hays' union with Frend would have been impossible in any case.

On the contrary, even though Augustus is also required not to marry to maintain his uncle's stipend, the reason why he rejects Emma is that he has already contracted a secret marriage. Unlike the scheming and cold-hearted Frend, Augustus is moved by his passions and his questionable sense of moral duty. He confesses on his deathbed that he had always loved Emma but that he could not reciprocate her feelings because of social obligations. Therefore, Emma's life might have been considerably different, and she could have benefited from the union she craved for, if societal norms had not been so strict, and Augustus had behaved more cautiously. While Hays's real-life passion is disregarded, Emma's fictional passion is not (Rajan, 2010, p. xx). The narrative retelling places the cause of Emma's troubles in secrecy, vice, and the uses of society. Emma's desire is valid because it is confirmed by Augustus' final love confession. In short, Hays demonstrates the rightfulness of female sexual desire and condemns social restrictions on women's passion.

3.3. Education and sensibility

Emma is characterised by her extremely sensitive nature and her ardent desire for freedom and knowledge. Her sensibility was fostered by her loving adoptive family that rendered Emma particularly prone to develop strong emotional bonds. She was so fond of her aunt and uncle that every short separation caused her tears and complaints. The narrator is aware that her heightened emotionalism was caused by Mrs Melmoth and that it potentially constituted a flaw: "the tenderness of this worthy woman generated in my infant disposition that susceptibility, that lively propensity to attachment, to which I have through life been a martyr" (Hays, 2009, p. 14). Later, Emma will confess: "It is necessary for me to love and admire, or I sink into sadness" (Ibid., p. 146).

In her youth, Emma was extremely fascinated by the adventurous Eastern tales Mrs Melmoth, herself a reader "of the old romances" (Ibid., p. 11), used to narrate to entertain the children:

> the more they excited vivid emotions, the more wonderful they were, the greater was my transport: they became my favourite amusement, and produced, in my young mind, a strong desire of learning to read the books which contained such enchanting stories of entertainment (Ibid., p. 14).

Emma's emotional susceptibility to stories led her to learn to read. She was supported and encouraged by her adoptive parents and read her uncle's favourites: "Pope's Homer, and Thomson's Seasons" (Ibid.). She became extremely fond of books, and was influenced by the stories she read:

> stories were still my passion, and I sighed for a romance that would never end. In my sports with my companions, I acted over what I had read: I was alternately the valiant knight—the gentle damsel—the adventurous mariner—the daring robber—the courteous lover—and the airy coquet (Ibid., p. 15).

Emma reads various kinds of fiction and impersonates diverse kinds of characters while playing with her cousins. Her imagination makes associations freely and disregards gender or class distinctions. Thus, Hays illustrates how little differentiations imposed by society matter at an early age. The author believed that in an ideal natural condition the mind does not have a gender and that male and female profiles are constructed by social custom and education (Walker, 2018a, pp. 76, 145). Then, Emma subscribes to a circulating library and "devoured—little careful in the selection—from ten to fourteen novels in a week" (Hays, 2009, p. 18).

To sum up, Emma's unguided reading and Mr Melmoth's tenderness contributed to shaping Emma's character. The heroine relies much on her imagination and her sensibility. She also became "vain and self-willed": she was accustomed to fulfilling her wishes and got angry easily though not lastingly if she could not satisfy them (Ibid., pp. 14-15). Her adoptive parents were too permissive: they pampered her in their affection and mostly complied with her wishes. As a result, Emma has a strong aversion towards impositions, as she demonstrates when she is sent to boarding school at twelve years old. Far from her family's fondness and with specific subjects to study and activities to do, the school is like a prison to her. She explains that:

> my actions were all constrained;—I was obliged to sit poring over needle-work, and forbidden to prate;—my body was tortured into forms, my mind coerced, and

> tasks imposed upon me, grammar and French, mere words, that conveyed to me no ideas (Ibid., p. 15).

Conventional eighteenth-century female education is restricted to Emma both physically and mentally and contrasts with the way she has trained herself so far. The heroine is not interested in the subjects the school envisages and is forbidden to express herself freely. Her energy is detained and diverted to static activities, such as tailoring, and her genuine speech is delimited in favour of an empty language. The lexical choice of command and prohibition enforces Emma's annoyance. When she manages to procure herself books to read, she is punished, and the books are seized. On these occasions an early sense of rebellion emerges and pushes her to compose "doggrel rhymes" to revenge on her teachers (Ibid., p. 16). Emma uses her own speech to contrast the received discourse by the institutions. Through language Emma manages to "escape power and cultural constraints through writing in an unorthodox manner" her whole life (Ty, 1993, p. 49). The *Memoirs* themselves are evidence of that rebellious use of linguistic communication.

Then, Emma's education continues in Mr Courtney's library. Her initial enthusiasm for the high availability of books is abashed when she notices that the bookcases were locked. The access to knowledge is controlled by her father. Indeed, Mr Courtney had observed that Emma's "imagination had been left to wander unrestrained in the fairy fields of fiction" and admonishes her: "your fancy requires a *rein* rather than a *spur*" (Hays, 2009, p. 21). He considers it proper to counterbalance her dreamy inclination with serious discipline. Thus, he chooses historical readings for her, starting with Plutarch's *Parallel Lives.* He occasionally makes some cursory remarks on her study.

Emma never really liked history because the intellectual and artistic grandeur achieved by the great populations of the past was always spoilt by the emergence of corruption and vices. In contrast, the heroine gladly alleviated her spirits through poetry and fiction. Even at a young age, she demonstrates an early repulsion for the real material world and a preference for the inner world of emotions and thoughts. Then, Emma began her metaphysical enquiries about the nature of the soul. She appreciated theology and philosophy because she felt that her

> mind began to be emancipated, […] I reasoned freely, endeavoured to arrange and methodize my opinions, and to trace them fearlessly through all consequences: while from exercising my thoughts with freedom, I seemed to acquire new strength and dignity of character (Ibid., p. 25).

Slowly, Emma wins her father's trust, and he provides her with the keys to the bookcases. One day, the protagonist encounters Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. The work awakens the deepest sympathies and emotions in Emma's mind in a turbulent way: "the pleasure I experienced approached the limits of pain—it was tumult—all the ardour of my character was excited" (Ibid.). As Mr Courtney discovers Emma crying over the book, he takes it away from her immediately. However, Emma has read enough of it:

> the impression made on my mind was never to be effaced—it was even productive of a long chain of consequences, that will continue to operate till the day of my death (Ibid.).

The fact that Emma did not complete the reading of Rousseau's novel is problematic in that Emma "reads about Julie's passion but not its correction" (Rajan, 2010, p. 84). The potential danger is that Julie talked freely about her feelings despite the societal imposition of obligation and integrity towards the family (Ty, 1996, p. xxii). Thus, Emma still encourages her emotional expression even though she does not acquire the means to control her passions. The narrator is aware of this fault and its grave consequences. The protagonist's unguided access to the locked paternal books demonstrates the risks connected to freedom.

Emma says that her father never demonstrated any affection for her, but he earned her respect. He gave Emma useful hints and instructions for her educational development, even if he did not act either as a father or as a teacher. Also, the notions Emma acquires make her cousins "look[...] up to [her] as a kind of superior being", heightening her vanity (Hays, 2009, p. 26). On the one hand, Emma's character forms itself in sympathy and love for virtue, while, on the other, Emma nourishes her intellectual interest with books and knowledge that tend to create pride and a sense of superiority (Kelly, 1993, p. 98).

Interestingly, Walker emphasises the fact that Emma's strong devotion to knowledge is "unique in women's writing" (2018a, p. 145). Hays demonstrates that women can be interested in "masculine" topics. Interest and curiosity become, along with love, the engine that sets Emma's mind in motion. In brief, Hays proves through Emma's story how "like men, women are creatures of education" (Ibid.). The rarity of female thinkers is only due to the systematic difficulties women experience in accessing knowledge and the predominantly male intellectual circles.

In addition, the author depicts a deep connection between education and feeling in the protagonist. This link enforces her idea that on the one hand reason, traditionally a masculine attribute, and on the other feeling, traditionally a feminine one, are not separated. In Emma's case, their joint force produces an "equivocal" but complex heroine that does not fit pre-existing schemes. Not only has reading enlarged Emma's mind, but it has also made her aware of the constrained female condition against which she is to clash her whole life. Being ambitious and active, the limitations established by society will only cause Emma psychological damage. As a consequence, even though the protagonist dreams of valorous and romantic adventures, she takes the role of the lady in distress when confronted with the real world (Ty, 1993, p. 53).

3.4. Dependence in the "magic circle"

Unfortunately, Emma's spiritual nobility and love for freedom are not met with material resources (Kelly, 1993, p. 98). Her uncommon education has made her aware of how women have been constructed and kept in a condition of dependence. Especially, she feels its implications in an accentuated way after the death of her adoptive parents and her father, when she has to provide for herself with little financial resources.

> *Dependence!*—I repeated to myself, and I felt my heart die within me. I revolved in my mind various plans for my future establishment.—I might, perhaps, be allowed to officiate, as an assistant, in the school where I had been placed in my childhood, with the mistress of which I still kept up an occasional correspondence; but this was a species of servitude, and my mind panted for freedom, for social intercourse, for scenes in motion, where the active curiosity of my temper might find a scope

> wherein to range and speculate. What could the interest of my little fortune afford? It would neither enable me to live alone, nor even to board in a family of any respectability. […] Cruel prejudices!—I exclaimed—hapless woman! Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamantine chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell? (Hays, 2009, pp. 31-32).

Emma gives voice to her frustration in facing the extremely limited possibilities women have in the eighteenth century. Lacking sufficient wealth and a supportive family, the only option left for her is that of servitude, a position she abhors. The protagonist considers the possibility of teaching in the school that she hated as a child. Emma blames female education that aims at creating man-pleasing female objects to be ideal wives but is quite useless in teaching women to provide for themselves. Typical female occupations, such as embroidery and tailoring, contribute to confining women to the domestic sphere and function as an excuse to restrain their learning of any other skill or discipline (Walker, 2018a, p. 73). Moreover, as Hays states in the *Appeal*, women could not convert their domestic labour into a profession, because men had already appropriated the activities suitable for women and turned them into commercial business (Ty, 1993, p. 52). Indeed, there is no professional career available to women.

The "adamantine chain" and the "magic circle" are two effective metaphors that illustrate women's confinement. Moreover, Wollstonecraft used the image of the "magic circle" in her Scandinavian *Letters* although she used it to refer to the comfort that the romantic imagination offers. In contrast, Hays' magic circle "stands for the invisible power of ideology over the mind and body of the individual" that keeps women in a condition of dependence (Kelly, 1993, p. 98). Breaking this "enchantment" that confines women to the domestic sphere is impossible. Emma's imprisonment will eventually turn her into the "victim of a [...] distempered imagination" and make her fall in love with a man she has never seen (Hays, 2009, p. 77). Nevertheless, despite acknowledging and lamenting the existence of social constraints, Emma manages to breach the "magic circle" on various occasions through words and actions (Ty, 1993, p. 56). She often takes an active rebellious stance to defend her position. She vindicates her rights and

desires when women conventionally would be silent. As far as she is allowed, she boldly decides for herself.

Ty notes that the patriarchal symbolic order deploys language to manipulate (Ibid., p. 48). In the eighteenth century women were forbidden to express themselves freely and were given patterns to follow, as Emma's education at school demonstrates. Indeed, other people decide for the protagonist even about her fate or education without asking her opinion (Ibid., p. 49). Despite having rejected the role of father, Mr Courtney determines that Emma is to be sent to a boarding school, and then wants her to come to his library to learn history and science.

Later, Mr Morton offers to accommodate Emma in his house where Emma's purposes are misunderstood two times (Ibid., p. 50). Firstly, when Emma offers to help with the education of the younger children, Mrs Morton accuses her of superiority for wishing to interfere in her pedagogical methods. Emma justifies herself by saying that her intention was only to render herself useful and not to display her erudition. Secondly, her friendly interest in Mr Francis is mistaken for a romantic interest. Emma's admiration for Mr Francis' interventions during dinner led her to seek his friendship and engage in a correspondence with him. Emma had acted according to her needs and did not consider how other people might interpret her actions. Mr Morton warns her: "you have a quick wit, but you want experience. [...] the world is justly attentive to the conduct of young women, and too apt to be censorious" (Hays, 2009, p. 43). She reassures Mr Morton: "I considered Mr Francis as a *philosopher*, and not as a *lover*" (Ibid., p. 44). Indeed, as a philosopher, Mr Francis will be a helpful guide to Emma. He will assist her in understanding metaphysical concepts and enduring some tricky situations. When Emma is perplexed because she feels contradictions between theory and experience, she seeks his advice through letters. In turn, Francis suggests her alternative perspectives to improve her understanding and encourages her to adopt a philosophical attitude toward the world. He advises her to see the bigger picture rather than only her own situation.

3.5. Female sexuality and desire

In the meantime, Emma becomes infatuated with an ideal depiction of Augustus that she constructs through the praises her cousin Ann and Mrs Harley make of him. Ann interestingly foretells Emma's falling in love during their first walk to Mrs Harley's house: "could you but see Augustus Harley, you would, infallibly, lose your heart [...] Montague is a fine gentleman, but Augustus Harley is more—*He is a man!*" (Ibid., p. 53). Emma does not consider Mr Montague highly because of his inconstant and incoherent behaviour caused by his inclination to indulge in his instincts. Ann's juxtaposition of Mr Montague with Augustus makes Emma think of a different type of man, more mature and rational. The protagonist mistakenly imagines him to be the embodiment of virtue, which is also ironically symbolised by his name of Roman origin.

Then, Emma describes how Augustus' portrait in Mrs Harley's library "played in [her] fancy—[her] heart paid involuntary homage to virtue" (Ibid.). Emma's love for virtue converts ultimately to love and sexual desire. Through the workings of imagination Augustus becomes "the St Preux, the Emilius, of [Emma's] sleeping and waking reveries" (Hays, 2009, p. 59). The heroine compares Augustus to the male protagonists of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* and *Emilius*. Augustus is the hero of the story Emma imagined through all the elements she gathered about him from her acquaintances.

In addition, Augustus Harley's surname recalls the main character of Henry Mackenzie's popular sentimental fiction *The Man of Feeling* (Ty, 1996, p. xxviii). Mackenzie's Harley is a timid naive sensitive man who enjoys his sensibility and is proud of his empathic capacity. The emotional part in him is so strong that it detaches him from the world and inhibits his actions. On the contrary, Hays' Harley is ambivalent about his sentiments. While he presumably indulged his passions during his Grand Tour, even marrying secretly, he has to dominate his emotions after meeting Emma and falling in love with her. Once he meets obligations, he seems to respect them even if his situation causes him many troubles and pain that he conceals. Interestingly, the similarity between both the Harleys is that they are able to confess their real love only before dying though for different reasons. While Mackenzie's Harley was prevented from speaking his real sentiments to Miss Walton because he feared an eventual

rejection, Hays' Harley confesses his love to Emma only on his deathbed because of his marital obligations.

Emma starts to examine her emotions rationally and realises that she has fallen in love with a man she has never seen: "I felt, that I loved an ideal object (for such was Augustus Harley to me) with a tender and fervent excess" (Hays, 2009, p. 60). The young protagonist wishes to know him and become the heroine of his sentimental story. Yet, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloise* depicts an adulterous and troubled love, and in *The Man of Feeling* the romance does not even begin. Both novels predict a tormented love relationship also in Hays' *Memoirs*.

Thus, Emma falls in love with a romanticised version of Augustus that does not correspond to what he is. When they get to know each other, Augustus is kind towards Emma, and he assists her in learning. He seems to appreciate her company and to encourage her affection. Emma describes a spiritual intellectual relationship in which she imagines a romantic attraction (Walker, 2018a, p. 147).

Augustus does not make a love confession when Emma judges appropriate, and Emma dreads the thought of not being able to see him anymore. She investigates the causes of her hesitation to confess her love. She judges them to arise from the hypocrisy of bourgeois conventions. Thus, considering them illogical, Emma decides to confide in her principles and Augustus' gentleness and declares her love to him in a heart-felt letter (Ibid, p. 146; Hays, 2009, pp. 79-83).

On paper Emma analyses the stages of the growth of her love for Augustus through a philosophical voice. She opens her heart to him and enumerates the qualities he possesses that she appreciates. Emma confesses her love not only for Augustus, but also for virtue. Indeed, she wishes for personal improvement thanks to a worthy connection: "an attachment sanctioned by nature, reason, and virtue, ennobles the mind capable of conceiving and cherishing it" (Hays, 2009, pp. 81-82). In addition, according to the narrated Emma, virtue produces happiness. She hopes to experience what is described in Hays' favourite quote of Alexander Pope: "the feast of reason, and the flow of souls" (Ibid., p. 71). Finally, she expects that Augustus will be moved by her sincere letter, and asks explicitly about his emotional situation: "*Is your heart, at present, free?*" (Ibid., p. 82).

Emma is conscious of her position and her desiring identity thanks to her habit of self-scrutiny. In taking the initiative, she affirms herself as a yearning subject that aspires to virtue and knowledge. She judges her goal to be reached through the union with a virtuous man whose qualities she admires. As Todd explains, Emma wishes for a customary amorous relationship, but the crucial point is the unconventional manner in which she is to achieve her romantic aim as it challenges female sexual roles (Ty, 1993, p. 50). Emma expresses her subjective wishes constructed through imagination while she is expected to be submissive and objectified in a Burkean society (Rajan, 2010, p. 88).

