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## **“All Men Would be Tyrants if They Could”: Three New England Women’s Perspectives on Political and Domestic Tyranny during the Revolutionary Era**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines female perspectives of tyranny within the political and domestic realms. Combining a close reading of their written works with biographical studies of their lives, this thesis looks specifically at three elite, highly literate New England women: Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray. These women were unable to formally participate in the political sphere, yet through their writing they responded to and offered commentary on the Revolution. Utilizing the same language and arguments they and other male patriots used in the Revolution, these three women innovated, following arguments about tyranny through to their natural conclusion, and applying them to relations within the home, they recognized that husbands and fathers also held the potential for tyranny. For them the domestic realm was not apolitical, but the epicenter of the power imbalances between men and women, and this structural imbalance mirrored the problems of inequality within society.

## Keywords

Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Judith Sargent Murray, American Revolution, Women, New England, Tyranny, Kings, Husbands, Fathers, Wives, Mothers, Daughters, Eighteenth-century female authors, Women's rights, Gender, Separate Spheres, Republican motherhood, Companionate marriage, Marriage, Girls'/Women's education.

## Summary

This thesis looks at women's perspectives of tyranny within the American Revolution and the home. Combining a close reading of their written works with biographical studies of their lives, this thesis looks specifically at three elite, highly literate women: Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray. These women were unable to participate in politics or public life. Remarkably, though, through their writing, these women still responded to and offered commentary on the Revolution, a highly political and traditionally male event. These three women were innovative and applied political arguments about British tyranny, used during the Revolution, to the family and home. Extending arguments about political tyranny, these women recognized that husbands and fathers held the same power as the King had on a smaller scale. The same threat of tyranny that the King held, therefore, also existed within husbands and fathers. For them the domestic realm was not apolitical, but the epicenter of the power imbalances between men and women, and this structural imbalance mirrored the problems of inequality within society.

## Dedication

For my parents.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Nancy Rhoden and Dr. Laurel Shire for their assistance and support throughout this process. Their advice and encouragement have been invaluable to both this paper and my growth as a historian. I would like to extend a further special thanks to Dr. Rhoden for her unlimited patience, kindness, and dedication. It was a pleasure to work with her these past two years. I would also like to thank the entire History Department at Western University, especially those professors from whom I took classes – their encouragement and the concepts discussed in those seminars have also intimately influenced this thesis.

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## Introduction

Tyranny was the keyword of the American Revolution. Tyranny is cruel and oppressive government, and so a tyrant is a corrupt leader, one who takes advantage of his position of power to benefit himself, with little to no regard for his subjects or dependents. In contrast, an ideal leader uses his power in the best interests of his country and people. In the late eighteenth century, American patriots understood British tyranny as the aggrandizement of the king at the expense of other branches of government, such as Parliament. When the king's power grew too great, and other branches of government too weak, the result was tyranny.

Patriot frustration originally was directed at the British Parliament in London, but as tensions rose, it came to focus on King George III. Patriots believed that the British king had ignored the complaints and petitions of the colonists, and that he had become a tyrant. It was in the summer of 1775 that the King's behaviour began to confirm patriot beliefs that the King was not interested in the problems of the colonists. On October 27, 1775, the King declared the colonies in open rebellion, despite colonists' continued efforts at this time to reach a peaceful solution. Also, George III hired Hessian mercenaries to fight against his American subjects.<sup>1</sup> With these actions, patriots realized that the King, not just Parliament (as they had until this point believed) was a tyrant. With the publication of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* in 1776, patriots became further opposed to the British King, and to monarchy in general.<sup>2</sup> By ignoring their complaints

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<sup>1</sup> Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, (New York: Free Press, 2009), 102-103.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Winthrop, "Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776," in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 60, no. 2 (Sept., 1973).

and petitions, and then acting decisively to continue to oppress them, patriots believed George III had abused his position as king, and was thus a tyrant.

That patriots viewed the King as a tyrant is evident from their various writings and publications; countless pamphlets were published discussing the King's tyranny, such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Was this concern about tyranny limited to male patriots, though? Were women also concerned with tyranny? If so, did they understand tyranny in the same way as male patriots, or did they have a gendered understanding, different from their male counterparts? Did they, perhaps, see tyranny in their relationships with fathers and husbands too? After all, in politics and in domestic relations there was a hierarchical structure of power and authority, in which the King or patriarch maintained power over others, especially women. Did their affection for their husbands alleviate trepidation about husbands as domestic tyrants? Did they offer critical commentaries on marriage or parenthood through the lens of their revolutionary experiences? Did they view all power imbalances as tyrannical, or were some seen as acceptable, or even desirable? Was there a female perspective on tyranny in the Revolution? Did women see tyranny in politics and the public arena differently from male patriots? Did women have a broader understanding of tyranny based on their concerns as wives and mothers? These are questions this project aims to answer.

This thesis examines the written work of three elite women: Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray - each of whom recognized British tyranny during the Revolutionary era and shared their perspectives on it in their writing. Combining a close reading of their written works with biographical studies of their lives,



this project looks specifically at three elite, highly literate women who (primarily) lived in Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> All three women were significant social figures, well educated, with family and friends actively involved in the revolutionary efforts against Britain. Abigail Adams wrote letters to her husband, John Adams, throughout the entirety of their fifty-four years of marriage; Judith Sargent Murray primarily composed essays and plays; and Mercy Otis Warren penned plays, poetry, and a history of the American Revolution. Each of these women was involved in the politics of the Revolution, in her own way, either through giving advice to her husband, or through published works. Formally proscribed to the domestic realm, women like Adams, Warren, and Murray were unable to participate formally in the political sphere, yet through their writing they were able to respond to and offer commentary on the events of the male dominated realms of war, politics, and revolution.

This thesis examines their writing in an effort to understand better their views on power imbalances, as well as both potential and actual “tyranny” as they understood it. In the process, this project also looks at the different media of written communication they each employed, how this affected their ability to convey their attitudes and opinions, and how their choice of genre directed their message to different private (in the case of Abigail Adams) or public audiences (in the case of Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray).

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<sup>3</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*; Rosemarie Zagarrri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*, (Wheeling: H. Davidson, 1995); and Sheila Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

The primary method of research used in this project is coupling biographical studies of Adams, Warren, and Murray with an analysis of their writings, through a close reading of primary sources, or, more specifically, through the use of the letters and published works of Adams, Warren, and Murray. A noticeable pattern of themes is clear in the writing of each woman. This thesis looks at three different forms of written material; letters Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, essays published by Judith Sargent Murray, and plays written by Mercy Otis Warren, as well as her history of the American Revolution. This will allow for analysis into the various ways different genres shaped the content of each woman's writing. Notably, this project does not attempt to survey the entirety of their written works, but, rather, will focus on primary sources that have been published, along with a handful of unpublished sources (such as letters) in order to uncover an understanding of how Adams', Murray's, and Warren's published works may relate to their lived experiences, as revealed from details of their biographies. While they wrote on myriad topics (ranging from death and nature to political news and finances), they repeatedly returned to themes of tyranny, marriage, and fatherhood. The sources examined in this project are ones selected from their respective collected bodies of work that are most relevant to, and that most clearly express their thoughts on these themes. In the case of Abigail Adams, since she did not publish any work, the writing examined for this research consists exclusively of letters written between her and John Adams. It is worth noting that Adams' letters are not publications in the traditional sense. That being said, Konstantin Dierks argues that letters can be considered publications, which enables

an analysis of Adams' letters as professed opinions that were politically influential.<sup>4</sup>

Primary sources utilized in this project are also limited to those written during the years leading up to, during, and after the American Revolution, rather than the complete life works of each woman (with the exception of Mercy Otis Warren's history of the Revolution, as it is directly relevant to the Revolution, despite being published decades after.)

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Abigail Smith was born in 1744 in Massachusetts. Her father was a wealthy minister. Twenty years later, in 1764, Abigail married John Adams. Throughout John's political career, including his vice presidency and presidency, Adams acted as her husband's advisor, and shared her political opinions with him. Her most famous advice, "remember the ladies," written to John, in the spring of 1776, as he labored to create an independent America, has worked to firmly identify Adams as an unofficial political activist, and an advocate for women's equality. As one of her biographers, Woody Holton, argues, her letters have revealed she had a significant influence on John Adams and on the political realm.<sup>5</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren was older than Abigail Adams. Born in 1728 in Barnstable, Massachusetts, Warren was the third child of thirteen in a wealthy family. Her father was a Colonel and was involved in the Revolution, a factor that likely contributed to Warren's interest in politics. In her adult years, Warren was a successful poet and playwright, and

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<sup>4</sup> Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 3-7.

<sup>5</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*.

her works were often political satires. She also wrote a three-volume book, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, making Warren the first female American historian. A staunch republican, Warren was very vocal in her political opinions, and was in regular correspondence with many prominent political figures, including John Adams, George Washington, and Alexander Hamilton. Warren remained politically vocal her entire life, and her success as an author and playwright made her a renowned figure amongst her upper-class American contemporaries (both male and female) during the Revolutionary era.

Born in 1751 to a prosperous merchant family, Judith Sargent Murray would become a strong advocate for improved equality for women. Influenced greatly both by her experiences with gender-based inequalities in early American education and by her Universalist faith, Murray was a strong advocate for women's equality, particularly for improving women's education, and wrote several essays on the topic. While she welcomed the new Enlightenment ideologies of equality and independence (albeit applied only for the elite, white population) advanced by the American Revolution, Murray strongly opposed the violence the war brought. Her attitudes towards the war, combined with her religious beliefs, further shaped her understanding and writing on gender values.

Boys and men contributed to the Revolution through military service and political involvement, but how could women be politically active? The term "political" must here be briefly addressed. Rosemarie Zagari, among other historians, explores a broader

definition of “political” than merely the formal political sphere of voting and holding office, expanding the definition of political to include informal norms like symbolic action and everyday behaviours. Such an expansion of the meaning of political allows historians to look outside of the formal political sphere to acknowledge *women’s* behaviours as political as well. Women were active participants in the American Revolution. Women played different but still important roles than their male counterparts. While their husbands were away from home due to the Revolution, wives acted as “deputy husbands,” a role coined by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, which included handling their husband’s responsibilities until they were home and able to do so themselves.<sup>6</sup> Women also served as petitioners, protestors, and consumers, providing support for the Revolutionary cause while at the same time potentially weakening British forces. By boycotting British goods, women played an important role in the Revolution. Boycotting meant that women had to turn to different means of production, such as homespun. Women also formed organizations to aid patriot troops, such as a campaign by the female patriots of Philadelphia to collect funds for Washington’s army.<sup>7</sup> Philanthropy was popular amongst the Protestant colonists, and through their charity efforts, women helped to raise money for the Continental Army. These activities were class-based, and, as such, not all women participated in the Revolution the same way. Women of upper and lower classes participated in boycotts and faced labour changes in their usual responsibilities. Elite women were much less likely than lower class women to

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<sup>6</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England*, (New York: Knopf, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 99.

participate in protests and crowds, as they presented a risk of harm or injury, either to their person or their reputation. These are examples of female political activism, which, in turn, have encouraged many historians to grapple with whether (and how much) women's experiences changed during the Revolution.

Mary Beth Norton's (unofficial) trilogy of books, *Liberty's Daughters*, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, and *Separated by their Sex* lay the groundwork for studying women in the American Revolutionary period. Norton examines the lives and experiences of women and girls across the colonies over the colonial, revolutionary, and early national eras. Through her survey of American women's experiences, Norton argues that the eighteenth century saw a shift in the social hierarchy from one that primarily emphasized class, to one based on gender. In the eighteenth century elite women were not excluded from politics or political influence; their wealth and elite social positions, despite their gender, granted them access to the public realm, through unofficial or informal channels. In the nineteenth century, however, with the development of separate spheres ideology and greater importance placed on gender, elite women were excluded from the public realm on the basis of their gender.<sup>8</sup> This change was exacerbated with the Revolution. Linda Kerber and Joan Gundersen in their books, *Women of the Republic* and *To Be Useful to the World*, respectively, also analyze the experiences of women during the late colonial and revolutionary eras. Kerber traces the

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experiences of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980); Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); and Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*. Ithaca, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011).

origins of republican motherhood, a term she coined to describe the political identity women adopted to better enable them to argue for improved education, and contends that it formed after the Revolution, as women realized the Revolution had not brought them any improvements. Republican motherhood was the idea that mothers held an important role in society because they were responsible for raising their children, and, in particular, their sons, to be patriotic Americans. Excluded from the political mobilization and democratization that men experienced in the Revolution, republican motherhood aimed to boost women's political influence in the home.<sup>9</sup> Building on Norton and Kerber, Gunderson also examines women's experiences and the changes to these experiences before, during, and after the Revolution, but looks more at the intersection of class and race. Gunderson argues that some changes did affect some women, but, collectively, women saw no significant change in their status following the Revolution.<sup>10</sup> Norton, Kerber, and Gunderson all argue that women were active participants in the American Revolution, and that the Revolution brought societal changes that helped, at least for a few years, improve women's situation. Together, these three authors allow for an understanding of diverse women's experiences during the mid-to-late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in North America.

Following the Revolution, America underwent a significant transformation. Whether these changes reached American women, however, is an issue of debate amongst historians. Joan Hoff argues that the American Revolution did not bring

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<sup>9</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

<sup>10</sup> Joan Gunderson, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740 – 1790*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

significant reform for women. Arguing that women had not had the necessary opportunities and contact with the world to “be prepared for a pluralistic society,” and therefore did not have the ability to comprehend Revolutionary ideologies of virtue and independence, Hoff posits that any improvements to women’s rights were due to the general passing of time and not related to the Revolution.<sup>11</sup> It is clear from their writing that Adams, Warren, and Murray were not only well aware of their subordinate social position as women, but also (and particularly in Murray’s case) fought hard to ensure the Revolution *did* bring changes for women. Norton, unlike Hoff, argues that the Revolution brought positive changes for women. In handling finances and merchandise while their husbands were away, women grew increasingly adept at business matters. At the same time, while away from home, husbands’ business and financial knowledge grew increasingly out of date and irrelevant. As Norton argues, “women who would previously have risked criticism if they abandoned their ‘natural’ feminine timidity now found themselves praised for doing just that.”<sup>12</sup> With new knowledge and greater confidence, women such as Adams, Warren, and Murray felt more confident about sharing their ideas and opinions.

Falling somewhere in between Hoff and Norton, Kerber, Gunderson, and Zagarri all make arguments in favour of mixed results; the Revolution did bring changes for women, but these changes did not last. As Kerber argues, while the Revolution provided

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<sup>11</sup> Joan Hoff, “The Negative Impact of the American Revolution on White Women,” in *Major Problems in American Women’s History: Documents and Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> eds. Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath, 1996), quote on 83-84.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Beth Norton, “The Positive Impact of the American Revolution on White Women,” in *Major Problems in American Women’s History: Documents and Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> eds. Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath, 1996), 102.



a new, republican ideology with which the country was shaped, this ideology applied only to white men. Women, on the other hand, were excluded from America's formal political context, and as Kerber argues, were forced to create their own ideology. Kerber primarily looks at the origins of republican motherhood, which she argues was the essential justification for how and why women came to have political identities, yet at the same time served as justification for women to remain within the domestic realm and out of formal politics. As moral guides for their children and husbands, republican mothers had to remain within the domestic realm to keep from being corrupted by the public realm. Tracing the lives of three generations of women, Gunderson agrees with Kerber that the most significant role women had was that of republican mother, but argues that these changes did not last long into the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> As she writes, "over time the new nation obliterated the traditional flexibility allowing women to assume a wide variety of roles by converting domesticity from a role into a biological trait. Memories of women's participation in the American Revolution were ignored or the actions reinterpreted to fit the new expectations for women."<sup>14</sup> Historians have also studied women's agency and resistance to their limited rights during the Revolutionary Era. Lucia McMahon argues that following the Revolution, more focus was on women's education. Along with this increased access to education, McMahon argues there was a growing sentiment among women who saw themselves as intellectually equal with their male counterparts. However, as McMahon notes, while women may have had intellectual

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<sup>13</sup> Gunderson, *To Be Useful to the World*, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Gunderson, *To Be Useful to the World*, 179.

equality, this did not yet translate to political, legal, or economic equality.<sup>15</sup> Zagarrri also argues that women experienced a period of change following the Revolution, but Zagarrri also argues that this period did not last long. After the Revolution, America was still deciding what type of country it would be. In this confusion, women had more access to political discussions and more opportunities in general, but by Jefferson's presidency America underwent a backlash, reinforcing women's pre-Revolutionary roles, and at the same time introducing strict separate spheres. As Zagarrri argues, this backlash actually resulted in fewer opportunities for women than they had prior to the Revolution. The nineteenth century saw clearly distinct separate spheres for men and women, and soon turned to Victorian-era repression of any political and economic autonomy for women.<sup>16</sup>

These aforementioned books provide a background on women's experiences during the Revolutionary period, how the Revolution changed (or did not change) the everyday experience of women, and instances of female involvement with the political realm at the time. They also demonstrate how historians have studied women's involvement in the American Revolution differently, and how ideas of what is "political" have changed, expanding from a narrow understanding of formal electoral politics to a broader definition of social issues governed by policies, such as education, work, and women's rights. This project aims to complement Norton's arguments and studies, and further explore the way elite women interpreted and responded to the Revolution. Norton argues that elite women were involved in the political realm in the eighteenth century,

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<sup>15</sup> Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Rosemarie Zagarrri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

and the writings of Adams, Warren, and Murray support her argument. Through an analysis of their published works, though, it is clear that Adams, Warren, and Murray participated in the political realm, but were primarily concerned with the domestic realm. Taking Revolutionary grievances and transposing them to the domestic realm, Adams, Warren, and Murray all indicate a firm understanding of revolutionary concepts. It is possible that these women had feminist views outside of or independent of those they gained in the American Revolution. However, this is impossible to know, since the Revolution did happen, and the context in which they were writing shaped their attitudes. Furthermore, they do not have pre-revolutionary writings to compare to see if they expressed feminist opinions before the Revolution as they did afterwards. All three women first began to write and publish such views in the revolutionary years. That being said, Adams, Warren, and Murray may have been predisposed to want to advance women's situation, especially women like them, because of their own unequal education as women, and so saw in patriotism a language of equality that they could try to appropriate and use to improve women's equality. Male patriots interpreted Britain's governance as tyrannical, fought for freedom, and won liberty from that oppression. Yet female patriots, recognizing oppression more broadly than their male contemporaries, continued to argue against tyranny after the Revolution ended. How then, do we reconcile their lives with Kerber and Zagarri's arguments about confinement to the domestic realm?

Various books that discuss reading and literature as forms of communication are also useful to this project. Catherine Kelly and Heidi Brayman Hackle look at women's

reading in early modern America, focusing on gender as a dominant factor in women's reading practices. Kelly argues that women played important roles in both the creation and consumption of textual material and helped shape the development of a literary culture in America.<sup>17</sup> Cathy Davidson provides an overview of writing and reading in Revolutionary America, including the production of written material, and raises several questions historians need to keep in mind, such as how much books cost, how religious or political beliefs affected what was published, and how books were distributed.<sup>18</sup> To appreciate the context in which these women were writing, it is necessary to understand how their works were being circulated and to who was reading them. Konstantin Dierks adds to the scholarship on literature and writing in this time by looking at the value of letters as a form of communication. Dierks argues that letters allowed for the creation of a "communications infrastructure;" a small, private circle of communication that could remain secret from the British. Dierks argues that letters played a critical role in the success of the American Revolution, and explores letters as having the ability to generate significant social and cultural power. Dierks' argument reveals the significance of Adams' words to her husband, and sheds light on the power of letters as a genre.<sup>19</sup>

William Scheick also looks at women and reading in colonial America and argues that men's written works were noticeably different from women's writing, due to gender prescriptions. Scheick argues that colonial women writers used writing as an outlet for

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<sup>17</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackle and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Davidson, *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

their struggles with identity and oppression.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly interesting given that Murray wrote all of her *Gleaner* essays using a male persona, which suggests Murray was familiar with both men's and women's writing conventions, and purposely wrote as a man to lend authority to her arguments, a theory that Theresa Freda Nicolay's work supports. Nicolay argues that women used writing and authorship to gain access to traditionally male-dominated realms.<sup>21</sup> This is the case with Warren's *History*. History, at this point in time, was a male-dominated field. It makes sense that Warren would try to emulate this style in her own historical work both because that was the only format with which she was familiar and because following the (male) conventions of writing history would lend credence to her identity as an author.

This project examines three New England women's views on tyranny in three thematic chapters. Chapter One looks at patriot understandings of tyranny during the Revolutionary Era. The chapter also examines how Adams, Warren, and Murray described tyranny and its significance in the Revolution. What did they write about British tyranny? Did their perspectives of tyranny align with (male) patriot understandings of tyranny? Unable to participate within the political sphere formally, all three women instead shared their thoughts on the Revolution in their writing. This chapter argues that Adams, Warren, and Murray all recognized and understood British tyranny during the American Revolution. Upon examining their written works, chapter

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<sup>20</sup> William Scheick, *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Theresa Freda Nicolay, *Gender Roles, Literary Authority, and Three American Women Writers: Anne Dudley Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, (New York: P. Lang, 1995).

one also argues that the understandings of tyranny held by Adams, Warren, and Murray were similar to their male counterparts.

The Revolution was an example of political tyranny, but what did Adams, Warren, and Murray have to say about tyranny within the domestic realm? Chapters Two and Three examine tyranny outside of the formal political sphere, and within the domestic sphere as embodied in the relationships husbands and fathers had with their family members. In doing so, Chapters Two and Three shed light on all three women's views of tyranny within the domestic realm. Chapter two examines husbands as potential tyrants. Applying their understandings of tyranny from the American Revolution to the domestic realm, chapter two looks at Adams', Warren's, and Murray's professed opinions about husbands. It is clear that each woman recognized the power imbalance between husband and wife; this was not in itself unusual but accepted as part of the natural order of the world. While all three women had (seemingly) harmonious marriages, they remained aware, as is clear in their written works, that should a husband wish it, his authority over his wife could easily grow corrupt and tyrannical. Through a close reading of Adams' letters to her husband, Warren's play *The Sack of Rome*, and Murray's essays, this chapter argues that the same characteristics of tyranny in the Revolution also existed within marriage, and that all three women recognized this tyrannical potential in their writing.

