

# *Female Philosophy Refunctioned: Elizabeth Hamilton's Parodic Novel*

ELEANOR TY

**D**URING THE 1790s, a number of English women writers used the novel as a means of conveying their endorsement or disapproval of the ideals of liberty, equality, and the "rights of woman," the rallying cry of many female supporters of the French Revolution of 1789. Among the most notable of these early "feminists"<sup>1</sup> are Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, who both wrote essays and tracts, as well as fiction, to argue for a better system of education for young girls, for providing employment opportunities for single women, and more generally for regarding the female sex as rational and moral beings capable of thinking rather than as delicate and dependent creatures.<sup>2</sup> The debate between the women who advocated change and those who promoted the *status quo* has been examined by scholars under various topics, such as "the war of ideas" or the battle between the Jacobin and Anti-Jacobins.<sup>3</sup> However, this controversy was by no means divided simply into two camps. As some recent critics — Claudia Johnson, for example — have pointed out, the distinction between the reformers and the conservatives was not always clearly defined. Conservative and religious writers like Hannah More, for instance, as Mitzi Myers points out, called for a "revolution in female manners" just as radical writers like Wollstonecraft did. Gary Kelly, in his article on Jane Austen, observes that often both sides employed the same type of imagery or the same form, such as the first-person confessional narrative in their novels. To complicate matters further, these female novelists sometimes used irony, parody, and/or what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "double discourse" (Ch. 4) in their works which make it difficult to point out exactly to which camp one belonged.

One such novelist who reacted strongly to the revolutionary cant of the 1790s and seems to speak from the conservative side of the dispute is Elizabeth Hamilton. Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) is a novel which mocks the life and works of such female "philosophers"<sup>4</sup> or feminists as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays. Like Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray; or The Mother and Daughter* (1804), it could be described as a *roman à clef* because of its close adherence to the biographical material surrounding Wollstonecraft, Hays, William Godwin, and the circle of London intellectuals that included such people as Joseph Priestley, Tom Paine, William Blake, and Elizabeth Inchbald.<sup>5</sup> The novel, written in the form of a burlesque, is comic in spirit and employs exaggeration, especially of character, to create humour. Hamilton imitates the serious materials and manners of the "philosophers" and applies them to a lowly or caricatured subject or protagonist.<sup>6</sup> Quotations from Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Wollstonecraft's own posthumously published *Memoirs* (1798), and Hays's novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) abound in the novel. While the technique of parody or "the device of comic quotation" (Rose 5) is evidently used to point out the dangers and the shortcomings of the new "philosophy," it allows for some textual and ideological gaps in the novel, which I would like to point out. That Hamilton wished to correct what she believed was the newfangled philosophy espoused by Wollstonecraft and Hays is apparent. What is perhaps not as obvious are the implications of picking these female subjects as targets and, paradoxically, as heroines of her tale.

Though comic in effect, a parody need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target. Margaret Rose points out that "an ambiguity exists in the word 'parodia' in that 'para' can be translated to mean both nearness and opposition" (8). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon notes that "*para* in Greek can also mean 'beside,' and therefore there is a suggestion of an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast" (32). Hutcheon argues that "as a form of criticism, parody has the advantage of being both a recreation and a creation, making criticism into a kind of active exploration of form" (51). Brecht used the German *Umfunktionierung* or "to refunction" to describe the modern reuse of older literary texts. Brecht

sees literature as being "produced" in answer to certain social needs and, like any other product, capable of being "refunctioned" for new purposes. (Rose 19 n. 9). It is this notion of the new functions gained by a text in a new context such as parody that I want to examine in Hamilton's turn-of-the-century novel. For in quoting at length from the texts of the authors being parodied, Hamilton also inadvertently reproduces these arguments in her own work. The reproduction may indeed incite laughter but it may also paradoxically create new interest or attract a new audience for the master text.