In the eighteenth century marriage was the only possible path to fulfilment for women and also female education aimed at it. Only through marriage can Emma have a social position and thus some rights and a voice. Nevertheless, Emma is already an outcast and does not care about belonging to polite society, at least consciously. In fact, she does not ask for marriage, but for love (Ibid., p. xx). In her opinion, emotional and intellectual gratification is more important than external material achievements.

Despite the gradual change towards a companionate marriage, women were customarily not expected to have a voice in choosing their partner. Eventually, they could only refuse an offer of marriage. Indeed, Emma declines Mr Montague's first engagement proposal because she would not love him sincerely. She behaves coherently to her principles: "I would not marry any man, merely for an *establishment*, for whom I did not feel an affection" (Hays, 2009, p. 56). She vindicates love and personal desire over the institutions and promotes this change of custom.

Furthermore, Emma surpasses the prescribed sexual boundaries and daringly reverts social conventions. She takes the male responsibility to make the first step in the courtship and talks about her feelings and her desires. Emma's courting is a subversive act that potentially has dangerous implications for the social order. Since the female body was the means through which inheritance was transmitted, it was vital to restrain women's sexuality to maintain order in the social layers and control the distribution of wealth.

The fear of female sexuality was firmly established in the eighteenth century. It led to considering women who wanted to decide on their emotional and sexual life as

monsters (Ty, 1993, p. 55). If they were also interested in scientific disciplines, they were denigrated even more (Ibid.). The feminist thinker Luce Irigaray explains that female sexuality was regarded "as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole" (Ibid., p. 56). The fear of this uncontrollable yet unknown force is what made the majority of people dismiss and belittle women who talked about their sexuality.

At any rate, female sexuality exists even if it is restrained or ignored. Emma discovered hers thanks to her intellectual training and will talk about it freely through letters, in which she feels safer to expose herself (Hays, 2009, p. 117). Thus, Emma disrupts the conventional connotation of woman: she redefines the boundaries of gender and those of reason, sensibility and passion, as already Wollstonecraft had done (Bour, 2015, p. 153). She represents a revolutionary womanhood that necessitates a revision of the lexical meaning of many concepts, such as sensibility and virtue.

In a cultural climate that reevaluates the human emotional part, Bour argues that eighteenth-century theories of sensibility were male-centred and excluded women (1998, p. 149). While in men sensibility was a mark of humanity, in women it was a characteristic of their weak nature. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft enlarged the definition of sensibility to include sensuality (Bour, 2015, p. 150). The feminist writer also claimed that women become rational beings, when they stop being attached to rakes (Jones, 1994, p. 175). Then, Hays valued the strength that originates in sensibility. However, depending on their power, both reason and sensibility can alienate them (Bour, 1998, p. 149). Not only does the concept of sensibility need to be reworked, but also the division between passion and reason must be reconsidered.

On the unconscious level, Emma's desire for Augustus is far more complex in that he "represents many things she lacks" in her condition as a woman and orphan (Ty, 1996, p. xxxi). Surely, desire exists because of the constant absence of something (Ibid., p. xxx). It can never be satisfied due to the discrepancy between the imagined object of wish and what is actually achieved. A persistent void is at its core, a dissatisfaction that pushes to desire continuously. Moreover, the object of desire is only a partial representation of something else beyond it (Rajan, 2010, p. 87-88).

In Emma's case, Augustus represents the source of knowledge and the membership to a family. Indeed, Emma's love for Augustus originates from the friendship with Mrs Harley, as the heroine analyses: "my grateful love for Mrs Harley had, already, by a transition easy to be traced by a philosophic mind, transferred itself to her son" (Hays, 2009, p. 59). Preventing any other socially acceptable expression, Emma's desire is expressed in the love for a man (Rajan, 2010, p. 90).

Specifically, Emma suffers from the absence of a loving mother figure. After Mrs Melmoth's death, the protagonist feels like "A deserted outcast from society—a desolate orphan" with no home (Hays, 2009, p. 74). Unsurprisingly, Emma is reminded of her affective want when she empathises with Mrs Harley's loneliness that is caused by the separation from her son (Ty, 1996, p. xxx). While Emma wants a mother, Mrs Harley wants her son. Their friendship soon turns into a sort of parental relationship that is to be accomplished through Augustus. Eventually, Emma becomes Mrs Harley's "beloved daughter—the meritorious child of her affections" in caring for Augustus after the carriage accident; and later Augustus calls Emma her sister when she lives with his mother and they spend much time together (Hays, 2009, pp. 69, 71; Ty, 1996, p. xxxii). Thus, Emma is already part of the family in terms of affection, but she can be officially part of it only through marriage. Not only does Emma desire Augustus, but also Mrs Harley expresses her wish that Augustus should be united with Emma in marriage. Through the man, Mrs Harley can inherit a daughter and Emma can belong to a family. Moreover, thanks to Augustus Emma also has access to things she could not get to otherwise, such as knowledge.

3.6. Strong passions in epistles

Since it is a bold assertion to voice, Emma cautiously composes her love declaration in the form of a letter. She feels that she "could express [herself] with more freedom on paper" (Hays, 2009, p. 39). This is probably due to the fact that the topics she writes about are not appropriate for society: personal sexual longing and lust cannot be voiced in public discourse (Rajan, 2010, p. xx). The act of thinking and transferring the thoughts in a written text occupies an individual space, exactly as the imagination

does. In this way it is independent from external constraints and can really be a pure free enquiry.

The composition of letters is constructed on the absence of the reader. Emma writes her version of the past or wishes for the future, which interferes with the objectivity of the story. Interestingly, Ty suggests that "Though grounded in the factual, letters are always part-fantasy, detailing scenes from an unrecoverable past, or articulating a yet unattainable future" (1996, p. xxii).

As Hays' correspondence demonstrates, epistles are not necessarily read only by the addressees. Indeed, Hays' letters to Godwin about her relationship with Frend were also read by Wollstonecraft. Ultimately, the reworked transference of these letters into a published work broadens the audience of the story. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* become a "letter to the reader, thus putting [romantic] desire in circulation" (Rajan, 2010, p. 92). Desire is what both epistolary and memoir transmit. Moreover, the two forms allow a younger rebellious Emma and a mature disappointed Emma to coexist. Even though the narrator delivers the tale in a cautionary tone, she questions unresolved passions and asks for a different interpretation.

Mary Jacobus states that epistolary creates an "intermediate state" in the communication between the writer and the reader in that it connects personal inner reality and external world (Ibid., p. 109). Hays' "inner psychic reality" is revealed to an exterior public that understands Hays' ideas in the context of their own perception of the external reality (Ibid.). This blurs and complicates the descriptions of the events and of psychological and emotional states.

Both in Hays' and Emma's case, the writing subject is both "analysand and analyst, sensate being and inquiring scientist" (Walker, 2018a, p. 137). Hays writes to unburden her mind and to understand the events and her responses better through the retelling of the story. In this action the self is thus repositioned in a retrospective narrative. The philosophical self-scrutiny defines the subject that reflects on itself and retells the story of what happened according to his or her point of view, which is subject to change over time. Thus, the self is constantly constructed and deconstructed but not resolved through auto-narration in an "unfinished transcription of a subject still in

process" (Rajan, 2010, p. 83). This implies that the subject cannot be enclosed in a fixed role.

Even though the *Memoirs* are directed to a female audience, Emma addresses only men: Augustus Harley, his son, and Mr Francis. The protagonist trusts her addressees, and thinks they have an uncommon enlightened understanding and are humane and generous. Emma puts herself in an ambiguous position in which she voices unfeminine opinions to a male audience and expresses her desires. She is in between her actual self and what she wishes to be (Ibid., p. 108). Through letters she reimagines an alternative feminine subjectivity that clashes with the existing one and that cannot be shown publicly. In writing to the younger Augustus, Emma's dissenting voice can be heard by someone with societal rights. Thus, Emma can hope for a future change that can be enacted only by men. She is aware that women face various impediments when attempting to exceed their social roles. Hays' choice contrasts with that of Wollstonecraft in *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*. Indeed, Maria delivers her story as a cautionary tale to her daughter who will probably replicate her mother's life. While raising female consciousness is surely important, it is not enough for Hays.

While Emma's words flow uncontrollably through her letters, men become silent. This proves the heroine's marginality in eighteenth-century society. Emma's letters to Augustus are not promptly nor properly answered. He evades her questions and a frank confrontation on sentimental matters. In fact, he admits that he "knew not how—[he] *could not answer* [Emma's] *letter*" (Hays, 2009, p. 96). Augustus reveals that he is not accustomed to responding to female emotional claims. We might also imply that Augustus considered his wife only as an object of desire and did not consider her feelings or needs.

Consequently, Augustus shifts the focus on himself and makes clear that he is "neither a stoic or a philosopher" and his life "has not been free from error" (Ibid.). Then, he asks her "whether, absorbed in [her] own sensations, [she] allowed [herself] to remember, and to respect, the feelings of others" (Ibid., p. 159). Indeed, Emma's inner turbulence blinded her concern for other people's condition, to which, however, she is not insensitive. Emma is naturally generous and willing to employ herself to assist her acquaintances multiple times, for example in nursing her sick friends.

Admittedly, Augustus finds himself in an arduous situation that, however, is generated by his own mistakes. He seems to have encouraged Emma's affection, but then he refuses her, just like Frend appears to have done with Hays (Walker, 2018a, p. 141). His behaviour is incomprehensible until his final love confession. On the contrary, Emma's mistakes arise not only from her own misjudgement, but also from the unfitting requirements of the female role, as she analyses: "the mind of energy, struggling to emancipate itself, will entangle itself in error" (Hays, 2009, p. 159). While Augustus had an ample margin of choice, Emma did not.

This is another reason why the focus of the *Memoirs* is the inner reality of the female protagonist whose self-centredness silences other characters. Unlike, for example, Mr Francis, whose letters are included in the text, Augustus' words and actions are always reported by Emma except for some brief passages (Bour, 2015, p. 154). He is presented only through the protagonist's point of view, which may not adhere to facts and be distorted because of her love (Ibid). In fact, Emma believed Augustus to be generous and admired his humane ideas. Thus, the Hays' readers cannot form an objective idea of the male protagonist. Moreover, other voices, not only Emma's acquaintances, are repressed, even those of other unfortunate women, like the wife of Augustus (Jones, 1994, p. 184). Hays developed the secondary characters less carefully and in a less detailed manner than Emma.

Emma's and Augustus' behaviours also show a different attitude towards society: while men conform to it, women are more likely to challenge it. Indeed, as a woman, Emma has nothing to lose and is willing to risk everything when she says: "I will not spare myself" (Hays, 2009, p. 103). Instead, Augustus has to maintain his privileges as a male individual. He is absent and weak: he cannot impose himself on society and accepts traditional customs. He is also ambiguous in that it mixes "a residual libertine identity, representative of Burkean social structures, and an emergent 1790s new man, victim along with the heroine of 'human institutions'" (Jones, 1994, p. 184). This hybrid condition causes an inner conflict that is also revealed in Augustus' countenance, as Emma worryingly observes (Hays, 2009, p. 115). However, what is clear is that Augustus is a mismatch for Emma because of the complex nature of her desire (Ty, 1996, p. xxxiii). Not only are traditional and literary male models unfit for the demands

of a revolutionary femininity, but also a new masculinity is still arduous to conceive (Jones, 1994, p. 184; Bour, 2015, p. 154).

Furthermore, men do not understand Emma's plight, as the epistolary exchange with Mr Francis demonstrates. Emma addresses him to find comfort after the discovery of Augustus' secret marriage, but she ends up arguing to defend herself.

Mr Francis represents the scientific rational voice reflecting the dominant social discourse of those years (Ty, 1996, p. xxvii). He gives Emma the blame for her distress: according to him, she had been "hunting after torture" because she "addressed a man impenetrable as a rock" (Hays, 2009, p. 139). He judges her behaviour to be a "moon-struck madness" that led her to "sacrifice[...] at the shrine of illusion" instead of "worship[…] at the altar of reason" (Ibid.). Her friend exhorts Emma to independence: she should learn to find her own happiness by herself and with her own means. She should stop being dependent on other people.

Then, he minimises her sorrow by juxtaposing it with what he calls "real evils of human life" (Ibid.). Mr Francis considers a "real evil" any physical accident or disease that undermines bodily health and hinders intellectual exercise. On the contrary, unrequited love does not belong to this category because it is created in idleness and imagination. Thus, according to Mr Francis, only material causes provide valid obstacles to happiness.

Finally, the philosopher remarks that Emma's love had become so strong because of concealment. To sum up, Mr Francis' critique is rational and theoretical. He identifies Emma's alienation from the world as the cause of her evils. However, he does not consider the actual eighteenth-century female condition, and thus cannot really offer a practical solution Emma can apply (Ty, 1996, p. xxvii).

In her reply, Emma rebuts his assertions. She deploys the imaginary of illness to describe how she has become a victim of her passion. She has been poisoned by sensibility during all her life. Her suffering is "a real calamity" to her and reason has no power under her circumstances (Hays, 2009, p. 141). She is miserable "Because the strong, predominant, sentiment of my soul, close twisted with all its cherished associations, has been rudely torn away, and the blood follows from the lacerated

wound" (Ibid., p. 142). Since according to custom women's highest aspiration in life was to marry conveniently, Emma is left with no prospect of happiness when she is rejected by Augustus. Hays suggests that to channel ideas and energies into diverse topics and activities would be beneficial to female cognitive and emotional well-being. Indeed, Emma is "roused [...] from the languor into which [she] was sinking" when she has to compose her reply to Mr Francis (Ibid., p. 141). Also, earlier in the novel, she is relieved from dejection when she is invited to join Mrs Denbeigh in London to disrupt her wait for Augustus' letter (Ibid., p. 91).

Through metaphors, Emma examines rationally her pain, and identifies the cause of its intensity in her ambiguous condition of *"a woman, to whom education has given a sexual character*" (Ibid., p. 117). Women's natural predisposition to a sensibility that has been ultimately accentuated by education is not met with societal requirements of female chastity. Considering that female passionate expressions are regarded inappropriate, women become equivocal beings who possess a heightened sensibility but are forbidden to love straightforwardly. Emma cannot overcome her unhappiness and is unable to enact a change: "But while the source continues troubled, why expect the streams to run so pure?" (Ibid., p. 142).

Then, Emma proceeds to accuse the sexual double standard that allows men to experiment sexually, while women are not permitted to do the same. This causes men to become "sordid and dissolute in their pleasures" to the point of being "incapable of satisfying the heart of a woman of sensibility and virtue" (Ibid., p. 144). Gender-sexual standards are so contrasting that communication between men and women becomes impossible. This lack of understanding is confirmed by Emma's correspondence with Mr Francis and Augustus.

Finally, Emma is disappointed that Harley is not "a model of excellence" (Ibid.). She has been humbled and discouraged by her mistakes. Yet, she still wishes to be helpful to him for intellectual and moral improvement, and to inspire affection. She recognises her stubbornness, her madness in still hoping to win the man. She believes that dedication may reward her wishes. On the other hand, she consoles herself because of the singularity of her passion that is "*a solitary madness in the eighteenth century: it is not on the altars of love, but of gold, that men, now, come to pay their offerings*"

(Ibid., p. 143). Thus, Emma makes a distinction between herself and the world. She states the importance of individual feeling over material interests, thus criticising the bourgeois mentality that looks primarily for wealth. Along with feeling, she also values her intellectual capacity even if it might be harmful: “I am, at least, a reasoning maniac: perhaps the most dangerous species of insanity” (Ibid., p. 142).

Most importantly, Emma’s letter revises the division between reason and passion in the Enlightenment. In fact, Hays’ whole work vindicates the legitimacy of passion which was customarily considered second to reason. Echoing the Scottish philosopher David Hume, Emma confesses that “my reason was the auxiliary of my passion, or rather my passion the generative principle of my reason” (Ibid., p. 142). Not only are reason and passion connected, but passion creates the conditions for reason to operate. The rational analysis of her feelings and her material and societal position helps Emma decide which way to act (Bour, 1998, p. 148).

Hays adopts Helvétius’ conceptualisation of passion as a creative force that pushes to action and ultimately to happiness (Ty, 1996, p. xxi). Indeed, passion is what propels Emma to think and act throughout the whole novel. She asks: “what are passions, but another name for powers?” (Hays, 2009, p. 86). In contrast to popular belief, passions are not a mark of weakness, but of uncommon strength. Hays thinks that strong passions are characteristic of a strong mind and also of an intelligence above the average.

Moreover, Emma claims that “A strong passion is a solitary passion, that concentrates all our desires within one point” (Ibid., p. 61). Her love for Augustus absorbed all her energies and contributed to alienating her from the external world. Emma is isolated in her passion and even reason serves to intensify her emotions through a repetitive self-analysis, which is enclosed in the definition of the female role. Thus, along with social structures, both passion and reason isolate Emma (Bour, 1998, p. 149).

Hays was interested in reason and passion and tried to unite them even if the outcome was not coherent (Ty, 1993, p. 58). Both qualities need to work together to grant human happiness and welfare. In addition, in challenging the superiority of reason Hays also questions gender power relations that equate men to reason and women to

passion (Bour, 2015, p. 152). However, Emma's enduring unhappiness demonstrates that the new equilibrium has not been yet achieved.

3.7. Divided self

Felicity A. Nussbaum claims that self in producing an autobiography attempts to retrieve a unity, which is necessary to its conceptualisation (Nussbaum, 1989, p. 15). In truth, many gaps emerge because the self is inherently divided (Ibid). While Emma has a strong sense of self and integrity, she is also divided in many aspects.