Men had authority over women as their husbands, and also over their daughters and sons as fathers. Chapter Three then turns to an exploration of the professed opinions of Adams, Warren, and Murray concerning the relationships between mothers and

fathers, and fathers and their children. Once again, when analyzed as a form of a power imbalance, all three women published thoughts on the potential for tyranny by fathers. At the same time, however, all three women participated in and approved, at least partially, of the conventional family dynamic. Adams, Warren, and Murray were all acutely aware of the control fathers held over their children. Mothers contributed to parental decisions, but it was fathers who ultimately had the final say on a variety of issues, including the type of education their children would get, and how expensive a dowry they would either give or accept when their children were ready to be married. Chapter three argues that while many fathers may have been fair and just patriarchs, the same potential for tyranny that existed in husbands was present in the relationships between both fathers and mothers, and fathers and their children. The chapter also argues that there was a parallel between the power of the individual father, and the state, acting as patriarch of the country.

The letters of Abigail Adams, the plays of Mercy Otis Warren, and the essays of Judith Sargent Murray are analyzed here as expressions of informal political opinion. By doing so, this project contributes to the history of elite women and the Revolution, by combining an understanding of their experiences and professed opinions with a close reading of their published literature and writing. How did they express their opinions on imbalances of power and women's participation in the American Revolution through writing? In what ways did their choice of written genre either limit or enhance their ability to convey these ideas? These women had clear understandings of tyranny and other power imbalances, and in their written works, Adams, Warren, and Murray

consider the implications that this power imbalance had; as Abigail Adams so famously wrote, “all men would be tyrants if they could.”



## **Chapter One** **Tyranny and the King**

In the 1760s and 1770s, political debates filled a variety of colonial publications; pamphlets and newspaper articles were mass printed and widely distributed. Pamphlets accumulated, revealing the evolution of American thought, culminating in 1776 with Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, a highly influential patriot pamphlet.<sup>1</sup> Among patriot authors were three elite women in New England: Abigail Adams, who wrote letters to her husband; Mercy Otis Warren, a playwright and poet; and Judith Sargent Murray, an essayist. The letters that Adams sent to her husband, the plays Warren composed, and the collection of essays Murray penned all reveal their opinions on the ongoing political events, including how they viewed the British government and King George III. That these women were publishing political material is notable because female literacy rates were lower than their male counterparts. As such, female authors were rare, and women were formally excluded from the political realm, so women who wrote about politics were rarer still. Interestingly, their writings indicate that all three women shared the same perspectives on the American Revolution and King George III as their male author contemporaries. Adams, Murray, and Warren all held the belief after 1775 that the British government and monarchy was corrupt. American patriots felt that the British were violating their rights by ruling unjustly and deliberately betraying the trust of British colonial subjects. As colonial men and women had different connections to the state, it

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Nelson, *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 92. By the end of 1776, *Common Sense* had been printed, "between 150,000 and 250,000 [times], at a time when the American population stood at three million – the equivalent in per capita of selling thirty-five million copies of a single title today."

reasonably follows that they would also have different understandings of tyranny.

Surprisingly, though, as their writings indicate, Adams, Warren, and Murray all viewed King George III as a tyrant, and often in similar ways as their fellow male patriots. This suggests these elite female authors shared patriots' views and expressed them, thereby contributing to and advancing "the representation of resistance."<sup>2</sup> Adams, Warren, and Murray were publishing works that aimed to draw awareness to issues they felt were important, at times actively encouraging men and women to join efforts against British tyranny. They were politically active revolutionaries, shaping as well as reflecting patriotism.

In the nineteenth century, particularly with the arrival of the Victorian period, prescribed gender roles grew much stricter, with the development of the two-sex model and separate spheres models. According to the two-sex model, men and women were complementary, and thereby opposites of one another. The two-sex model posed a serious problem to gender equality, however, because following the logic that men and women were opposites, if men were strong, women must be weak; if men were logical, women were emotional; and if men were superior, women were inferior.<sup>3</sup> The two-sex model developed into the separate spheres model, which divided the world into two spheres: public and private. Men were in control of the formal public sphere which encompassed matters of politics, business, and economics.<sup>4</sup> If the public sphere was

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon M. Harris, "Whose Past is it? Women Writers in Early America," in *Early American Literature*, Vol. 30 no. 2 (Spring, 1995), 177.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 5, 8, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Fathers and Mothers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1996), 24.

masculine, the private sphere must therefore be feminine.<sup>5</sup> Women were relegated to the private sphere, which encompassed the domestic realm, to be wives, mothers, and aids to their husbands.<sup>6</sup> In the eighteenth century, at the time of the Revolution, this degree of gender separation was not yet so rigid. In her book, *Separated by Their Sex*, Mary Beth Norton argues that in the eighteenth-century, the primary determinant of one's power was social status rather than gender.<sup>7</sup>

Women supported the Revolution and displayed their patriotism in various ways. Boycotting was a popular form of patriotism, as were civic processions, political salons, street protests, and political writers.<sup>8</sup> Female authorship (even on political matters) during the Revolutionary period was not, therefore, unheard of. That being said, female authorship was not common either, and women's involvement in the political field was not welcomed. Perhaps this explains why Adams limited her writing to letters to John and why Murray and Warren published so much of their work (particularly their political pieces) anonymously. Anonymity served women multiple purposes. Firstly, it worked to protect their reputations as respectable women, because politics was not a feminine field. Even Adams, writing privately to her husband and friends, felt the need to occasionally apologize for her "masculine interest in politics."<sup>9</sup> Secondly, anonymity also helped protect Murray and Warren from danger, because the material they were writing was at

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<sup>5</sup> Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Hicks, "Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 62 no 2 (Apr., 2005), 266.

<sup>9</sup> Hicks, "Portia and Marcia," 289.

this time, after all, treasonous. Thirdly, anonymity lent legitimacy to women's writing. Unable to recognize the author, colonists were more likely to read arguments made by women that they might have otherwise dismissed. Murray even wrote under a male persona, going by Mr. Vigilius or Mr. Gleaner, which she admitted was for the purpose of lending authority to her arguments. Murray explains the reasoning for her male identity, writing, "observing, in a variety of instances, the indifference, not to say contempt with which female productions are regarded, and seeking to arrest attention at least for a time, I was thus furnished with a very powerful motive for an assumption, which, I flattered myself would prove favourable to my aspiring wishes."<sup>10</sup>

Well before war broke out in 1775, patriot frustrations and discontent with British rule were brewing. Revolutionary sentiment began to build at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. Following the war, Britain sought to pay off its war debt, and chose to do so in part by increasing taxes on the colonies.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Quebec Act determined how Britain would govern the new French-Canadian subjects. British lenience towards Catholicism, and the expansion of Quebec south of the Great Lakes, into what many British settlers considered American colonial territory, threatened the colonists' way of life.<sup>12</sup> Following the Seven Years' War and the Quebec Act, discontent spread amongst the colonists, priming and uniting them for the war of Independence. Parliament also passed several further acts, including the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts,

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, "Conclusion: The Gleaner Unmasked," in *The Gleaner*, vol. 3, 313.

<sup>11</sup> Vernon P. Creviston, "'No King Unless it be a Constitutional King': The Quebec Act in the Coming of the American Revolution," in *Historian* Vol. 73 no. 3 (Sept., 2011), 464.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Metzger, *The Quebec Act: A Primary Cause of the American Revolution*, (New York: United States Historical Society, 1936) 48-53.

and the Tea Act.<sup>13</sup> Yet the attempt to increase revenues also raised suspicions about the constitutionality and propriety of such taxation. The accumulation of taxes and acts, without representation within British parliament, brought patriot colonists to new levels of irritation. As John Adams wrote in a letter to Abigail,

Shall We submit to Parliamentary Taxation, to avoid Mobs? Will not Parliamentary Taxation if established, occasion Vices, Crimes and Follies, infinitely more numerous, dangerous, and fatal to the Community? Will not parliamentary Taxation if established, raise a Revenue, unjustly and wrongfully?<sup>14</sup>

John, a leading patriot, was extremely concerned with the various taxes and legislation Britain imposed on America, and the spread of British corruption in the colonies. He continues in the same letter, writing,

If this Revenue is scattered by the Hand of Corruption, among the public Officers, and Magistrates and Rulers, in the Community, will it not propagate Vices more numerous, more malignant and pestilential among them. Will it not render Magistrates servile, and fawning to their vicious Superiours? and insolent and tyrannical to their Inferiours? Is Insolence, Abuse and Impudence more tolerable in a Magistrate than in a subject?<sup>15</sup>

Initially, colonists blamed the British government officials for their misfortunes. When too little was done in response to their complaints, colonists began to turn their frustrations on George III.

There were several contributing factors that pushed patriots towards rebellion, but the Quebec Act had particular significance.<sup>16</sup> Patriots had a growing distrust of the

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<sup>13</sup> Creviston, ““No King Unless it be a Constitutional King, ”” 464.

<sup>14</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 6, 1774, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>15</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 6, 1774, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 238.

British due to the Coercive Acts, so when they were passed, patriots interpreted them as further evidence of corruption in government.<sup>17</sup> The Quebec Act contributed to this distrust and was interpreted by many patriots as definitive proof not only that the British were corrupt, but also that George III was a tyrant.<sup>18</sup> One of the reasons the Quebec Act offended patriots to the extent it did is because its leniency on Catholicism had been endorsed by their king.<sup>19</sup> Protestants and Catholics have long disagreed, but Britain and the American colonies were particularly sensitive to the threat of Catholicism at the time of the Quebec Act.<sup>20</sup> The Quebec Act allowed the persistence and even the expansion of Catholicism, and patriots viewed this as an affront on their British rights. As King, George III was responsible for protecting his Protestant people from Catholicism. His support of the Quebec Act, therefore, meant to patriots that corruption existed in all levels of government, all the way up to the king, the last stronghold against Catholicism. When George III gave his support for the passing of the Quebec Act, patriots took it as conclusive evidence that their king was not concerned with his subjects' best interests, had been corrupted by his power, and become a tyrant.<sup>21</sup>

Seventeenth-century England was filled with both genuine plots and conspiracies of plots, adding to an atmosphere of growing distrust in authority. As Gordon Wood notes, Britons saw potential threats from every direction; "French plots, Irish plots, Popish plots, Whig plots, Tory plots [and] Jacobite plots."<sup>22</sup> In the seventeenth century

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<sup>17</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 238.

<sup>18</sup> Creviston, "No King Unless it be a Constitutional King," 464.

<sup>19</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 238.

<sup>20</sup> Creviston, "No King Unless it be a Constitutional King," 469.

<sup>21</sup> Creviston, "No King Unless it be a Constitutional King," 469 – 472.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style," 410.

British paranoia of Catholicism had erupted as news and rumors of various plots spread amongst the English.<sup>23</sup> This environment of conspiracy and suspicion primed patriot colonists for a rebellion, because “by the eighteenth-century conspiracy was not simply a means of explaining how rulers were deposed; it had become a common means of explaining how rulers and others directing political events really operated.”<sup>24</sup> The changing understanding of conspiracy reveals that Britons, and patriots in particular, had lost trust in the British government and were suspicious of the king. Moreover, patriots “embraced conspiracy theories that held that the king had destroyed the traditional balance of government to gain total control over Parliament, in order to establish a tyranny in Britain and America.”<sup>25</sup> By emphasizing George III’s tyranny as strongly as possible, with the aid of conspiracy theories, patriots hoped to unite colonists against a singular villain and thereby strengthen their rebellion. This was because, “it was easier to conceive of the tyranny of an individual than the collective tyranny of Parliament, especially when the colonists had for years believed in the blessings of the British constitution and British government.”<sup>26</sup>

George III’s decisions to station Irish regiments in Boston and later to hire Hessian mercenaries also frayed tensions between patriots and the British. A standing army, one that remained employed even during peace time, functioned as a display of

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon S. Wood, “Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 39 No. 3 (Jul., 1982)

<sup>24</sup> Wood, “Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style,” 410.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “‘If Others Will Not Be Active, I Must Drive’: George III and the American Revolution,” in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 2 no. 1 (Spring, 2004) 20.

<sup>26</sup> O’Shaughnessy, “‘If Others Will Not Be Active,’” 20.

arbitrary power that aimed to exert control over the colonists, as well as monitor patriot activities.<sup>27</sup> If that were not enough to upset colonists who were already suspicious of British action, the British army posted in the colonies was maintained at the colonists' expense.<sup>28</sup> Throughout British history, standing armies were often connected to tyranny, or, as Maier puts it, "ends other than the good of the governed."<sup>29</sup> The first English standing army, in fact, was used by Oliver Cromwell for his personal gain.<sup>30</sup> Historically, British citizens, including those in the colonies, understood a standing army to be an "engine of tyranny," to be utilized by a corrupt executive, be it a king or leader of an army, like Cromwell.<sup>31</sup>

Patriots viewed a standing army, therefore, as further strengthening their claim that the British government had become corrupt. The presence of the standing army also strengthened both patriot perceptions of the King as responsible for their grievances, and patriot arguments against the propriety of a sole ruler having access to such extensive power, because it served as a clear proof of the corruption that occurs when one person has too much power.

In Britain, a monarchical society, the king was the most powerful and revered figure under God, sitting atop the social hierarchy, then considered part of the natural world.<sup>32</sup> The British system of government in particular was built upon a three-tier

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<sup>27</sup> Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 46.

<sup>28</sup> Reginald C. Stuart, "'Engines of Tyranny': Recent Historiography on Standing Armies During the Era of the American Revolution," in *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 19 no. 2 (Aug., 1984), 195.

<sup>29</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart, "'Engines of Tyranny,'" 185.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart, "'Engines of Tyranny,'" 198.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 19.



system made up of monarchs, nobles, and plebians.<sup>33</sup> What enabled this structure to function was a balance of power amongst each tier, offering stability and providing checks and balances on each level. By the Revolutionary era, however, patriots believed that the checks and balances of the monarchical system of government were no longer functioning and had been corrupted by those in power. As Thomas Paine argued, “to say that the Constitution of England is...of three powers reciprocally checking each other [is] farcical.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Bailyn argues that colonists understood all political controversies to be caused by “the disposition of power.” By power, Bailyn specified that it referred to “dominion;” essentially entitlement and control over others.<sup>35</sup> Patriots held the belief that George III and his Parliament were abusing this power, and thereby infringing upon the colonists’ natural rights. Politics was also interpreted in the eighteenth century English world as a contest between power and liberty, implying that power was prone to corruptive forces that could curtail liberty.

By the Revolutionary era, “tyranny” was a familiar term, a common concept throughout British history, and one with which colonists would have been familiar. Using their historical experience, Britons and North Americans understood tyranny as deliberate corruption carried out and encouraged by the monarch, the head of government. A king, in theory, was a just and benevolent ruler. If corrupted, which is to say no longer acting in his subjects’ best interests, the king would be considered a tyrant.

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<sup>33</sup> Nelson, *Thomas Paine*, 117.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense: Addressed to the inhabitants of America, on the following interest subjects: I. Of the Origins and Design of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution. II Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession. III Thoughts on the miscellaneous Reflection*, (London: J.Ridgway, 1791), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 54 – 56, quotation on 55.

In the British North American colonies, this was an understanding of patriots and loyalists alike. In the case of the American Revolution, patriots felt that George III was a tyrant, and that Parliament and officials were corrupt, further contributing to the King's tyrannical rule. They felt George III was responsible for British legislation that "deprived them of their traditionally British liberties."<sup>36</sup> While loyalists accepted that a tyrant should be opposed in theory, they did not always agree that the actions of George III constituted tyranny. For patriots to attempt to gain their independence from Britain was until this point unheard of. Yet this was not the first time British subjects reacted to end or prevent tyranny. King Charles I was viewed as a tyrant by his subjects and in 1649 was executed for treason.<sup>37</sup> Less than fifty years later in 1688, James II was also deposed as a corrupt king due to his Catholic faith and allegiance with France, a similar offence allegedly committed by George III with the Quebec Act.<sup>38</sup> What is unique and remarkable in the American case is the degree of corruption patriots believed existed, and the intensity of their response. Instead of deposing a tyrant king, as was British practice in the past, patriots ultimately decided to throw away the entire political system of monarchy and start fresh as a new nation. This speaks strongly to the seriousness with which patriots responded to what they viewed as tyranny, their belief that the government was so corrupt it needed a whole new system, and the centrality of their fear of excessive executive power.

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<sup>36</sup> Stella F. Duff, "The Case Against the King: The Virginia Gazette's Indict George III," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 6 no. 3 (Jul., 1949), 383.

<sup>37</sup> Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*, 7.

In the 1760s, 1770s, and beyond, many forms of literature were published which discussed political tensions with Britain and between patriots and loyalists. These publications played a significant role in the success of the Revolution. As Michael Warner argues, printed and published works allowed Americans to share ideas, coordinate rebellion against the British, and unite under a common goal. Printed material was therefore both an expression of patriot dissatisfaction, and the primary medium by which patriot attitudes circulated.<sup>39</sup> Warner explains the significance of patriot publications during the Revolutionary period, writing that “at the same time that colonists were engaging in violent crowd actions, organized law-breaking, and boycotts, they also engineered a newspaper and pamphlet war in a way that was arguably more integral to the American resistance than to any other Revolution.”<sup>40</sup> A popular and primary act of patriotism was, therefore the creation and publication of patriot support and propaganda. Numerous influential patriotic publications were printed in this period. These three women who are the focus of this project were not the only female authors at this time, but male authorship far outnumbered that of women.<sup>41</sup> While difficult to accurately determine literacy rates in the eighteenth century, until 1790 female literacy in New England was lower than that of men.<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Monaghan suggests that because reading

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Norton, *Separated by Their Sex*, 136.

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer E. Monaghan, “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England,” in *Reading in America*, ed. Cathy Davidson (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 53.

was taught prior to writing, women's education often did not expand far enough to include learning to write, even amongst women able to read,<sup>43</sup>

Patriots' views about the British and their reasons for rebellion were published and distributed widely, in every written medium: newspapers (which sometimes published letters), magazines, speeches and sermons, broadsides, essays, and almanacs.<sup>44</sup> Pamphlets were a prime source of patriot attitudes during the Revolution. As Bernard Bailyn argues, pamphlets "reveal, more clearly than any other single group of documents the contemporary meaning of that transforming event."<sup>45</sup> Through their publications, patriots debated the propriety of Parliament's jurisdiction and involvement in the colonies.<sup>46</sup> The genre in which a publication was produced played a role in finding and then influencing an author's audience. Pamphlets, which were published widely and inexpensively, were an excellent way to spread information quickly. Abigail Adams was trying to persuade her husband of her opinions. For this, personal letters offered Adams the best opportunity to achieve her objective. Likewise, Warren's plays were printed on pamphlets, and because she was trying to reach as wide an audience as possible, this genre proved beneficial for her purposes. Judith Sargent Murray chose to write argumentative and persuasive essays because she was attempting to persuade and convince an audience of general readers of her views. All three women chose genres that best served their purposes.

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<sup>43</sup> Monaghan, "Literacy Instruction and Gender," 53-54.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 20.

Patriots supported their arguments about the threat of tyranny that Britain might (and evidently did) pose, with both Enlightenment and Classical ideologies. Philosophers during the Enlightenment discussed ideas such as freedom, liberty, reason, and virtue. John Locke's ideas on natural rights, liberalism, and the role of government were popular amongst patriot colonists.<sup>47</sup> The Enlightenment held particular significance in eighteenth century America, when Revolutionaries used the language of the Enlightenment to justify their rebellion against Britain. Colonists personally identified with and recognized themselves in the Enlightenment's philosophers and used their ideologies as frameworks for Revolutionary literature.

Revitalized by the Enlightenment, the ideas that eighteenth century philosophers admired were often the same as those valued by the philosophers of antiquity. Patriots identified with classical heroes who represented the principles they admired during a period of neo-classicism during the pre-Revolutionary years. Patriots were particularly drawn to neo-classicism because of its ideas on democracy, a concept that was becoming palatable as patriots grew increasingly frustrated with monarchy.<sup>48</sup> As a result, in addition to endorsing and distributing classical philosophy, Patriot publications in the eighteenth century had an emphasis on Roman characters and names. This let patriots associate themselves with classical heroes in opposition to classical villains who represented the British. In doing so, patriots politicized classicism and adopted its language to express themselves.<sup>49</sup> George Washington self-identified with various Roman figures, including

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<sup>47</sup> Hicks, "Portia and Marcia," 266.

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> Hicks, "Portia and Marcia," 266.

Cato the younger, a martyr figure; Fabius, a Roman general; and Cincinnatus, a “farmer-warrior.”<sup>50</sup>

Women also utilized classicism as a means of conveying their thoughts on the Revolution and the new nation.<sup>51</sup> Limited in their ability to involve themselves more directly in political affairs, “elite women married to patriots latched on to the idea of the Roman matron, who was chaste, sober, dignified, and dedicated to the selfless service of Rome,”<sup>52</sup> and “made key contributions to the Roman republic and had defied the corruption of Imperial Rome.”<sup>53</sup> Adams, Warren, and Murray all utilized classical names in their writing: Adams often signed her letters with names of various Roman matrons, usually opting for Portia; Murray originally published her essays under the name Constantia; and in all five of Warren’s plays (including *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of Castile*), her characters have Roman names, and, as the title suggests, *The Sack of Rome* is set in ancient Rome. Furthermore, Warren published her political plays anonymously, and although she did not use a Roman name as often as Abigail, she did occasionally adopt the Roman name Marcia.<sup>54</sup> In each case, references to classicism worked to signify and empower the women’s support of the patriot cause and their agreement with the Enlightenment principles and neo-classical values.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the use of Roman matrons as a historic precedent served to lend legitimacy to their own

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<sup>50</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 271.

<sup>51</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 117.

<sup>52</sup> Brayman Hackel, *Reading Women*, 117-118.

<sup>53</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 265-266.

<sup>54</sup> Brayman Hackel, *Reading Women*, 117-118.