In the context of the 1790s, parody was a particularly appropriate mode of expressing the ambivalence female novelists such as Opie, Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth<sup>7</sup> felt towards patriarchy and its abuses. While it does not contain a caricature of the female philosopher, one of the most famous parodic novels of the period, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* — which mocks Gothic conventions — has been read by one critic as a work which "concerns itself explicitly with the prerogatives of those who have real power and the constraints of those who do not" (18). A very influential voice of the day was Edmund Burke, whose ultra-conservative argument, espoused in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1789-90) and his *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) equated the political events in France with the destruction of the social order and the family unit as they existed. Burke emphasized the vulnerability of authority and patriarchal rule through revolutionaries, crazed ruffians who wished to create a new society (Paulson 49-52). For Burke, the family was a micro-cosmic state, a basic political unit in its own right. Duty to the patriarchal head was seen as the first step towards a love of society, country, and mankind.

In pleading for women's intellectual and moral status, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and other feminists were perceived to be dangerous threats to the social structure of late eighteenth-century England which, according to Burke, was based solidly on a hierarchical and monarchical system. To be associated with the vindicators of the rights of woman in some ways became akin to being unpatriotic, especially after the treason trials of 1794 and the fear of French Napoleonic invasion towards the close of the century.

To complicate matters further, Mary Wollstonecraft and her followers had acquired an unfavourable reputation for being lascivious. Their pleas for freedom were equated with desires for sexual license for a number of reasons. Mary Hays's novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, features a heroine who dares to proclaim her affections for a man whom she admires. One of the shocking events of the novel involves the heroine offering herself sexually to the man she loves without the sanction of marriage. At the time of publication, it was known that the story was based on Hays's real-life correspondence and association with William Frend. In addition, after the death of Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797, William Godwin published his well-intentioned, but ill-timed *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) in which he presented a sensitive, but factual account of Wollstonecraft's life, including her youthful infatuation with the already married painter Henry Fuseli, her affair with American speculator and former officer Gilbert Imlay, the birth of her illegitimate daughter, Fanny, her two unsuccessful attempts at suicide, and her co-habitation with Godwin before marriage. These facts gave the conservative side an opportune and tangible example of the negative moral effects of female liberation. The Reverend Richard Polwhele attacked the vindicators of the rights of woman as "*Unsex'd Females*" (1798), while the *Anti-Jacobin Review* of 1798 took advantage of Wollstonecraft's infamous reputation and listed her name under the heading "prostitution" in their index.

To avoid being labelled and ridiculed as a follower of Wollstonecraft then, many of the women writers at the turn of the century developed narrative strategies and used fictional forms which enabled them to explore highly charged political topics without censure. Novelists like Edgeworth, Austen, Opie, Hamilton, and Mary Brunton<sup>8</sup> learned to circumvent criticism by employing more indirect means of examining the legitimacy of masculine authority, the prescribed ideal of the docile female, or the proper education for women. One could say that they use what Luce Irigaray calls a "hysterical" discourse, miming their male master's language, often suppressing their own desire, and yet, at the same time, in

many ways subverting the Father's law through textual contradictoriness and multiplicity of voices (136-37).

Given the political, literary, and social climate of the 1790s, Hamilton's choice of parody as a form is not accidental. Parody itself consists of "two-text-worlds — those of the parodist and [her] target" received by the reader at the same time and place (Rose 16). Kristeva notes that a parody "operates according to a principle of *law anticipating its own transgression*" (42). For Bakhtin, parody is a kind of mimicry that

rips the word away from its object, disunifies the two, shows that a given straightforward generic word — epic or tragic — is one sided, bounded, incapable of exhausting the object; the process of parodying forces us to experience those sides of the object that are not otherwise included in a given genre or a given style. Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre. (55)

In all of these definitions of parody, there is a sense of the double, of violence, laughter, and transgression. While the creation of the caricature-like portrait of "modern philosophers" such as Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Godwin in the novel puts Hamilton firmly on the side of the Anti-Jacobin writers, it does not necessarily show that she wholeheartedly endorses the views on female conduct and patriarchal authority put forth by such writers as Jane West and Hannah More. In both the conduct books and the novels of the latter authors, women are encouraged to submit unquestioningly to patriarchal power. Young girls are urged to practice restraint, to learn to be docile, and not to contradict authority.<sup>9</sup> In Hamilton's novel, on the other hand, while the most obvious lesson is also resignation to male rule and a reinforcement of the belief in the *status quo*, or "whatever is, is right," there are a number of gaps and inconsistencies within the text which show the author's uneasiness with the doctrines she espouses.