Through her memoirs, Emma expresses the necessity of being an individual with own characteristics and story. The protagonist is highly self-conscious and proud of her ego and values. Even though she distances herself from the female standard, she has internalised some societal assumptions. She is divided between the consciousness of her own sexuality and the received gender model (Kelly, 1993, pp. 100-101). She describes her powerful sense of self:

> I feel, that I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine—but a *woman, to whom education has given a sexual character*. It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my oppressed sex; yet, I have neither the talents for a legislator nor for a reformer, of the world. I have still many female foibles, and shrinking delicacies, that unfit me for raising to arduous heights. Ambition cannot stimulate me, and to accumulate wealth, I am still less fitted (Hays, 2009, p. 117).

Emma's uncommon education made her overstep societal boundaries and achieve something more than other women. This generates her pride and a sense of superiority. Nevertheless, she feels that gender limitations impede the disclosure of her full potential and access to typically male occupations. She engages in female activities that do not satisfy her (Ibid., p. 85). At the same time, she does not feel superior to other women, she confesses to be vain too (Ibid.).

Indeed, traditional beliefs on female weakness and male strength are hard to overcome for Emma. She dramatises the systematic impediments society established for women and considers them to be the origin of her dependent condition: "the plea of *sex*" is "artificial" and caused by "the customs of society" that "have enslaved, enervated,

and degraded woman" (Ibid., p. 39). While following enlightened ideals, Emma recognises her weakness for which she provides external reasons.

On the contrary, she is convinced that the wise men she considers teachers and guides act according to virtuous principles and do not make many mistakes. She idolises them and thinks that they offer good advice and solutions. The heroine believes that they have a stronger disposition and are able to endure difficulties more successfully than women. For example, Emma's assumption about the masculine "stronger mind" in bearing pain makes Augustus angry: "'Strength!' said he, turning from me with emotion, 'rather say, weakness!'" (Ibid., p. 105). Emma sometimes fails to remember other people's humanity and does not understand their point of view. She surely exaggerates the gendered model of behaviour. When the ideal falters, Emma is disappointed.

Nevertheless, the protagonist recognises that human beings are liable to mistakes, and thus she tries to weaken her guilt and shame. She attempts to attenuate the repercussions of her actions by stating that "if the error has been *only mine*, surely my sufferings have been in proportion" (Ibid., pp. 98, 158). She is willing to act like a sacrificial victim who takes on all the painful consequences that, however, are extremely hard to bear. Emma continuously changes her mind and needs to transfer her conflicting emotions into letters. She alternatively decides to see Augustus no more and to be friends again. She resolves to love even if unrequited, states that her fondness "has, in some measure, changed its nature", and wishes him happiness (Ibid., p. 99).

However, Augustus' silence transforms the protagonist's love into resentment that starts to emerge more frequently in her statements. Emma accuses Augustus: "the wound you have inflicted *is indelible*", and "you will regret, too late, the tender, faithful, ingenuous, heart, that you have pierced through and through—*that you have almost broken*!" (Ibid., pp. 127, 130). At the same time, she is worried about his well-being and attenuates the blame: "But I mean not to reproach you—it is not given me to contribute to your happiness—the dearest and most ardent wish of my soul—I would not then inflict unnecessary pain" (Ibid., p. 127).

Yet, she believes that everything happened just in her mind, and maybe also because of self-preservation, she reiterates: "I, alone, am the author of my own

misfortunes, and should, therefore, be the only object of anger and resentment" (Ibid., p. 150). Her insistence on taking the responsibility for her words and actions underlies the mortification of making a mistake that impacts the external world and other people. Thus, the error and her identification with the expiatory victim also position Emma outside society and enhance her singularity. The protagonist is at times desperate for her loneliness and helplessness: "In the midst of my fellow beings, occupied in various pursuits, I seemed, as if in an immense desart, a solitary outcast from society" (Ibid., p. 163). However, she recognises that her nonconformist condition requires mental strength (Ibid., p. 90).

In addition, the heroine does not notice the inconstancy in her behaviour and her separateness from the real world. She cannot mediate her overwhelming emotions with reality. Other people need to point out this fact to her. Augustus comments that she "was *fastidious*" and "wanted a world made on purpose for [her], and beings formed after one model" (Ibid., p. 113). She should attempt to accept the world as it is and "endeavour to become more like an inhabitant of the world" (Ibid.).

The life of the mind is secret and opposed to what other people see. Emma advocates compliance to "the unequivocal language of sincerity", but she had been hiding her love for August so skilfully that nobody would have guessed it (Ibid., p. 98). Mr Francis observes:

> You brooded over your emotions, and considered them as a sacred deposit—You have written to me, I have seen you frequently, during the whole of this transaction, without ever having received the slightest hint of it, yet, if I be a fit counsellor now, I was a fit counsellor then; your folly was so gross, that, if it had been exposed to the light of day, it could not have subsided for a moment. Even now you suppress the name of your hero (Ibid, 140).

Indeed, Emma considers her inner emotional life to be an immense value. She concealed her feelings because of reserve, gentleness, as to avoid rumours concerning herself and her beloved. Then, she claims that "*Truth* I will never call either indelicate or inhuman", but she unconsciously cannot accept it without knowing its reasons first (Ibid., 130). Admittedly, Hays felt that sincerity was a "fine theory", but in some cases it

was “impracticable” (Walker, 2018a, p. 142). She lamented to Godwin: “*I am its victim*!” (Ibid).

Emma states that “Nature has formed woman peculiarly susceptible of the tender affections” that are enhanced by literature, fancy and reflection (Hays, 2009, p. 89). Thus, the protagonist’s education and reading heightened her sensibility and encouraged her fancy to make up stories. She seems to impersonate the stereotype of the reading woman whose dreamy attitude had been nurtured by fiction that caused her detachment from reality. Even though many authors condemned reading romances as pernicious, Hays considered it beneficial. She believed that reading romances contributed to the intellectual training of women who otherwise had little means of educating themselves. Reading would incite animations that would help to fix the associations that would fortify the intellect (Walker, 2018a, p. 70). However, Emma’s exaggerated exemplification of unguided reading is a warning of the excesses.

The conflictive view on reason and passion is stated in Emma’s initial cautionary letter to Augustus’ son. While the protagonist accepts the devaluation of passions sanctioned by society, she states their force in highlighting their importance and the need to rework her convoluted unsolved passion. Indeed, the whole *Memoirs* are on passions and the consequences of their delimitation (Ty, 1993, pp. 58-59). Emma’s story questions the custom of limiting passions and tries to inculcate the need to integrate them into society. Hays highlights the female contradiction promoted by society: while it encourages the growth of sensibility in women, it condemns passions that are the natural development of sensibility (Kelly, 1993, p. 102). Emma believes she is cured of passion after her marriage, but she is wrong because the return of Augustus destabilises her emotional state. She is not completely “restored to reason”, as she told Mr Montague (Hays, 2009, p. 170). Thus, the protagonist’s consciousness is not entirely represented. However, the represented self is the starting point for a possible transformation (Ty, 1993, p. 57). Hays wishes for acceptance of female passion and equilibrium between reason and passion.

Furthermore, only “masculine language” was available to Emma for writing her memoirs (Ibid., p. 51). In utilising a received language, Emma cannot express herself properly, and her speech is interpreted as hysteric by the male-centred elite. According

to Irigaray, masculine language impedes the full expression of female energy that is put aside and creates chaos (Ibid.). This prevents the emergence of a continuous feminine discourse linked to the maternal. In the novel, this is even more accentuated by the absence of maternal figures. Emma is believed to be hysteric by men because of her unfitting declarations. Her attempt to "[feminise] an otherwise masculine discourse" results in a disordered monologue and her attempt to rationalise her feelings drives her almost to madness (Kelly, 1993, p. 101).

Finally, Emma cannot survive completely unless she embraces the injured male part in herself (Rajan, 2010, p. 111). And even more, the protagonist rejects the culture-received feminine attributes when her sense of duty requires firmer behaviour. Emma "banished the *woman* from [her] heart" when she had to treat the dying Augustus (Hays, 2009, p. 176). She relinquishes the feminine sensibility which had been thriving in her mind to construct love. Emma's knowledge of the medical professions overpowers her feminine emotionalism (Kelly, 1993, p. 103). The goodness of her heart renders her a tireless and attentive nurse as she claims: "*affection had converted me into a heroine!*" (Hays, 2009, p. 176). Interestingly, Emma debunks Mr Francis' judgement that considered Emma "incapable of heroism" (Ibid., p. 136). In breaking the received denotations, the protagonist is able to define herself autonomously.

Similarly, Emma summons all her strength to subdue her troubled emotions and lighten Mrs Harley's last months of life: "I quickly chased from my bosom, and my countenance, every trace of sadness, when summoned to attend my friend" (Ibid., p. 151). Emma's kindness towards the people she loves demolishes physical limits. Hays seems to imply that the traditionally characterised femininity is incompatible with actual effectiveness and usefulness. On the contrary, the new womanhood is determined and reliable.

3.8. Repetition and destructiveness

As Bour suggests, Emma's sensibility alienates her from society (1998, p. 150). This process is seen through the textual confinement and the structural repetitions of the work. The heroine's multiple letters to Augustus hammer on the same central topic: the reasons why Augustus should reject her. The protagonist cannot find a satisfactory answer and Augustus does not provide one. Emma's letters function as a monologic expression of desires, hopes and disappointments that also generate uncertainty because of the lack of an external reply (Ty, 1993, p. 51). Alone with her thoughts and passions, Emma cannot move on. She is stuck in a psychological prison in which her passion and sensibility aggravate themselves to the point of becoming "nearly morbid", as Emma confesses (Bour, 1998, p. 151; Hays, 2009, p. 106). Reason cannot help her overcome material conditions, and confinement favours repetitive behaviour (Bour, 1998, p. 151).

In fact, Emma's insistent and redundant letters to Augustus that highlight the evidence of her affection for him are a signal of the lack of possibilities of action for her. It is the stiffness of social norms that caused her "hysteric" behaviour, as it is labelled by the male-dominated culture. Also, language preserves women in a condition of dependence, represses female desires, and denigrates women's opinions. Emma's obsessive love declarations smother the reader who may become annoyed by the protagonist's constant and uncontrolled emotional outbursts. Indeed, Hays wanted this repulsive reaction to cause an indignant response towards gender limitations in the reader. Thus, her audience would ideally become favourable towards a change in the system (Ty, 1993, p. 57). Emma repeats her story in the narrative and hopes for a future interruption of the tradition of female submission.

Repetition figures not only in the themes of the work, but also in its structure. The effects of passion are repeated; this happens to the events of Emma's life too. Significantly, Emma meets Augustus for the first time in an accident, and later Augustus reappears in her life because of an accident. The accidents are also metaphorical in that they disrupt Emma's life and destabilise her emotional state.

The first accident happens during a carriage drive in a raging storm on the secluded moors on a January night. While Emma escapes uninjured, both Mr Montague and Augustus (still a stranger to her) are wounded, the former in an attempt to save

himself and the latter in helping to stop the carriage. Uncommon circumstances put both men in a condition of dependence on Emma who employs herself to aid them. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, there is an analogous situation (Ty, 1996, p. xxxi). In a cold January evening on a solitary country lane the young female protagonist assists Mr Rochester in remounting his horse after a fall that sprained his ankle. In this case, too, the accident is the occasion in which Jane sees Mr Rochester for the first time, whom she knows only indirectly as her employer. Both accidents temporally reverse gender power relations and also allude to a "female fantasy and the complicated expression of desire" (Ibid.).

In addition, the accidents temporarily suspend eighteenth-century customs of decorum and allow closer contact between man and woman (Ibid). This is especially true for Emma and Augustus who depart together to find assistance for Mr Montague and the broken carriage. During their walk, Augustus falls on the ground and appears to be injured. Emma tries to secure a comforting position for him and bids him not to fatigue himself. She describes her actions and fears:

> I clasped the stranger to my throbbing bosom,—the coldness of death seemed upon him—I wrapped my shawl around him, vainly attempting to screen him from the piercing blast. He spake not; my terrified imagination already represented him as a lifeless corpse; I sat motionless for some minutes, in the torpor of despair (Hays, 2009, p. 66).

Emma is extremely worried for the health of her companion. Her apprehension is expressed through the dashes and the semantic field of death and stillness. Her sentences are concise and can be divided into short univocal units. Ty notes that Emma's "actions are indicative of her internal agitations and her suppressed desires" (1996, p. xxxi). At the inn, Augustus is treated by a physician, and Emma can finally calm her "feverish agitation" through a restoring sleep (Hays, 2009, p. 67). The next day, she finally recognises him as the son of her beloved friend and is relieved by his slow recovery.

The second accident is a horse fall that happens towards the end of the novel. The reappearance of Augustus signals the deterioration of Emma's marriage to Mr Montague. In fact, the protagonist's unresolved passion emerges again and affects her

apparently firm state of mind. Emma voices her exasperation: "'Oh, Augustus! *too tenderly beloved*, thou wert fated to be the ruin of my peace!'" (Ibid., p. 173). Metaphorically, passion is depicted to be fortuitous in the social context that, on the contrary, must be rationally ordered (Rajan, 2010, p. 105). Emotions have the power to disrupt social structures and contracts. Emma rationally decided to marry Mr Montague because of her desperate condition of material needs. However, her pleasant life as a dutiful wife occupies much less room in the *Memoirs* than the raving passion for Augustus. Moreover, Emma's tranquil married life contrasts with the energy and unrest that characterise her passion and render it interesting. Clearly, Emma's choice of embracing reason without having first resolved her unsettling passion is contestable. Because of the imbalance between reason and passion her marriage to Mr Montague cannot last. Thus, Hays demonstrates how both elements must be taken into consideration in a romantic relationship.

Finally, the fact that Augustus dies under Emma's care in her house literalises the earlier disappearance of Emma's idealised version of him and the categorical impossibility of a romantic union (Ibid., p. 106). It ultimately enforces the notion that the Augustus Emma had constructed did not exist. In addition, the marriage between the couple does not happen in the second generation either because Emma's daughter dies before entering adulthood. Thus, she cannot be united to Augustus' son, as Emma had wished. Moreover, also Augustus' son repeats the pattern of unrequited love that characterised Emma's young years.

Apart from accidents, many deaths occur in the *Memoirs* too. Not only are they a common feature in the sentimental novel, as Bour suggests, but they are also indicative of the fragility of human life (1998, p. 151). Specifically, the deaths of the eldest Mr Melmoth, Mrs Harley, and Augustus are caused by "internal" injuries or disorders (Hays, 2009, p. 12, 151, 173). All these characters suffer from affective motives. Both Mr Melmoth and Mrs Harley experience separation from their beloved families, the former for work motives, the latter because her children are married. Augustus has a complicated love situation and endures a series of misfortunes. Hays seems to imply that the absence of love impacts humans mortally. Emma too voices this conviction.

Even if the heroine does not die in the course of the narration, she suffers greatly from her unrequited love. Her torment consists of a "numberless contradictory emotions [that] revolve in [her] disturbed mind" (Ibid., p. 90). Her affection is expressed in terms of imprisonment and death: "such an affection, infallibly, enslaves the heart that cherishes it; and slavery is the tomb of virtue and of peace" (Ibid., p. 129). Emma becomes "disgusted with life", "a deep and habitual depression prey[s] upon her spirits" (Ibid., p. 97). Her unstable emotional and mental state also affects her body: she lacks the constancy and rigour to exercise her mind, to employ in some activity. Emma becomes "weak, languid, enervated", constantly depressed and intervals from a feverish state to a convalescent one (Ibid., p. 149). Here, Hays illustrates the Jacobin belief that the mental faculties impact the physical essence (Kelly, 1993, p. 99). The protagonist points out that her illness is caused by external limitations: "The social propensities of a mind forbidden to expand itself, forced back, preyed incessantly upon my mind, secretly consuming its powers" (Ibid., p. 134). Her strong energy is wasted on self-destruction. Her health is partially restored through generosity, when she employs herself to help Mrs Harley alleviate her last months of life.

To sum up, the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* depict passion as a corrosive force that is connected with "violence and death" and "destructiveness" (Rajan, 2010, p. 105). Its consequences are accidents, mental and physical disorders and death. It is not surprising that the dominance of passions and the adhesion to a tidy rational order were considered necessary. Similarly to a Gothic novel, there is a play between order and disorder. The narrator seems cured of her passionate excesses, but she still values emotions (Ty, 1993, p. 58).

3.9. Dysfunctional families

The *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* makes clear that "the family is a failed structure" (Rajan, 2010, p. 85). In fact, all families are depicted negatively, starting from Emma's family of origin. Her father is "a man of pleasure" who has married out of financial convenience so that he could lead a life of comfort "gratifyng the humour of the moment" (Hays, 2009, p. 30). He is "inaccessible to those kindlings of the affections" and neglects his family (Ibid., p. 31). Indeed, Emma's mother died in childbirth, but was

consumed also by her husband's indifference. Mr Courtney "plunge[s] in expence and debauchery" without any consideration for the future of his relations (Ibid., p. 10). Emma refuses to consider him as her father because he rejected that role (Ibid., p. 28). Accordingly, Mr Courtney confesses on his deathbed that "Marriage, generally speaking, in the existing state of things, must of necessity be an affair of *finance*" (Ibid., p. 30).