<sup>55</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 289.

political interventions through writing. As Hicks writes, “[Adams’] pen name reminded correspondents that, like a roman woman, she had a proven political role.”<sup>56</sup>

On another level, classical references served as a simple way to express patriotism, particularly when it was difficult to do so otherwise. Portia, the name Adams frequently used, was the wife and co-conspirator of famed Roman leader Brutus, who killed Caesar.<sup>57</sup> In her letters to John, Abigail repeatedly shared her opinions on the British, calling them cruel and tyrannical.<sup>58</sup> In a letter to John from July 5, 1775, Abigail wrote, “The present state of the inhabitants of Boston is that of the most abject slaves under the most cruel and despotick [sic] of Tyrants”<sup>59</sup> Later, in the fall of that same year, Adams wrote again about British tyranny, writing to John that “I could not join to day in the petitions of our worthy parson, for a reconciliation between our, no longer parent state, but tyrant state, and these colonies.”<sup>60</sup> Unmistakably, Abigail expressed her view that the British government was corrupt, deceitful, and operating under a tyrant king. Abigail’s dramatic reference to slavery, and its hyperbole, are further revealing of her views that the colonists were oppressed by the British. Quite clearly, Abigail expressed the belief that under King George III Britain had become tyrannical. In one of Abigail’s letters she further expressed a desire to separate from Britain, claiming that the British

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<sup>56</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 289.

<sup>57</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 289.

<sup>58</sup> It should be briefly noted that Abigail was not a published author, like Murray and Warren. Based on Konstantin Dierk’s *In My Power*, Adams’ letters should be thought of as publications since they were writings which were in various ways made public, 3-7.

<sup>59</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, July 5, 1775, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018

<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/index>, henceforth: MHS “*The Adams Family Papers*”

<sup>60</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, November 12, 1775, MHS “*The Adams Family Papers*.”

were not worthy of any continued ties to America.<sup>61</sup> This is a sentiment she repeats frequently, often referring to or complaining about the “hostile depredation of Britain,”<sup>62</sup> In May of 1776, Abigail wrote to John that, “if a king lets his people slip from him[,] he is no longer a king,” heavily indicating that she no longer respected George III as a king.<sup>63</sup> In 1778, during the American Revolutionary War, Abigail wrote of wanting to be able to contribute to the defeat of “as cruel a tyrant” as George III.<sup>64</sup> These are consistent with the ideas of Britain expressed in John’s letters and in patriotic publications circulating in Massachusetts. As John wrote in a letter from June 26, 1776, “I hope our People will now make the Lower Harbour, impregnable, and never again suffer the Flagg [sic] of a Tyrant to fly, within any Part of it.”<sup>65</sup> Abigail’s views are also similar to those shared in Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*. Paine argued that the King could not be trusted, because “a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy.”<sup>66</sup> In a letter from August 14, 1776, John argues that the Revolutionary War was just and necessary violence because, ‘rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.’<sup>67</sup> This is quite an extreme statement. John, in trying to persuade Abigail of his argument, uses exaggerated propaganda. In another letter, John writes to Abigail saying, “can Wealth or Titles, soften the Pains of the Mind upon reflecting that a Man has done Evil, and endeavoured to do

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<sup>61</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, November 12, 1775, “*The Adams Family Papers*,” MHS.

<sup>62</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, April 23, 1781, “*The Adams Family Papers*,” MHS.

<sup>63</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7-9, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018

<sup>64</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 8, 1778, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018

<sup>65</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, June 26, 1776, MHS “*The Adams Family Papers*.” accessed September 2018

<sup>66</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 14, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.



Evil to Millions, that he has destroyed free Governments and established Tyrannies!”<sup>68</sup>

Both husband and wife wrote equally passionately of Britain’s tyranny. Abigail’s letters do not reveal a “female” perspective on British tyranny, but rather a shared, popular understanding of British corruption and oppression.

Abigail Adams’ correspondence with her husband indicates that the couple had similar perspectives on tyranny. That Abigail wrote and shared her views on the Revolution, on George III, and on tyranny, indicates that she was a participant in the Revolution. This supports Norton’s argument that elite women, because of their status, were able to contribute to the political realm, but Abigail was doing more than just echoing her husband’s beliefs. As her letters indicate, and as the subsequent chapters argue, Abigail also shared perspectives on the potential for tyrannical power imbalances within the home.

In the early 1770s, Mercy Otis Warren anonymously published three satirical and propagandist plays, entitled *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group*. Published in 1772, *The Adulateur* was a satirical play set in Servia, a fictional representation of Massachusetts. The play tells the tale of a rebellion against a treacherous tyrant, Rapatio, a representation of Thomas Hutchinson, a widely disliked British governor with whom Warren took particular issue.<sup>69</sup> Leading the fictional rebellion against Rapatio is Brutus, a patriotic hero, leading fellow citizens to resist Rapatio’s corrupt rule. *The Defeat*, published the next year in 1773, acts as an unofficial sequel to *The Adulateur*, further

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<sup>68</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 13, 1777, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Eileen Hunt Botting, “Women Writing War: Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Mather Crocker on the American Revolution,” *Massachusetts History Review*, vol. 18 (2016), 92.

detailing Rapatio's wrongdoing, and the patriotism of Brutus and his supporters, ready to go to war against Rapatio to bring freedom to Servia. In 1775 Warren published her third patriot play *The Group*, which further describes the patriot rebellion against Rapatio.

Warren's plays reveal the progression of patriot attitudes towards the British; initially local British representatives, such as Hutchinson, were criticized by patriots. Over time, their focus shifted to blame Parliament for having manipulated and tricked the king into acting against the colony's best interests. This is apparent, in *The Adulateur*, when a character named Syla expresses this exact sentiment, that their "royal master" was being exploited by "those he trusts!"<sup>70</sup> Warren portrays the king as being controlled by members of British Parliament, but blameless himself. By the time she published *The Group*, however, George III is depicted as a witting and gleeful tyrant, aiming to destroy the citizens of Servia. Rapatio, at multiple points, expresses a desire to "trample," "stamp," or "crush" the freedom of Servia's citizens, all the while with sadistic glee.<sup>71</sup>

As the plays follow real-life events in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, and because the plays are intended as patriot propaganda, Warren outlines patriot complaints with the British throughout the plays. This works to demonstrate British corruption, as Rapatio and his supporters' actions would have no doubt resonated with readers. In *The Adulateur*, Rapatio vows to send an army across the Atlantic, to post his "creatures" throughout the country, to demonstrate his power as well as "trample" the country.<sup>72</sup> This has obvious similarities to colonists' complaints about King George's

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<sup>70</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 3, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 1 Scene 2, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 4 Scene 1, 30. "thus while each post is garnish'd [sic] with my creatures, / Ill [sic] show my powr [sic], and trample on my country."

positioning two Irish regiments as a standing army in Boston in 1768 and later in 1776 sending Hessian mercenaries to the colonies.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Warren also writes

TRUMPS. He strikes a bargain with his country's foes,  
and joins to wrap America in flames  
Yet with feign'd pity, and Satanic  
grin...still hoping to deceive,<sup>74</sup>

which is reminiscent of patriots' sense of betrayal in the King's support of the Coercive Acts and Quebec Act.<sup>75</sup> In some instances, Warren's work was barely fiction. In *The Group* a character calls outright for action against the king, saying, "I feign would push them to the last extreme, / To draw their swords against their legal King."<sup>76</sup> Warren's plays are indeed fiction, but they reveal genuine patriot attitudes. As Cathy Davidson argues, what a "text says is forever linked to the mundane realities underlying the physical product that gives the text a material embodiment."<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in her book, *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argues that literature and literary studies should be regarded not only as art, but as attempts to change the social order.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, as satirical plays, Warren's works are inherently based on real life sentiments about actual, parallel events, yet, in claiming her work was fiction, Warren was able to express anti-British and anti-monarchical sentiments and still be protected against claims of treason.

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<sup>73</sup> Colin Bonwick, *The American Revolution*, (Hong Kong: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1991), 74-75, 79, 89.

<sup>74</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 2 Scene 1, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Duff, "The Case Against the King," 383.

<sup>76</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 2 Scene 3, 16.

<sup>77</sup> Cathy Davidson, *Reading in America*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>78</sup> Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xi.

Alison Olson outlines the usefulness of satire, explaining that “if you said something false about a person, that was libel, but if you simply ridiculed someone and your ridicule was based on truth, it was satire.”<sup>79</sup> In this way, Warren (like other satirists) was able to avoid accusations of treason, despite the many clear, pointed attacks within her work.

Furthermore, Warren writes the plays with a clearly virtuous hero against a powerful and immoral king, creating an obvious hero to support and villain to dislike. As Warren’s goal was to produce patriot propaganda that would recruit colonists to their Revolutionary cause, she portrays Rapatio as exaggeratedly evil. Throughout the plays, Rapatio reveals himself to be a cruel, unjust tyrant, saying horrific things such as that he would extinguish, “the blood of innocence,”<sup>80</sup> that he would, “trample down the choicest of their rights”<sup>81</sup> and laws,<sup>82</sup> and boasting about out-achieving Nero, a classical Roman tyrant.<sup>83</sup> Rapatio also claimed that he would attack Servia and leave “piles of mangled corpses.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps most revealing of patriot attitudes, Rapatio is also deceitful, and wittingly tyrannical. When met with patriot complaints, Rapatio initially feigns surprise and concern for the patriots, and promises to correct problems at all costs.<sup>85</sup> However, after the patriots leave, Rapatio reveals he was lulling Servian patriots into a false sense

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<sup>79</sup> Alison Gilbert Olson, “Political Humor, Deference, and the American Revolution,” in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* Vol. 3 no. 2 (Fall, 2005), 368. Olson refers to satire as “the ‘attack form’ of humor,” 364.

<sup>80</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 4, 28.

<sup>81</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 1 Scene 1, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 4, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 4 Scene 1, 30.

<sup>84</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 4, 29. “Then Im secure – know Patriots thisand [sic] tremble. / Grief shall again its wonted seat resume, / And piles of mangled corpses croud [sic] the tomb. / Throall [sic] the wanton streets of powr [sic] Ill [sic] rove, / And soar exulting like the bird of Jove, / On lost pinions [sic] put a sovereign sway, / And glow illustrious in the blaze of day.”

<sup>85</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 3, 25.

of security, as he continued on with his “schemes.”<sup>86</sup> This is not unlike the betrayal patriots felt towards George III, and suggests that George III, another tyrant, had perhaps only been pretending to care about his subjects too, and in actuality was doing so to disguise more evil intentions. There are dozens of further examples of Rapatio’s villainy, and Warren’s heavy emphasis on Rapatio’s tyranny. Perhaps the most symbolic description of Rapatio’s violence occurs in *The Group*, when he decides to utilize fire against Servia.<sup>87</sup> In opting to use fire, there is no concern for damages, injuries, or death. Furthermore, women and children are just as, if not more, likely to be killed in a burning building. Warren deliberately pairs Rapatio with fire to stress the notion that he does not care about his subjects, nor is he acting in their best interests. Warren equates Rapatio and George III when she reveals that Rapatio was the solitary ruler of Servia, and maintained control of every level of government, much like George III, to the dismay of American patriots. Rapatio’s villainy and tyranny implicate George III as a tyrannical ruler.

While Rapatio is the primary antagonist of the plays, his men and supporters are equally unjust. Warren also details throughout the play that the justice system and British courts were corrupt, since she explicitly writes that patriot characters in her plays were refusing to respect Rapatio’s authority, and because he and his government had grown too corrupt and cruel to continue to tolerate.<sup>88</sup> Warren clearly expresses the idea that the British had grown corrupt and sinful, led morally astray by greed and insatiable longing

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<sup>86</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 4, 27.

<sup>87</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 2, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 2, 14.

for power.<sup>89</sup> This literary sentiment matches other patriot publications; Warren makes a statement against the corruption of British agents and the British Parliament, based on claims of oppression and unjust governing. In *Common Sense*, Paine argued that the aristocracy, the King's peers, were also corrupt and tyrannical.<sup>90</sup> Warren's portrayal of tyranny in her plays extended beyond Rapatio to his associates. Throughout the three plays, more than one senator confesses that he had once been virtuous and repelled by corruption, but unfortunately, "thoughts like these have long since slept."<sup>91</sup> Another admits a similar sentiment, saying that they had tossed aside any regard for their conscience.<sup>92</sup> Here, Warren suggests that it is the entirety of the British government, not just the king, that had overtime grown corrupt and unfit for leadership. Warren further paints the British as corrupt, power-hungry, and motivated by greed since various government officials in her plays admit to betraying their country for bribes.<sup>93</sup> Shortly later in the play, Rapatio describes his men (whom Warren consistently describes as "creatures"), as "minions" of oppressive power, complicit subordinates, and deceitful.<sup>94</sup>

Warren's plays worked not simply to remind readers of British faults, but also to inspire colonists to become patriots themselves. As such, Warren appeals to popular virtues, brought into contemporary conversation by the Enlightenment and revival of classicism, but also by the pamphlets of her own day that promoted Revolution. In *The*

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<sup>89</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 3, 19. "Of glorious freedom, planted in the breast / Of ev'ry man who boasts a Briton's name, / Until some base born lust of foreign growth / Contaminate his soul, till false ambition, / Or the sordid hope of swelling coffers, / Poison the mind, and brutalize the man."

<sup>90</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 3 Scene 4, 28.

<sup>92</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 1 Scene 1, 3.

<sup>93</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 1 Scene 1, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 4 Scene 2, 32.

*Group*, Brutus tells his men, “Weve [sic] done as Patriots ought” by being noble men, acting from their “*sense of honor*.”<sup>95</sup> Warren’s meaning here is quite clear; patriots were equated with honour and nobility, rather than selfish avarice, as the British were. Warren plays with concepts of honour and nobility to both galvanize American patriots, and guilt British supporters into becoming honourable men, by which she means those who reject executive tyranny and corruption. Throughout the three plays, there are dozens of quotes that demonstrate the patriot propaganda Warren intended to create. Warren emphasized the same Enlightenment and classical republican ideologies popularized in the circulating pre-Revolutionary pamphlet and propaganda literature. The patriot characters throughout her plays frequently refer to popular ideologies, such as freedom, honour, virtue, and happiness. While trying to rally men to his cause, Brutus declares, “gods! Are we men? / And stand we still [...and[...bear it? Wheres [sic] our sense? / Our ancient sense of freedom?”<sup>96</sup> During the early 1770s, when Warren’s plays were published, the phrase “ancient sense of freedom,” was a clear connection to the classic and Enlightenment ideologies patriots championed.

Yet another component to Warren’s use of propaganda are her disavowals of loyalist arguments, and deliberate attempts both to shame loyalists and deter others from becoming loyalists. No passage conveys this as succinctly or clearly than in *The Adulateur*, when Collateralis says of Rapatio’s supporters, “can you suppose there yet is such a dupe / As still believes that wretch an honest man?”<sup>97</sup> Warren also addresses why

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<sup>95</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 2 Scene 1, 11.

<sup>96</sup> Warren, *The Group*, Act 2 Scene 1, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 1, 10.

patriots felt the need to resist British corruption, in a conversation between two characters, Humbug and Trumps. As Humbug asks, “why exclaim at all / Against the man who made thee what thou art,” implying resistance to Rapatio was traitorous.<sup>98</sup> Warren further attempts to shame loyalists and paint them as mistaken fools who regret their choice to remain loyal to Rapatio. A character named Crowbar, meant to represent a loyalist, states that he had

CROWBAR. blindly swore obedience to his will,  
 So wise, so just, so good I thought Rapatio,  
 That if salvation rested on his word  
 I'd pin my faith and risk my hopes thereon.<sup>99</sup>

Another of Rapatio's previous supporters, Collateralis, expresses the same sentiment in the following act, saying,

COLLATERALIS. I almost wish I never had engag'd  
 To rob my country of her native rights,  
 ...  
 Had I been dumb, or my right hand cut off,  
 E'er I so servilely had held it up,  
 Or giv'n my voice abjectly to rescind  
 The wisest step that mortal man could take  
 To curb the tallons of tyrannical power,

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<sup>98</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 1, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 1 Scene 1, 2.



Out stretch'd rapacious ready to devour.<sup>100</sup>

All three of Warren's political plays are rife with patriot propaganda, and she discusses many different reasons why patriots were correct that the British were corrupt and George III was a tyrant, like Rapatio. Warren deliberately casts Rapatio as dramatic and cruel, and Brutus and his group of patriots as noble and good, equating them with truth, liberty, peace, and happiness. Rapatio's men, and the various senator characters in the plays represent loyalists, those who were standing by as Rapatio wreaked his havoc on Servia. Warren paints loyalists as either complicit with tyranny, too foolish to recognize tyranny, or as ultimately realizing the error of their ways and turning against Rapatio. Throughout all three plays, Warren pushes patriot propaganda on her readers, clearly writing the patriots as admirable heroes, in sharp juxtaposition to Rapatio's complete lack of empathy or morals. Furthermore, throughout all three plays, Warren interprets and presents tyranny according to patriot conventions, as male patriot authors did as well.

Mercy Otis Warren's plays were satirical takes on the political developments of the Revolution. Warren's plays were also patriot propaganda, published on pamphlets and wide spread across New England. This reveals Warren was a fully comprehensive and active participant in the American Revolution. Her first three plays sought to help spread the patriot cause and perspective. This, as with the revelations of Abigail's letters, is again in alignment with Norton's arguments on class and gender in the eighteenth century. Elite women, due to their wealth and social position, were able to participate

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<sup>100</sup> Warren, *The Adulateur*, Act 2 Scene 3, 20.

within the political realm. Warren's publications and patriot beliefs made her an active participant in the American Revolution and a contributor to the formation of America.

Judith Sargent Murray shared her views on British tyranny in various essays throughout *The Gleaner*. Murray's essays were published primarily during the 1790s, after the American victory in the Revolutionary War, and captured her political hopes in the early years of a new America. Murray wrote frequently on the shaping of a new American government, and the desire to prevent another, similarly tyrannical situation from developing within the American presidency. During the period 1789 to 1796, Murray published several essays in the *Massachusetts Magazine* under the name Constantia (another homage to patriotic classicism). In the 1790s, Murray compiled essays and republished them into a three-volume collection called *The Gleaner*.

Murray frequently wrote her opinions on the American government, and how she felt the country should operate, following its independence. As she discussed the future of America, Murray referred to British colonial rule and improvements that had been made to American life since the Revolution. In an essay titled "Declamations upon the Degeneracy of the Times," published in 1798, Murray, looking toward America's future, tells of how Americans had successfully battled and struggled for liberty, and that, ultimately, America won, and, "independence claps her wings; peace is restored; governments are formed; public faith established; and we bid fair to become a great and happy people"<sup>101</sup> Here, Murray utilizes an exaggerated but common expression of joy and optimism for America's future in her writing, which reveals her approval of the

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<sup>101</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia, Vol. I, No. IV* (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 38-39.

Revolution and the nation's new, improved course toward liberty. Murray supports her arguments with historical examples, such as the reign of Mary Tudor, Irish persecutions by the British, and "the government, or rather mortal tyranny of James."<sup>102</sup> This is similar to how other patriots supported their argument that George III was a tyrant by referring to historical examples. In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine supports his argument against George III by referencing Charles I's reign. As he writes, "for the fate of Charles I had only made kings more subtle – not more just."<sup>103</sup> Paine argued not only that George III was a tyrant, but that kings in general were tyrants.<sup>104</sup> In another instance, Murray praises the United States for its ability to create a "government of the people,"<sup>105</sup> and boasts of the superiority of the American government over that of others.<sup>106</sup> In a separate essay, Murray repeats the sentiment, as she writes, "Our admirable Constitution unites the advantages which are attributed to a monarchical government, to an oligarchy, and a democracy."<sup>107</sup> This suggests that Murray agreed that the British monarchy had disadvantages that the American constitution made sure to avoid; it is reasonable to assume Murray is alluding to the potential for corruption. This is further reinforced in her choice to describe the American republic a "government of the people," which implies that the previous government did *not* work for the people and failed to address their needs. Additionally, consider Murray's choice of the word "oligarchy," which implies

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<sup>102</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol 1, No. IV, 40-41. Murray does not clarify which James she is referring to, but it is likely James II.

<sup>103</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 10.

<sup>105</sup> Murray, *No. IV*, 38-39.

<sup>106</sup> Murray, *No. IV*, 259.

<sup>107</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. IV (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 40.

corruption, rather than “aristocracy,” a more neutral term. Murray’s use of oligarchy, meaning corrupt control by a select elite, suggests either a deliberate decision to reference British corruption or, an unintentional choice, which then suggests Murray equated the aristocracy with corruption, an indication of previous experience with a corrupt upper echelon. Through the lens of the American Revolution, Murray expresses clear concern for the future of America, based on past instances of British tyranny, and hopes that the government might continue without corruption, and without any “*illegal interference, all foreign, unconstitutional, and unbecoming influence.*”<sup>108</sup>

Murray’s essays repeatedly returned to her vision for the future of America. In doing so, Murray refers to flaws in the previous system. Through these references, Murray reveals an understanding of political tyranny that was similar to the perspectives of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren, and of male patriots. With her implied criticism of the past, as well as her arguments and hopes for the American future, Murray was sharing her own political perspectives and contributing to the shaping of America.

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Several patriot newspapers and publications also printed arguments that the British government was no longer effectively governing, and that the colonies were being oppressed.<sup>109</sup> Initially, even in the early 1770s, “it was widely assumed [by patriots] that the King acted largely under the influence of his advisers.”<sup>110</sup> When George III allowed the Coercive Acts of 1774, patriots realized the King himself was also corrupt, and

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<sup>108</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XXVI (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 259.

<sup>109</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 22.

<sup>110</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 237.

accused him of violating his oath to rule fairly which negated the King's authority over the colonies. By 1775, therefore, patriot "writers frequently asserted...that the king himself was the center of the design for despotism."<sup>111</sup>

In the American Revolutionary period, patriot publications were everywhere in the colonies. Utilising concepts popularized by the Enlightenment and classicism, patriot authors contributed to the Revolutionary cause by unifying colonists against British colonial rule. Amongst these patriot authors were Abigail Adams, Judith Sargent Murray, and Mercy Otis Warren. Their writings reveal that the female perspective on political tyranny was not different from male patriots. As British subjects, male and female colonists were affected by corruption and tyranny in the British government. Men and women both perceived oppression from Britain, and because of this they had a shared sense of patriotism that Adams, Warren, and Murray all participated in and contributed to by shaping patriot propaganda themselves. As patriotic authors, Adams, Warren, and Murray all contributed to the ascendance and spread of American patriot opinion despite having no formally recognized role in the political realm. Having the same understanding of tyranny as men is not an indication that these women were merely parroting the ideas they shared with men. Adams, Warren, and Murray expressed the same ideas as male authors, but also extended them, because their authorship further contributed to the mobilization and shaping of patriot opinion. Additionally, as chapters two and three demonstrate, all three women had a gendered perception of tyranny within the domestic realm. They accepted and advanced patriot views of tyranny in the public realm, and they

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<sup>111</sup> Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 237-238, quote on 238.

innovated by applying the concept of tyranny to the private world of marital and familial relationships.