Of utmost significance is the light, playful, ironic, and self-conscious attitude of the narrator in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*. While one could say that in any novel where the narrator

self-consciously addresses the reader, such as Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, the author expresses an awareness of reader reaction and anticipates this response, in a parody this identification with the reader becomes particularly acute. As Rose points out, the parodist "must assume that the object of his satire will be known to a proportion of the reading public. . . . In the 'metaliterary' analysis of another text, the parodist is to be seen in the dual role of reader and writer, as both the 'decoder' of the parodied text and its new 'encoder'" (18). The danger here, as in other parodies, is that rather than condemning the parodied text, the parody may end up inadvertently becoming an advertisement for it. For example, in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, the narrator stops her story at several points to make allusions to contemporary works she deplors. At one point while describing the opportunistic rogue, Vallaton, who destroys English families by seducing virtuous wives and daughters, the narrator refuses to "gratify" the "curiosity of our reader with a circumstantial and minute detail of this part of his history;" as she says, the "achievements of our hero"<sup>10</sup> are now being prepared "for the press by one of our *female philosophers*" (1: 56-57). Another example occurs when the narrator, presenting the Goddess of Reason and Mr. Myope, characters based on Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, directs us to the "second chapter of these memoirs," saying "the circumstances of their meeting, together with all the events of that memorable day, have there been given at such full length, that we shall not weary the reader by a repetition" (1: 64). In both these asides, the narrator directs her reader to texts she supposedly condemns but which she acknowledges that she has read or knows about. Paradoxically, the ironic reference also creates a sub-textual connection between Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* and Wollstonecraft's real life *Memoirs* or the novels of these "female philosophers."

As an "encoder" of the parodied texts, Hamilton makes much use of parody as a "device for comic quotation."<sup>11</sup> The heroine of *Modern Philosophers*, aptly named Bridgetina Botherim, often misapplies or takes Godwin's and Mary Hays's precepts literally, thereby becoming an object of ridicule to those around her. When one of the other characters gets injured in an accident, for instance,

Bridgetina congratulates him "on the glorious opportunity" he now enjoys of "proving the omnipotence of mind over matter." She tells the man with the broken arm and dislocated shoulder: "Happy had it been for the world, if not only your arm, but every bone in your body had been broken, so that it had been the means of furnishing mankind with a proof of the perfectibility of philosophical energy!" (2: 18-19). In a similar vein, she congratulates the same patient who complains that he could not sleep for the pain in his arm, for "being able for so long a time to ward off the great foe of human genius, the degrader of the noblest faculties of the mind, . . . that torpid and insensible state" called sleep (2: 22). Bridgetina's literal application of Godwin's ideas of the perfectibility of humankind<sup>12</sup> to the physical side of man, not only creates comedy, but emphasizes the impossibility and absurdity of these beliefs.

However, that Hamilton's attitude to Godwin's philosophy is not entirely negative is shown at another point in the novel. One of the touchstone characters, Mr. Sydney, who often gives his son lectures on right and moral conduct, does not condemn Mr. Myope (the Godwinian figure), but admits that he admires Myope's "spirit of philanthropy" and applauds the "zeal" in which Myope espouses the "cause of the poor and the oppressed" (3: 290). What Sydney objects to is the "inutility" of "enlightening the public mind" only to create "gall" and bitterness in the poor (3: 290-91). Yet, his own solution, which is the Christian one of placing one's hope on the "certainty of the favour of God" may be equally impractical and dubious to non-believers (3: 292). Hamilton, then, may be speaking for both sides of the argument even though on the surface, her case is a conservative, Christian one. She attacks Godwinian beliefs overtly in the novel, shows these to be imperfect and perhaps idealistic. At the same time, however, by not having Godwin's adversary, Sydney, give a pragmatic, workable solution to the problems of the poor, Hamilton leaves her readers feeling ambivalent about the merits of both camps. As Sydney asserts, Christianity does console, but the novel proves that it is as inefficacious in giving tangible aid as Godwin's hope of the "voluntary cession of property" (3: 291).