Mr Courtney is juxtaposed with his brother Mr Morton who is a kindhearted wise man disposed to listen to Emma's opinions. However, his marriage stifles his good temperament: "his virtues were, in a great measure, sunk in a habitual indolence of temper; he would sometimes sacrifice his principles to his repose, though never to his interest" (Ibid., p. 34). His wife is a disagreeable authoritative woman whose predominantly negative qualities are ill-matched with his. Emma criticises the lightness in which young people decide to marry without thinking about the future consequences (Ibid, pp. 45-46). Their marriage is not instrumental in mutual improvement.

Then, the younger Mr Melmoth, Emma's eldest stepbrother, married a superficial and frivolous woman he met in the West Indies. They satirically represent the chauvinist patriarch and the beautiful unintelligent coquette. Their conservative marriage that perpetrates old-fashioned values is anachronistic.

The only virtuous union is that of Emma's maternal aunt and uncle the Melmoths who "married young, purely from motives of affection" (Ibid., p. 11). They spend quality time together and with their children. Their family constitutes a "source of joy" for them that intensifies their affection, and quality time together provides the "highest relaxation" for the couple (Ibid., p. 12). The Melmoths' marriage represents the new model of domesticity that Emma also wishes for herself (Ty, 1996, p. xxviii). However, the Melmoths' idyllic marriage does not last because of Mr Melmoth's premature death.

Also, Augustus has a problematic marital situation. In fact, he married imprudently during a journey to Europe. His marriage is kept secret so as to not lose his uncle's stipend that was bestowed on him on the unusual condition that he remained celibate. Since his uncle had been extremely disappointed and hurt by the betrayal of his wife who ran away with another man, he hoped to spare his nephew a similar grief by encouraging a stoic attitude. This resolution questions the normalisation of the

institution of marriage and highlights its faults related to the emotional aspect. Moreover, it reverses the monetary issues that are implied in marriage. It was customary to marry for wealth while, on the contrary, Augustus was required to remain single to preserve his money. While Hays believed in the importance of companionate marriage, she does not endorse the stoic attitude towards feelings because she thinks that it is inapplicable. In addition to secrecy, which causes many difficulties, Augustus' marriage is unfortunate because of the sickly health of his wife and his children, and the fact that he later falls in love with Emma. He admits that he "had been unjust to the bonds which [he] had voluntarily contracted" (Hays, 2009, p. 178). Nevertheless, his marriage is not included in the narration, thus we cannot judge whether he was a virtuous husband and father.

Finally, after giving up her pursuit of Augustus, Emma marries Mr Montague out of extenuation. It is a convenience union that Emma accepts because she is in a disastrous financial situation. Her marriage to Mr Montague is based on "a rational esteem, and a grateful affection" that allows her to be useful and to repose (Ibid., p. 169). It contrasts with the powerful enthusiasm and fanaticism Emma felt for Augustus. Her former passion was caused by "the morbid excess of a distempered imagination" that destroyed "all the strength, the dignity, the powers of [her] mind" and inhibited her actions (Ibid.). While Emma loved an inexistent ideal version of Augustus, she is fond of Mr Montague's actual person. She is aware of his virtues and faults, and she hopes for constant mutual improvement.

Nevertheless, her marriage also fails because Emma decided to accept Mr Montague's proposal primarily for material needs and confided that affection would grow in time. Mr Montague grows so jealous of Emma's earlier infatuation with Augustus that he slowly deranges. He commits adultery, murder and finally suicide. Thus, Emma is alone again. As the Burkean family was the basis of society, we infer that society is a failed structure too. Both are in need of reformation to keep up with the times.

3.10. Motherhood and second generation

Society gave Emma no choice other than to be a wife and a mother. Her desiring identity is thus subjugated and kept under control in fitting a social category. After Mr Montague's suicide, Emma enjoys more freedom as a widow and disposes of money of her own. As a mother, she raises her daughter and Augustus' son together as if they were blood siblings. She applies her progressive social vision and educates them together teaching them the same subjects. She also hopes that they will develop the virtuous love relationship that was impossible between herself and Augustus.

As a result, the second generation doubles the first, but it also inverts the conditions thus questioning gender delineations (Rajan, 2010, p. 102). A clear hint of the repetition is the fact that parents and children have the same name. Emma has a daughter and Augustus has a son. Despite the maintenance of the gender lines, there is a reversal of fate. While the younger Augustus is similar to Emma because of their passionate temperament, both the little Emma and senior Augustus die by the end of the narration. In either case, the blissful domestic union remains unattainable (Bour, 1998, p. 151). Moreover, the death of Emma's daughter impedes the actualisation of the traditional narrative romance and ultimately dismisses the conservative social structure of the family (Rajan, 2010, p. 102).

Although the mother and son duo is unconventional at the ending of a novel, it represents quite a solid couple that contrasts with Emma and Augustus' precarious relationship (Walker, 2018a, p. 155, n. 81). Emma calls the younger Augustus "*my more than son*" to express her affection for him, underlying that emotional bonds do not need to be sanctioned by a blood or institutional connection (Hays, 2009, p. 195). As his adoptive mother, Emma is allowed to deliver her memoirs to him and fit into the social structure.

Rajan suggests that Emma had to become male in order to let her passion endure (though transformed), but she had to sacrifice her female self, which is represented by her daughter (2010, p. 104). After the death of the younger Emma, the protagonist is still responsible for her adopted son's education. Generally, men acted as teachers to male children, while women were responsible for the education of young ladies. The gender reversal that sees the mother as a teacher and the son as a pupil is a pioneering

image for a future enlightened community (Kelly, 1993, p. 103). This relationship also contrasts with the fact that both Emma and Hays were instructed by men. Emma hopes that her son's revolutionary education will create the basis for a new masculinity that will be more conscious and sensible of gender issues. Indeed, only through a renovation of both masculinity and femininity will a reformation of society be possible (Jones, 1994, p. 182).

Nevertheless, the danger of repetition may still impede the expected change. In fact, the young Augustus is "the living image" of his father and it is possible that he will act like him despite his liberal training (Hays, 2009, p. 196; Jones, 1994, p. 182). Emma waits for death disillusioned for her fate but still hopes for a future social reorganisation for which, however, there are still many uncertainties.

The ending is difficult to imagine and signals the complexities involved in reimagining an altered society. The *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* show the inadequacies of the existing narrative forms and demand further reading, which functions as a further repetition (Rajan, 2010, p. 107). The repetition may lead to revise the meaning of the events but also to weaken the intensity of the sensations and the urgency of the message. Since Hays wrote the work in part as a self-therapy, repetition serves also to control herself and to subdue her excessive emotional response (Ibid.). However, repetition is also problematic because it may impede change. Emma entertains hopes for the future thanks to her adoptive son, but she expects the alteration to take place in a remote time. Having overstepped the boundaries prescribed to women, what is reserved for Emma is "moral martyrdom" (Hays, 2009, p. 133).

CHAPTER 4

The fictional female self: *The Victim of Prejudice*

4.1. Plot, structure, and genre

Hays' second novel *The Victim of Prejudice* was published in two volumes in 1799. *The Victim of Prejudice* is more conventional in form and themes than *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* for multiple reasons. The author was aware of the change in her persona's public perception and the fact that her earlier work began to be considered immoral (Bour, 1998, p. 148). As not to expose herself too much, Hays' second fictional piece lacks the strong autobiographical aspect characteristic of her first novel. Moreover, the aggravation of the censoring climate towards the end of the 1790s, which led to the imprisonment of many revolutionaries, pushed the author to be more guarded. In addition, Wollstonecraft was dead by that year and Hays' friendship with Godwin, damaged after the loss of the feminist writer, was partly restored through Hays' new piece of fiction.

Differently from *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* which shows the fiery force of a young resolute heroine, *The Victim of Prejudice* displays an unsuccessful female protagonist who lost all hope for an enlightened future because of the systemic impediments she met to financial autonomy. Therefore, the new work inverts the situation of the first: it displays the potential and possibility of female independence and then it contests its actualisation (Walker, 2018a, p. 193). Indeed, Hays was more pessimistic regarding the possibility of revolution in those years.

The novel is the life writing of Mary Raymond who recounts her life retrospectively from prison. The whole narrative explains the progress of her life under the guidance of her virtuous principles that cannot defeat the causes of her disgraces. The protagonist is an orphan adopted by the erudite Mr Raymond who loves and supports her as if she was his beloved daughter. When Mary is eleven, Mr Raymond accepts William and Edmund Pelham to school, the sons of the Honourable Mr Pelham. Mary is taught with the two boys whom she befriends, and they play together. However,

through a couple of accidents they meet the landlord Sir Peter Osborne, who harasses the young girl.

Since Mr Raymond noticed the growing fondness between Mary and William, he decides to separate them because he fears that their affection will not be accepted by the boy's father. Thus, Mary moves in with Mr Raymond's friends the Nevilles. At their house, Mary learns that happiness and social rank are not connected: the Nevilles' simple life fortifies the affection between the family members.

When William discovers where Mary is staying, he visits her, and tries to convince her that he can persuade his father to approve their love. The heroine informs Mr Raymond of William's intention, but her guardian's reply informs her of her illegitimate birth which will impede her to wed an aristocrat like William. Because of the young man's insistence, Mary consents to marry him only on the condition that Mr Pelham is informed in detail of the circumstances regarding her birth. Expectedly, the father categorically refuses their union and sends his sons to the Grand Tour.

At the same time, the Neville family has to move abroad with the expense of five hundred pounds because of the disposition of the new landlord. Despite her tutor's warning, the heroine does not hesitate to use up the whole sum that Mr Raymond had saved for her future to help the family. Thus, her friends leave the continent, and Mr Raymond, whose health has been worsening, dies. Now, Mary is alone.

Following her guardian's directions, Mary sets off for London where she is tricked by Osborne who proposes to her. At her refusal, he imprisons her and, after Mary's failed attempt to escape, rapes her. The man excuses himself and offers a legal reparation for the damage but the girl categorically rejects him and asks for freedom instead. He unsuccessfully tries to persuade her to desist but at last she lets her go.

In the streets of the metropolis, Mary casually meets William. She is in a feeble state, and he takes her to a hotel, where she spends three weeks on her sickbed. William procures the necessary medical assistance and visits her every day. As Mary recovers, the childhood friends briefly relate to each other what has happened to them during their separation. Since William believed Mary to be engaged, he married a rich heiress, but

now he asks Mary to become his mistress. Mary refuses his offer, sends him away and moves to another part of the city.

Eventually, the heroine applies to Mr Raymond's acquaintances who, however, reject her services because of her suspicious story. Similarly, her job search is unfortunate: she receives many negative responses and the two situations that she is able to find are not practicable either because of the employer's sexual advances, or the credit the employer gives to rumours.

Finally, the hostess has Mary imprisoned for her inability to repay her debt with her. Osborne offers to bail her and to marry her, but Mary refuses to be insulted by her persecutor. Instead, she is saved from prison by James, a former employee of Mr Raymond. They work and live together as father and daughter on a small farm in the countryside close to a sympathetic and benevolent community. However, after six peaceful months, bad weather ruins the harvest, and James becomes ill too. Mary tries to be cheerful while assisting her benefactor and loans fifteen pounds to a wealthy neighbour to be safe with expenses. However, Osborne's rumours about Mary reach the community, which becomes hostile towards the protagonist. Not much time after, James dies, in her arms.

Mary is arrested for debt again. In prison, Mary sinks into despair and inactivity and her health deteriorates. After two years, the Nevilles come back to England and, informed that their benefactor was Mary, they localise her position, bail her, and host her. They suspect that their business abroad was organised by Osborne who wanted to isolate Mary.

Having neglected a persistent cold, Mr Neville's illness gets critical and he dies. Shortly after, Mrs Neville deceases too, recognising that she had loved her husband to the point of self-annihilation. Mary performs their dying wishes, and dejected, awaits death.

The novelty that *The Victim of Prejudice* introduces is the centrality of the fallen woman in the narration. Mary Raymond is a violated woman who would normally be ignored in society but whom Hays gives a voice to vindicate her position and criticise social practices against vulnerable people (Bour, 1998, p. 145). In that period, it was

uncommon to design a character of dubious respectability as the protagonist of novels. Indeed, even Wollstonecraft devised the prison ward Jemima for the role of the former prostitute, and not Maria herself, in *The Wrongs of Woman* (Kelly, 1993, p. 124). Nevertheless, Hays' choice is strategic to explain the fallen woman's powerful point of view through the first person narrator that authenticates and empowers her individuality against the dominant narrative (Ty, 1999, p. 135). Mary Raymond is in an ambiguous position: she proclaims to be pure while she is condemned by society. She declares a high self-esteem and fights her unjust treatment.

In addition, while in the eighteenth century it was commonly reckoned that the moral fall of women was a private matter that depended exclusively on their will and inherent propensity to corruption, Hays demonstrates the opposite: external political and social factors contribute to people's lives more than it was believed (Sherman, 2001, p. 132). Thus, Mary and her mother do not wilfully choose a life of dependence (and the latter of crime) and do not take delight in their situation. Hays disrupts the popular fictional narrative of cunning criminals who were proud of their intelligence, which permitted them to be successful in unlawful acts, as in the case of Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. Instead, Hays emphasised the human aspect and the vulnerability of these stigmatised figures.

As in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Hays deployed elements from different genres, including memoirs, epistles and embedded narratives (Bour, 2015, p. 154). In *The Victim of Prejudice* epistles are mostly referred to and reported. There are multiple layers in the narration in chapter twelve of the first volume when Mr Raymond recounts his relationship with Mary's mother in a letter and then transmits to his protégé her mother's memoirs.

Hays also utilises some elements of the sentimental and the Gothic. Apart from the presence of sentimental scenes and lexicon, the author expresses her ideas "of gender and class inequality" through the "stock character of sentimental fiction, that of the suffering heroine, or virtue in distress" that is embodied by the protagonist (Ty, 1993, p. 67). The first-person narrator is instrumental in heightening the plight of the heroine in her hopeless situation.

Moreover, the protagonist's fragility also connects the novel to Gothic fiction. As many Gothic heroines, Mary is an orphan who is persecuted by a wealthy and powerful landlord. Hays depicts Sir Peter Osborne as a detestable Gothic villain who desires to take advantage of the heroine (Bour, 2015, p. 154). He employs treacherous stratagems to isolate and limit Mary's action for his licentious purposes. The heroine's imprisonment in a "chamber locked on the outside" and her following "escape [...] in dark halls and corridors" during a night feast are characteristics of Gothic fiction too (Ty, 1993, p. 66). Osborne utilises deceit to manipulate Mary who tries to evade his influence and recreate her life on a respectable basis. However, every attempt fails because Osborne and the mechanisms of society operate to limit her freedom. Mary's bleak and confining situation is enhanced by the supernatural quality of hallucinations and dreams.

However, as a difference to the Gothic, *The Victim of Prejudice* has a stronger contact with reality rather than fiction. Indeed, Hays intended to criticise the defenceless situation of middle and lower-class women who became the easy victims of seductions that provoked their social and moral ruin. The dread of *The Victim of Prejudice* exists in the material world too: Mary's "horrors are all too real and literal" as they come true on the night of the rape (Ibid., pp. 66-67). In addition, the noble saviour does not exist. Mary refuses the disreputable propositions of salvation offered by noblemen so as not to compromise her morality.

The author's concrete approach to the description of Mary's plight also contrasts with Richardson's *Clarissa*. Some critics argue that Hays wanted to transcribe "*Clarissa* from a feminist perspective" (Ibid., p. 65). In fact, the two stories are similar: both heroines belong to the middle class, are pursued by a nobleman who confines them deceitfully to their mansion where they are violated and insulted, and lament their unfortunate fate in writing (Ibid., p. 66). Nevertheless, while Clarissa becomes a symbol of female virtue and fortitude and dies not much time after the rape, Mary suffers from the outrageous consequences of the rape and dies many years after the violation (Ibid.). Hays describes the brutal aspects of the condition of fallen women, and their struggle to survive their irremediable loss of reputation which makes them confront the scorn of society. They are the isolated victims of an unjust system.

4.2. Childhood idyll and education

The Victim of Prejudice begins with the contrast between Mary's unhappy adulthood, the writing time in prison, and the idyllic childhood scene. The protagonist grew up under the care of Mr Raymond who retired from society in the Welsh countryside. Here, she was exposed to natural rural life and to "fatigue and occasional labour" and she learnt "to exercise [her] ingenuity and exert [her] faculties, arrange [her] thoughts and discipline [her] imagination" (Hays, 1998, p. 5). She was an active child who played with boys and girls, climbed trees, and rode horses.

Her benevolent tutor "instructed [Mary] in the rudiments of the French, Italian, and Latin, languages; in the elements of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic" (Ibid., p. 6). Even though these subjects were not usually taught to young women in favour of decorative acquirements, they were, instead, part of a complete education promoted by both radical and conservative female intellectuals as instrumental for a better understanding between men and women. Mary had the possibility to exercise both her mind and her body through study and play. Physical and mental training favours the realisation of an independent subjectivity whose well-being is seen in the protagonist's vigorous figure (Kelly, 1993, pp. 119-120).

Unlike Emma Courtney, Mary received a formal education that was generally reserved for boys. Indeed, Mr Raymond schools Mary and the sons of Mr Pelham together. While William has a passionate character and is quite careless in his studies, Edmund is calmer and achieves the most advancement in his learning, outstripping his older brother (Hays, 1998, p. 11). However, William's impetuous temper and Edmund's sickly health undermine their application to intellectual exercise. Thus, Mary surpasses her friends' learning progress. Furthermore, she enjoys learning: "with an active mind and an ardent curiosity, [Mary] conceive[s] an enthusiastic love of science and literature" (Ibid., pp. 24-25). Hays shows that young women can be interested in knowledge.