## **Chapter Two Tyranny and Husbands**

“Tyranny” was almost exclusively used by American revolutionaries to describe political tyranny, but, as their writings reveal, Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray were all aware that the same power imbalance that could allow a king to become a tyrant was also present within the relationship between husbands and wives. As explored in the previous chapter, tyranny occurs when a ruler, such as a king, grows corrupt. In other words, tyranny is the result of an imbalance of power and the malevolent use of that power over one’s dominions. For patriots, this primarily described the King, but as Adams, Warren, and Murray were all aware, tyranny could also be applied to husbands. As head of the house, husbands had dominion over the house and its occupants; they were legally in control of their wife’s property and finances. This patriarchal structure was largely accepted, at the time, as the natural order of the world. When a husband was fair and affectionate, husbandly control and wifely dependence was met with approval. If a husband was cruel and corrupt, though, such an abuse of power left wives vulnerable.

This chapter seeks to examine the opinions of the three women authors on the ways that tyranny either existed or had the potential to exist within the realm of marriage. Through their letters, Abigail and John reveal a strong friendship and affection for each other. At the same time, Abigail’s letters also reveal the complicated relationship between wives and husbands: even though happily married, Abigail’s letters show she was acutely aware of the lack of autonomy women had in marriage. What makes Abigail so memorable is the way her letters also reveal how she was able to create power for

herself within her marriage. A close reading of one of Mercy Otis Warren's later plays, *The Sack of Rome*, sheds light on her views on marriage and tyranny. Through fictional characters, Warren gives insight into the nuances of marriage, husbands, and the power that they held. Judith Sargent Murray wrote multiple essays in *The Gleaner* arguing for women's empowerment, and, in the process, shares her opinions on husbands and tyranny. Throughout *The Gleaner*, Murray wrote affectionate messages to her husband, and speaks fondly of marriage; yet, at the same time, she argued fervently for women to have more equality within marriage. Each woman recognized women were oppressed, much the same way patriots believed they were oppressed by Britain. These women were extending patriot arguments about tyranny in ways patriot men certainly had not intended. Although many husbands may have been kind and just, should a husband become cruel and corrupt, he would be a tyrant, similar to George III.

During the eighteenth century, most of British North America operated according to strict gender roles. In theory women's involvement within civic life and political issues was limited to motherhood, domesticity, religion, and charity work.<sup>1</sup> The Revolution did bring new opportunities to women, but at the same time it took others away.<sup>2</sup> Linda Kerber argues that the Revolutionary period introduced a republican ideology that reshaped the political order, re-imagining what it meant to be a citizen, and deciding how best to govern.<sup>3</sup> However, Kerber notes that these changes primarily concerned men, not

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<sup>1</sup> Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 170-179.

<sup>2</sup> Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 181.

<sup>3</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (New York: Norton, 1986), 7.



women.<sup>4</sup> Despite the liberty that elite and middle class, white American men had achieved in the Revolution, women did not experience the same changes. As Kerber later argues, the Revolution had many women passionately in its support, which would have been a highly political experience, but once the Revolution was over, women were still excluded from the political realm.<sup>5</sup> Kerber looks primarily at republican motherhood, but her observations reveal the gender-based constrictions women faced, and these limitations clearly placed women in a subservient position to men within marriage.

Rosemarie Zagari compares the Revolutionary period and the early nineteenth century, arguing that the immediate improvements disappeared, and only a few decades after the war saw a return to strict gender separation.<sup>6</sup> Revolutionary era America did not afford women many opportunities for independence. Marriage was nearly mandatory, and this meant women were paired with men who had an immense amount of control over their lives. In a relationship with such a significant power imbalance, the possibility of a tyrannical situation was great. As will be explained further in Chapter Three, a woman's education was much different from that of her male contemporaries. Elite, white women were intended to stay home and run the household, effectively excluding such women from having any public position of power. A husband's primary job was to support his family financially and ensure their future financial security.<sup>7</sup> Husbands controlled the financial, legal, and political realms. Wives' responsibilities, on the other

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<sup>4</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 121.

hand, largely comprised of the “cares of the home and family, including aspects of household management, production, and consumption associated with domestic economy.”<sup>8</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich argues that wives were complementary to their husbands, but were still considered secondary to them at the same time.<sup>9</sup> As Ulrich describes, wives filled the role of housewife, as they learnt various “female specialities,” and had only a limited area of authority.<sup>10</sup>

The ideal marriage in Revolutionary and early Republic America was one based, theoretically, on mutual respect and friendship. These notions were strengthened after the Revolution, when there was an extra emphasis on which values the new nation would adopt.<sup>11</sup> In a newly formed America, the family became a model of what society would be like, functioning as “society in miniature.”<sup>12</sup> Rhetoric of freedom and liberty popularized with the Revolution was also present in the ideals of republican marriage. Filled with optimism for the country’s future, the republican marriage was intended to be paradise; an Edenic, heavenly union.<sup>13</sup> Republican marriage was theoretically egalitarian, described as a “friendship between equals.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there were clear contradictions between Republican marriage in theory and in practice.

Husband and wife ideally formed a partnership with complementary and opposite responsibilities. It was a husband’s duty to provide for his family, and it was considered

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<sup>8</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 44 no. 4 (1987), 694.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 699.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 706.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 707.

important for individuals to uphold and fulfill one's responsibilities. Also, since the family unit functioned as a miniature model for society, American men who successfully managed these responsibilities demonstrated patriotism. Furthermore, it was thought to be crucial that a husband and wife uphold their responsibilities and behave properly because through them their children would learn a "model of proper social relationships," and "proper modes of conduct."<sup>15</sup> Ideally, it was a husband's responsibility to provide for and govern his family. This included responsibility for his wife, both in terms of any debts she may have had before the marriage, or those she accumulated as his wife, and in terms of how she behaved (which, as her superior, would reflect on him).

Countering inequality, and bringing a sense of balance to marriage, was the notion of companionate marriage. Generally, companionate marriage is understood by historians as emerging in the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The companionate ideal meant re-defining one's expectations of married life. A good marriage was not primarily one of romantic love, but of friendship; a union of the mind and reason, rather than of the heart. Romantic love, should it exist, was an added bonus.<sup>17</sup> Companionate marriage, therefore, was marriage that balanced gender equality and respect, while also abiding by society's prescriptive gender and marital roles.<sup>18</sup>

Potentially egalitarian, but also properly hierarchical, marriage was something of a mixed message. If the husband was the head of the house, Adam in a metaphorical

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 29.

<sup>16</sup> McMahan, *Mere Equals*, 116.

<sup>17</sup> McMahan, *Mere Equals*, 116-117.

<sup>18</sup> McMahan, *Mere Equals*, 121.

garden of Eden, then the wife was Eve, secondary to Adam and too foolish to be in a greater position of power.<sup>19</sup> This power dynamic and hierarchy were crucial to the American republic, for, as Jan Lewis explains, “the family was but the society in miniature...[and] the affectionate union between a man and his wife...[was] the model for all the relationships in the society.”<sup>20</sup> Even though wives were meant to be mutually obedient and respectful, it was the wife’s responsibility to ensure the success of the marriage at a rate disproportional to men, because as women, wives were more compliant.<sup>21</sup> As Lewis explains, “The symmetrical marriage thus gave way, under very little pressure, to a disproportionate one in which the wife, in order to maintain domestic tranquility, was expected to defer.”<sup>22</sup> Marriage itself was a contradictory and confusing concept; it required a hierarchy of power, but also friendship, yet how could a mutually respectful friendship exist in a hierarchy? That companionate marriages did exist implies that this power imbalance must have been either minimal or largely uncontested. At the same time, though, husbands did absolutely have power over their wives, and there was a significant imbalance. In Revolutionary America, men were now asserting their own independence, yet women still were supposed to be strongly deferential. Why?

With so many threats to women’s health and safety, it is a wonder that women ever got married. Despite the extreme vulnerability marriage put women in though, “marriage formed the basis of all other relationships, both in the family, because it led to parenthood, and in society, because it schooled men in the disinterested benevolence that

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 707-708.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 699.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 712.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 712-713.

was supposed by republican ideologies to constitute virtue.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, because marriage was so foundational, “the man or woman who proposed to live alone, then, was heretic and traitor or both.”<sup>24</sup> Murray’s essays further indicate the degree of social pressure, as she argues, “[marriage] is the goal to which they are constantly pointed, the great ultimatum of every arrangement: an old maid, they are from infancy taught, at least indirectly, to consider as a contemptible being.”<sup>25</sup> Marriage might be fraught with danger and uncertainty, but it was nearly unavoidable.

A man could easily prove a poor or unsuccessful husband. An inability to provide for his family was one way he could fail. Additionally, husbands failed to uphold their roles when they were unable to control their wives.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, there were many men who believed it was appropriate to use physical coercion to correct or prevent their wife’s “bad” behaviour. The American Revolution was started, in part, because of the Coercive Acts; this must have resonated with women, who were also dealing with coercion, yet women, who were actually oppressed, did not benefit much from the Revolution that promised greater equality and freedom. Furthermore, wives were legally inferior to their husbands, and were expected to submit to their husband’s leadership.<sup>27</sup> As Norton argues, “such deference did not imply that she could not have opinions of her own, but rather that if she and her spouse disagreed, he had to prevail in the end.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 709.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 709.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 167, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, “The Republican Wife,” 712-713.

<sup>27</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 73-74.

<sup>28</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 77.

Because a wife's subjection to her husband was understood in Revolutionary America as fundamental to the order of society, "men thought it their right to use force to ensure their wives' obedience."<sup>29</sup> Abuse could be physical, emotional, or verbal, but abuse was not considered sufficient grounds for divorce. Abuse and coercion were tools used to maintain hierarchical relations.

Alternatively, it was a wife's responsibility to obey and help her husband and run the family's household economy. This included housework, child-bearing and rearing, and educating children before they started formal schooling, but could also include tending the garden, gathering eggs and preparing food, and sewing garments for the family.<sup>30</sup> "Housewife" is a deceptive term for the amount of work it included. Women were also expected to fill several additional, roles, including, but not limited to deputy husband, neighbour, and Christian.<sup>31</sup> This female effort brought no increased authority, for despite the numerous responsibilities women held, their labour was not recognized as genuine work, since Revolutionary society viewed work as pertaining only to male professions and paid labour in the public sphere. Ulrich explains this hypocrisy, writing that women were not defined by the work that they did, but rather by their role in the social order. Regardless of the labour involved in being a housewife, women would not get recognition for it from the rest of society.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich "The Ways of Her Household," in Linda K. Kerber and Jane De Hart Mathews, ed., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 37.

Beyond legal and economic control, marriage also required women to sacrifice their comfortable and familiar home life from childhood, making themselves vulnerable and solely dependent on their husbands. As Lucia McMahon points out, marriage was a significant life step, because it meant many young women had to leave their parents' home and now rely solely on their new husbands for "emotional intellectual, and financial support."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, women frequently had to move to wherever was best for their husband to work, which often meant a dramatic and isolating move to a community without their friends or family.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, there was no guarantee that a marriage would be agreeable to either party because, although having the potential for amicability, marriage was still very much an economic relationship: a means to provide financial or social security more than a loving union.<sup>35</sup> Marriage required women to put their lives entirely in their husband's hands. The nature of marriage in the eighteenth century ensured a woman's dependence on their husband from the very beginning.

Revolutionary era marriages were highly patriarchal in nature. Beyond a gender-based separation of duties, marriage simultaneously allowed husbands a high degree of control over their wives and placed women in a position of extreme vulnerability. Legally, marriage meant women and their property were under the possession of their husbands. This doctrine, known as "coverture," created the notion of a "Femme Covert," literally meaning "covered woman," and meant that a married woman and her property were "covered," or legally subsumed, by her husband.<sup>36</sup> Even though laws of coverture

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<sup>33</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 123.

<sup>34</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 124.

<sup>35</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 167.

<sup>36</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 117.

were designed to increase men's power while ensuring women's subordination, this is not to say that all of early America was deliberately cruel towards women; coverture was actually interpreted by many as protective in nature.<sup>37</sup> Since husbands were better educated, and it was assumed that women did not have the necessary understanding of economics and law, coverture (in theory) allowed for a husband to look after and provide for his wife. Ingrained in this idea was that good husbands were expected to protect their wives as well as provide for them. In a companionate marriage, coverture would have been beneficial, or at least not a threat, to women. However, such laws could only have been beneficial for the women who had the good fortune of marrying a kind, generous, and financially wise husband, who might then treat his wife with respect and equality.

When a marriage was unhappy, with a husband who did not treat his wife well, coverture allowed for marriages to be heavily balanced in favour of men. This sexism was both deeply entrenched and systemic after centuries of women being defined as politically and economically "incapable" and invisible.<sup>38</sup> As Kerber argues, limiting a woman's control of her own property, as coverture did, also worked to limit her political power, and provided justification for further limitations on women throughout the legal system.<sup>39</sup> Coverture nullified a woman's political and economic identity. Marylynn Salmon outlines several examples of the ways in which husbands could exert control over their wives, and that the law left women vulnerable. As she writes,

Under the common law, a married woman...could not own property, either real or personal. All personal property a woman brought to a marriage became her husband's. He could spend her money, sell her stocks or slaves, and appropriate

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<sup>37</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 139.

<sup>38</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 153.

<sup>39</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 153.



her clothing and jewelry. He gained managerial rights to her lands, houses, and tenements and decided if land was to be farmed by the family or leased. He also controlled the rents and profits from all real estate.<sup>40</sup>

Salmon also details examples of the ways in which women lacked legal power. Wives typically were not able to sell or manage property, either their own, prior to marriage, or property acquired during their marriage. Since they had no legal property, women were not able to write a will without their husband's consent, but even then a woman's control was limited typically to only her personal property.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, prior to the Revolution, upon their husband's deaths, wives were legally entitled to a dower, which was a third of their husband's estate,<sup>42</sup> and which served as another way that women were protected as widows. Following the Revolution, however, widows' dower rights were eroded, which Kerber argues was "the most important legal development directly affecting the women of the early Republic."<sup>43</sup>

There were a few attempts to provide women at least some protection from the duress that marriage and laws of coverture could cause. For one, women were able to acquire marriage settlements. Marriage settlements, contracts signed prior to marriage, outlined rights that a woman would be able to continue to have after marriage. This would enable wives to retain a small degree of power and comfort, and this right to property allowed married women a degree of protection against laws meant to negate their autonomy.<sup>44</sup> Marriage settlements were rare, however, and utilised only by elite

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<sup>40</sup> Marylynn Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina," in Linda K. Kerber and Jane De Hart Mathews, ed., *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina," 41.

<sup>42</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 146.

<sup>43</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 147.

<sup>44</sup> Salmon, "Women and Property in South Carolina," 41.

women with property. While they provided some degree of protection to the elite, therefore, marriage settlements brought no benefits to the majority of American women.<sup>45</sup> Women could also apply for “feme sole” legal status, which functioned similarly to a pre-nuptial agreement, offering higher protection over their property and any money they may have had. Status as a feme sole was extremely rare, though, and was only utilized by extremely wealthy women, and usually because their fathers insisted on it.

The Revolution only had a small effect on the laws of coverture, but it did make a notable change to divorce laws.<sup>46</sup> After the Revolutionary War, a handful of American states passed new laws which made divorce more readily accessible.<sup>47</sup> However, as Zagarri points out, the increased accessibility to divorce did not mean that the Revolution had brought women more rights and greater autonomy.<sup>48</sup> Had the Revolution brought women a politically or legally equal identity, laws of coverture would have ended with American independence. As it were, however, the Revolution did not bring women any significant change to their legal status. Indeed, the decision was to utilise coverture and dependence over autonomy and independence.<sup>49</sup> Prior to the Revolution, divorce in the colonies was not common. New England Puritan tradition saw marriage as a civil contract that could be broken just like any other contract could be. This meant that New England had statutes for divorce in their legal code, but they were the only region to do

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<sup>45</sup> Salmon, “Women and Property in South Carolina,” 41.

<sup>46</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*.

<sup>49</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 119.

so.<sup>50</sup> A woman was not even able to divorce a cruel or abusive husband without petitioning government. Instances of abuse, either mental or physical, were not considered adequate grounds for divorce.<sup>51</sup> The most common reason for divorce in pre-Revolutionary New England, according to divorce petitions, was the husband's desertion.<sup>52</sup> After the war, however, there was an increase in women prepared to divorce their husbands, and a hike in adultery as the reason listed.<sup>53</sup> This rise in divorce rates was particularly noticeable in New England, because Massachusetts alone had more access to and therefore more frequent divorces than other American colonies.<sup>54</sup> As Nancy Cott explains, between 1692 and 1786, there were 229 petitions for either separation or divorce filed.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, as Cott points out, these divorces were primarily filed in the second half of the eighteenth century; twenty-seven of the 229 divorce cases were from the years before 1735, while 158 cases occurred just from 1755 to 1786.<sup>56</sup> After the Revolution, however, it was far less likely for women to receive their full dower rights. The increase in accessibility to divorce was not large, however, for even with added ease, divorce was almost as difficult to obtain after the Revolution as it had been before the Revolution.<sup>57</sup>

Abigail Adams' marriage and her correspondence with John reflect real-world examples of a husband's potential for tyranny, and the complicated relationship wives

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<sup>50</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 160.

<sup>51</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 170.

<sup>52</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 162.

<sup>53</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 164.

<sup>54</sup> Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 109.

<sup>55</sup> Cott, *A Heritage of Her Own*, 108.

<sup>56</sup> Cott, *A Heritage of Her Own*, 108.

<sup>57</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 184.

had as both oppressed by and affectionate towards their spouses. The letters sent between Abigail and her husband reveal a close relationship, one in which Abigail regularly referred to her husband as her “dear friend,” who remained steadily affectionate, trusting, and sympathetic. In a letter to John in their third year of marriage, Abigail wrote, “Tomorrow I return home, where I hope soon to receive the Dearest of friends and the tenderest of Husbands, with that unabated affection which has for years past, and will whilst the vital spark lasts, burn in the bosom of your affectionate.”<sup>58</sup> A decade later, the same sentiment is still present. In a letter to John, dated 5 July, 1776, Abigail concluded with a small prayer for John’s health and safety, and mentioned she would think of him as she fell asleep,<sup>59</sup> which serves as further evidence of an affectionate and comfortable marriage. Due to his various diplomatic positions, John was frequently away from his family. Even while in America, John spent much of his time away from home, either with his political work, and while working as a lawyer. Throughout their fifty-four year marriage, which ended with Abigail’s death in 1818, the couple spent numerous years separated from each other.<sup>60</sup> Despite the distance between them, and the many years of their marriage, Abigail’s letters continually demonstrate strong affection for John; she repeatedly mentions wishing John were back home. In a letter to John in 1776, Abigail wrote of how much she missed John while he was away from home during the Revolution, saying, “all domestick [sic] pleasures and enjoyments are absorbed in the

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<sup>58</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 14, 1767, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, July 5, 1775, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, (New York: Free Press, 2009).

great and important duty you owe your Country, ‘for our Country is as it were a secondary God, and the first and greatest parent...’ Thus I don’t talk about how much I miss you.”<sup>61</sup> On their anniversary, after thirteen years of marriage, Abigail sent a letter to John, writing, “This day of dearest Friends compleats [sic] thirteen years since we were solemnly united in wedlock; three years of the time we have been cruelly separated.”<sup>62</sup> In a different letter from 1774, Abigail writes,

I dare not express to you at 300 hundred miles distance how ardently I long for your return. I have some very miserly Wishes; and cannot consent to your spending one hour in Town till at least I have had you 12. The idea plays about my heart, unnerves my hand whilst I write, awakens all the tender sentiments that years have increased and matured, and which when with me were every day dispensing to you.<sup>63</sup>

John’s letters back to Abigail were equally affectionate. In a letter to Abigail in 1764, John wrote, “But you who has always softened and warmed my heart, shall restore my benevolence as well as my Health and Tranquility of mind. You shall polish and refine manners...”<sup>64</sup> In a letter to Abigail nearly thirty years later, John reveals a playful nature between the couple, sharing jokes and riddles through their letters, when he writes, “there, I have given you Riddles enough to vex you.”<sup>65</sup> John indicates that he and Abigail had a teasing and affectionate relationship. John’s attempt to “vex” Abigail suggests a

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<sup>61</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7-9, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, October 25, 1777, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, October 16, 1774, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>64</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, 1764, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>65</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, February 17, 1794, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018

comfortable and cheerful level of familiarity. If their letters alone can be relied upon as proof, Abigail and John had a companionate marriage.