In addition, the extensive repetition and incorporation of passages from *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* creates a double effect in the novel. As a parody, the novel has to be "critical and yet sympathetic towards its target" both by "definition and structurally" (Rose 8). Godwin's treatise serves as the object of satire but it also paradoxically contributes to or aids the structure of the novel by lending what Rose calls its "preformed linguistic material" to the novel (8). Bridgetina Botherim's speeches are very often direct appropriation of Godwin's work, complete with footnotes by Hamilton. When Bridgetina makes up her mind to follow a man she admires to London, for instance, she defends her plan by saying:

My scheme . . . is too extensive for any but a mind of great powers to comprehend. It is not bounded by the narrow limits of individual happiness, but extends to embrace the grand object of general utility. Your education has been too confined to enable you to follow an energetic mind in which passions generate powers, and powers generate passions . . . to general usefulness. (2: 237)<sup>13</sup>

In the context of the novel, Bridgetina is laughable to the point of absurdity because the man she is so intent on chasing is clearly in love with another woman. Yet despite the comedy, the melodrama, the foolishness, there is something noble about Bridgetina's speech, something attractive about her goals. It is true she acts rashly, but she is also full of energy and ambition compared to the rather insipid but obedient girls such as Maria Sydney and Harriet Orwell who are meant to be model young ladies. The ambivalent effect here and in many other instances in the novel can be explained by what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia" which is a special type of "double-voiced discourse" (324). Bakhtin describes this type of discourse as serving "two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (324). Without directly committing herself to the revolutionary cause, Hamilton is able to repeat and thereby promulgate some of its tenets, albeit in a comic fashion. Godwin's text is "refunctioned" to suit Hamilton's ideological and political purposes. The quotation shows how *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* perches precariously between dependence and indepen-

dence, between mockery and admiration of the parent texts and their philosophies.

In a similar way, Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* is also frequently cited by Bridgetina and treated by Hamilton both ridiculously and respectfully. Bridgetina's character is modelled on the fictional character Emma Courtney who is an autobiographical rendition of Mary Hays. Hamilton conflates the fictional Emma who is outspoken and obstinate with the intelligent but passionate Hays to create a shrew-like comic character who is short, disfigured, ugly, and bothersome as her name suggests.<sup>14</sup> In the novel, Bridgetina squints (1: 2), is homely and plain, has short legs (1: 29), wears gaudy clothes, and continually pesters people with her philosophy and learning. Though she can quote verbatim from Godwin and Wollstonecraft's works, she lacks manners and common social graces. In the transformation of an articulate and passionate woman/heroine into a stereotypical hag or old maid figure, Hamilton adopts a somewhat masculine means of controlling what society sees as a disruptive female force. Hays's Emma Courtney, who pleaded for the right to education, to a profession, to female sexuality may have seemed threatening to the ideological construct of the docile and submissive eighteenth-century woman content with her domestic sphere. To recast her into a shrew figure makes her an innocuous figure, familiar to literary conventions, and therefore easily categorized and dismissed. The parodic version of Hays's Emma Courtney, unlike its original, is non-threatening to the patriarchal order, precisely because she is so comic. Repetition in the novel becomes a means of control or mastery of the foreign or the unknown.<sup>15</sup> The potentially disturbing force is thereby contained and neutralized.

However, the repetition can also create another effect which the parodist may or may not have intended. At the same time that it incites laughter, it can also generate sympathy or admiration for the parent text or for the parodee. For example, Bridgetina, described graphically "drawing up her long craggy neck so as to put the shrivelled parchment-like skin which covered it upon the full stretch," asserts:

Beauty . . . is a consideration beneath the notice of a philosopher, as the want of it is no moral obstacle to love: will not the mind that

is sufficiently enlightened always behold the preferableness of certain objects? . . . In a reasonable state of society, women will not restrain their powers, they will then display their energies; and the vigour of their minds, exerted in the winning eloquence of courtship, will not be exerted in vain. (1: 195)

While Bridgetina may indeed look grotesque and unattractive, her arguments are pertinent and well-founded. She decries the "distinction of sex" because she asserts that "moral causes" are "superior to physical" ones (1: 196). She contends:

And are not women formed with powers and energies capable of perfectibility? Ah? miserable and deplorable state of things, in which these powers are debased by the meanness of household cares! Ah, wretched woman, restrained by the cruel fetters of decorum! Vile and ignoble bondage! the offspring of an unjust and odious tyranny, a tyranny whose remorseless cruelty assigns to woman the care of her family! (1: 196-97)