Hays applied Wollstonecraft's beliefs on female education. Given equal possibilities, boys and girls have the same intellectual and physical potential that allows them to perform the same activities successfully. Ideally, the outcome is only a matter of personal choice and application. In her theoretical works, Hays directly attacked the

conventional education of young women, which limited their interests through secondary and unnecessary abilities. She concludes that "because the education of women has been uniformly more *perverted*, as well as neglected, than that of men [,] Their general inferiority, then, follows as a consequence" (Hays in Walker, 2006, p. 237). Moreover, the fact that women are not trained for a profession contributes to female submission since they cannot provide for themselves economically (Sherman, 1997, p. 148). Thus, educative customs validate male predominance and female subordination.

4.3. Disruption

The childhood scene is protective, benevolent and encouraging but it is also irretrievable. Mr Raymond taught Mary important moral qualities: truth, virtue, and generosity. Nevertheless, the heroine's cheerful idyll is soon marred by two accidents concerning Sir Peter Osborne that happen during light-hearted play with William. They signal the intrusion of the external world and the beginning of a slow inner transformation into adulthood that is marked by violence and sexuality (Jones, 1997, p. 213).

The first episode is about the grapes of Osborne's orchard. William wishes to "procure some of those grapes that hang so invitingly", but Mary is convinced that it would be an act against the teachings of her protector (Hays, 1998, p. 12). The young man blames his friend for female weakness and of not loving him sufficiently. In a privileged social position, William beguiles Mary, who belongs to a lower class, with refined goods to which he is accustomed (Jones, 1997, p. 214). The male provocation to overstep social boundaries is revealed in terms of heroism and risk (Sherman, 2001, p. 138).

Mary's dismay at William's unjust accusation initiates an inner conflict between virtue and desire, her sense of ethics and the wish to please her friend (Partenza, 2008, p. 55). Mary weighs her doubts on her moral precepts and her unpleasant emotions. Her "contending feelings" made her "eyes fill[...] with tears, and [her] bosom palpitate[...]"

(Hays, 1998, p. 13). Finally, she decides to fulfil William's request to relieve the emotional pain provoked by his haughty belittlement. She is looking for a "sweet compensation" that will be granted in her favour (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, her decision causes guilt and shame that is physically revealed through "an indignant glow [in her] cheek" (Partenza, 2008, p. 55; Hays, 1998, p. 13). Mary needs to justify her action that clashes with her moral code and parental precepts. She finds an external cause to her transgression: "it was not for selfish gratification I had subjected myself to hazard and censure, but to serve and oblige my friend" (Hays, 1998, p. 13). Mary naively lessens the gravity of theft and absolves herself through an appeal to generosity. Thus, she tries to retrieve her innocence that the little crime had spoiled (Partenza, 2008, pp. 55-56).

While William pushes Mary towards disobedience by questioning her affection, Osborne takes advantage of the misdeed. He catches her in the act of stealing and identifies her as "a true daughter of Eve" who took the forbidden fruit (Hays, 1998, p. 14). Significantly, the epithet contrasts the opposite biblical figures of Eve with Mary. The protagonist, connected through her first name to the pure Virgin Mary, becomes the heiress of the original sin that forebodes her expulsion from the paternal shelter. Thus, the passage from childhood to adulthood is viewed in terms of violation, loss of innocence, and sexuality which imply punishment. On the other hand, Osborne reveals his simplifying attitude towards describing women who can only be classified either as temptresses or virgins (Ty, 1993, p. 62). His "stereotypical and automatic categorisation of her is a form of victimisation" and manipulation that envisages a specific treatment (Ibid.).

Indeed, instead of punishing the theft, Osborne resolves to have a kiss from the "little beauty", and after that he will be glad to offer Mary every fruit she wants (Hays, 1998, p. 14). At that time, fruit theft was a crime that was normally punished by death and Osborne, being the wealthiest man in that area, presumably exercised the role of magistrate to judge local crimes (Sherman, 2001, pp. 138-139). However, he decides to suspend the ordinary legal procedure, and demands sexual favours from Mary. Accustomed to commanding and fulfilling his desires, Osborne views Mary as an object of consumption, exactly like the grapes, and he does not consider neither the girl's

wishes or needs. The interruption of the normal course of justice underlines the fact that sex is a discriminative factor that confirms women's extraneousness to social rules. Thus, Hays "exhibits the gendering of justice: punishment for crime is valenced to its perpetrator's sex, complicated by class affiliation" (Ibid., p. 138). Justice is not equal for everybody because it is performed by wealthy but not virtuous men who decide the criminal's punishment through personal preferences and whims.

The protagonist is frightened and offended by Osborne's insulting behaviour. Her body retains the signs of the violation: her "clothes torn, [her] hands and arms bruised, scratched, and streaming with blood" (Hays, 1998, p. 14). Mary candidly explains to Mr Raymond who was alarmed by her appearance that the fruit comes "from the green-house of Sir Peter Osborne: I give them to William because – *I love him*" (Ibid., p. 15). She clarifies that she took the grapes without permission, but does not mention that it was William who requested that pledge of love to protect him. Mary's affection causes her disobedience and confuses her moral system.

However, her guilt impedes her from looking at her guardian: "I ventured not to lift my eyes to his: a confused consciousness of my fault flashed upon my mind, depriving it of its wonted confidence" (Ibid., p. 16). This first transgression creates a rift in her conscience that taints her self-esteem and moral strength. She condemns herself so harshly that even many days later she is "still far from being reconciled to [her]self" (Ibid., p. 17). Mary feels a sense of failure because her actions contrast with her sense of ethics. From this episode, she learns to be always true to her principles, and later in life she will not compromise her judgement.

Then, when William confesses to have asked Mary to take the grapes, Mr Raymond recognises the "uneasiness [...] this rash boy occasioned" them (Ibid., p. 18). He understands that his adoptive daughter's friendship with William provides a disruptive element in their originally serene family life. He also starts to worry that their relationship may evolve into something more serious and cause future trouble.

The second accident is that of the wild hare falling prey to hunters. Mary instinctively shelters the "poor animal" that "seemed to look wistfully in [her] face, as if imploring protection" (Ibid., p. 21). The hare is a defenceless victim and the young protagonist is empathic about its suffering. The animal's situation is an anticipation of

Mary's fate, as she is a victim of persecution and intolerance in her adult years. Through the novel, the protagonist is connected to the hare through the semantic field of oppression and suffering and on this occasion she receives the whiplashes designed for it (Ty, 1993, p. 62). The hunters, headed by Osborne, hunt primarily for fun, but it is a matter of life or death for the animal (Ibid.). As Osborne recognises Mary, he wants her to "pay the full forfeit of all [her] trespasses" and harasses her (Hays, 1998, p. 22). This time, William counterattacks the oppressor and saves Mary and the little hare.

Also in this case, Mary's body reveals the violence she suffered:

> My neck and arms bore marks of the rough discipline I had received, yet I neither uttered a complaint nor shed a tear: indignation inspired me with a sullen fortitude; while, in the smart blows acquired in the cause of humanity and friendship, I found only a source of triumph (Ibid., pp. 21-22).

Mr Raymond grieves to see Mary's scars, but she wears them proudly as she got them in protecting her friend and the hare. She affirms that "in the cause of *right* we should contemn bodily pain" (Ibid., p. 23). They cure and free the hare because, as Mary says: "Liberty, my father has told me, is the truest and most invaluable good" (Ibid., p. 24). The heroine proves a high moral quality that, however, is complicated to apply to real life. Paradoxically, her adherence to moral principles will contribute to her fall.

In short, Mary's entrance into adulthood is characterised by her love for William and the fear of Osborne who wants to have her at any cost (Partenza, 2008, p. 56). The sexual theme is present both in its liberating and threatening form. In the first case, it generates disruption of the established order, while in the second terror, the appearance of Osborne initiates the pattern of pursued and persecutor. However, despite the unfortunate accidents, Mary is victorious because of the moral significance she attributes to her actions and scars. She is confident that her pain is merely a temporary mark of unfairness and that it will be erased by justice that will naturally take its course (Sherman, 1997, p. 153). In that, she rejects Osborne's authority and rules and asserts a set of ideal moral values (Sherman, 2001, p. 139).

4.4. Prejudices of society

Also the meeting with Mr Pelham and his sons is an external element in Mary's cheerful childhood. In fact, until that moment she had never questioned her familial situation and referred to Mr Raymond as her "more than father" (Hays, 1998, p. 15). She was satisfied with her life, carefree and beloved by her tutor, who perhaps was too indulgent towards his adopted child. Nevertheless, it is exactly the actual nature of her relationship with Mr Raymond, the element that she had ignored so far, that will fatally determine her life (Partenza, 2008, p. 57).

In the conversation between Mr Raymond and Mr Pelham, Mary learns that she is "an unfortunate orphan" Mr Raymond has adopted "to shelter [her] from a world that will hardly be inclined to do her justice, and upon which she has few claims" (Hays, 1998, p. 8). This assertion generates in her "a powerful and irresistible emotion" that makes her "burst into tears" and hug her guardian (Ibid.). She explains that: "For the first time in my life, I had been sensible to an embarrassment, and a temporary feeling of depression and apprehension" (Ibid., p. 9). There is a sharp division between the happy sensations of the period preceding Mr Raymond's affirmation and Mary's following sense of inferiority. The contact with the aristocracy is harmful to the protagonist's happiness and undermines her confidence. She feels inferior to other people and ashamed to have been saved from a disgraceful life. Earlier, she did not think how much she owed to her guardian's kindness.

Mr Raymond and Mr Pelham adhere to two contrasting sets of values. Since Mr Raymond provided Mary with a complete education that included the observance of ethics, for him "The beauty, the virtue, the talents, of [his] child, in the eye of philosophy, are an invaluable dowry" that renders her second to nobody (Ibid., p. 32). On the contrary, Mr Pelham disregards multiple intellectual and moral qualities in favour of wealth and social prestige. He represents the conservative aristocrat who is required to retain class privileges and material wealth. For him, Mary's cognitive virtues are unimportant because of her unknown parental heritage. In contrast to Mr Raymond who supports Mary, Mr Pelham defends only his family honour and himself (Partenza, 2008, p. 58). Mr Pelham's approach is exclusive and selfish, rather than inclusive and generous. Indeed, he commands that his sons must be "preserve[d] [...]

from forming any improper acquaintances, or humiliating connections, which might tend to interfere with his views for their future dignity and advancement" (Hays, 1998, p. 8). While he demands to maintain class separation, he does not explain the manner in which that should be granted (Partenza, 2008, p. 58). There is also a clear lexical distinction between these two worlds that juxtaposes the aristocracy's "splendid connections" and Mary's "obscure birth" (Ibid.). As a consequence, William and Mary expect two well-distinguished fates.

However, Mr Raymond unconsciously conveys an implicit message of inferiority that derives from customary social practices. Indeed, when he introduced Mary to his guest, he did not consider that, in fact, women make a "few claims" but they are ignored by the people who have the power to help them (Hays, 1998, p. 8; Sherman, 1997, p. 145). Mary accepts her fragility because her guardian and teacher described her in those terms. She looked up to his judgement due to her respect for him and her inexperience in the social world. Therefore, Mr "Raymond manifests patriarchy's persistent power to shape discourse" in inculcating his beliefs in Mary (Sherman, 1997, p. 146).

Mary and William cultivate an affectionate friendship over which, at first, Mr Raymond rejoices. Nevertheless, as he understands the romantic nature of their bond, he worries that their union will not be approved by the boy's father. The narrator describes Mr Raymond's doubts:

> My benefactor had, for some time past, anxiously watched the growing attachment between myself and his pupil. He, deeply regretted the painful necessity of checking a sympathy at once so natural, virtuous, and amiable. He knew not how to debauch the simplicity of my mind by acquainting me with the manners and maxims of the world. […] Painful suspicions assailed him: he began to doubt whether, in my cultivated mind, in fostering a virtuous sensibility, in imbuing my heart with principles of justice and rectitude, he had not been betraying my happiness! (Hays, 1998, p. 25).

Mr Raymond confronts the "natural, virtuous, and amiable" "simplicity of [Mary's] mind" that had spontaneously grown from "sensibility" with the artificial "manners and maxims of the world" (Ibid.). His educational method clashes with the requirements of social life from which he retired but that influences him through his

teaching activities. Thus, he has to observe customs he does not share for economic needs that link him to the Pelham family. Tragically, ideals do not provide happiness because society does not follow a "natural" and ethical structure. Both Mr Raymond and Mary have to observe societal rules. As a consequence, Mr Raymond has to adapt his rational teachings to societal codes, and changes his attitude towards his pupils. Thus, he prevents society from being altered through progressive ideas of justice and ethics.

When Mary is seventeen, Mr Raymond explains to the heroine that he has to separate her from William. He claims to be "responsible to another tribunal than that of *reason*", that of society, whose "mandates, often irrational, are, nevertheless, always despotic" (Ibid., p. 31). Even though he cherishes Mary's accomplishments and rational mind, he judges it prudent to part her child from William due to "certain prejudices, which the world has agreed to respect and observe" that belittle her human value because unaccompanied by wealth and an honourable family line (Ibid.). He concludes decidedly: "*You can never be the wife of William Pelham*" (Ibid., p. 32).

When confronted with the values of the higher class, Mr Raymond compromises the ideals that he had also transmitted to his pupils. He is a fragile figure, a bad teacher who has instructed his students in a manner idealistically good but impractical in the social world. Thus, the children have to unlearn their acquirements and start from a completely different basis. Since Mr Raymond schools William and Edmund for an economic payment, he has to observe Mr Pelham's beliefs in their regard (Sherman, 1997, p. 155). As a consequence, Mr Raymond "was never firmly committed to reason" (Ibid., p. 156). While he proclaims an enlightened revolutionary language, he does not apply it and, instead, conforms to the social order. Thus, he hinders revolutionary progress and confirms the existing social relations.

Furthermore, the guardian's ban unwittingly makes Mary understand the actual nature of her sentiments towards William (Ty, 1999, p. 143). Before that moment, Mary had never thought of her friend as a lover, but henceforth she laments the impossibility of marrying him. In other words, Mary starts to view herself

> as a sexual being, and the energies she previously devoted to intellectual and physical pursuits are henceforth channelled into feminine ones that conform to social expectations of what a woman should be (Ibid.).

For the first time, she looks at herself as a woman and confronts herself with the definition and expectations of the feminine. She is not interested in her intellectual studies anymore, but in a romantic relationship with William. Thus, while Mr Raymond tries to limit Mary's body, it unwittingly makes her aware of the social implications of her sex and her wish to be united to the man she loves. Mary's passion is disruptive not only because women are not supposed to have desires, but also because William belongs to the upper class. Mary gradually comprehends the fact that "her [romantic] desire and her body are perverse and unacceptable to respectable society" (Ibid., p. 144).

Lastly, Mr Raymond provides an unstable shelter for Mary who is expelled from his house as she starts to act and think in a manner that disrupts the social order. Mr Raymond's discourse is paradoxical: while he admits the possibility of female independence on the one hand, he denies its actualisation in real life. He encourages Mary to renounce her love for a noble man, observe rationality and truth, and find happiness in her unprivileged condition (Sherman, 1997, p. 154). He negates her romantic desire and prevents her agency from having her removed from her friend. Thus, the "male shelter" impedes female autonomy because it observes the limitations of gender and class (Ibid., p. 150). Through Mr Raymond, Hays "depicts the power of patriarchy, operant through a single, well-meaning (but tortured) father, to disrupt forces promoting reason and justice for women" (Ibid., p. 159). In short, the enlightened man cooperates to preserve a condition of female dependence (Ibid, p. 155). Not only Mr Raymond is implicated, but also *Emma Courtney*'s Mr Francis, and real-life intellectuals such as William Godwin.

On the other hand, Mary does not understand why she should be separated from William. For her, it looks like a great injustice: "What tyranny is this? When reason, virtue, nature, sanctify its emotions, why should the heart be controlled? who will dare control it?" (Hays, 1998, p. 35). The rapid interrogative sequence expresses Mary's distress (Partenza, 2008, p. 59). As the cause of injustice is more important than the person who commits it, the most significance is laid on the "why" rather than on the other question words (Ibid.). Mary recognises the fracture between natural affections and the social system. This new perspective contrasts with the former harmony between her moral inner world and the external one that was granted in her childhood shelter by

Mr Raymond's wisdom (Ibid., p. 53). She understands that mankind does not observe the ideals she has learnt: "While the practice of the world opposes the principles of the sage, education is a fallacious effort, morals an empty theory, and sentiment an elusive dream" (Hays, 1998, p. 33).

Despite her failure to comprehend her guardian's request, she decides to obey him because of her respect and affection towards him. She judges that Mr Raymond's "dictates and those of *reason* are the same" and hopes that time will help her to understand (Ibid., p. 30). Thus, she renounces her "rational autonomy" and gives power to the male guide (Sherman, 1997, p. 157). She justifies the paternal power to decide on her life in terms of affection, gratitude, and rational faith.

In addition, William discovers the nature of his sentiments for Mary thanks to their separation (Kelly, 1993, p. 121). He accuses Mary of being "a victim to control" who has "tamely submitted to a tyranny that [her] heart disavows" causing suffering for both (Hays, 1998, p. 52). He assures her: "my father […] is the slave of honour, but he is not sordid" (Ibid., p. 53). He thinks that he will approve the union between his son and the daughter of an erudite man such as Mr Raymond. However, he ignores the crucial point that Mary and Mr Raymond are not blood relatives (Ibid.).