Even though Abigail and John had a happy relationship, Abigail was still aware of the ways in which marriage, as a concept, was tyrannical. In her most famous letter, during the Revolution, Abigail wrote to John, saying, “I desire you would remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors.”<sup>66</sup> She continues her request of John, writing, “do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands.”<sup>67</sup> Abigail’s meaning could not be clearer. That Abigail referred to a husband’s “unlimited power” draws a strong similarity to the concerns Patriots had about George III and the British, where the central issue was an imbalance of power. Abigail recognized the same power imbalance that Patriots (including her) saw as a threat to liberty, and she saw evidence of tyranny within the relationship between husbands and wives. A few months later, Abigail repeated the sentiment, taking a more aggressive stance and writing,

I can not say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives. But you must remember that arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very viable to be broken – and notwithstanding all your wise Laws and Maxims we have it in our power not only to free ourselves but to subdue our Masters, and without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7-9, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

Again, Abigail refers to “arbitrary power,” another connection between husbands and tyrants. Abigail also uses language from the American Revolution in her arguments for greater gender equality. Abigail’s word choices such as “violence,” “masters,” and “arbitrary power,” draw parallels between the oppression wives faced and the oppression of Britain that patriots faced. This accomplishes two things: first, Abigail reveals an awareness of the similarities between the relationship between a husband and wife and between Britain and America; second, Abigail deliberately utilizes revolutionary language that she knows will resonate with John and thus makes him more likely to reply favourably. Abigail’s most famous and well-remembered quotes are from this same series of letters that she wrote to John in 1776, as he and other members of the Continental Congress worked to create order for their new country. In response to John’s less-than-concerned reply, Abigail retorts slightly more curtly, clearly displeased with her husband’s dismissal of her grievances: yet another parallel to the unanswered grievances of patriots that ultimately led to the Revolution. As Abigail wrote, “Remember. All men would be tyrants if they could.”<sup>69</sup> She continues in the letter writing,

If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, no representation....That your Sex are naturally tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of friend.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

It is clear that Abigail was acutely aware of the ways in which husbands, and marriage in general, were or could be tyrannical. That she makes her point by writing, “we are determined to foment a Rebellion...we have no voice, no representation,”<sup>71</sup> is telling. Abigail uses the same Revolutionary language that John and his fellow Revolutionary leaders were using in their grievances with the British. This reveals both that Abigail saw husbands as having the potential for tyranny, and the parallels between women’s oppression from men and the colonists’ oppression from Britain. This, combined with the fact that Abigail wrote letters, as opposed to any other medium, is further revealing. Naturally, Abigail would be writing to her husband, but the intimacy that letters allowed between the two of them also allowed Abigail an added degree of familiarity and thereby emotional manipulation over John. In utilizing revolutionary language, Abigail is able to express her ideas and opinions in a way that will resonate with John and be most likely to garner his support. Abigail continues in the letter appealing to John’s political power and influence to improve women’s rights, as she writes, “regard us then as Beings.”<sup>72</sup>

Abigail provided critical social commentary on marriage and its potential likelihood to generate tyrannical husbands and oppressed wives. Abigail tempered her proto-feminism at times, complimenting John, and praising the superiority of men. As she writes, “Some were made for Rule others for Submission, and even amongst my own Sex this doctrine holds good.” In an interesting letter dated February 26, 1794, Abigail wrote to John that,

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<sup>71</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31-April 5, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.



Women rained [sic] for many successive ages, among the Lacedemonians, the woman had a great share in political Government; and it was agreeable to the Laws given them by Lieurgns. In Borneo, the women reign alone, and their Husbands enjoy no other privileged [sic] than that of being their most dignified subjects; but as Reigning and Ruling is so much out of fashion, at the present day. My ambition will extend no further than Reigning in the Heart of my Husband. That is my throne and there I aspire to be absolute.<sup>73</sup>

Here, Abigail assures John that she is content being and will remain a proper, obedient wife. Yet in the same instance, she also reminds John of the power that women were capable of, should they exert themselves and should the community accept their talents.

Their letters also reveal that Abigail was often in charge of handling the family's finances and property. With John away so frequently, Abigail served as deputy husband. During the economic uncertainty of the Revolution, Abigail improved her frugality and bargaining abilities to successfully navigate the market, and she handled the household and the family's finances. Abigail also took over the responsibility of managing the family farm.<sup>74</sup> Thanks to her aptitude in these fields, Abigail was able to retain the family's wealth throughout the Revolution, as well as put aside savings of her own. As Woody Holton points out, the fact that Abigail set aside her own money, and, what is more, referred to it as her own money, is quite peculiar. As discussed above, due to laws of coverture, any property of Abigail legally belonged to John. In several letters, John writes to Abigail, advising her how to manage the land and handle the family estate. As he writes in a letter dated January 28, 1799, "the salt Marsh you may buy but it is too dear. The Cedar [sic] swamp too is vastly too dear...I will be no part of Taxes of any

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<sup>73</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, February 26, 1794, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive," accessed September 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 40-41.

kind, nor...of Blacksmith's Bills. I will have a rent clear of all deductions. It may be let for 3 years. But I must have the Salt Marsh at the farms and Quincys [sic] Meadow and Belchers Place. The rent must be less."<sup>75</sup> This was a typical instruction found in men's letters to their wives. Uneasy with the thought of putting their affairs in their wives' hands, men compensated by giving directions to their wives, whom they viewed as incapable of or inexperienced with managing affairs on their own. In an earlier letter, written on July 26, 1778, John replies to Abigail, writing,

You inquire how you shall pay taxes? I will tell you – ask the favour of your Uncle Smith or some other friend to let you have Silver, and draw your Bills upon me. The money shall be paid, in the instant of the sight of your Bill, but let it be drawn in your own handwriting... With Silver, you may get your Father, or your Uncle, or Brother Cranch to pay taxes.<sup>76</sup>

It is reasonable that Abigail should ask John how he would prefer his money handled, especially considering she was theoretically not supposed to understand finances, nor would she have had much practical experience of doing so. However, this question of how to pay taxes is more for appearances and proper etiquette than a genuine inquiry. John advised Abigail to ask her father, uncle, or brother. It is unlikely Abigail had not already thought of this herself. For all the advice and instruction John gave Abigail, she demonstrates a fairly adept understanding of the market economy. Adams closed her letter suggesting an idea and then asking for John's opinion, writing out a carefully thought out plan, but used timid and unconfident language, before asking for John's approval, writing, "I could wish to receive any particular directions which you may think

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<sup>75</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, January 28, 1799, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

<sup>76</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 26, 1778, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

proper to give before I embark.”<sup>77</sup> Clearly, Abigail had a more than adequate grasp of the market economy, taxes and property law. “I was thinking” is an indication of how she manipulated John through her letters. Abigail knew more information, and she knew that he, being away, had no other option than to trust her, yet she still let him feel as though he made the decisions and was in control.

A reading of Abigail’s letters with John, combined with an understanding of their marriage via biography reveals the power imbalances between the Adamses and how they operated as husband and wife. Despite having a companionate marriage, seemingly happily married for over fifty years, this did not mean they had a fully egalitarian marriage. As Abigail's letters reveal, she was well aware of the power imbalance between her and John, and both respected their imbalance and tried to subvert it. Abigail further recognized that her marriage was fortunate, and that the power husbands held over their wives held the potential for tyranny. Abigail applied Revolutionary perspectives on tyranny to the domestic realm and husbandly authority. At the same time, Abigail’s letters reveal insights into companionate marriage in practice, and demonstrate the nuances and complications that exist within even companionate marriages.

Looking at Mercy Otis Warren’s portrayals of fictional marriage is revealing of Warren’s views on marriage. In one of her latter two plays, *The Sack of Rome*, Warren, both explicitly and implicitly, expresses her opinions on the concept and contemporary conventions of marriage. Published in 1790 (although not performed during her lifetime), *The Sack of Rome* tells the story of Rome’s collapse, and how this military defeat

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<sup>77</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, January 3, 1784, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

affected two women in particular: Edoxia, the Empress of Rome, and her daughter, Eudocia. This play, like Warren's first three, looks at themes of war and political turmoil. Despite commonalities in theme with Warren's widely published plays, and being one of Warren's few completed plays, *The Sack of Rome* is widely considered to have lacked the evident passion that *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* did. The story of an epic military defeat, the play was meant to depict "the tumult and misery into which mankind are often plunged by an unwarrantable indulgence of the discordant passions of the human mind."<sup>78</sup> These themes have obvious allusions to the American Revolution, and the tumultuousness of the Revolutionary years, and the decline in manners and morals Warren felt was occurring.<sup>79</sup> *The Sack of Rome* looked at women's experiences during war, a perspective left out of Warren's previous plays.

Such a perspective raises the question of Warren's audience. Warren published *The Sack of Rome* in 1790 as part of her first book, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*.<sup>80</sup> The book was the product of Warren coming, "into her own as a writer and literary figure of note." The book contained, along with *The Sack of Rome*, a selection of poems on various topics, and Warren's other play, *The Ladies of Castile*. A personal project, rather than political propaganda, "the volume reflected Mercy's growing assertiveness as a woman writer."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Warren's later work "revealed Mercy's changing understanding of women's role. Unlike her earlier efforts, in which

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<sup>78</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, preface.

<sup>76</sup> Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*, (Wheeling: H. Davidson, 1995), 102.

<sup>80</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 135.

female characters played only minor roles, her later plays included substantial parts for women.”<sup>82</sup> That being said, Warren’s plays were both influenced by Warren’s experience with revolution and the social turmoil that accompanied it. Rosemarie Zagarri, Warren’s biographer, writes that Warren was distressed with worries of “the nation’s deterioration from a ‘golden-age’ to a state of ‘dark oblivion.’”<sup>83</sup> It is probable that Warren was writing to an audience of patriots, who would be interested in the revolutionary settings in her work, but additionally, as personal projects, Warren was also probably writing to her social circle: friends, comprising of upper-class women and political leaders, who would read her work.

*The Sack of Rome* tells the story of the city of Rome as it was attacked and invaded by barbarian Vandals and led to ruin by the evil Emperor Valentinian. The play explores the fall of Rome and its impact on its characters: Gaudentius, the son of a commander of the Roman army murdered by Valentinian, who seeks to avenge his father’s murder by killing Valentinian. At the same time, Gaudentius is in love with Eudocia, Valentinian’s daughter, and does not want to jeopardize his chances at marrying her by killing her father; Edoxia, the wife of Valentinian, mother of Eudocia, and Empress of Rome, who attempts to save Rome herself, by striking a deal with the Vandals and opening the city gates to them. Unfortunately, Edoxia’s attempt failed, for the Vandals betrayed her and conquered the city; and Eudocia, following her mother’s failed plan, is captured by Vandals, to be taken to Carthage and married to a barbarian prince. Edoxia too is enslaved, and attempts to escape via suicide, but her attempt is

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<sup>82</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 135.

<sup>83</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 99.

prevented. Zaggarri highlights Warren's creation of Edoxia, "a woman who actively asserted herself into the political realm," who ultimately failed, but still "openly [acting] on her political beliefs," as a prominent message of the play.<sup>84</sup>

In a close reading of her play, though, one can also find insight into Warren's views on the domestic realm, or, more specifically, marriage. Following the death of the Roman Emperor, Valentinian, Edoxia and Eudocia are enslaved by Vandals, to be taken to Carthage, where "Eudocia was to marry a barbarian prince." Edoxia protests, crying, "no more / death to my eyes – the tyrant comes...the princess insulted – and enslaved – by vulgar hands to the vandal tent."<sup>85</sup> Genseric, the Vandal king, ignores Edoxia's protestations and directs his slaves to continue taking her to Carthage.<sup>86</sup> At one point, Edoxia attempts to gain her freedom by killing herself, but she is stopped by Genseric. As Edoxia declares, "but thanks to heaven, the empress of the West/ has yet the means and will an Empress die."<sup>87</sup> Edoxia does not even have this freedom, it turns out, for Genseric is able to stop her with ease.<sup>88</sup> This is a powerful statement, with which Warren highlights the extreme limitation of women's rights and personal freedom. Despite her explicit wishes and opinions, Edoxia is ignored by all the men around her. She is so opposed to a life with Genseric that she would rather kill herself. That Edoxia felt this was her only option speaks to the degree of control men had over women, and the state of power imbalances within a marriage. Although this is an extreme example, the same

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<sup>84</sup> Zaggarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 136.

<sup>85</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 75.

<sup>86</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 76.

<sup>87</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 76.

<sup>88</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 76. "Slaves, seize her hand – she must not die."

power dynamic existed in eighteenth century America. In this regard, Edoxia and Eudocia's fates are not far off from the real-world experiences of many eighteenth century colonial women. Edoxia's failed attempt at death acts as an equally powerful message; she was not in control even of her own literal life. This strongly suggests that Warren is familiar with the inequalities wives faced in society and was cognizant of the threat of tyranny husbands posed.

Through her descriptions of characters, Warren reveals her opinions on the qualities husbands and wives should have. This is further highlighted through Warren's use of good and evil in her characters as evident in her earlier three plays. The play's protagonist, Gaudentius, betrothed to Eudocia, is the son of Aetius, the Commander of the Roman army. Throughout the play, Gaudentius is a champion for virtue and justice. That Warren makes Gaudentius a sympathetic, heroic character directs the reader to side and agree with Gaudentius. Opposite of Gaudentius is Hunneric, the Vandal son of Genseric, and Eudocia's new betrothed following Rome's collapse. Like her mother, Edoxia, Eudocia vehemently protests this union, wishing to die or be killed rather than marry Hunneric.<sup>89</sup> With the same ease that Genseric denied Edoxia death, Hunneric dismisses Eudocia's attempt, and replies to Eudocia with a simple, "No, my Eudocia, live – thou art my queen."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 83. "Oh! Some kind seraph snatch my soul away,/ and shroud my griefs beneath the peaceful tomb;/ or must a dagger ope [sic] a passage hence,/ to set me free from Hunneric's embrace?" and; Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 90. "Strike here most noble Hunneric – end my pain – /now if thy soul can do one generous deed/ ... But let me die with him, life, my Lord,/ my husband, my Gaudentius."

<sup>90</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 90.

Similarly, Warren deliberately vilifies the male characters who exhibit the most arbitrary control. The villains of Warren's plays all used their power for cruel purposes, without a hint of remorse. Genseric, the Vandal king of Carthage, invaded Rome, killed Valentinian, the Emperor of Rome, and forced Edoxia to Carthage. Clearly, Warren portrays him as a villain, explicitly calling him a tyrant and a traitor (which rings of Revolutionary influence), stealing her wealth and enslaving her (a similar sentiment Abigail expressed about the British in chapter one).<sup>91</sup> Once again, Genseric pays no attention to Edoxia.<sup>92</sup> Threatening the state of the Roman empire, as well as the lives of Edoxia and Eudocia, Genseric is an obvious tyrant. Equally treacherous is Hunneric, who willfully ignores Eudocia's wishes, and kills Gaudentius, Eudocia's betrothed. At one point during the fifth act, Hunneric states, "Seize this young purious prince, and on the rack.../ Extend each limb – with heated pincers tare [sic], / 'Till I have time to find new tortures out."<sup>93</sup> Warren makes Hunneric out clearly to be a villain. Furthermore, the Vandals were invaders - not real leaders, but usurpers, or illegitimate tyrants. This works to exaggerate their treachery further. An illegitimate tyrannical invading king would probably have resonated with patriot readers who connected Genseric's character to George III. By casting these men as the villains, Warren takes a clear stance in opposition to their behaviour, which suggests that she is opposed to their behaviour as tyrants and husbands.

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<sup>91</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 74.

<sup>92</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 75.

<sup>93</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 3, 75.



On the other hand, the qualities and characteristics that Warren approves of, such as love, loyalty, and courage, are all displayed in the heroic characters in her plays. At the same time, though, Warren is also making the statement that even men who do possess positive and desirable qualities have the potential for tyranny. Eudocia and Gaudentius are written as more or less happily betrothed (barring his disdain for her father, Valentinian). At the same time, however, Gaudentius still displays the characteristics of a villainous tyrant; he ignores Eudocia's feelings and opinions. When Eudocia expresses her opinions against Traulista, Gaudentius ignores her. Near the end of the play, Eudocia tells Gaudentius that she does not like his friend, Traulista, because she finds him cruel and deeply corrupt.<sup>94</sup> Traulista is a barbarian prince, and Eudocia has good reason to be wary of him. At various points in the play, Traulista reveals himself to be a deceitful villain, as he admits that he "equally [despises]," all women and has no desire to "possess" one, as his male counterparts do, but only wants to be a Roman Emperor.<sup>95</sup> Gaudentius ignores Eudocia's concerns, however, telling her to trust Traulista anyway.<sup>96</sup> Gaudentius is shortly proven wrong when Traulista betrays him, the two men fight, and Traulista is mortally wounded.<sup>97</sup> Gaudentius then exclaims, "Oh! Heavens! Traulista – art thou the villain - / Traitor – dastard -slave – lurking in secret, / to betray thy friends?"<sup>98</sup> Gaudentius's misplaced trust and refusal to listen to Eudocia reveals his sense of his superior ability and his doubt in Eudocia's judgement. In telling Eudocia to "dissipate

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<sup>94</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 87.

<sup>95</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 80-81.

<sup>96</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 97.

<sup>98</sup> Warren, *The Sack of Rome*, Act 5, Scene 5, 88.

distrust” he is at the same time not listening to her, ignoring her concerns, and denying her the right to her opinions and experiences, which exactly describes the behaviour of a tyrant. This is revealing within a relationship; mutual respect is an essential component to a marriage based on equality. In a marriage without trust, therefore, the power imbalance between husband and wife is much larger and lends itself to tyranny much easier.

Gaudentius is not portrayed as a tyrant, though. Rather, Warren suggests that he has a quality of tyrannical behaviour, or that he had latent male qualities of tyranny. Due to the hierarchy of the world, of men’s supposed natural superiority over women, men were prone to think of themselves as better or more intelligent than women, an attitude that lends itself to tyranny easily.

Once again, as in *The Sack of Rome*, Warren’s writing seems to suggest a partial approval of conventional marital behaviour. At the same time, however, Warren also indicates frustration at the lack of opportunities afforded to wives, and the vastly greater degree of power husbands held over their wives. *The Sack of Rome* looked at husbands as tyrannical invaders, and Warren indicates an annoyance with the socially accepted degree of inequality between husbands and wives. Warren was writing about behaviour and sentiments that she was familiar with herself.

*The Sack of Rome* is largely considered to be a mediocre play. Literary talent aside, it is, at the very least, a complete play. This, of course, is different from her first three plays discussed previously in chapter one. *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* were not finished plays, but are largely considered to be superior to Warren’s later

work as a result of the clear, heartfelt patriotism Warren displayed in them.<sup>99</sup> This may be the case; perhaps Warren did have much more fervor in her earlier plays. Regardless, her latter plays do display a strong passion, hidden within the dialogue and actions of her characters. Both of Warren's latter plays focus on political upheaval and revolution, and the theme of patriotism in general, while the dialogue consistently focuses on the gender restrictions women faced. The various ways marriage was oppressive are apparent in the differences between Warren's Gaudentius and Hunneric, and their individual behaviours, but these are fictional characters. Fictional characters allowed Warren to disguise her own thoughts in the words of her characters, for her readers would not be able to know which characters, if any, expressed her own views or not. Warren thinly veils her message by creating villainous, overtly tyrannical men, but her opinions about marriage are still apparent.

Warren explores the range of husbandly behaviour and authority, *The Sack of Rome* contains tyrants who would make tyrant husbands, as well as kindly men, who are not tyrants, yet still could display tyrannical behaviour. Like Abigail, Warren was seemingly happily married with a husband who supported her career as an author, yet, like Adams, Warren recognized the dangers present in the imbalance between a wife and a husband, even in a happy and loving relationship. Warren applied an understanding of tyranny and tyrants gleaned from the Revolution to the power relations within marriage, and, in doing so, draws awareness to the complications that existed even within

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<sup>99</sup> Zagari, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 138; and Benjamin Franklin, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions Compiled with an Introduction by Benjamin Franklin V*, (America: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980), vii-viii.

companionate marriages. The husbands in such a marriage still had a greater degree of power than their wives held, and, while they did not use their power tyrannically, Warren's various portrayals of marriage and husbandly power reveal the complications to an egalitarian marriage even under the most happily married.

Judith Sargent Murray also expressed her opinions on marriage and tyranny in her writing. By all indication, Murray had a loving relationship with her husband, similar to Abigail Adams. Unlike Adams, Murray had poor luck in her marriages. In 1769 Murray, then Sargent, married ship captain John Stevens. Unfortunately for Murray, John was not good at managing money. Stevens accumulated a massive amount of debt, and in 1784 Stevens sailed to the West Indies supposedly with the aim of reducing his debt once there, but instead effectively abandoning his debt and his wife. Murray now found herself at a point of bankruptcy and abandoned, a stark difference from her privileged upbringing. According to her biographer Sheila Skemp, Murray found her financial state humiliating.<sup>100</sup> Skemp writes that Murray stopped leaving her home for two years, even to attend church services.<sup>101</sup> In 1786, only two years after he left, John Stevens died.<sup>102</sup> Two years later Judith married again, this time to a pastor named John Murray, with whom she found similar stresses.<sup>103</sup> Her second husband, John Murray, was a Universalist preacher, and upon meeting him prior even to her first marriage, he persuaded the Sargent family to convert to Universalism themselves.<sup>104</sup> This was a

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<sup>100</sup> Sheila L. Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 155.

<sup>101</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 145.

<sup>102</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 153.

<sup>103</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 165-177.

<sup>104</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 296-297.

significant life change. New England had a history of strong Puritan faith. As Congregationalists believed, the afterlife in heaven could only be accessed by a predestined few. Universalism, however, believed the opposite: that people could universally be saved. To many Puritans, as Skemp suggests, Universalism was a horrifying, blasphemous sect of Protestantism.<sup>105</sup> In both of her marriages, regardless of how happy or affectionate, Murray's life was in the hands of her husband and shaped profoundly by his views, intelligence, and actions.

No doubt influenced to some degree by her difficult life experiences, Murray wrote numerous essays on female empowerment. Murray repeatedly wrote in favour of significant improvements to girls' education. As a child, Murray, although much better educated than most girls at the time, did not receive as good an education as her brother did, a fact that bothered her.<sup>106</sup> One of the reasons Murray wanted to improve women's education was because of her frustration with the lack of economic independence wives had. As Murray writes, "I would give my daughters every accomplishment which I thought proper; and, to crown all, I would early accustom them to habits of industry and order. They should be taught with precision the art of economical; they should be able to procure for themselves the necessaries of life; independence should be placed within their grasp."<sup>107</sup>

Murray's published essays were arguments in favour of women's increased equality and education, on the grounds that these were important contributing

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<sup>105</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 160-163.

<sup>106</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 167.

components in strengthening patriotism. If a woman was better educated, she would be better equipped at raising her sons as republican patriots. Murray, on the other hand, wrote in favour of improved women's education, for that would strengthen patriotism and improve their sons' civic education, but also because an improved education would help to alleviate the power imbalance within marriage. In one of Murray's essays, she admits that she has "repeatedly" seen the faithful and persevering affection of wives watching and at times worrying about the choices and mistakes of their husbands, who Murray refers to as "the diseased man."<sup>108</sup> Here again, Murray was no doubt influenced by her own life experiences, after her first husband abandoned her, after mismanaging finances until she was bankrupt. After the ways her husbands both completely altered her life, it is no wonder that Murray would be cautious of and opposed to the inequality between husbands and wives. Murray makes several similar points, over multiple essays, writing that, "our girls...have no other means of advancing themselves but in the matrimonial line."<sup>109</sup> This is an opinion that Murray returns to on more than one occasion. As Murray wrote in a separate essay, "marriage should not be represented as...a certain, or even necessary event; [girls] should learn to respect a single life, and even to regard it as the most eligible, except a warm, mutual and judicious attachment had gained their ascendancy in the bosom."<sup>110</sup> Murray continues, writing that she

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<sup>108</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. II, No. XC (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 208.