Much of the success of Hamilton's parody lies in her ability to imitate the lofty language of the radical writers. Here, she reduces some of Wollstonecraft and Hays's pleas for justice and equality to a lament on the duties of "household" chores using the same kind of effusive, sentimental language that the feminists employed. Even the metaphors, the fetters, bondage, and tyranny, spring directly from the rhetoric of the revolution.<sup>16</sup> Despite the comedy, however, there is a real sense of urgency and passion to Bridgetina's pleas. The reader is subjected to a polyphony of voices and experiences here as we are provoked to laughter yet feel pity and admiration at the same moment.

The reader is not the only one to feel this reaction to the caricature figure. Other characters in the novel are similarly ambivalent about her, condemning her, but also half-admiring and commiserating with her. The "deformity of [Bridgetina's] person, the fantastic singularity of her dress, rendered more conspicuous by the still stranger singularity of her manners" arouse pity, compassion, and desire to protect in the heart of Maria Fielding, one of the most charitable and sensible women of the novel (2: 344). Upon meeting her for the first time, other characters are astonished at the "fluency of her expression" (2: 350) as Bridgetina has an incomparable memory and can recite philosophy by rote. While

it is true that for the most part she is a ludicrous figure, there is some truth to her complaint that she is misunderstood. Bridgetina laments: "Why was I doomed to come to the world in such an age? Why was I born when an absurd, an unnatural institution ties up the hearts of men . . ." (2: 155). Indeed, one of the problems with the new philosophy is its ill-timed emergence and the misconstruing of it by the public. Hamilton repeats this idea through a diverse set of characters in the novel.

When Mr. Myope resigns himself to failure, for example, he says:

The new morality is too sublime for the present depraved and distempered state of human society. The experiments that have been made in it have been rather premature, and therefore cannot be expected to have been followed with advantageous consequences to the individuals, who have nobly stemmed the torrent of prejudice to make them. (3: 267)

In addition, the hero of the work appreciates Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* and recognizes that the philosophy itself is not faulty but "her zeal" that hurries her into "expressions which have raised a prejudice against the whole" (1: 196). He points out that Wollstonecraft never intended to "unsex women entirely" (1: 196) — a direct refutation of the conservative Reverend Polwhеле's accusation in his *Unsex'd Females*. In comparison to the "torrent of prejudice" against the new philosophy, these defences may appear slight, but they do demonstrate Hamilton's attempt to avoid denunciation of the female philosopher without qualification.

Other quotations or misquotations from *Emma Courtney* may inadvertently reinforce rather than ridicule Hays's points. As she cites the passages from the work of the female philosopher she mocks, Hamilton becomes not only reader but also analytical critic of that text. As Shoshana Felman points out, "the critical interpretation . . . not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*" (101). In a parody, the repetition becomes sometimes problematic, double-edged, and paradoxical in nature, as the avowed intent of derision may not be shared by the reader. At certain points in the text, the readers' sympathies may be with the object of the parody, especially if they

are acquainted with or share the point of view of the original or master text. In *Emma Courtney*, which is the source of parody for much of Hamilton's work, Mary Hays condemns female dependence in eighteenth-century society using various forms of entrapment imagery. Her heroine, Emma, exclaims: "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" (31). Not content with the "insipid routine" of cards and chatter, or "domestic employment" as other women are, Emma feels "hemmed in on every side by the constitutions of society" and her own "prejudices." She feels trapped within what she calls a "magic circle." Emma's life illustrates one of the main arguments in Hays's works, which is that women who are intelligent, yet forbidden from becoming useful members of the community become eccentrics, as their "strong feelings" and "strong energies" are "forced back, . . . pent up, ravage and destroy the mind which gave them birth" (85-86).