On the other hand, Mary lacks the strength to oppose her lover effectively as she is still "weakened by contradictory principles" and "entangled in an inextricable labyrinth" (Ibid., p. 54). She resolutely answers him, but does not manage to convince him of her position because she has to defer to Mr Raymond's rational dictates that she still does not comprehend.

4.5. The mother's memoirs

Finally, Mr Raymond's letter provides information on Mary's mother as the reason that led him to separate her from William. The protagonist does not have direct access to her mother, but only through Mr Raymond who contextualises and interprets the maternal tale. He believes that Mary's past will determine her future because "In the eye of the world, the misfortunes of [her] birth stain [her] unsullied youth" (Ibid., p. 69). The parental origin will determine how people see the protagonist.

Mary's mother, who is also called Mary, composes her memoirs in prison before her execution. She retraces the "sources of those calamities" in her faulty education, "frivolous ambition" and "specious, but false, expectations" that led her to prefer a flattering but deceitful man to the gentle and wise Mr Raymond (Ibid., p. 61). She feels remorse for her romantic choice that determined her expulsion from the "paternal shelter" and falls into a dissolute life of pleasures (Sherman, 1997, p. 157). Indeed, the older Mary recounts the initial "intoxication of [her] vanity and [her] senses" that she experienced during the time she spent with her seducer (Hays, 1998, p. 61). However, he abandoned her and soon after she was discovered to be pregnant. Rejected by her parents and her former lover, she gradually trusted and felt gratitude towards a man who acted kindly to her and offered her protection. However, she was soon betrayed again "and became, a second time, the victim of [her] simplicity and the inhuman arts of a practised deceiver" (Ibid., p. 65). Being in a "friendless and destitute" condition, she plunged into depravity and prostitution as the only means of survival (Ibid., p. 63). She ultimately was involved in murder for which she was imprisoned and executed.

As she writes, Mary's mother is aware of her situation. She ironically questions her destiny:

> From whence was I to draw fortitude to combat these accumulated evils? By what magical power or supernatural aid was a being, rendered, by all the previous habits of life and education, systematically weak and helpless, at once assume a courage thus daring and heroic? (Ibid., p. 65).

The eighteenth-century female condition is vulnerable because of the superficial and ornamental quality established by custom and education. Since young women were encouraged to vanity, they were easily charmed by the polished life of the upper classes.

They lacked the strength and means to fight against "accumulated evils" and protect themselves from misfortunes. Ironically, Hays suggests that women's only option to survive was through men's help or a magical intervention. Mary proceeds even further in her accusation of female conditioning, through a sort of Epiphany:

> by enlarging the circle of my observation, though in the bosom of depravity, my understanding became enlightened: I perceived myself the victim of injustice, of the prejudice, of society, which, by opposing to my return to virtue almost insuperable barriers, had plunged me into irremediable ruin. I grew sullen, desperate, hardened. I felt a malignant joy in retailing upon mankind a part of the evils which I sustained (Ibid., p. 66).

Mary's mother manages to see the injustice she has suffered from as a consequence of societal practices. Not being taught the means to detect falsehood and deceit, she became the easy victim of depraved men who exploited her sexually and betrayed her trust. Moreover, through gratitude, her energies were wasted on an unworthy man (Sherman, 1997, p. 150). After her descent into vice, most verbs are in the passive form as to indicate the fact that she has no wilful power to act nor individuality (Ty, 1999, p. 139). Fallen from virtue, she was rejected by everyone she knew because of her tarnished reputation.

Indeed, Hays wanted to criticise the "too-great stress laid on the *reputation* for chastity in *woman*", as she wrote in the Advertisement to the Reader at the beginning of the novel:

> Lest dullness or malignity should again wrest my purpose, it may be necessary to premise, that, in delineating, in the following pages, the mischiefs which have ensued the too-great stress laid on the *reputation* for chastity in *woman*, no disrespect is intended to the most important branch of temperance, the cement, the support, and the bond, of social-virtue: it is the *means* only, which are used to ensure it, that I presume to call in question. *Man* has hitherto been solicitous at once to indulge his own voluptuousness and to counteract its baneful tendencies: not less tragical than absurd have been the consequences! They may be traced in the corruption of our youth; in the dissoluteness which, like a flood, has overspread the land; in the sacrifice of hecatombs of victims. Let *man* revert to the source of these

> evils; let him be chaste himself, nor seek to reconcile contradictions (Hays, 1998, pp. 1-2).

The novel depicts the devastating consequences caused by the importance that society attaches to female chastity. Women should be void of sexual desire because of their capacity to procreate, which is crucial to the transmission of property to male aristocrat heirs. Thus, as women secured property, they needed to be protected through their submission as if they were objects (Partenza, 2008, p. 66). Female chastity was not useful to women, but to families, and, as a consequence, its gains were not personal, but social (Brooks, 2008, p. 15). In addition, sexual restraint served women to be protected from male passion, not from women themselves since female lust was considered nonexistent (Ibid., p. 14).

However, Hays does not condemn chastity in itself, which she considers a virtue instead. Since female virginity is so consequential in social organisation, the problem arises in the juxtaposition between substance and appearance. Indeed, the overvaluation of external signals of chastity pushes towards falsehood that contrasts with its inner moral quality (Ty, 1999, p. 134). On the contrary, Hays and Wollstonecraft endorsed a liberating meaning of chastity, a "morality that sprang from women's understanding and strength of character" (Ibid., p. 133). It is a profound and conscious virtue, rather than a received one.

On the other hand, men were encouraged in the opposite sexual behaviour. They grew dissolute and corrupt, but their vices penalised women (Brooks, 2008, p. 16). Thus, Hays attacks the sexual double standard that produces on the one hand a series of innocent female victims while on the other a group of dissolute sexual predators. The author encourages the readers to solve the problem of libertinism from its root instead of having to deal with its consequences: men should be chaste too. Thus, there will be a turn to the original moral value of chastity, and a consequential revolutionary consideration of women (Ibid.).

The older Mary harshly condemns the result of the sexual double standard:

> Men, however vicious, however cruel, reaches not the depravity of a shameless woman. *Despair* shuts not against him every avenue to repentance; *despair* drives him not from human sympathies; *despair* hurls him not from hope, from pity, from

> life's common charities, to plunge him into desperate, damned, guilt (Hays, 1998, p. 67).

She addresses male seducers and admonishes them to reflect upon the consequences of their actions. She contrasts the rakes' "revel of an hour" with violated women's "deplorable ruin" and "irremediable perdition" (Ibid.). She points out their hypocrisy: male seducers undermine the basis of virtue and those of society while pretending to be polite and refined.

As a woman lost her chastity, she was not considered a woman any more (Bour, 1998, p. 149). Outside of male protection, society did not consider impure women's psychological and material needs. Fallen women could not satisfy either their emotional necessities or those of men to escape a harsher condemnation. Forced to play either the victim or the temptress, they exacerbate their denunciation of the dominant idea of femininity (Ibid.).

The consequences of male dissoluteness had been "not less tragical than absurd" (Ibid., p. 1). Women did not have the means to survive respectably sexual violation as society did not provide a redemption path for fallen women nor had sympathy towards them. Social indifference and ostracism are exemplified in the older Mary's story: nobody showed sympathy towards her and her condemnation was worse than the role she performed in the crime (Sherman, 2001, p. 145). Indeed, "Mary [was] demonized before she [was] criminalized" because of the importance the court laid on the character of the accused person (Ibid, p. 144). Not only in the moment of the murder Mary was in a pub, a place considered inappropriate for respectable women, but she was also deemed to tempt young men into debauchery because of her obscene profession (Ibid., pp. 143-144). As women were blamed for male depravity, society punished women, concealed the existence of prostitutes and eliminated them if they had the chance.

In addition, the assassination was not premeditated as it happened in a tavern where men usually behaved naturally and at times impulsively (Ibid., p. 145). Here, two men start a fight over Mary, and one of them is killed. Even if "Mary is the object of a fight", she is regarded to be the accomplice of the murderer as it was rumoured that she had kept the victim still for the final blow (Ibid.). In truth, Mary is caught in a situation in which she has not the possibility to decide and from which she cannot escape

triumphantly (Ibid.). She is arrested and accused not of manslaughter, but of murder, which implies purpose, and that determines her death by hanging. Exactly as the protagonist's accident of the grape theft, the mother's condemnation proves that women are outside the regular course of justice.

Because of the unbeatable and systematic hindrances, Mary decides to take her revenge. She deliberately disseminates corruption and nastiness into society, nourishing her resentment. She describes that her transformation into a "monster, cruel, ferocious" was caused by "The injuries and insults to which [her] odious profession exposed [her and which] eradicated from [her] heart every remaining human feeling" (Hays, 1998, pp. 66-67). The absence of love and sympathy dehumanises people and twists their original good nature. No longer innocent, Mary loses the right to humanity. Society works to annihilate her, and Mary returns what she receives in a cycle of mutual destruction.

In the eighteenth century the prostitute was a criminal who did not have a place in society as she destabilised familial ties through female sexual initiative. Mary's mother herself had acquired the notion that a fallen woman was horrifying and contagious and thus needed to be eliminated (Ty, 1999, p. 140). Indeed, she admits in her writing: "In surviving virtue and fame, I have already lived but too long" (Hays, 1998, p. 61).

At last hardened by the treatment she received, the older Mary is destabilised by purity and friendship. In her desperate situation, her child procured her the only joy she experienced. She ensured it under external care and in time she visited it less frequently so as not to damage it with her noxious influence. The mother juxtaposes her daughter's "innocence" with her "guilt" (Ibid., p. 66). The little Mary reminded her of her youth and the possibilities she had irretrievably lost for an alternative future. Finally, the sight of Mr Raymond, her former suitor, destabilises her emotions and resolves her to make order in her mind through writing.

In prison, the older Mary recognises that her death will come soon and begins to transfer her reflections to a written narration. Her final thoughts on her life confirm that "*Law* completes the triumph of injustice" (Hays, 1998, p. 68). She feels that her life has been conditioned from the start. Being fragile, innocent, and inexperienced, she became easy prey to treacheries, staining her respectability. Then, she was hindered any

possibility of redemption and the cruel treatment she received hardened her initial goodness. Not only the construction of society does not protect women from libertines, but it also contributes to completely demolishing women when they naively commit mistakes (Ibid., p. 68-69).

The mother's final address to Mr Raymond is a sympathetic pleading to protect her daughter from disgrace addressing his humanity. She prays him to

> snatch from destruction the child of an illicit commerce, shelter her infant purity from contagion, guard her helpless youth from a pitiless world, cultivate her reason, make her feel her nature's worth, strengthen her faculties, inure her to suffer hardship, rouse her to independence, inspire her with fortitude, with energy, with self-respect, and teach her to condemn the tyranny that would impose fetters of sex upon her mind (Ibid., p. 69).

Hoping to save the child from an unmerciful destiny, Mary asks Mr Raymond to adopt her daughter and instruct her to avoid the fault she has suffered from. Thus, she wishes to preserve her infant innocence and have a future different from her own thanks to a better education. She also states the necessity that she understands the fallacy of societal prejudices that confine women and condemn them.

Mr Raymond accepts to raise Mary's daughter as a member of his family to whom he now explains his purpose

> to secure to you without alloy the happiness of the present: yet it was my arduous purpose, while promoting your enjoyment, to render even your pleasures subservient to a higher view, — That of invigorating your frame and fortifying your spirit, that you might be prepared to meet the future, to suffer its trials, and brave its vicissitudes, with courage and dignity (Ibid., p. 57).

The guardian tries to provide the protagonist with the happiest childhood possible. He educates her to reason and fortitude so that she will acquire the means to bear with dignity the forthcoming cruel treatments caused by the prejudices against her illegitimate birth. However, he will not endeavour to enact a change in the system to erase the injustice and grant Mary happiness also in her adult years. Even though Mr Raymond recognises the discriminating mechanisms of society and judges them unfairly, he does not challenge them. Thus, he does not completely fulfil the wish of the

mother in that he will not be able to preserve Mary's innocence and happiness. He understands that the mark of sexual impurity is inherited and accepts sexual injustice as natural in the social dynamics (Sherman, 2001, p. 149). Mr Raymond grieves over the offences to which Mary is doomed but he is powerless, and ineffective because he does not want to expose himself in destabilising social power relations. While he believes in advanced principles, he does not apply them and conforms to societal hypocrisies instead.

Moreover, even a wise man such as Mr Raymond cannot abstain from stereotypically considering women as saints or harlots (Ty, 1999, p. 138). At first, he loved Mary's mother and regarded her as "lovely" and "formed in her most perfect mould" by "Nature" (Hays, 1998, p. 58). After being rejected by her, he starts to observe a slow decline in her demeanour that tackles her brightness. As the older Mary touches the abysmal depths of depravity on the night of the murder at the pub, Mr Raymond hardly recognises her. In a desperate condition, she has "a wan and haggard countenance, her clothes rent and her hair dishevelled" (Ibid., p. 59). He is incredulous about the transition that "the idol of its youthful affections" has performed towards an "unfortunate, self-abandoned" wretch (Ibid., p. 60). He describes the common ground between the two opposite figures: "the remains of uncommon beauty might still be traced in a form and countenance stained with blood, disordered by recent inebriation, disfigured by vice, and worn by disease" (Ibid., p. 60). The young virgin has been spoiled, vice and sexuality turned her into a monster. Her figure is characterised by chaos, blood, and excess, which bring illness and mental disorder. Physical degradation and moral fall are inseparable.

To sum up, Mr Raymond's use of the mother's memoirs is instrumental in controlling his adoptive daughter in order to serve aristocratic prejudices even if unintentionally. Indeed, the deterministic approach to life which is endorsed by Mr Raymond (and also by Mary and Hays) will entrap the protagonist in her mother's guilt.

4.6. Maternal link

The heroine's past is connected to her future through an obsessive continuous reading of the maternal memoirs. The discovery of her blood parent signals a moment of crisis in her consciousness and contrasts with her initial light cheerfulness. Significantly, it is also situated in the middle of the novel (Ty, 1999, p. 138).

Mary's contact with all that remains of her mother becomes so forceful that she repeats her destiny, even if the two stories have some divergences. The protagonist "perused" many times her mother's "fatal narrative" whose injustice generated a "sense of oppression, almost suffocation" in Mary (Hays, 1998, p. 71). Benumbed, she has a walk in the stormy weather which she conceives to be "less rude and savage than barbarous man" who imposes severe judgements on people based on material conditions (Ibid., p. 72). Symbolically, Mary's wandering in nature represents an attempt to cleanse herself from her past and its implications for her future. However, humanity has no power to control either natural forces or social mechanisms (Kelly, 1993, p. 122). The weather's violence overwhelms her: she faints out of exhaustion and is confined to bed because of a fever. As she recovers physically, also her mind fortifies itself. She understands what she has to do: "In me, it is virtue to submit to a destiny, however painful, not wilfully incurred; and, in all that affects myself merely, to rise magnanimously above it" (Hays, 1998, p. 77). Mary is resolute in applying her moral precepts and proving her value to Mr Raymond, who had instructed her to virtue (Ibid., p. 74).

After the sexual violation, Mary's social condition is analogous to that of her mother. Thus, their connection deepens, as the protagonist's dream during her illness shows:

> Imaginary terrors, broken recollections, strange phantoms, wild and wandering thoughts, harassed and persecuted me. In some of these terrible moments, the visionary form of my wretched mother seemed to flit before me. One moment, methought I beheld her in the arms of her seducer, revelling in licentious pleasure; the next, I saw her haggard, intoxicated, self-abandoned, joining in the midnight riot; and, in an instant, as the fantastic scene shifted, covered with blood, accused of murder, shrieking in horrible despair, dragged to the scaffold, sinking beneath the

> hand of the executioner! Then, all pallid and ghastly, with clasped hands, streaming eyes, and agonizing earnestness, she seemed to urge me to take example from her fate! Her dying groans and reiterated warnings, in low, tremulous accents, continued to vibrate on my ear: they became fainter and fainter, when methought I rushed forward to clasp my hapless parent in a last embrace. I beheld the convulsive pangs, the gaspings, the struggles, the distortions of death (Ibid., p. 123).

The Gothic quality of the nightmare describes the haunting sense of confinement of the mother's narrative. Even though Mary never met her parent and had any information on her only through Mr Raymond, here, she imagines to have direct contact with her. Ty reads in this passage an unconscious need "to return to the marginalised and outcast maternal" that Mary had never known (Ty, 1993, p. 64). At this point orphaned by her adoptive father, Mary feels closer to her unknown mother whom she reconstructs in her imagination through her parental memoirs.

Indeed, according to the sociologist Nancy Chodorow, the link between mother and daughter persists even after infancy because mothers tend to identify themselves with their daughters (Ibid., p. 32). Thus, Mary's connection to her female parent shapes her own identity and confers renewed dignity. The heroine compensates for the absence of maternal love through a reassuring feeling of family belonging that will determine an identical destiny, symbolically signalled by the embrace between mother and daughter. Through the sleeping illusions, the dead parent carries a message to her living daughter and encourages an uncanny repetition of her life. On the one hand, the dream signals an emotional aversion towards the story, both towards the mother's past and the protagonist's future (Jones, 1997, p. 213). On the other hand, the embrace generates a sense of belonging and comfort that contrasts with the sensible but cold guide of reason exhorted by Mr Raymond who is now dead. Thus, Mary decides to accept her mother's experience as her heritage and tries to survive in eighteenth-century society confiding only in herself and her ideals.