<sup>109</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 167.

<sup>110</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 168.

believed young women should be better educated to make them less vulnerable upon either their husbands or family connections for security.<sup>111</sup>

Murray's life serves as a case study, as it were, of marriage in Revolutionary America, in a similar way to that of Adams and Warren. Murray's own experiences, and the numerous essays she later wrote, reveal the possibilities for tyrannical control Murray recognized in husbands' authority. Murray's first husband had not been a tyrant, but his inability to provide for and protect Murray left her with firsthand experience of the problems that existed in marital power relations. Wives were dependent upon their husbands, and should he be cruel, this dependency wives faced left them vulnerable to abuse and misfortune. Even when a husband was not cruel, even with a happy and loving marriage, this same power imbalance remained. Murray objected not to marriage entirely, but to the degree of husbandly authority men held. Murray's writings, along with those of Adams and Warren, reveal a recognition of the imbalance between husband and wife and the threat of tyranny that accompanied their imbalance. Furthermore, the experiences Murray had with marriage, along with those of Adams and Warren, all reveal the nuances and imperfections that existed within companionate marriage. This serves as a reminder of the way lived experiences exist within historical concepts. Companionate marriages were an ideal. In actuality, marriage has complications that can easily be forgotten.

The Revolution started a discussion of the King's tyranny and of political tyranny that was extended and enhanced by women such as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray, from the realm of high politics to the domestic foundations of

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<sup>111</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 168.

gender relations in the home. Taking the language of the Revolution, and patriot understandings of political tyranny, these three women explored the similarities between the King's tyranny and the power held by husbands. Abigail Adams had a long, companionate marriage with John and expressed in her letters to him content with her position as his wife and subordinate, yet she also expressed her displeasure and concern about the power imbalance between husbands and wives. As John worked to create a system of government, Abigail asked her husband to consider this imbalance, with the implication being to improve women's equality within marriage. John seemingly dismissed her comments as a joke, but as their letters reveal, Abigail was genuinely concerned with the power men held and the implications of this power. Abigail also softened the edges of husbandly authority in her letters by using language of affection and persuasion. She seemed to defer to his judgement, even when she demonstrated an uncanny ability to offer detailed suggestions in a careful way that he would most likely support. In this manner, she recognized and accepted his authority and yet stretched her own authority as well. Mercy Otis Warren, in *The Sack of Rome*, expresses similar sentiments about husbands as Abigail. Through Eudocia's protestations against marrying a Vandal tyrant, and her and Eudocia's inability to control their own fate, Warren implies that tyrannical men also make tyrannical husbands. Through Gaudentius's character, Warren demonstrates the various types of husbands, and how they used their power. Even Gaudentius, portrayed as a sympathetic protagonist, exhibited traits of tyrannical behaviour. Warren's own husband seemingly supported her career as a published author, but the subjects of her play demonstrated how both good and evil male characters, as



leaders and as husbands could become tyrants. Because Warren was privileged to have career freedom, she had both the latitude and the opportunity to comment on the prevalence of tyranny among other husbands in society. Judith Sargent Murray argues most explicitly against the power imbalance within marriage. Her life story had demonstrated the problems women face when their husbands do not provide for their families adequately. Murray experienced husbandly desertion, rather than tyranny, but she had plenty to say about the power imbalances between husbands and wives. Her arguments for women's improved education, her most frequent topic, were in effect arguments for greater equality within marriage, and even for avoiding marriage altogether.

That Adams, Warren, and Murray all recognized the potential for tyranny and discussed it in their written works suggests multiple things. First, it further suggests that they were active, comprehending participants in the American Revolution. That they were able to apply Revolutionary arguments about tyranny to the domestic realm indicates they were not just repeating the perspectives of their families and husbands. Secondly, they were utilizing Revolutionary language and perspectives of tyranny to raise awareness of tyrannical power imbalances within the domestic realm. This was both highly innovative for the time, and an important first step in the development of women's rights.

This chapter explores the lived experiences of women who had companionate marriages. Biography reveals how actual lives are messier than historical categories, such as that of "companionate marriage." These three women's lives, as case studies, reveal

the characteristics of companionate marriages and the limits of companionship. Although they had amiable marriages, they had to negotiate power relations within the marriage, navigate between male authority and any latitude they carved out as companion wives. Their writing provides a critical commentary on marriage and the likelihood of husbandly tyranny in marriage generally. While a companionate marriage is an historical concept, in the lived experience it was more complicated. Wives could have a companion in their husband, and yet still, as these women did, both accept their husband's power and resist husbandly tyranny. Historians who have presented companionate marriage as an idealized type that protected and cherished elite women as wives may imply that such marriages mitigated against female activism. These three authors' views on tyranny of husbands shows that elite women could approve of and reinforce a normative imbalance of power within marriage that gave husbands numerous advantages, and protected elite wives' interests and status, but this did not make them oblivious to the negative aspects of husbandly tyranny—either in terms of the petty tyrannies their own husband might occasionally exhibit, or the more substantial and harmful tyrannies that other husbands in society exhibited. Their own privilege did not make them oblivious to inherent problems of tyranny within marriage.

As the written works of Adams, Warren, and Murray demonstrate, each woman saw marriage as having the potential to be loving and positive, but also as existing on the cusp of tyranny. Husbands held control of almost every aspect of their wives' lives. They could determine where their wife would live; under laws of coverture they subsumed their wife's economic, legal, and political identity; and they had the freedom to do what

they wished with their wife's property. If a husband was kind and respectful, this power imbalance could be managed, but should a husband not treat his wife as an equal, he had all the legal, political, and economic means to enable him to become a tyrant husband. That these women had loving relationships suggests that they were not writing about tyranny within their own marriages, but rather were cognizant that companionate marriages, such as their own, had normative power imbalances, yet could still produce tyranny in miniature. This tyranny, of a husband over his wife, may not have led to global rebellion as George III's did, yet the potential for tyranny from their husbands was just as important to wives, who risked tyrannical oppression in marriage and regularly negotiated power relations within their own marriage. For male patriots, the Revolution ended with the Revolutionary War, yet for female patriots, the discussion of tyranny was just beginning.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Tyranny and Fathers**

Men had authority over their wives as husbands, and over their children as fathers. Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray all had the opportunity to get two different perspectives on fathers and fatherhood, both as daughters, and then later as wives and mothers. This gave them dual exposure to the power imbalances between fathers and their households which allowed Adams, Warren, and Murray to gain an understanding of the various ways that fathers had authority over their children's lives and experiences, and the potential for tyranny this power imbalance held. Fathers played a critical role in home life and the upbringing of a child: they maintained control over the family finances and wealth, fathers participated in the selection of potential spouses for their sons and daughters, fathers were responsible for their children's education, including what they learned, where they learnt it, and who taught them, and it was fathers who had legal custody of their children. The women of this study, as evident in their published works, recognized fathers had the potential for tyranny. Through their experiences with their own fathers, their experiences with their husbands as a father to their children, through their shared parental powers as mothers, and through their observations about fathers in society, Adams, Warren, and Murray all recognized the potential for tyranny within fathers. What did these three women write about fathers and their potential for tyranny over their children (and other members of the household below the wife)? How did they view the responsibilities and power of fathers in comparison to mothers, based on their own life and their observations of the world?

What were their professed opinions about the influence of fathers in society generally?

These are questions that this chapter seeks to answer.

Looking first at an examination of the conventional roles and responsibilities of fathers, mothers, and children in Revolutionary-era America, the chapter then examines female responses to the power dynamics between fathers and mothers. Abigail's letters with John and their personal correspondence showing their experience parenting while separated reveals their parenting decisions and methods. These letters, along with Abigail's biography, allow insight into her experiences with, and perspectives of, fathers, acting as a case study into the family dynamics of a Revolutionary-era household. Through an examination of Mercy Otis Warren's play, *The Ladies of Castile*, in combination with her biography, and her role as a republican mother, as evident from her writing in *The History of The Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, Warren's views on fathers and tyranny can be ascertained. Warren's play, through fiction, examines the various types of fathers, and how they chose to utilise their power. Lastly, this chapter looks at Judith Sargent Murray's professed opinions on fatherhood. Murray connects fatherhood to education, and education to women's opportunities. Influenced by her own lived experiences, Murray's essays are arguments meant to persuade her general audience. Essays, a tool of persuasion, allowed Murray the best likelihood of inspiring the changes to women's education and opportunities she wished to see. Murray's essays, therefore, reveal her views on fathers were not merely a critique of any one individual father, but of the existing social practices of fatherhood, and she offers a vision for a world that did not yet quite exist.

Just as the husband had authority over his wife, so did fathers have authority over their households. As mentioned previously in chapter two, the family unit was believed by Colonial and Revolutionary Americans and the English Atlantic world to be a miniature version of society. The same monarchical hierarchy that Americans understood to be the natural order of the world was also the same hierarchical structure within the household,<sup>1</sup> or, as Wood refers to it, “the great chain of existence that ordered the entire universe.”<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert Filmer considered the family structure and the responsibility of fathers to that of a king and his subjects, and claimed a father’s and a king’s duties, “to be exactly the same.”<sup>3</sup> “King” of the house, fathers were in charge of their wife and children, any servants or apprentices who also lived with the family, and any enslaved African Americans they had.<sup>4</sup> Just like a king, if a father abused his power, or failed to protect and support his household, he could become a tyrant.<sup>5</sup> Under ideal conditions, the other members of the household regularly accepted their dependence upon a patriarch. A highly influential figure in early late eighteenth century America, John Adams was in favour of this structure, and argued that without “a marked subordination of mother and children to the father,” there could never be any “real” American government.<sup>6</sup> The subordination of a wife and children to the household head was the very foundation of life in Colonial America and the early Republic,<sup>7</sup> and because this system was so crucial

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 43-44.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 295.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 59.

to American life, “the laws were thus designed to bolster [father’s] authority and to ensure their primacy in the family.”<sup>8</sup>

As parents, mothers and fathers were supposed to, in theory, share parental power (although not evenly). Since Anglo-Americans believed fathers to be superior to the rest of the household, however, “parental power” tended to actually refer only to paternal power. Mothers still had parental authority, but it was limited: fathers were complementary and oppositional to mothers. Parents were responsible for protecting their children and preparing them for life as adults. This included many responsibilities, such as “seeing they learned necessary skills of farming, artisanry, or housewifery...teaching them to read and do basic arithmetic...overseeing their children’s choice of spouses, as law required...and supplying them with an appropriate share of the family resources, especially through gifts at the time of their marriage or through inheritance.”<sup>9</sup>

The ideal family was governed amicably and agreeably, but ultimately fathers had the final say on decisions about their children.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, it was the father’s responsibility to control and manage the household finances, help his wife rear his sons, and “[exercise] a nominal supervision over household affairs.”<sup>11</sup> Raising their children was the duty of both parents, but fathers paid particular attention to teaching their sons. It was a father’s duty to teach their sons useful skills, provide them with an appropriate education, and prepare their sons for their vocations. Elite boys were taught to read and write, maths and sciences, and languages, including Latin. This was because they would

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<sup>8</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 105.

<sup>9</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 95; *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 3.

need these skills in their professions as merchants, lawyers, politicians, ministers, professors, or even tradesmen. Educational achievements for poor boys was unlikely to include sciences and Latin, unless they were a scholarship student, but rather focused on those practical skills useful for tradesmen.

In addition to raising their sons, fathers were responsible for ensuring their children married appropriately and well. It was also a father's responsibility to "investigate" potential suitors to ensure his daughters would be taken care of financially.<sup>12</sup> Ensuring his children married satisfactorily as well as overseeing their choice of spouse was one of a father's main responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> A failure to do so would reflect as a failure of the father. Similarly, if his children did not marry by a time deemed appropriate by the community, it further reflected poorly on a father. At the same time, if parents tried to force a choice of spouse upon their children, this too was considered a failing of the father. Despite these difficulties, though, "fathers could not escape the responsibility, for marriages without paternal consent led to family ruin and legal chaos."<sup>14</sup>

Many fathers were decent and benevolent household rulers, but in the instance when a father was cruel, the power he held could result in tyranny. Children were expected to obey their parents. Furthermore, children were dependent upon their fathers. If they did not obey their fathers, children faced the possibility of being financially disowned. Without their father's protection, children were unable to protect themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 111.



In this regard, interestingly, girls had a slightly greater sense of freedom than boys, for, as Norton explains, “although they needed a dowry to make a good match, that inheritance was less important to their futures than were the legacies of real property, tools, and livestock on which their young male contemporaries relied.”<sup>15</sup> Yet financially, daughters were at greater risk because their future security depended on the talents and good fortune of their young husband, whose business acumen might not yet be entirely known. A child’s dependency on their father was natural, but should a father be tyrannical, children had virtually no other option than to endure.

Mothers had a different set of parenting duties than fathers. Also with the aim of protecting and preparing their children, a mother’s responsibility lay primarily in doing housework, nurturing and teaching their children, and raising their daughters.<sup>16</sup> Mothers were also responsible for tempering a father’s parental authority, and acting as an effective “fourth branch of government,” that is, “a device that ensured social control in the gentlest possible way.”<sup>17</sup> While the children were still too young for proper education, mothers were responsible for caring for their children, both boys and girls. Then, when boys reached an age that their parents deemed appropriate, fathers took over raising them, while mothers raised their daughters. It was a mother’s job to ensure her daughter knew how to run her own household, to clean, to sew, spin, and dye clothing, to cook, bake, and otherwise prepare food, and to look after younger siblings and generally know how to be a good wife and mother. The reason for this difference in education

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<sup>15</sup> Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 95; and Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 200.

<sup>17</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 200.

between boys and girls was because boys required it for their professions. Since girls could not become “legislators, or ministers, or lawyers, little care was taken to provide them with any but the most elementary forms of schooling.”<sup>18</sup>

After the Revolution there was an increased focus on improving girls’ education. Many Americans, including Adams, Warren, and Murray, argued for improved education for girls. With the promise of equality that the Revolution brought, women anticipated greater equality with regards to their education. As Zagarri writes, “the Revolution had politicized the population and given them a sense of their own power.”<sup>19</sup> If men were not going to “remember the ladies,” women would have to fight for their right to greater education. The formation of a republican mother identity was consistent with this purpose. If only those who were politically active were considered citizens and given liberties, women would need to find a way to make themselves politically active. Through republican motherhood, women, such as Adams, Warren, and Murray, created a political identity for themselves in the importance they played in shaping the future citizens of the nation.<sup>20</sup>

Class was another factor that made a difference to how children were educated. Children who were able to attend school were fortunate. The children of the elite, upper class were able to afford their own tutors. For children in the lower class, and for children who were not white, education was much rarer. The education or training a boy received depended heavily on class and race. Wealthy, white boys were tutored to prepare them

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<sup>18</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1995), 104.

<sup>20</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

for college. Lower class white boys may have been taught to read and write, but primarily they learned skills necessary for various trades. For non-white boys, though, education was extremely rare. Likewise, the education to which a girl had access depended not just on gender, but on race and class too. Elite white girls, like Adams, Warren and Murray were highly privileged. While most girls in New England knew how to read, that was all. Being able to write was considered a vocational skill, and therefore a skill only required by men.<sup>21</sup> Even the ability to read, despite New England's high literacy rates, was not a privilege enjoyed by everyone. Having the time and ability to read books was a luxury that the majority of Americans could not afford.<sup>22</sup> Lower class girls and especially non-white girls had almost no access to education.<sup>23</sup>

After the Revolution there was an increased focus on improving girls' education. Many Americans, including Adams, Warren, and Murray, argued for improved education for girls. With the promise of equality that the Revolution brought, women anticipated greater equality with regards to their education. However, men were less eager than their female counterparts for women to be educated. The hierarchical order of the world placed men above women, and the concept of women being equally as educated as men was unimaginable to American male leaders. Even just the idea of improved education was threatening to men's understanding of their place in society and the patriarchal structure their privilege stemmed from. As Lucia McMahon argues, "early national Americans were troubled by the idea that women's intellectual equality might disrupt the social,

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<sup>21</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> An exception to this is Phyllis Wheatley, who despite being enslaved, was famed for her literary talents.

economic, and political frameworks that were sustained by the notion of sexual difference.”<sup>24</sup> In order to convince men that girls should be better educated, therefore, women’s access to higher intellectual development had to have an “utilitarian justification,”<sup>25</sup> which women found in republican motherhood.

Republican motherhood, a concept coined by historian Linda Kerber, was the idea that mothers held an important role in society because they were responsible for raising their sons to be patriotic Americans. The responsibility mothers held allowed them to guide and influence their children (but particularly sons), meaning mothers had a significant effect on the future of the young nation. Kerber writes, “the Republican Mother’s life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue: she educated her sons for it, she condemned and corrected her husband’s lapses from it.”<sup>26</sup> Using their maternal role as a justification, women were able to create a political identity for themselves and lend legitimacy to their parental authority. As such, republican motherhood gave women a greater degree of power, and shifted motherhood from being seen exclusively as a domestic role, to a “political and proto-political” function, which consequently helped to better balance the power dynamic between a mother and a father, while it also justified women’s exclusion from the world outside the home.<sup>27</sup> The best chance of effecting any improvements in girls’ education and women’s equality would be as a republican mother because the political identity it gave mothers increased their importance in society and

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<sup>24</sup> Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 227.

<sup>26</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 229.

<sup>27</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 28.

gave authority to their ideas. As Kerber writes, “women had the power to direct the moral development of the male citizens of the Republic,”<sup>28</sup> and, in this way, mothers served as moral guides or teachers for both their children and husband.

The relationship between father and mother and father and child were therefore nuanced. While, theoretically, mothers and fathers shared the responsibilities of parents, these responsibilities were not evenly shared, and were divided based on gender.

Additionally, fathers were head of the household, which meant that no matter how evenly a mother and father parented their children, fathers always held more power and authority than mothers. At the same time, a father’s ability to use his power was tempered by his wife and children, who although subordinate, had the ability to emotionally manipulate a father. Should a father utilize his authority with no regard for his household’s interests, his relationship with his wife and children would be threatened. Additionally, with the rise of republican motherhood, mothers gained more authority that further balanced against a father’s. As a result, the power fathers held was (partially) checked, and often used benevolently, for his family’s best interest. The potential for tyranny existed within a father’s power, but only men who already had a predisposition for tyranny became tyrannical fathers.

These nuances within family governance are demonstrated wonderfully in the relationship between Abigail and John Adams, as is clear in their correspondence.

Abigail was born in 1744 and lived as a child in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Her father, William Smith, was a successful minister, and because of his success, the family was part

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<sup>28</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 229. Note “male” citizen: girls were taught and guided by their mother’s too, but they were not considered citizens.

of the elite upper class of Massachusetts. The second born of four children, Abigail was the middle of two sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, and she also had a younger brother, William. Abigail's parents also employed servants, further adding to the household her father governed. Part of a wealthy, elite family, Abigail received a respectable education, although she never attended school. Either because her parents found it inappropriate or because chronic illness as child did not permit it, Abigail was instead educated informally by her parents and her maternal grandmother.<sup>29</sup> It is doubtful this left Abigail at much of a disadvantage, though, since, as she later mentioned in a letter to her granddaughter, even in the wealthiest families, girls' education was limited to writing and basic arithmetic.<sup>30</sup> Abigail's parents and grandmother taught her to read and to "think deeply."<sup>31</sup> As she grew older, Abigail continued her academic pursuits, and formed a makeshift study group with her friends in what her biographer, Woody Holton, refers to as a "self-conscious [effort] to teach and learn."<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Abigail taught herself French.<sup>33</sup> Despite all of her efforts, however, Abigail's informal education did not compare to that of her brother and other male contemporaries. As future men, Abigail's brother and male cousins received formal educations, and were taught, not by their friends, but by highly renowned professors and masters.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear from their letters that Abigail and John largely kept to conventional parenting practices. Abigail Smith married John Adams in 1764, and in 1765 the couple

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<sup>29</sup> Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 10.

had their first child, a daughter also named Abigail, whom they referred to by the nickname, “Nabby.” Over the next thirteen years, the two had another five children; John Quincy, born in 1767, Grace Susanna in 1768, Charles in 1770, and finally, Thomas Boylston, in 1772. Abigail and John also had another daughter, Elizabeth, who was born stillborn in 1777. Of their six children only four lived past infancy, with Grace Susanna’s death in 1770, only two years after she was born, and then Elizabeth’s death, seven years later. Due to his occupation as a lawyer and politician, and frequent later posts in Europe, John was away from home often, and occasionally for a few years at a time. This meant that Abigail was often left raising the children by herself, only communicating with John through their letters, for months, or even years on end.

Despite his physical distance, letters allowed an absent John to participate in the raising of their children, either through directions to Abigail, or with advice. Abigail did have other men in her extended family who could at times serve as a father figure to the children, such as her father, her uncles, her brother, and her brothers-in-law, but substitute father figures are not the same as the steady presence of one’s own father. This is something Abigail expressed concern over in her letters. Abigail wrote about the importance of fathers, bemoaning John’s absence, and wishing he were there raising the children with her. Abigail wrote, “in a year or two, the sons will be so far advanced in life, as to make it necessary for their Benefit, to place them at the seats of Learning and Science, indeed the period has already arrived, and whilst I fondle over one, it is no small relief to my anxious mind, that those, who are separated from me, are under your care

and inspection.”<sup>35</sup> This sentiment indicates that Abigail is acknowledging that her sons were at an age when John would take a more prominent role in raising and educating her boys, which is confirmed later in the same letter when Abigail writes, “they have arrived at an age, when a mother’s care becomes less necessary and a father’s more important.”<sup>36</sup> Abigail’s concerns reveal two things: first, it shows that John and Abigail were raising their children in a conventional manner, with John raising his sons once they were older (John Quincy and Charles would have been thirteen and ten, respectively, at this point). Secondly, it reveals the power that John had over both his children and his wife. While under John’s care, his children were sent to school, away from home. Such schooling was not unusual, and although Abigail indicates John was a good father, he still had the ability to send his children away from their mother, siblings, and friends, and the ability to separate his wife from her children. While this authority in itself is not tyrannical, John’s power, and Abigail’s already acknowledged awareness for men’s inclination for tyranny could easily be abused.