Ironically in *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Hamilton inadvertently reproduces and demonstrates Hays's thesis through the character of Bridgetina. First, Bridgetina frequently repeats Emma's arguments when she speaks. For example, "I pant for the society of the enlightened" (1: 248), she tells her mother. At another point, she exclaims:

How shall I describe my sufferings? . . . I yearn to be useful . . . but the inexpressible yearning of a soul which pants for general utility, is, by the odious institutions of a distempered civilization, rendered abortive. . . . Barbarous fetters! cruel chains! odious state of society! Oh, that the age of reason were but come, when no soft-souled maiden shall sigh in vain! (2: 92-93)

In Hamilton's version, it is true that the complaints become exaggerated to the point of being comical and rather pathetic, but nevertheless, the important points are highlighted and echoed. The similarities in language, style, and diction suggest that Hamilton did a thorough study of the novel she parodied and is not as distanced from it as some of her characters profess to be.

Furthermore, the source of much of the humour of the novel stems from Bridgetina's foolishness or eccentricities. The fact that she has the capacity to learn, albeit by rote, many philosophical

ideas, yet is reduced to a grotesque and ugly figure illustrates perfectly Hays's argument of the wasted potential in "women of superior minds" (86). We may laugh at Bridgetina and her various antics, but accompanied by this laughter surely is an awareness of the social and cultural institutions which have placed her in that ludicrous position. Consciously or not, then, Hamilton has "refunctioned," and used Hays's text to develop her readers' understanding of the plight of the female philosopher through her parodic novel.

Another point about Emma Courtney's character that Hamilton picks up and mocks is her misdirected passion. In Hays's novel, the heroine, whose active imagination is aided by her reading of what she calls the "dangerous, enchanting work," the *Heloïse* of Rousseau, believes herself in love with a young man, Augustus Harley (25). Often through the course of the novel, Emma's thoughts and letters demonstrate her wish to value sincerity and openness rather than the restraint and modesty customarily expected of a woman in eighteenth-century society. She ponders about declaring her love to Augustus:

Ah! did he but know my tenderness — *the desire of being beloved*, of inspiring sympathy, is congenial to the human heart — why should I hesitate to inform him of my affection — why do I blush and tremble at the mere idea? It is a false shame! It is a pernicious system of morals which teaches us that hypocrisy can be virtue!  
(79)

Furthermore, Emma's love for Augustus is by no means a purely platonic one. One aspect of Hays's novel which provoked censure in the conservative audience is its acknowledgement of female sexuality and female desires. Emma insists that the mind

must have an object. . . . I feel, that I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine — but a *woman, to whom education has given a sexual character*. . . . I would experience those sweet sensations, of which nature has formed my heart so exquisitely susceptible. My ardent sensibilities incite me to love — to seek to inspire sympathy — to be beloved! (120)

In her parody of Emma, Hamilton pushes this idea of excessive sensibility and Emma's need to be loved to its comic limits.

Hamilton's heroine, Bridgetina, predictably reads Rousseau and raves about the "sublime virtues" of "Eloisa" (1: 190). She, too, falls in love with a man who is already attached to another. The subtle difference between the original and the parody is that while Augustus Harley confesses at his deathbed that he has loved Emma from the start but was prevented from acknowledging his feelings because of the "dictates of rigid honour" (180) in Hamilton's story, Bridgetina's passion has been a mistake from beginning to end. The object of Bridgetina's affections, Henry Sydney, has never felt anything but pity and disgust for her, as he is very much in love with another woman. In close imitation of Emma's style, Hamilton has her heroine declare: "And shall I not indulge the sweet sentiments of nature that now inspire my breast? Shall a false regard for the debasing and immoral institutions of a corrupt society deter me from making a suitable return to his enchanting tenderness?" (2: 28). Bridgetina refuses to let social mores prevent her from announcing her adoration of Henry. She says: "Why should I blush to inform him of my affection?" and goes so far as to follow Henry to London where she is unwanted and ridiculed even further.

The obvious lesson the parodied situation provides is the necessity of female restraint, the use of sense rather than sensibility, which seems to be an echo of the teachings of conservative novelists such as Jane West and Hannah More. However, in Hamilton's novel, the message is rather ambiguously delivered. For while the novel condemns Bridgetina's rashness, her desire for self-expression and freedom, conversely, it does not exalt the women who, without qualification or a sense of regret, advocate docility and submission. Two characters who speak on behalf of control or the "necessity of submitting the passions to the authority of reason" (2: 126) are Martha Goodwin and Maria Fielding.<sup>17</sup> Early in the novel, Mrs. Martha advises her pretty niece not to form an alliance with the hero, Henry Sydney, because he is poor (2: 127) and because he is still young enough and may change his mind. Her suspicion turns out to be unfounded in the end, because Henry is faithful and inherits a fortune. In addition, in comparison with Bridgetina's liveliness and zest for life, Mrs. Martha's counsel seems rather cold, unfeeling, even inappropriate. Telling her young nieces to trust