Certainly, Mary's condition diverges in many aspects from that of her mother. Firstly, they do not start on the same basis. While the mother had a desultory education, Mary was schooled by a wise man who transmitted her scientific notions and virtuous precepts. Mary's adherence to reason guides her life choices even if their outcome is disadvantageous for her. On the contrary, the older Mary was charmed by superficial

material gratifications and fell victim to men who profited from her. Thus, she lost her virginity and innocence, and, out of desperation, became a prostitute as her only means of subsistence. In contrast, Mary decides to resist Osborne's seductions and William's weak love in the name of self-respect: she never becomes either a prostitute or a mistress. Since the heroine avoids this sad commonplace fate, Hays defies the traditional narrative on fallen women (Ibid., p. 212). However, Mary's story contains all the elements to scrutinise the issue of prostitution and ruined women.

Nevertheless, different education and different choices do not save the heroine from ruin. The point Hays wants to make is that social prejudices do not make distinctions based on capacities or ethics, but on appearance and socio-economical status. Social class, connections, and financial resources determine people's lives. Mary's repetition of her mother's fate proves the immobility of society and people's mentality (Bour, 1998, p. 152). Even if the protagonist does not become a sex worker, she is not able to obtain freedom and will have a disastrous life (Jones, 1997, p. 213).

4.7. Romantic disillusion

The heroine slowly understands the consequences that the fact of being a "child of infamy and calamity" brings to her existence (Hays, 1998, p. 69). Mary is aware that her illegitimate birth has stained her reputation and will preclude her participation in refined social life. As an orphan, she is nameless, and thus she does not expect high regard from the people of her time (Bour, 1998, p. 145). Even though the consciousness of her new-found status as an outsider is painful because of the discrimination it determines, it empowers her to adhere to the truth even more and criticise class prejudices and injustices more sharply.

Mary has a different attitude towards her story than William. She internalised her social inferiority and wished not "to bring dishonour as [her] only dowry to the arms of the man [she] love[s]" (Hays, 1998, p. 75). In confronting him, she tries to persuade him that their different ranks require distinct destinies. She enforces her point by stating that

Mr Pelham's pride would not permit him "to enrol a daughter of infamy in a family vain of illustrious descent" (Ibid., p. 77).

William contrasts Mary's argument by exhorting her to abandon the "senseless chimera, […] odious tyranny" she imagines (Ibid., p. 75). Since only few people are acquainted with her mother's tale, William believes that Mary's origin can be kept secret "by a prudent silence" so that "the consequences of its disclosure might yet be averted" (Ibid., p. 78). He is willing to display only a partial truth for convenience to obtain his wish that, on the contrary, would be shattered by the plain truth (Partenza, 2008, p. 63). Thus, William acknowledges the difference between substance and appearance that the world observes and his preference for the latter when it favours his goals. He is willing to censure language and manipulate narratives when sincerity would bring inconvenient consequences (Ibid.). He disregards moral ideals in favour of practical experience: "Virtue itself is worthless but as a mean to *happiness*" (Hays, 1998, p. 78). The young aristocrat reasons that through concealment they would be able to marry and live happily.

In addition, also society endorses this mechanism. While it requests truth, it also requires polite conduct, which encourages to mask any displeasing natural reaction as not to offend other people (Partenza, 2008, p. 63). Personal truth and social truth do not coincide in most cases, but concealment is accepted as long as it is not detected (Ibid.).

On the contrary, Mary does not want to marry through deceit which is incompatible with her principles. She is determined to adhere to sincerity, in which she finds an emancipating force that allows her to confirm her identity and be true to herself and to other people too (Ibid., p. 65). She decides to be authentic in her actions so that she can maintain her self-respect and asserts her resolution firmly. Finally, because of William's insistence, she consents to marry him only on the condition that Mr Pelham approves their union, in spite of knowing Mary's origin in every detail.

Expectedly, Mr Pelham categorically refuses the lovers' attachment and enacts his plan to separate them by sending his sons to the continent. William scolds Mary: "Your mistaken heroism has ruined us! My father is inexorable" (Hays, 1998, p. 81). Not only does William resent the mistake that her determination has caused, but he also manifests his extraneousness to her values that he identifies with her person (Partenza, 2008, p.

66). Paradoxically, he still proclaims love for her and proposes to promise to each other before his departure. But Mary confides in an enduring idealised love that does not need additional ties and refuses to vow: “let us both be free, and let our re-union be the cheerful, voluntary, dignified, consummation of love and virtue” (Hays, 1998, p. 85). Displeased with her rejection, William states that her individual agency will be determinant of her own destruction:

> if you are then resolved rather to obey the dictates of a frigid prudence than yield to the united claims of virtue, love, and reason, you will probably regret in the future the effects of a despair for which *you* only will be responsible (Ibid., pp. 81-82).

Mary’s ideological approach contrasts with William’s opportunistic and practical one. While Mary is coherent with her principles, William is ready to compromise his ethics to traditions. In fact, Partenza judges him to be a static character who accepts received customs and does not assert his own moral beliefs that would lead to authentic personal growth (Partenza, 2008, p. 61). Despite his emotional drive, which is apparently indomitable, he lacks the strength to challenge his father who represents society and conduct manuals (Ibid., pp. 66-67). Indeed, Mr Pelham and society are “inexorable” in avoiding mingling the aristocracy with the lower classes.

During William’s journey, Mary’s observance of sincerity impedes her from accepting a neighbouring farmer’s marriage proposal, to which Mr Raymond would have consented to see his daughter secured in a protected situation. However, Mary does not wish to be united to a man she does not love, and her heart still belongs to William whose devotion, however, is already contested because of the enchantments the big European cities offer. Mr Raymond advises her to “let him try the world, and prove his boasted strength” (Hays, 1998, p. 80).

Eventually, back from his journey, William becomes the victim of his own way of thinking. Since he believed the rumour about Mary’s engagement to a wealthy man, he married a rich heiress as his father planned. He discovers the cunning manipulation of information enacted by Mr Pelham not only on Mary’s fate but also on Mr Raymond’s death only after he casually met Mary destitute and sick in the streets of London. Clearly, William’s passive acceptance of received narratives signals a misplaced and excessive trust in his father and on society. His experience proves that “the victim of

control" was not Mary, but himself (Ibid., p. 52). His "boasted strength" is subdued through the helpless observance of paternal rules and, as Mary and Mr Raymond feared, he became "*a man of the world*" (Ibid., p. 55).

The young man distinguishes between "the dictates of nature and virtue and the factitious relations of society" (Ibid., p. 127). Even if he recognises the social claims of a wife, he assures Mary that it was only a union of convenience and no affection has ever existed between himself and his spouse. He wishes Mary to become his mistress because "*affections* should be restored to their dear original possessor" to gratify his heart (Ibid., p. 127). While he practises the falsehood of society, he still demands a pure attachment from which he has consented to be removed. His frivolous union proves Mr Raymond's distrust of love and marriage:

> Few marriages are formed on what is called *love*, in its appropriate sense; it is a bewitching, but delusive, sentiment; it dwells in the imagination, and frequently has little other connection with the object. The true beauty, of which the lover is enamoured, is merely ideal (Ibid., p. 98).

From this moment, the heroine has evidence that "If William is lost to Mary, he is also lost to virtue" (Ibid., p. 100). She refuses his willingness to marry for such futile motives and escape the consequences of his actions. She exhorts him to fulfil his duties towards his wife, and decides to see him no more. Being Mary disenchanted with the illusive protection men offer in a sort of "magic circle", she refuses any kind of help from him: "Dishonour, death itself, is a calamity less insupportable *than self-reproach*" (Ibid., pp. 122, 129). Thus, she resolves to provide for herself by herself: "to confide in the heart of *man* is to lay up stores for sorrow: henceforth I rest on myself" (Ibid., p. 130). She is confident in her abilities and believes to be able to survive on her own:

> It is not necessary that I should marry; I can exert my talents for support, or procure a sustenance by the labour of my hands. I dare encounter indigence; but I dare not prostitute my sincerity and my faith (Ibid., p. 99).

4.8. Osborne's manipulation and social ostracism

However, events do not unfold as Mary expected. After Mr Raymond's death, the protagonist has to provide for herself financially and sets off for London, which is depicted by her guardian as the city of possibilities: "in London, connections may be acquired, employment sought, observation avoided, and liberty preserved" (Ibid., p. 102). Nevertheless, what happens to Mary in the metropolis contests these prospects. Due to her lack of connections and knowledge of the city, Mary falls into Osborne's trick. The villain takes advantage of her body, first imprisoning her, and then violating her.

Osborne appreciated Mary's beauty from the first time he saw her. Since he regards just her appearance, he merely considers her as an object to possess. He expects to dispose of her as he pleases thanks to his wealth and rank that has permitted him to fulfil all his desires: "Born to fortune, brought up in indulgence, and accustomed to command, [his] temper and [his] wishes ill brook control" (Ibid., pp. 112-113). After having unsuccessfully tried to seduce the heroine on different occasions, he imprisons her to make her reflect upon his marriage proposal. Indeed, he confides that his fortune and social status will persuade her.

However, Mary is determined to refuse his requests and demonstrates to have a strong will that is deplored by the baronet. As soon as the protagonist attempts to escape, he rapes her. Thus, Osborne denies her self-determination and degrades her to mere physical existence. Then, he asks for forgiveness and proposes a reparation for the act that, he assured her, had not been premeditated but was the consequence of the jovial inebriation of the moment (Ibid., p. 117). The villain recognises to have "irretrievably injured [Mary's] reputation" through the sexual violation and is aware of the social condemnation to which she will be subjected (Ibid., p. 118). Osborne exerts the authority of his privileged status to have total control over the poor girl. He sees "the seduced woman as a vulnerable and easy penetrable body": firstly he imprisons her, then rapes her, and finally demands to have legal claims on her (Ty, 1999, p. 145). Instead of using his power for the welfare of the fragile, Osborne gratifies his selfish and libidinous whims. Through his characterisation, Hays proves the incompetence of the Burkean male patriarch (Ty, 1993, p. 62).

On the other hand, Mary does not accept neither her persecutor's wishes nor the gravity of the rape and its consequences (Brooks, 2008, p. 17). Instead, she is determined to preserve her freedom: "I demand my liberty this moment […]. Think not, by feeble restraints, to fetter the body when the mind is determined and free" (Hays, 1998, pp. 117-118). Mary reveals her moral superiority, which allows her to denounce the base offence she has received. She also refuses Osborne's wealth or protection as they are false compensations for her struggles and will rather work to support herself (Ibid., p. 119). The protagonist prefers her dignity to a prosperous life and does not let her oppressor win over her free will.

In this aspect, Mary's affinity with Emily Melville from Godwin's *Things As They Are* emerges. Emily is an orphan adopted by her aunt, the mother of the selfish nobleman Mr Tyrrel. Even though he cares for her, Mr Tyrrel imprisons Emily as a punishment for her partiality towards Falkland whom he hates and envies. Eventually, Mr Tyrrel's rough treatment damages Emily's health and eventually leads to her death. However, Emily maintains a strong conviction for her beliefs against her unjust confinement when she declares: "You may imprison my body but you cannot conquer my mind" (Godwin in Walker, 2018a, p. 193). Emily's powerful assertion inspired Hays to shape the character of Mary Raymond.

What Osborne's persecutions achieved was to create terror in Mary who began to see herself as "vulnerable and weak" (Ty, 1999, p. 146). The sexual violation is merely the climax of a set of atrocious persecutions enacted by the aristocrat (Ibid., p. 147). In fact, from the first encounters with him, his odious presence generates discomfort and fear in Mary, who is forced to shut herself in the Neville family's house so as not to meet him. During the escape from her imprisonment, Osborne's voice makes her faint, destroying her agency and shattering her hopes of freedom. Thus, Mary is annihilated by Osborne whose power over her is immense, even if she rejects his dominance rationally and ideologically. Mary insists on her freedom against her oppressor who, however, has restricted her several times.

After her release, Mary roams aimlessly in the streets of London, a place that is conventionally depicted as dangerous, but that contrasts with her former imprisonment. Her wandering is also a signal of her fallen condition and her disorientation that results

in fever (Sherman, 2001, p. 153). After recovery, she reaches her guardian's acquaintances to apply for an occupation through a presentation letter from Mr Raymond. Being the master of the house from home, Mary meets his wife, whose questions Mary answers politely and sincerely. She tells in broad terms the misadventures that impeded her from applying earlier and where she presently resided.

Nevertheless, the courteous hostess is suspicious of the protagonist and addresses Mr Pelham, whose son was mentioned by Mary, to confirm the account. Predictably, Mr Pelham explains that Mary is not Mr Raymond's blood daughter and that, after her tutor's death, she has been in the mansion of a licentious aristocrat, and that she has seduced his married son. Thus, he depicts the protagonist as a wicked promiscuous woman. He justifies his calumnies with "motives of justice […] to prevent the probable mischiefs which might ensue from the admission of a young woman of such a description into an innocent and respectable family" (Hays, 1998, p. 135). In describing Mary under infamous terms, Mr Pelham interprets personal female experience through a male discourse that undermines the protagonist's credibility. As a consequence, defamation isolates Mary through the assumption that her own existence is mischievous and contagious. Mr Pelham "twists history": he reverts the meaning of justice, which protects solely the interests of the wealthy classes and excludes the fragile population (Ibid., p. 160). His detailed account, which intends to harm Mary's reputation, contrasts with Mary's simple discourse, which is concise and reticent so as not to denigrate herself and her persecutors.

Unsurprisingly, the lady trusts Mr Pelham's false testimony as proof of kindness towards her own family honour and refuses to listen to Mary's self-defence (Hays, 1998, pp. 136-137). Thus, not only does Hays criticise male discourse that misshapes female experience, but also women who decide to confirm that version of the story and ignore the divergent claims of distressed women (Sherman, 1997, p. 161). Hays demonstrates that history is written by men, and women's accounts are dismissed even by women themselves (Ibid.).

While the protagonist does not lay as much importance on her reputation as on personal integrity, other people do consider the former meaningful and determinant to their conduct towards her. Indeed, Mr Raymond advised Mary that "The good opinion

of our fellow-beings is desirable: it is connected with usefulness, and ought not to be contemned" (Hays, 1998, p. 102). However, Mary's illegitimate status and her cruel rape do not make her respectable to the neighbouring community.

Similarly to William's plead of concealment, Osborne notes that "a prudent silence" on Mary's side would have been advisable so as not to spread malicious rumours of the sexual violation among his servants (Ibid., p. 118). Not only the breach of female virginity must be censored from the world, but also noblemen's culpability. In accordance, Osborne desists Mary from prosecuting legally because it would only worsen her reputation. Indeed, trials gave the "rape a public character" and their emphasis was misplaced on the "victim's character" rather than on the criminal act (Sherman, 2001, p. 152). Since raped women were considered neither respectable nor credible, noblemen were rarely sentenced for violating lower-class women (Ibid., p. 151). Thus, Mary could not appeal to justice because of her low social status and injured reputation, and she is encouraged to remain silent so as not to worsen her situation.

In addition, the protagonist could not appeal to the defamation law to contrast Mr Pelham's and Osborne's narratives. Only people belonging to a trade acknowledged by civil regulation could take legal action against accusations "of unfitness for a profession" (Sherman, 2001, p. 155). As a consequence, the humble activities to which Mary applied were not included. Also in this case, institutional regulations did not offer protection for working-class women (Ibid.).

In any case, Mary continues her search for a paid occupation, at first in the artistic or intellectual field and then in servitude. However, in most cases she gets rejected for multiple reasons. Her lack of experience and references was contested, and her delicate appearance was not considered fit for labour (Hays, 1998, pp. 142-143). Mary also regrets the impossibility of paying for the goods with which she was supposed to perform certain jobs (Ibid.). She gets hired only twice, firstly as a flower painter and secondly as a travel companion to a rich lady.

However, the heroine's enthusiasm for the nearly-gained independence is soon demolished as she understands "that the fatal tale of [her] disgrace pursued and blasted all [her] efforts" (Ibid., p. 140). In fact, as the first employer is informed of Mary's story by a servant of Osborne, he makes sexual advances towards the protagonist. Thus

wounded, Mary desperately abandons the place at once and does not request the payment for her paintings for fear of being insulted again. On the contrary, she is dismissed by her second employer through a letter a little time before the departure. The lady had been acquainted with Mary's unfortunate tale and had been told that the heroine's "present distress was, in a great degree, wilful; that [she] had kind friends, who […] would […] gladly receive [her]" (Ibid., p. 145). The female employer listens to her wealthy neighbours and dismisses Mary, whose friendship she now believes to be improper. She confides that the poor woman will be saved from need by her "kind friends". However, the lady does not contemplate Mary's point of view and the fact that she does not want to be helped by her supposed "friends".

Finally, Mary is arrested twice for debt because of her inability to find a job and sustain herself economically. She refuses Osborne's bail, but she is rescued from prison the first time by a former servant of Mr Raymond a short time after the first arrest, and the second time by the Neville family two years after her incarceration. Hays describes how the permanence in prison damages the protagonist's health: dampness and stale air cause inflammations to her body while solitude and inactivity debilitate her mind and annihilate her spirit (Hays, 1998, p. 168).

Through the representation of the insalubrious prison condition, the author joins the movements of social reform against imprisonment for indebtedness. Indeed, debt prisoners were likely to end their days in a mediocre prison for their inability to return the amount of money owed (Sherman, 2001, p. 156). However, this revolutionary campaign considered exclusively male prisoners. Thus, Hays expands its claims to single women and attacks the fact that "*women*'s indebtedness results from a system opposed to their independence" (Ibid., p. 157).