Even with their correspondence giving John input, because of the time it took to send and receive letters, Abigail often raised the children on her own. John sent his instructions and views on his children’s education to Abigail, operating on the hope and assumption that she would uphold his requests. This trust in Abigail is clearly expressed when John wrote to Adams saying, “I must trust Providence and thine excellent Mamma

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<sup>35</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, November 13-24, 1780, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, November 13-24, 1780, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.



for the education of my Children.”<sup>37</sup> For this parenting method to function properly, though, and for their marriage to remain affectionate and amicable, Abigail would have to obey John’s decisions. If she did not, John had the power to separate her from her children and raise them himself instead.

That being said, with the extra bit of freedom from John being away, Abigail did try on occasion to apply her own decisions, subverting John’s power in the process. This was the case when Abigail wrote to John and attempted to casually mention that she had started their daughter learning Latin and Greek. As Holton describes, “Abigail wanted ten-year-old Nabby to learn Latin and Greek, and she directed John Thaxter, who was serving as the girl’s tutor, to provide her the language instruction that [Abigail] had been denied.”<sup>38</sup> As Holton points out, Abigail must have realized John would not approve, because in the letter to her husband, she nonchalantly adds a line about Nabby’s education in the middle of her letter, before quickly moving on to a new topic. After a long letter discussing the Revolution, in between a line about wanting to “purchase Lord Chesterfield’s letters,” and a request for information on “Lord Sterling’s character,” Abigail writes, “I smiled at your couplet of Latin, your daughter may be able in time to conster [sic] it as she has already made some considerable proficiency in her [base grammar].”<sup>39</sup> In response, John wrote back reminding his wife of her duties as a mother, writing, and subtly reminding her of her subordinate position,

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<sup>37</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, December 2, 1781, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 104.

<sup>39</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 16-18, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

John has Genius and so has Charles. Take care that they don't go astray. Cultivate their minds, inspire their little hearts, raise their wishes. Fix their attention upon great and glorious Objects, root out every little thing, weed out every Meanness make them great and manly. Teach them to scorn Injustice, Ingratitude, Cowardice, and Falsehood. Let them reverse nothing but Religion, morality and Liberty.<sup>40</sup>

In his letter, John's lessons to Abigail revolve solely around moral guidance and Republican virtues, what a mother was supposed to teach to her children. Taking John's words into consideration, what is more revealing, then, is when John continues his letter, "Nabby and Tommy are not forgotten by me altho [sic] I did not mention them before. The first by Reason of her Sex, requires a different education from the two I have mentioned. Of this you are the only judge."<sup>41</sup> John's words are revealing because they indicate the gendered division in education between their daughter and sons. It also further demonstrates the division of responsibilities between father and mother. As a father, John was not responsible for educating Nabby. Tommy, at only four years old, also fell under Abigail's jurisdiction. What is even more interesting is that after "reminding" Abigail that their daughter "required a different education," John's sentence ends "of their only you are the judge."<sup>42</sup> At no point does John tell Abigail their daughter could not learn Latin, but his meaning is clear. That Abigail is "the only judge" is therefore more pretense than actual authority. Even more interesting, John also wrote a letter to Nabby, where he did not explicitly prohibit her from continuing learning Greek

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<sup>40</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 15, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

<sup>41</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 15, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

<sup>42</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 15, 1776, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

and Latin, but did warn her that it was not respectable for women to know such things.<sup>43</sup> Instead, John told his daughter that she was allowed to learn French, a much more appropriate language for her; for elite women, speaking French was an accomplishment that showed they were refined, elegant, and cultured. Comparatively, all three of Abigail and John's sons were encouraged to and did attend Harvard. This is a prime example of the authority John held, the power balance between John and Abigail, and the control over his daughter's education and consequently, her opportunities. Abigail's decision, which by half-heartedly attempting to hide, she clearly recognized was controversial, and John was clearly uncomfortable with it, and, as a result, there is no other mention of Nabby learning Latin or Greek again.<sup>44</sup> Still, though, during the time it took for John to get Abigail's letter, and for John to write back, Abigail was in charge, and her daughter *did* get a rudimentary education.<sup>45</sup> In a benevolent father, this exertion of power is used only in his children's best interest (as John believed he was doing here), but in the wrong hands, this degree of power could easily lead to tyrannical household governance. Had John been a cruel father, this control would have enabled him to become an oppressive tyrant.

Abigail considered a father's influence to be critical to a child's proper development. John's frequent absences from home were, she wrote to him, "one of [her] greatest misfortunes [for her husband] to be separated from my children at a time when

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<sup>43</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 104.

<sup>44</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 104.

the joint instructions and admonitions of parents sink in deeper than in mature years.”<sup>46</sup> John also had, at least by paternal right, if not actuality, control over the choice of people with whom his children associated. In a letter to Abigail about Nabby from January 22, 1783, John writes, “But above all I positively forbid, any connection between my daughter and any youth upon Earth, who does not totally eradicate every Taste for Gaiety and Expence. I never knew one had it and indulged it, but what was made a Rascall by it, sooner or later.”<sup>47</sup> Nabby would have been eighteen at this point, but unmarried, and still under her parents’ guardianship. That John should feel the need to express his concerns to Abigail suggests that his daughter *had* made such an acquaintance and was upset about it. Away from home, John was unable to personally exert his authority, so he had to trust Abigail to enforce his decisions; this lack of literal control perhaps led John to overcompensate in his letter, to try and stress his authority. This left Abigail a higher degree of parental authority and freedom than she might otherwise have had, but she was still obligated to defer to John’s instructions, lest she upset him. If Abigail did not obey her husband, he might exert his authority more forcefully. He was unlikely to separate Abigail from her children, though he technically could, if sufficiently provoked.

John’s power is tempered by his affection for his family. John reveals in a letter to Abigail the role fathers held concerning what young men their daughters saw and potentially married, but he also reveals how his family limited his authority. As he writes,

My dear Daughter’s happiness employs my thoughts night and Day. Don’t let her form connections with any one, who is not devoted entirely to study and to

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<sup>46</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, August 5, 1777, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>47</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, January 22, 1783, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

business. To honour and Virtue. If there is a trait of frivolity and dissipation left, I pray that she may renounce it, forever. I ask not fortune nor favour for mine, but Prudence, Talents and Labour. She may go with my Consent whenever she can find enough of these.<sup>48</sup>

John is at once referring to the necessity of his consent before his daughter could marry, but with her happiness employing his thoughts “night and day,” it is unlikely that John would use his parental power to deny Nabby happiness or impose a decision (especially one as important as one’s spouse) she disliked upon her. It is no secret that John was in charge of the family, and on many occasions Abigail expressed contentment and approval of this structure. As she wrote in one letter, a “well ordered home is my chief delight, and the affectionate domestick [sic] wife with the Relative Duties which accompany that character my highest ambition.”<sup>49</sup> Yet their letters reveal that Abigail did not always agree with John’s decisions, and did try on occasion to subvert John’s power; this was the case when she tried to slip past John that she was having Nabby learn Greek and Latin. Clearly, Abigail recognized the limitations she (and her daughter) faced and tried to stretch these limitations, without angering John. At the same time, Abigail was acutely aware of the potential for tyranny men held. John was not himself a tyrant, but Abigail’s deference to the decisions he made that she did not approve of, coupled with her wariness of men’s authority, indicates that Abigail was cognizant of John’s potential to be a tyrant, and the ease with which a less benevolent father could be a tyrant.

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<sup>48</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, March 28, 1783, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, June 20, 1783, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

Throughout their years of correspondence, John demonstrates his patriarchal authority over Abigail and his family many times. In 1780, John gave financial orders to Abigail, writing, “you will remember that we have many children, and that our Duty to them requires that We should manage all our Affairs with the strictest OEconomy [sic].<sup>50</sup> Reprimanding Abigail and Nabby, John wrote in a letter from January 23, 1783 that, “the more silent she is in Company, the better for me in exact proportion and I would have this observed as a rule by the mother as well as the daughter.”<sup>51</sup> These are examples of John’s authority: he had the final say over the family finances and what freedom Abigail did have with his money had to be approved by him. John also demonstrates control over his wife and daughter’s freedom of speech. At the same time, though, these are examples of John’s leniency and benevolence as a father, because for him to write to Abigail reminding her to better manage funds, Abigail must have had some freedom with the family expenses (which is also clear given that Abigail famously handled John’s accounts and finances while he was away from home.) If John was writing to tell his wife and daughter that they should hold their tongues more, it is likely because they felt comfortable voicing their opinions and had, in this instance, crossed a line and offended John. Despite often indicating compassion for his family, as patriarch, no matter the sway Abigail or his children may have had, John was still in charge of his family, and ultimately the family was governed under his authority above anyone else’s, including Abigail’s.

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<sup>50</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, February 16, 1780, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

<sup>51</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, January 22, 1783, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed September 2018.

John's ability to opt for compassion or stricter governance allowed him still greater power. In a letter from 1777, John writes to Abigail that, "your daughter has a firmness of mind and a prudence beyond her years. She will not act contrary to the advice of her friends, and in a particular manner her parents. It has not been a matter of indifference to either of them."<sup>52</sup> John expresses displeasure and frustration with his daughter, and his use of the phrase "your daughter" as opposed to "my" or "our," although a commonly gendered address, suggests that his parental affection still had its limits, because it implies that his affection hinged on his children's obedience to him. Angering John by disobeying him put his wife and children in a precarious and vulnerable spot. For the most part his children seem to have respected his authority, but in instances when they did not, such as when Nabby spoke out of turn, he opted for harsher paternal reactions. His children seem to have recognized the necessity of appeasing their father, for, as Abigail reassures John in one of her letters, "be assured that [Nabby] will never make a choice without your approbation which I know she considers as Essential to her happiness."<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Abigail was well aware of men's potential for tyranny, and, as is clear in their letters, Abigail recognized this same potential for tyranny in the amount of power fathers held. Had John been a lesser man, or if men with tyrannical tendencies became fathers, the power they held could easily result in a tyrant father.

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<sup>52</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, June 29, 1777, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, June 20, 1783, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive", accessed September 2018.

The letters between Abigail and John reveal the relationships and power dynamics between members of the Adams family. It is apparent through their letters that the Adams were a fairly conventional elite Anglo-American family. John, as head, made the final decisions, and held authoritative power over his household, but his power is tempered by his relationship with his wife. As a benevolent husband and father, John did not want to act in a way that harmed his family, or that cost him their respect. In this way, maintaining a healthy, companionate marriage limited John's power, and bolstered both Abigail's and his children's. Furthermore, with republican motherhood, Abigail gained parental authority. This did not solely aid Abigail, though, for at the same time with John as the family head, Abigail had to show deference to him and his decisions. Furthermore, republican motherhood strengthened arguments that women needed to remain in the home. This reveals the complications and messy real-life experiences of a historical concept such as republican motherhood.

Abigail and John's letters serve as a case study, in effect, of a Republican-era patriarchal family in practice, but they only demonstrate a benevolent father. Mercy Otis Warren, who also wrote about her perspectives on fathers, explored a wider range of fathers and their behaviours in her fictional play, *The Ladies of Castile*. The eldest daughter of thirteen siblings (of which only six lived to adulthood) to Colonel James Otis and Mary Allyne, Mercy Otis Warren had a vastly different childhood than most other girls in the eighteenth century, even in comparison with fellow elite women, like Abigail Adams and Judith Sargent Murray. Both Warren's father and grandfather were



“prominent figures in business and local politics.”<sup>54</sup> As a result, Warren’s family was one of the most elite families in Massachusetts at the time, and her family’s wealth gave Warren more opportunities than she would have otherwise had. Through her experience helping her mother, Warren learned the necessary practical skills she would need as mistress of her own home, as well as more “sophisticated skills” such as embroidery and stitching.<sup>55</sup> Warren’s mother also taught her to read. This was not at all unusual. As mentioned, the female literacy rate in New England was high (Zagarri suggests it was 70%) at the beginning of the eighteenth century when Warren was growing up.<sup>56</sup> What made Warren’s childhood so unusual was not what her mother taught her, but “the way the men in her life treated her.”<sup>57</sup> Warren had a close relationship with her father, and as her biographer Rosemarie Zagarri argues, “James seems to have had a special fondness for his daughter, who reciprocated his sentiments and took care of him in his later years.”<sup>58</sup> Due to this relationship, Warren’s father supported her desire for “a highly unorthodox education...more appropriate for a boy than a girl.”<sup>59</sup> That father and daughter were close is interesting, considering Colonel Otis’ parenting methods. Warren’s father was strict, believed in strong discipline, and “exercised his authority over the family with a firm hand,” a method that Warren would later refer to as a “patriarchship.”<sup>60</sup> Further affecting Warren’s impression of fatherly authority, although

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<sup>54</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 9.

<sup>57</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 11.

she did not refer to it in her plays, her parents employed multiple servants and had an enslaved African American, all of whom her father had ultimate control over. Despite being strict, Mercy Otis Warren's father granted her permission to be tutored alongside her brothers. As such, Warren was educated on Greek and Roman literature (in translation), history (both ancient and modern) and...the works of English authors (including Shakespeare), an education better than most (American) boys.<sup>61</sup>

Warren's brother James, whom she often referred to as her best and closest friend, also encouraged Warren's education.<sup>62</sup> Warren and her older brothers, James and Joseph, were taught by their uncle, Reverend Jonathan Russell who tutored them with "a rigorous classical education," so that James and Joseph might attend college. Throughout their tutelage, James studied with his sister, encouraging her curiosity, and increasing her desire for knowledge. Later in life, when James became politically involved, and shared his thoughts with her, Warren also gained a political education.<sup>63</sup> She did not have exactly the same education as her brothers (James graduated from Harvard and earned a Master's degree), and some topics were still considered inappropriate for her, such as Greek and Latin, but Warren's education far surpassed many of her female contemporaries.

Warren was further fortunate, for upon marriage, her husband, James Warren, more than simply tolerated her "unrespectable" education and interests, James "actually encouraged her 'unfeminine' interest in politics and writing."<sup>64</sup> Warren was lucky to have

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<sup>61</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 10-13.

<sup>62</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 3.

such a supportive husband, and a loving partnership, one that Zagarri suggests was “notable for its intimacy, passion, and mutual respect.” Together, the couple had five sons: James, Winslow, Charles, Henry, and George, and, in a letter to one of her sons, Warren referred to James as “the best husband, the best father – the best friend.”<sup>65</sup>

Warren, then, grew up with a father who at once maintained firm patriarchal authority, but with whom she also had a close and special relationship and who also encouraged her education beyond what was typical for an elite daughter. She then married a man who further accepted her interests, with whom she also had an affectionate and loving relationship, whom she viewed as “the best father.”<sup>66</sup> From her father when she was growing up, to her husband’s fathering of her own children, Warren was exposed to both the power and authority fathers could control, as well as the many different examples in society and in literature of how a father could use this authority.

Upon a close reading of her writing, this nuanced understanding of fathers is evident in her characters. *The Ladies of Castile*, published in 1790, was one of two plays that Warren completed that year (the other being *The Sack of Rome*.) In writing these two works, she met the challenge of her son Winslow, who wanted her to write about a non-American subject about which she was less familiar. *The Ladies of Castile* is set in sixteenth century Spain, during a civil war.<sup>67</sup> This is a setting that would have no doubt resonated with Warren, since the American Revolution had many qualities of a civil war. *The Ladies of Castile* explores how a Spanish civil war affected the lives of seven

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<sup>65</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Jane De Hart-Mathews and Linda K. Kerber, ed., *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 269.

primary characters: Don Valesco, the regent emperor; his son, Conde Haro; and his daughter, Donna Louisa; as well as Don Juan de Padilla, the leader of the rebellion; his wife Donna Maria; her brother Don Francis, who is in love with Louisa; and a young nobleman named Pedro, who is also in love with Louisa. Although the play is about a civil war, it focuses on how the war affected the relationships between these characters, rather than on the ongoing war itself. Louisa reciprocates Francis' love, but he is the leader of the rebellion army and she is not allowed to marry him. On the other hand, Velasco, Louisa's father, intended her to marry Pedro, for whom Louisa did not have affection. Kerber argues that the primary message of the play is "obviously" the differences in disposition between Maria and Louisa: "Even in the exigencies of war, women must control themselves and their options. The Louisas of the world do not survive revolutions; the Marias...emerge stronger and in control."<sup>68</sup> This may be the case, but in the interactions between Valesco and his children, and between Juan de Padilla and Maria who discuss their infant son, Warren's views on fatherhood can be better understood.

Velasco, father to both a son and daughter, talks to and treats his children in a highly gendered way. In a conversation with his son, Conde Haro, he and Velasco discuss topics such as the ongoing war, liberty, virtue, glory, fame, and combat, all of which are traditionally masculine subjects. Valesco is in favour of war, and suggests that his son, "then haste, and chase these miscreants from the land -/ Cut down their line, and blast their idle hopes.../ The sword shall quell all factions in the land."<sup>69</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>68</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 271.

<sup>69</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 1, Scene 2, 6.

Conde Haro does not share his father's zeal for warfare, though, and instead, expresses discomfort at the idea of leading the army, saying, "I lament my fate; - my sire and prince, /Point me to glory, combating my will, /And make my duty lead to deeds I hate."<sup>70</sup> Conde Haro is more sensible than his father, and disagrees with his leadership tactics, saying, "I ne'er will tinge the field with human blood,/ if milder means can bloodless victory win."<sup>71</sup> Despite their disagreements and his moral high ground, Conde Haro still obeys Valesco's commands.<sup>72</sup> This is in part because Valesco is the regent Emperor, but also because Valesco is his father. To make his decision more difficult, Conde Haro is in love with Maria, the wife of Juan de Padilla, and Velasco's enemy. As he laments, Conde Haro does not want to defeat Juan de Padilla, for that would make "[him] odious in Maria's eye."<sup>73</sup> Even still, despite having strong reasons to disobey Valesco, Conde Haro still obediently follows his father's instructions.

During act four, when Juan de Padilla and Francis have been defeated and are Valesco's prisoners, Conde Haro again begs Valesco to rule mercifully, saying, "I must implore my father's lenient hand."<sup>74</sup> Warren's portrayal of Valesco is interesting: a tyrannical ruler, and also the father to two sympathetic characters. Unable to govern Spain justly, Velasco also fails to justly govern his family. Just like in *The Sack of Rome*, where Warren suggests that a tyrant will make a tyrannical husband, Velasco, a tyrant over Spain, will also make a tyrannical father. Neither of his children refer to their father

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<sup>70</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 1, Scene 2, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 1, Scene 2, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 2, Scene 3, 25. "Velasco's will...I must obey, or blast my rising fame."

<sup>73</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 2, Scene 3, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 4, Scene 1, 48.

as a tyrant (although other characters do), but his behaviour is that of one. Velasco's abuse of his authority, in forcing his child to do something against his will, indicates Velasco was a tyrannical father. Furthermore, Conde Haro's reference to Velasco as his father, as opposed to his emperor, suggests Warren was deliberately associating Velasco's authority not with his political identity, but with his identity as a father.

In Velasco's conversation with his daughter, Louisa, the topic is limited to marriage. In one particular scene, Velasco comes upon Louisa crying and asks her why. When Louisa tells her father that she "weeps" for her country, he responds not with kindness or comfort, but by saying, "a daughter is a curse, /Whene'er she lets her wanton thoughts run loose."<sup>75</sup> He continues, further compounding Louisa's despair, by telling her that she is to have an arranged marriage to Pedro, and that he would not tolerate her clear upset, saying,

VELASCO. Nor dare to shew thy weeping face abroad:

To crown thy nuptials with a noble lord,

To whom thou art betroth'd – who claims thy hand:

Thou shalt by his...

I've pledg'd my faith.<sup>76</sup>

Louisa begs her father to reconsider, requesting to instead stay unmarried as a maid, rather than follow through with this marriage arrangement.<sup>77</sup> Velasco doubles down on his decision, however, saying, "I've sworn, no will revoke my plighted faith; /Prepare

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<sup>75</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 36.

<sup>77</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 36-37.

thyself for wedlock's sacred vows; /One week completes the matrimonial tie."<sup>78</sup> A distraught Louisa then replies, "O let me live in some dark hermitage, /Or in some gloomy cell – I'll cloister'd die, /But can't this once obey my father's will."<sup>79</sup> Having angered her father, the scene ends and "Valesco enraged, leads her off."<sup>80</sup> In another instance during the play's fourth act, Louisa dramatically exclaims, "Revoke thy sentence – snatch me from perdition -/ Or let me die with him my heart adores./ [*Sinks on her knee before her father, and faints.*]"<sup>81</sup> Still, Velasco maintains a calm, confident control over Louisa's decisions, when he says to Pedro shortly later, "Pedro, retire – I'll bend her to thy will, / She shall be thine – thou art my son –"<sup>82</sup> These lines clearly demonstrate a level of control and authority that Velasco held over his daughter, Louisa. Velasco has the ability to reprimand Louisa, to select a husband for her, and to exile his daughter (if only in this case to her room). Furthermore, he responds to his daughter's despair with only more force. Velasco is written as a tyrannical father in his interactions with Louisa. Instead of comforting or aiding his daughter, Velasco responds to her grievances by having her carried off and locked in her room, ignoring his daughter's pleas, forcing her to marry someone against her will, and imprisoning her within a domestic realm she was already confined to.

Warren complicates this relationship between father and daughter when Velasco later discusses his interaction with Louisa with Conde Haro, saying,

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<sup>78</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 37.

<sup>79</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 3, Scene 2, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 4, Scene 3, 54.

<sup>82</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 4, Scene 3, 56.

VELASCO. I yesterday confin'd her to her room;  
 Bade her paepare [sic] to pay her nuptial vows  
 To one I'd chosen for her rightful lord,  
 To save her honour from a wanton love.<sup>83</sup>

He is forcing his daughter to marry someone she does not want to, yet he claims it is for her best interests that he does so. With this, Warren seems to suggest that even though Velasco is a tyrant, his same parenting decision, in a kinder father, would not necessarily be tyrannical.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, in the scene near the end of the play, Warren gives Velasco a semi-redeeming moment. Velasco and Francis put aside their differences, and Velasco grants Francis Louisa's hand in marriage, and even says, "Go Francis, see if yet Louisa lives, /And Heaven forgive my cruelty to her!"<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, Francis does not reach Louisa quickly enough, for Velasco's tyrannical treatment of his daughter proves fatal, and Louisa kills herself.<sup>86</sup> (This is in keeping with Kerber's argument about Warren's primary message of the play; those who fail to be strong and sensible will not survive in this world.) With this, Warren again makes the suggestion that a man can behave tyrannically at times, but that it did not necessarily make him a tyrant. In this case, because Velasco *is* a clear tyrant, the stronger or more likely implication Warren is making is that tyrants are not irredeemable. At the same time, Warren is cautioning against falling prey to tyrannical behaviour – it might very well lead to irreversible damage and regret.