"Divine Wisdom" rather than to follow the inclination of her heart, she says:

Time has not taught me to forget the cruel pang of disappointed love, but it has taught me to rejoice in the disappointment that cost me once so dear. . . . By struggling with passion, I invigorated my virtue; by subduing it, I exalted the empire of reason in my breast. (2: 133-34)

While the aunt has resigned herself to her state of being single and has "found an ample recompense for the mortification" of being called Mrs. Martha (1: 136), we may wonder about the suitability of her advice for a young girl just about to begin her life.

The reader's doubt about the stoic predilection of reason overcoming passion increases with the tale of Maria Fielding, a heart-wrenching story of self-sacrifice and thwarted love. Mrs. Fielding, in love with Henry's father, Sydney, becomes a victim of parental authority and deception and ends up losing her lover. Years later, himself wedded to another while she is still unmarried, Sydney praises her strong capacity for emotional attachment, her "pure and affectionate heart":

Mere passion is in its nature fickle and transitory, but an attachment such as I have described, will bid defiance to time; and though it may submit to the control of reason, will, long after all the *passion* with which it was first connected has been obliterated, retain its influence over the breast. (2: 332)

The fidelity of Maria Fielding's love, later directed to Sydney's son, is an attestation of strength and power of female affection. Mrs. Fielding's example seems to contradict the lesson that Aunt Martha wishes to instill in her niece, the same lesson Bridgetina has to learn, that of conquering passion through reason and sense. Thus, the textual inconsistencies reveal Hamilton's difficulties in wholeheartedly reproducing the moral lessons of the conservatives. While Bridgetina's passion may be misdirected and foolish, the novel as a whole celebrates rather than condemns the power of woman's capacity for emotion, and the expression of this feeling.

In the guise of a parody then, Hamilton freely adapts and echoes the philosophy of revolutionary thinkers such as Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Hays. In the volatile climate of the 1790s,

parody was an effective device that enabled her at the same time both to denounce and replicate some of the most important tenets of the radical writers. While *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* can hardly be called a feminist novel, it discloses many contradictory notions of femininity faced by women at the end of the eighteenth century and reveals some of the difficulties in the construction of a female subject.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rendall reminds us that the word "feminist" is actually used anachronistically here as the term, coined by the Utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, was not used in English until around 1894 (1). See Browne for a historical and social perspective of the beginnings of feminism.
- <sup>2</sup> See works by Wollstonecraft and Hays and studies of their prose essays by Rogers and Conger.
- <sup>3</sup> See Butler, *War of Ideas*; Kelly, *Jacobin*; Todd Ch. 13; Spencer 130-31; Spender 263-69.
- <sup>4</sup> Johnson says that in the 1790s, "philosophy" was a "sensitive term," which very often signalled a writer's partisanship. Because of its association with philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot, the word "acquires particularly volatile implications that sometimes ring like challenges in the very titles of novels." For example, a philosopher could suggest someone who dares think for himself or herself, but "employed within the matrix of counter-revolutionary ideology, . . . 'philosophy' is a bad word, denoting that system of outrageous and ostensibly newfangled theories privileging private judgement and justifying the chimerical and hedonistic pursuit of personal happiness" (11).
- <sup>5</sup> See Butler, Marshall, Tomalin, and Wardle.
- <sup>6</sup> Abrams categorizes parody as a form of high burlesque in his definition: "a parody imitates the serious materials and manner of a particular literary work, or the characteristic style of a particular author, or the stylistic and other features of a serious literary form, and applies them to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject" (18).
- <sup>7</sup> In Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), a character called Harriot Freke appears in a chapter entitled "Rights of Woman." Edgeworth uses Freke as a figure of ridicule in much the same way as Opie and Hamilton use their female philosophers. Opie's *Adeline Mowbray; or The Mother and Daughter* (1804) features a misguided young girl, modelled on Mary Wollstonecraft, who scorns marriage and goes off to live with a radical author whom she admires. She learns too late the importance not only of virtue, but of a virtuous reputation.
- <sup>8</sup> Brunton's *Self-Control* (1810-11), though rather late, is another novel which expresses strong moral and religious principles but features an extraordinarily strong and independent heroine who resists seduction, battles poverty by selling her paintings, and finally escapes from the clutches of a libertine by rowing a canoe over a waterfall in America.
- <sup>9</sup> For example, in *Strictures* (1799), More writes: "An early habitual restraint is peculiarly important to the future character and happiness of