Mary's final detention, caused by her financial dependence, echoes her former imprisonment in Osborne's mansion, which was provoked by male lust instead (Ibid., p. 159). Indeed, the physical prison literalises the confinement generated by the female role, as Wollstonecraft's Maria expresses: "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (Wollstonecraft in Sherman, 2001, p. 136). Mary is forced to recognise her sexuality and cope with her limited possibilities as a woman. For mankind, it is her

female body that is meaningful while her intellectual mind is insignificant (Ty, 1999, p. 149).

Lastly, the prison is also the physical place where both mother and daughter write their memoirs (Sherman, 2001, p. 138). The compilation of their lives serves to occupy their time, to reflect and subdue their despair. Their detention is the price they have to pay for having confronted the social order. However, in contrast to her mother, who is executed a few days after the incarceration, Mary dies slowly through a constant "loss of self" (Ibid., p. 160). She becomes numb and vanishes from the external world while her energy is preserved only in her written memoirs (Ibid.).

4.9. Self-respect and moral integrity

For a moment, Mary considers changing her name to escape the consequences of the rumours surrounding her person, but she desists immediately. She insists on her pure conscience:

> I am guiltless, […] why should I then affect disguise, or have recourse to falsehood? In every honest and consistent means of safety I will not desert myself. It is not necessary that I should wilfully spread the tale of my own disgrace or imprudence, yet I will not, by prevarication, shrink from their consequences (Hays, 1998, pp. 140-141).

In proclaiming her innocence, Mary deems concealment and deceit unnecessary. Her determination to be coherent with her upright principles despite the mistreatment she suffered confirms her righteousness and allows her to be sincere and authentic. She acts with great self-respect and is ready to respond to the effects of her actions. She asserts her own virtuous integrity that enables her to detach herself from her unhappy life experiences that are beyond her control (Sherman, 1997, p. 161). Indeed, the protagonist refuses to bear the guilt of Osborne's violation since she had no wilful agency in it.

Mary considers her inner reality transcendent from personal history and the treatment she has received (Sherman, 1997, p. 161). Through the alienation from

physical experience, which causes social oppression, chastity acquires a new liberating significance. In fact, for Mary chastity becomes a "personal choice" that is connected to a rational and moral attitude and is separated from her violated body (Brooks, 2008, pp. 21-22). Thus, Mary purifies this sexual quality by depriving it of falsity and hypocrisy. Her argument implies a return to the original contrast between being and appearing and, thus, between her adherence to truth and society's penchant towards concealment. Her pure and consistent perspective entitles her to criticise the hypocrisy of the social system about female sexuality. Indeed, the heroine debunks her immoral reputation by vindicating her innocence. As a result, Hays suggests that traditional definitions can be challenged and she "attempts to reposition woman socially and philosophically" (Brooks, 2008, pp. 15-16).

However, Mary's personal virtue does not improve her material conditions. While her integrity prevents her from a further moral fall into sexual dissoluteness, it also aggravates her social and financial situation in that she decides to endure the social consequences of her past. Had she been silent and compliant to male desire, she could have married William and probably would not have suffered sexual violation. Even when, towards the end of the novel, Osborne "implore[s] [Mary's] forgiveness […] and [beseeches her], with apparent sincerity, to accept the only recompense in his power to bestow, — a *legal* title to his hand and fortune" Mary categorically refuses any help from him, either nuptial or economical (Hays, 1998, p. 164). Instead, she accusingly demands that her reputation, youth and honour be restored. While the damage Osborne has caused is irreparable in the eyes of the world, Mary wishes to maintain her integrity and self-respect.

Mary does not marry, and her ruin follows because she does not want to partake in the hypocritical mechanisms of society. Hays seems to suggest that women do not have a future outside of marriage in the eighteenth century. Even Emma Courtney married, even if against her will, to be saved from financial disaster to which Mary is deemed instead. Mary acknowledges her struggle:

> Difficulties almost insuperable, difficulties peculiar to my sex, my age, and my unfortunate situation, opposed themselves to my efforts on every side. I sought only the bare means of subsistence: amidst the luxuriant and the opulent, who

> surrounded me, I put in no claims either for happiness, for gratification, or even for the common comforts of life: yet, surely, *I had a right to exist*! […] I determined to live; I determined that the devices of my persecutors should not overwhelm me: my spirit roused itself to defeat their malice and baffle their barbarous schemes. From the deplorable circumstances in which I felt myself involved, I seemed but to acquire new strength and courage: I exerted my invention, and called every power into action (Ibid., p. 141).

While the protagonist expects nothing from mankind, she demonstrates a powerful subjectivity that gathers all the possible strength to resist her unjust oppressors. She refuses the implications her illegitimate status and her sexual violation have on her conscience. Contrasting her persecutors, she claims her "*right to exist*" and "desperately clings to the only thing left intact: her self-esteem" (Ty, 1993, p. 67). Even though she suffers a physical decline, her ethics remain constant and unassailable, contrastingly to her mother, whose descent was both moral and material (Partenza, 2008, p. 72). She vindicates a new strong female subjectivity that is independent of received social definition and treatment.

Differently from Mary's powerful self, Mrs Neville embodied the faithful, loving wife who defined her identity through her love for her husband (Ty, 1993, p. 70). During her whole existence, she conveys all her energies towards her man's well-being and worries excessively about every issue he encounters. When Mr Neville dies, she recognises that she "had no individual existence; [her] very being was absorbed in that of [her] husband" (Hays, 1998, p. 173). Nevertheless, Mrs Neville is the example of an ordinary wife of those years. In fact, it was believed that women managed to "experience emotional repletion in the male's sheltering gesture, assimilating themselves into stillness suggestive of sexual consummation" (Sherman, 1997, p. 151). Thus, women were believed to express themselves at best by servicing their husbands and family, under a male shelter, and not employing themselves in something rewarding for themselves only. Irigaray emphasised the fact that, historically, the feminine defined itself only in terms of the contrary of the masculine whose success was determined also by feminine care (Ty, 1993, pp. 70-71). As a consequence, the characterisation of the feminine is distorted because of its submissive and serviceable attitude that impedes the development into an independent subject. While Mrs Neville accepted the social

definition of woman, Mary tried to escape it but she was punished for her transgression. Even in different positions, both women remain "in unrealized potentiality", insignificant, and will be easily forgotten by posterity (Sherman, 1997, p. 163; Ty, 1993, p. 71).

Mary's complete failure exasperates her and pushes to conclude her memoirs with an appeal to future generations:

> Almighty Nature, mysterious are thy decrees! — The vigorous promise of my youth has failed. The victim of a barbarous prejudice, society has cast me out from its bosom. The sensibilities of my heart have been turned to bitterness, the powers of my mind wasted, my projects rendered abortive, my virtues and my sufferings alike unrewarded, *I have lived in vain*! unless the story of my sorrow should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claims of humanity and justice. From the fate of my wretched mother (in which, alas! my own has been involved,) let him learn, that, while the slave of sensuality, inconsistent as assuming, he pours, by *his conduct*, contempt upon chastity, in vain will he impose on *woman* barbarous penalties, or seek to multiply restrictions; his seductions and example, yet more powerful, will defeat his precepts, of which *hypocrisy*, not virtue, is the genuine fruit. Ignorance and despotism, combating frailty with cruelty, may go on to propose *partial* reform in one invariable, melancholy, round; reason derides the weak effort; while the fabric of superstition and crime, extending its broad base, mocks the toil of the visionary projector (Hays, 1998, pp. 174-175).

In the end, Mary equates societal restrictions to natural forces as both are too powerful to be contrasted by herself alone (Kelly, 1993, p. 123). Society definitively repudiated Mary because of sexual prejudices and negated her any possibility of sustenance and happiness. As a contrast to her juvenile expectations, the heroine feels that her capacities are tragically wasted when she desperately cries, "*I have lived in vain!*". Her lament is the outcome of the clash between her determination and the stiffness of traditions that impedes social change (Partenza, 2008, p. 73). However, the interpretation of her final address is modified through the conjunction "unless", which introduces the conditions under which Mary's story becomes meaningful. Hays hopes that men will understand the hypocrisy surrounding the gendering of chastity and the unjust treatment reserved for the victims of male depravity thanks to an emphatic

response to Mary's story. She hopes for the progress of civilisation that will acquire awareness and humanity while rejecting hypocrisy, ignorance, and despotism.

Mary has failed to demonstrate how abject the female condition is in the hope that women in the future will be spared a similar discriminating treatment (Brooks, 2008, p. 23). Interestingly, since Mary's story diverges from common narratives on seduced women, "Mary is *not* representative; she must remain *the* rather than *a* victim" (Ibid.). Her unicity emphasises the dramatic individual struggle that cannot be avoided. Surely, for Hays it is better to rebel and lose rather than submit to a docile model and conform to the social and cultural expectations of that role (Ty, 1993, p. 71).

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to shed light on the eighteenth-century 'female philosopher' through the revolutionary author Mary Hays and her fictional heroines Emma Courtney and Mary Raymond. The female writer candidly introduced her intimate experience as a rational thinker and sentimental woman to the literary scene of her time. It was a "hazardous experiment" that brought the complexity of female feeling and desire into the spotlight (Hays, 2009, p. 4). Not only did she include examples of generousness and goodwill, but she also voiced forceful negative feelings that arose from the disappointing clash between hopeful expectations and unrewarding reality. As she revealed unexpected issues whose morality was considered dubious, she was not welcomed by her contemporaries. Hays' life proves that "Radical idealism […] produces its own exiles, principally women" (Keane, 2000, p. 9).

Hays' revolutionary mindset is reproduced in the protagonists of her two novels. Their progressive attitude arises from their unconventional education, which allows them to acquire the means to analyse the world through ethics and reason. The three 'female philosophers' understand the situation in which women are placed, point out the unjust customary female submission, act, and argue in favour of freedom.

Hays could benefit from a better education than those traditionally reserved for girls thanks to her dissenting background and middle class. Indeed, the sectarian religious discussions in meeting houses, in which Hays participated, sparked the author's curiosity and encouraged her personal search for divinity through reason from a young age. In her pursuit of knowledge, she sought access to books, but she mainly confided on male mentors, the first of them being her beloved John Eccles, then the Reverend Robert Robinson, William Godwin and many other intellectuals. Thanks to them, she could have access to academic books and be up to date with current debates.

In her youth, Emma Courtney reads much fiction that inflames her imagination and enhances her sentimentality. Her father tries to counterbalance her uncontrolled passion for stories with serious texts that are included in his vast library. Even if she is

at first crossed by the imposition, the protagonist enjoys learning about various subjects. Finally, she meets the philosopher Mr Francis, who is modelled after Godwin, whose conversations investigate different engaging philosophical topics. Thus, in Emma's case too, male help with intellectual training is fundamental. However, while the heroine considers reason a steady principle that should direct people's lives, she does not train her feelings and falls prey to them. Hays surely wanted to point out the dangers that an unguided and incomplete female education could cause.

Both Emma Courtney and Hays followed an unorganised curriculum of study whose guide was only their individual interests. On the other hand, Mary Raymond has the unusual privilege of enjoying the same education as her male friends under the guidance of Mr Raymond, who is careful in instilling the importance of reason and virtue. Thus, Mary has the opportunity to form an upright and strong mind and, ideally, to have the same possibilities as men.

These three examples of Bildung provide the female individual with a distinct self-consciousness, confidence, and awareness of the great moral value of truth, sincerity and generosity. Hays', Emma's and Mary's abilities could be useful in redressing society to prefer ethical qualities to wealth, but women's unicity meets discrimination and opposition instead. Indeed, since Hays' and her heroines' attitudes are judged to be transgressive, they must be punished and marginalised.

Firstly, Hays was ridiculed for her revolutionary ideas and bold exposure of her private thoughts and desires in her first novel. Her feminism was associated with that of Wollstonecraft, who was a charming and confident woman wrongly believed to encourage libertine behaviour. In contrast, Mary Hays was unattractive and socially awkward. Thus, she became an easy target for a cruel satire that hurt her and provoked her gradual isolation. Hays' enduring adherence to radical ideas past the revolutionary decade and her unmarried status favoured her derision too. She felt the fracture between her development as a female intellectual and the lack of recognition from the world. Even though the opinion of the general public discouraged her, she continued to employ her energies for the feminist cause through more traditional methods.

In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, the focus is not precisely on social oppression, but instead on silence and neglect as responses to female claims. Emma's sincere,

emotionally-charged, but disquieted letters to Augustus are a signal of the restlessness and dissatisfaction with the protagonist's condition. On the other hand, Augustus' replies are vague and sporadic. He provides unconvincing and incomplete motives for his refusal of Emma. Thus, the protagonist is alone and unable to overcome the man's decision or to understand it; her passion exacerbates into resentment, which starts to destroy her physical and mental health. Emma's uncontrolled emotional excess alienates her.

Nevertheless, as we examined in chapter two, Emma's stubborn love confession is unconsciously generated by the impossibility of female independence in eighteenth-century society. In fact, only through the connection to a man can Emma have a respectable social position, access to knowledge, and the possibility to employ herself in useful activities. Indeed, the protagonist enjoys these conditions when she marries Mr Montague. However, their union is unsuccessful because of her husband's deleterious jealousy after the reappearance of Augustus. Thus, not only does Hays voice her distrust for the social institution of the family, but she also enforces the necessity to learn to control one's own feelings. Furthermore, since Augustus is in actual fact in love with Emma, female passion and desire are validated.

Thirdly, Mary Raymond is the 'victim of prejudice' of society due to material conditions over which she has no control. In contrast to the mental and physical abilities she has acquired thanks to her liberal education, the fact that her mother, whom she has never known, is a prostitute determines her exclusion from polite society. Not only is class a determinant factor, but also a lack of money (that Mary used up to save her friends) and meaningful connections, except for Mr Raymond. Her mother's wish that a comprehensive education would grant her daughter a different life from her own is proved to be illusory. Social determinism and prejudices will inevitably render the protagonist's past determinant of her future.

Mary's decline is socially constructed, as the mechanisms that control women, including chastity, are. Indeed, Hays accuses the "too-great stress laid on the *reputation* for chastity in *woman*", which causes two main issues (Hays, 1997, p. 1). The first one is the creation of two distinct sexual standards which generate, on the one hand, a group of male sexual predators and, on the other, a group of female victims. The second

problem regards the hypocrisy of society on respectability. Indeed, as the author emphasises the word "*reputation*" and not "chastity", it is the penchant of society towards concealment that she blames, and not chastity itself. This is also exemplified by the fact that both William and Osborne encourage Mary to hide the truth, the former on her illegitimate birth and the latter on the rape, so as not to worsen the heroine's reputation.

On the contrary, Mary feels that their invites are not fair and insists on her determination to be sincere. Because of this decision, she cannot be saved by men and suffers the physical decline of which she was warned. While Mary's intellectual qualities are irrelevant as they are not accompanied by a good reputation, connections and wealth, her social status and negative life experiences will determine her marginal and unprotected status in society. As an outcast and a fallen woman, Mary cannot contrast the malicious rumours about her and is unable to find a job to provide for herself economically. As a result, she is arrested for debt twice. According to Hays, Mary's physical imprisonment symbolises the female condition in eighteenth-century Britain.

Indeed, eighteenth-century women could not achieve social and financial independence because of systemic impediments. Even Hays, Emma and Mary's education is dependent on male teachers. However, while their cognitive training makes them aware of systematic gender restrictions, it also provides them with great moral integrity and a strong sense of self-respect that impedes them from compromisng with systematic corruption.

In conclusion, the three life stories demonstrate how women were marginal in eighteenth-century society. Since they did not fit the model of the obedient woman and challenged the 'things as they are', they met either denigration, derision, and opposition. Specifically, *The Victim of Prejudice* explains this condition at best: even if Mary is provided with rational training and observes ethical precepts as was encouraged by liberal thinkers, her (un)success in society is dependant on her social class, wealth and acquaintances: elements that are unrelated to her intellectual and moral worth. Indeed, Hays demonstrates how the determinism of the environment has an immense influence on individual's lives. Thus, superficial and material characteristics determine the worth

of individuals in the social system, which tends to keep the social classes separated. Prejudice becomes a means of social control and maintenance that tends to silence and isolate discordant voices.

Yet, Hays, Emma and Mary deliver powerful narrations on virtue and female rights. They share a firm and upright perception of themselves that contrasts with society's judgement. Thus, they challenge the corruption of 'things as they are' and suggest alternative solutions for general moral and social improvement. Hays valued her works s the most significant achievement in her life, as it was the result of her enduring interest in knowledge. Her singularity, unconformity, but also her faults and unrest made her have a unique life, as she wrote in her letter dated 14th February 1806 to Henry Crabb Robinson: "I sought & made to myself an extraordinary destiny" (Hays, 1806 in Whelan).

Hays' experimentation led to denigration and derision during her lifetime, but she advanced modern issues and contributed with innovations in some fields, for example, in the genre of biography or didactic for girls. In accord with English Jacobins' address to posterity, Hays' anticipation of themes and topics has been received more warmly and vividly in recent decades rather than by her contemporaries. Indeed, her focus on the self with its positive and negative emotions and their analysis is highly actual. In fact, nowadays, an increasing number of people are interested in the psychology of the mind and in mental health issues. Moreover, the feminist cause of gender equality at work and in the social sphere has much prominence in our everyday lives. Our knowledge of the past and its differences with our present should make us aware of the achievements and privileges that humanity has reached with much effort. The example of the past thinkers should inspire and encourage us to believe in and work constantly towards the improvement of human institutions and relations and a better understanding of ourselves.

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