women. They should when very young be inured to contradiction. . . . They should be led to distrust their own judgement, they should learn not to murmur at expostulation; but should be accustomed to expect and to endure opposition" (1: 152).

Similarly, in West's *Advantages of Education* (1793), the heroine's mother gives her daughter this advice before her nuptials: "shew [your husband] that you are his helpmate, not his incumbrance. . . . Humility, which inspires a lowly mind and moderates desires, is the surest road to content" (2: 234).

- <sup>10</sup> Johnson notes that "the villainous Vallaton runs through a sequence of professions that come straight from the pages of Burke's *Reflections [on the Revolution in France]* and *Letter [to a member of the National Assembly]*: progressing as an orphan, a thankless valet, a hairdresser, a writer, and finally a patriot, he travels to England in order to make mischief in good families" (10).

- <sup>11</sup> This definition of parody originates from the scholiasts and is used by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* (Rose 7).

- <sup>12</sup> Godwin says that "man is perfectible . . . By perfectible, it is not meant that he is capable of being brought to perfection. But the word seems sufficiently adapted to express the faculty of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement; and in this sense it is here to be understood" (58-59).

Hamilton has taken the notion of perfectibility and applied it in a physical and literal sense. Godwin, unlike Bridgetina, would not tell anyone to glory in physical suffering, because elsewhere in his *Political Justice* he says: ". . . it is a matter of great delicacy and difficulty, in most instances, to decide in favour of pain, which, whatever be its relative value, is certainly a negative quantity to be deducted in the sum total of happiness. . . . Pain, under the most favourable circumstances, must be admitted to be absolutely, though not relatively, an evil" (191).

- <sup>13</sup> Godwin's theory of rights depends a great deal upon utilitarianism. He believed that in deciding the merits of others, we should judge them according to their utility. He also conceived of the notion of "general utility" which Hamilton makes much use of in the novel. Godwin believed that "there is no action of our lives, which does not in some way affect [the] happiness [of every intellectual and sensitive existence]. Our property, our time, and our faculties, may all of them be made to contribute to this end" (84).

- <sup>14</sup> What Mary Hays looked like in real life is difficult to ascertain. Her youthful lover, John Eccles, to whom she was betrothed, wrote this about her: "a little girl with dark hair and features soft as those of the peaceful messengers of heaven. . . . I saw everything that was engaging and amiable in her face; she fascinated me, I believe . . . 'she engrossed me all.'" (qtd. in Luria 37). However, the more popular description of Hays's appearance is one given by an irate Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "a thing, ugly & petti-coated," who attempts to "ex-sylogize a God with cold-blooded Precision." (qtd. in Luria 12).

- <sup>15</sup> In psychoanalytical terms, one of the most famous repetitions in Freud's writings is the *fort/da* game played by Freud's grandson at his mother's absence. Freud interprets this game which involves the repetitive throwing of the reel over the cot as the desire to control the absent mother. Rimmon-Kenan links this kind of repetition to repression, to language, and to narrative which also "repeats by creating, and what it repeats is the absence from

- which it springs and which it renders present through its creation" (157). In this light, Hamilton's repetition of the feminist texts could be seen as a kind of re-creation of a repressed desire for the very freedoms she condemns.
- <sup>16</sup> Paulson points out that "by the time *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [1794] appeared, the castle, prison, tyrant, and sensitive girl could no longer be presented naively; they had all been familiarized and sophisticated by the events in France" (221).
- <sup>17</sup> I am not certain whether Hamilton intended the close lexical association of Martha Goodwin's name and that of Godwin, who is the model for Mr. Myope. The proximity of Goodwin to Godwin certainly would add to the confusion since the two characters stand for opposing views in the novel.

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