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<sup>83</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 4, Scene 1, 48.

<sup>84</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 5, Scene 4, 84-85.

<sup>85</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 5, Scene 3, 83.

<sup>86</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 5, Scene 3, 84-85.



Finally, Warren's inclusion of Juan de Padilla's character, who was also a father to a young son, further indicates that Warren was deliberately demonstrating the range of behaviours fathers could have. Padilla was the leader of the rebellion and was captured and killed. Upon Padilla's death, his dying words to his wife, Maria, were to

JUAN DE PADILLA. protect my son, and guard his infant years,

In his young bosom nurture every truth,

Till ripen'd worth and manly virtue glow,

and mark him thine and Padilla's son.<sup>87</sup>

With this, Warren implies the importance of a mother's role in raising her children (and in particular her sons); Padilla's primary concern for his son is not what his child would lack with the loss of his father, but that Maria was there to raise their son to be honest and virtuous. The juxtaposition between Velasco's and Padilla's dispositions suggests that Warren wrote Padilla as a benevolent father. His wish for his son to grow up an honest and virtuous man further implies his character is meant to be Velasco's opposite and a benevolent, kind father. Again, Warren indicates that a tyrant will make a tyrannical father, but the same power in a non-tyrannical man could still result in a just father.

Warren's relationship with her father was complex. He was a man who enabled his daughter to get an education comparable to boys', yet he was also a firm and authoritative parent; a "patriarchalist." The other men in Warren's life, her brothers, her husband, and even her son, Winslow, all supported her academic and literary pursuits. It is perhaps because of this support that Warren felt comfortable portraying these

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<sup>87</sup> Warren, *The Ladies of Castile*, Act 2, Scene 4, 27.

perspectives on fathers. The same attributes that Warren recognized in her own father and in the fathers of other children are visible in *The Ladies of Castile*, and it is probable that her own personal experiences with James Otis and James Warren influenced her writing.

In the play, Warren explores the similarities between the power of kings and fathers. This is apparent in Velasco's dual role as regent Emperor to Spain and as father to two of the play's main characters. As a tyrannical ruler, Velasco's behaviour also made him a tyrannical father. This is a similar message to Warren's views on tyranny and husbands, as explored in chapter two: a tyrant will not make a benevolent father. Warren adds nuance to Velasco's character, though, when she implies that his tyranny is in his daughter's best interest. Velasco was a tyrant, but the same authority that he abused could be used benevolently by another father. Warren's deliberate decision to give Velasco nuance further suggests that she believed that fathers, even when strict or "patriarchalist," could still be kind and loving. Padilla, although killed before he was able to take a more active role in his son's upbringing, is portrayed as kind and virtuous. The deliberate decision to create and portray these characters the way she did allows a window into Warren's perspectives on fathers and tyranny. The natural hierarchy between a father and his children is one built on a child's complete dependency, but it is only the tyrannical man who abuses his paternal authority and becomes a tyrant.

As well as a playwright, Mercy Otis Warren was the first female American historian. In 1805 she published *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political, and Moral Observations*, which brought Warren fame and praise within the political realm, but it

also secured her a reputation as a republican mother. In much of her writing a major theme Warren looked at “was the decline in public virtue and the transformation of American manners.”<sup>88</sup> She was arguing that women could provide a solution to the problem. This interest in promoting compassion is readily apparent throughout Warren’s book. Warren repeatedly expresses pity or support for the Indigenous populations in contact with her fellow white settlers. As she writes at one point,

the rivers of blood through which mankind generally wade to empire and greatness, must draw out the tear of compassion; and every sympathetic bosom will commiserate the sufferings of the whole human race either friends or foes, whether dying by the sword, sickness, or remorse, under the splendid canopy reared by their own guilty hands.<sup>89</sup>

Warren also writes that, “the Indian inhabitants, who had there long enjoyed a happy climate, and the fruits of a fertile soil, under a high degree of cultivation, fearless of danger from their distance civilized neighbours, were surprised by Clark and his party; their crops were destroyed, their settlements broken up; their villages burnt.”<sup>90</sup> Warren continues, writing, “the ideas of some Europeans as well as Americans, that the...tribes of savages cannot be civilized by the kind and humane endeavors of their neighbours is absurd and unfounded.”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Warren is praised by historians for her ability to express sympathy for Indigenous people, particularly considering that her son, Winslow, was killed by Native Americans while on the Western frontier.<sup>92</sup> Warren’s moral concern could be an attempt to gain an identity as a republican mother (although she would not

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<sup>88</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman’s Dilemma*, 143.

<sup>89</sup> Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 121.

<sup>90</sup> Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 116.

<sup>91</sup> Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 122.

<sup>92</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 141.

have known or used that term specifically). At the same time, that Warren would include moral observations was not unique to her *History*. Histories were typically written by men, as it was a subject that was largely considered inappropriate for a woman to write, and male authors included ethical observations in their work as well. That Warren includes moral observations could therefore also be because she was trying to emulate a male style of writing, and thus lend authority to her identity as a historian. Either way, due to Warren's focus on integrity, which she exercised in her book, she is remembered today as a republican mother and voice of sympathy and compassion, highly concerned with issues of ethics, righteousness, and manners, as America decided what sort of country it would be.<sup>93</sup> Warren's expressions of morality go beyond maternal morality directed at children. Instead, Warren, through her claim to moral authority, attempted to act as a moral guide to not just her children, but to America.

Through her play, *The Ladies of Castile*, Warren shared her perspectives on fathers and fatherly authority. By displaying a variety of paternal figures and behaviour, Warren suggests awareness of the power imbalance between father and mother and between father and child, and for the threat of tyranny that existed within this imbalance. Warren does not disapprove of a father's authority, as is clear in Juan de Padilla's character, and in her own experiences as a parental partner. At the same time, though, Warren does indicate an understanding of the ways children were vulnerable and the ways a mother's authority could be curbed. With her *History*, Warren demonstrates an identity both as a historian and as a moral guide for the young nation; in effect, as a

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<sup>93</sup> Nicolay, *Gender Roles, Literary Authority, and Three American Women Writers*, 1.

republican mother. At the same time, as Warren's biography indicates, republican motherhood did not greatly change mother's relations to fathers – Warren still had to defer to her husband's greater authority. Like in the case of Adams, republican motherhood proves to be a more complicated concept in practice than in theory.

That fathers held the potential for tyranny is a theme Judith Sargent Murray returned to frequently throughout her writing career. Judith Murray (nee Sargent) was born to a wealthy and successful merchant and his wife. Murray was the eldest child of eight siblings, although only three of her siblings reached adulthood, and, like Adams and Warren, grew up with servants working for her family.<sup>94</sup> By all indication, Murray had a fairly good relationship with both of her parents. As Sheila Skemp, her biographer, writes, “though she revered her father...Judith's love for her father was always tempered by her recognition of his power,” and she recognized that his superiority enabled him to control her freedom.<sup>95</sup> Even still, Skemp argues that Murray referred to her father as virtuous, philanthropic, sensible, and benevolent.<sup>96</sup>

Murray had an informal education. She was taught briefly by a local woman, as well as a pastor, to supplement the woman's lessons, and for a brief period, of just three months, Murray “attended what she characterized as a mediocre writing school.”<sup>97</sup> Murray taught herself grammar (as many other elite women did during this time), and her parents made certain that she was fluent in French, knew how to dance, and had an

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<sup>94</sup> Sheila L Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>95</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 17.

<sup>96</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 21.

extensive repertoire of various patterns of needlework. Murray was also taught math, but nothing more than simple arithmetic, nor was she taught the classics; both of these subjects were unnecessary for a girl to learn, and were therefore, “out of the question.”<sup>98</sup> Murray was more privileged than most of her female contemporaries, and her education reflects that.

Compared to her brother’s privileged education, Murray’s own education was only rudimentary, of which Murray would have no doubt been well aware. When Murray’s younger brother, Winthrop, was ten years old, he was sent by their parents to the Boston Latin School where he was able to acquire a classical education, including learning Greek and Latin, with the objective of preparing him for public life.<sup>99</sup> Usually only taught to wealthy upper class boys, the classics were, “a badge of distinction and exclusion, dividing the few – by class and gender – from the many.”<sup>100</sup> After his time at Boston Latin School, Winthrop attended Harvard.<sup>101</sup> Undoubtedly to Murray’s frustration, Winthrop was a poor student, and despite ultimately graduating from Harvard, he was suspended in his first year, and was expelled in 1770, “the result of his dalliances with ‘two women of ill-fame.’”<sup>102</sup>

Further contributing to her likely frustration with not having a better education (while her brother took his for granted) were the opportunities that having such an education brought. Her brother, a Harvard graduate, regardless of how scandalous, had a

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<sup>98</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 21.

<sup>99</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 19.

<sup>100</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 19.

variety of professional options from which to choose.<sup>103</sup> Judith's options, meanwhile, were limited to just one path: marriage, housewife, and motherhood. Murray's first marriage, to Captain John Stevens, ended badly: destitute, abandoned, and childless, Murray faced immense difficulty and social shame. John Stevens had not been able to provide for his wife. Stevens inherited a significant debt upon his father's death, and on top of that was poor at managing finances. This meant that upon marriage, Murray left her affluent family home and entered a life of financial despair. The failure of Murray's first marriage would have no doubt been a stressful time, and it is not surprising, therefore, that Murray discusses marriage in her essays as if it is forced obligation. As she writes, "Marriage should not be represented as a certain, or even necessary event."<sup>104</sup>

Murray was easily the most vocal proponent of the three women in this study of improving women's education and equality. Perhaps Murray's personal experiences with how a lack of education could leave women vulnerable and dependent on men galvanized her. As her essays in *The Gleaner* reveal, Murray blamed women's lack of autonomy on the fathers who chose how (or rather, how not) to educate their daughters. Murray's biographical history in combination with her essays, reveals deeper meaning behind Murray's essays. Throughout her entire literary career, Murray repeatedly and frequently returned to the topic of female education and capabilities. That Murray wrote so frequently on improved women's rights indicates that this was a topic about which she felt passionate, and therefore further suggests that her professed arguments were her

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<sup>103</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 22.

<sup>104</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. II, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 168.

genuine beliefs. As Skemp suggests, Murray was frustrated with her lack of education as a child, and it is this frustration that (at least in part) encourage Murray's arguments for improvements to girls' education.<sup>105</sup>

Murray blamed mismatched marriages on girls' education, and she connects their lacking education to an inadequacy of parental knowledge and skills. As she writes about the idea of forming a public school in town "when we consider how few parents are endowed by nature, or qualified by improvement, for the judicious discharge of duties so essential, we are almost ready to give our voice in favour of that plan."<sup>106</sup> It is not possible to know with certainty why Murray wrote these sentiments or what inspired her to do so, but it is plausible that Murray was reflecting on her father, as well as fathers in general.

Murray connected the tyrannical concept of marriage to women's lack of education. When Murray argued for greater educational opportunities for girls, she was, in effect, arguing for women's autonomy, or at least an expansion of their current agency. As Murray would later herself argue, having an education, even a mediocre one, "gave women an all-important edge in the marriage market."<sup>107</sup> The education elite girls received failed to "prepare them for public service, nor did they enable women to become economically independent."<sup>108</sup> Murray writes, in an essay, "I would give my daughters every accomplishment which I thought proper; and, to crown all, I would early accustom

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<sup>105</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 18-22.

<sup>106</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. II, No. XXXV (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 5-6.

<sup>107</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 21.



them to habits of industry and order.”<sup>109</sup> She no doubt would have reflected upon her own childhood and the knowledge she had been denied. She continues in the essay, writing “[girls] should be taught with precision the art of economical: they should be able to procure for themselves the necessaries of life; independence should be placed within their grasp.”<sup>110</sup> This last line is particularly interesting, as it raises the question, what dependence did she anticipate education would help? Even with greater education there still were few respectable employment opportunities available for women. Murray’s other essays suggest an explanation: a better education, particularly the “art of economical,” would allow girls a better ability to judge who was a suitable spouse, who would be able to properly protect and provide for his family. As she wrote in one essay, “the more competent the woman, the less vulnerable she would be to the pressures of the marriage market.”<sup>111</sup> This sentiment suggests that Murray was not only aware of ways girls were vulnerable, but also was of the opinion that women should have greater authority over their choice of future spouse and rely less heavily upon their father’s judgement. Furthermore, an understanding of economics would allow a wife, should she still end up with a poor husband, the ability to manage family expenses herself. Murray attributed the tyrannical conditions of marriage to the lack of education women had.

Murray was careful to keep from sounding too opposed to the contemporary gender conventions of the time, however. She assured her readers that men would not be

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<sup>109</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 167.

<sup>110</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. I, No. XVII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 168.

<sup>111</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. 1, No. XVII, 167-168.

negatively affected by changes to women's education, explaining that, should women have more access to education it would be enough to satisfy them. As Murray writes, "the noble expansion conferred by a liberal education will teach [women] humility; for it will give them a glance of those vast tracts of knowledge which they can never explore, until they are accommodated with far other powers than those at present assigned them."<sup>112</sup> There are many possible reasons why Warren would write this. First, it is possible that Murray genuinely felt this way. If Murray's frequent and passionate arguments for women's education were not genuine, it is doubtful she would have returned to the topic so often and with passion no less. Given that almost her entire body of work screams otherwise, though, this is not likely. Second, it is possible that Murray was simply trying not to scare men into existential crises or real opposition to women's improved education; if women were fully capable and equal to men, what then was the role of men in society? This explanation is much more likely than the first, because, having determined that Murray's advocacy for education was genuine, her claim that women would be satisfied with a "glance" at all the knowledge they then would not have access to is most likely a statement meant to placate anxious men rather than reflect Murray's true opinion; which curious person could actually be satisfied with only a "glance" at the world's knowledge?<sup>113</sup> Murray downplays her real intentions for women's education, for the purpose of appeasing fears that it would disrupt the world

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<sup>112</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes by Constantia*, Vol. II, No. LXXXVIII (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 189.

<sup>113</sup> Skemp, *First Lady of Letters*, 27. In her biography, Skemp argues that reading "shaped [Murray's] dissatisfaction with a society that told her...not to question the customs that defined her legitimate expectations."

order. There is another potential explanation as to why Murray would express such a view, and a key component to Murray's publications. Murray published her essays under a male persona. Writing as a man, Murray needed to indicate a desire to maintain patriarchal control, or risk ruining her cover. At the same time, however, Murray's choice in male persona also granted her the right to address issues publicly that she otherwise should not have had an opinion on. Furthermore, utilizing a male persona added a degree of credibility and authority to Murray's voice, that would allow her message to reach as wide an audience as possible.

By tempering her opinions, Murray fell shy of questioning the natural order that placed women inferior to men. Although Murray was not herself a feminist – she was not part of a collective movement, nor was she concerned with lower class women or women of colour – the arguments she made were themselves feminist.<sup>114</sup> Over the span of four essays, Murray argues in favour of women's capabilities and equality with men, writing for the purpose to “effectually establish the female right to that equality with their brethren, which, it is conceived, is assigned them in the Order of Nature.”<sup>115</sup> Using historical examples to support her arguments, Murray contends that women were equally as capable as men, because they were “capable of enduring hardships...equally ingenious and fruitful in resources [as their male counterparts],” had “fortitude and heroism [that]

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<sup>114</sup> Neither Adams, Warren, or Murray were feminists themselves. They were not concerned with the rights of lower class women, or of women of colour, but instead were concerned only with the rights of other elite, white women. This lack of intersectionality prevents Adams, Warren, and Murray from being feminists. Furthermore, there was no collective feminist movement or sense of female unity at the time that Adams, Warren, and Murray were alive; the concept of feminism did not yet exist. Still, the arguments that all three women made were feminist in nature, and were adopted by future generations of feminists.

<sup>115</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. II, No. LXXXVII, 195.

cannot be surpassed,” were patriotic, influential, energetic, eloquent, faithful, “capable of supporting, with honour, the toils of government,” and “equally susceptible of every literary acquirement.” For each of these various abilities and attributes, Murray explains her reasoning and strengthens her argument by referring to a historical example of women with such capabilities for each point.<sup>116</sup> She concludes her essay writing, “and these well authenticated facts, are, I conceive, alone sufficient to prove the powerful and transforming *effects of education and subsequent habits.*”<sup>117</sup> That Murray lists so many examples and is familiar with so many different cases of female abilities throughout history suggests once again that this is a topic she felt passionately about and had thoroughly researched.

Murray wrote essays about the improvement of women’s education. This was one of her most frequent topics. As her other essays indicate, Murray connected girls’ lack education with girls’ insufficiency with the abilities needed to be independent. Because education was determined, ultimately, by a child’s father, Murray connected female dependency with fatherly authority. Murray’s essays, therefore, share her perspectives on fathers and their potential for tyrannical governance. In her own life, Murray had a good relationship with her father, but at the same time, she knew first-hand the extent of fatherly authority.

Fathers were the chief governors of their households. They held authority over any enslaved black people they had, any servants, their children, and even their wives. The power that fathers held over their household “subjects” bears a striking resemblance

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<sup>116</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. II, No. LXXXIX, 202.

<sup>117</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. II, No. LXXXIX, 199.

to the power that the king held over his subjects. As Filmer argued, kings and fathers shared the exact responsibilities. Fathers ruled over a much smaller “kingdom,” but the authority they held, and the deference their household was expected to show them functioned as a miniature version of the world’s social hierarchy. If a king could become a tyrant, therefore, so too could a father. As their writings indicate, Adams, Warren, and Murray all recognized this potential for tyranny in their fathers, their children’s fathers, and fathers of other children (fathers in general).

Abigail Adams, in her letters to John, expressed these opinions, although she did so in subtle ways so as not to anger her husband. Through her letters, Abigail was able to temper her arguments with flattery to her husband, and the intensely personal aspect of writing and sending letters allowed Abigail room to comfort John’s worries and emotionally manipulate her husband, letting him feel as though he was in control, despite not being home, and more still, that he was forming his own opinions rather than being the subject of his wife’s directions. Letters allow insight into the ways Abigail and John raised their children, since they had to write to discuss and come to parenting decisions together. Although John gave both advice and edicts, gentle recommendations and firm directions, their letters allow insight into how both parents negotiated the imbalanced authority of a father and a mother. Furthermore, letters, or more specifically, parenting through letters in John’s absence, allowed Abigail greater input into how her children would be raised; with John not physically there, Abigail was often able to have some motherly autonomy. This is the case with her decision to try and have Nabby learn Greek and Latin. As a child herself, Abigail seems to have had a good relationship with her

father. Abigail clearly felt the education her parents provided for her was insufficient, for she formed makeshift study groups while a teenager, yet at the same time, her father did ensure she had a much better education than many girls of wealthy families.<sup>118</sup> Abigail's father may have had the authority to limit her education, but at the same time, he did facilitate and encourage the education she did have.

Similarly, Mercy Otis Warren's father played a prominent role in her childhood. At his direction, Warren's access to education surpassed that of her female contemporaries, and she had an education typically reserved for elite boys. Her education was still limited, for she was not taught Latin or Greek, but her father allowed her an excellent education nevertheless. In Warren's play, *The Ladies of Castile*, the interactions between fathers and their children and between father and mother reveal an awareness of the extent to which fathers had, and could choose to exert, control over their families, and in particular, over their daughters. Warren looks, in her play, at the power a father held in determining who his children (in this case his daughter) could marry and suggests that the degree of power a father held was enough to allow a father to govern as a tyrant. Through her *History*, Warren earned a reputation as a republican mother. As her biography reveals, though, such an identity is more complicated than is suggested by the categorization of "republican mother."

The importance of a girl's access to education, and the potential for tyranny that this authority gave fathers is most clear in Judith Sargent Murray's childhood education, which she later wrote about in her essays. Like Adams and Warren, Murray was well

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<sup>118</sup> Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 8-12.

educated as a girl. Upon her marriage to John Stevens, though, Murray quickly experienced how her own education had failed her, and how much the access to education, or the lack thereof, left women highly dependent and vulnerable. It is little surprise, after her husband left her bankrupt, that Murray wrote several essays arguing for better education for girls, and particularly for better economical education. Murray argued that women's dependency was the result of their lack of education, and that it was a girl's father who determined the perimeters of her education. For Murray, this amount of authority held a high potential for a tyrannical abuse of a father's power. Although she does not mention in her essays any frustration with her own father for approving her marriage to John Stevens, it is plausible that Murray's own experiences did influence her opinion of fathers' responsibilities in their children's marriages. She suggests that improved girls' education would improve their independence, writing, "the Sex should be taught to depend on their own efforts, for the procurement of an establishment in life."<sup>119</sup>

Murray, in her essays, attempted to persuade others of her arguments. The extent to which she succeeded cannot be known, but what exactly did Murray hope to accomplish with her arguments? Some potential answers were discussed above, with regards to marriage, but consider this: even if education did not lead immediately to greater opportunities, it did give elite, white women a voice. All three women in this study were fortunate enough to have had loving fathers and husbands, and receive the education they did, and all three women used the power this education gave them to write

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<sup>119</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. III, No. XCI, 219.

their thoughts and perspectives, to draw attention to the oppression women faced, and, particularly in Murray's case, to argue for change.

Adams, Warren, and Murray brought into discussion social issues within the home, but they did not engage further in female activism other than to raise awareness to it. In part this is because they did not wish to push further on a system that largely benefitted themselves, and in another part, this is because they were not concerned with the rights of lower class women, but merely of elite, wealthy women, such as themselves. They are not remembered as feminists, therefore, but they did make an important contribution to the developments of women's rights nonetheless. Adams, Warren, and Murray all recognized and gave voice to a problem within society as they saw it and made arguments that this social problem stemmed from the tyranny of fathers. Fathers held authority over households, and it was fathers who held the power (and indeed were likely) to deny their daughters an equal education with their brothers. In so doing, fathers reinforced the gender expectations of society, at the potential peril of their daughters who would then be left financially vulnerable and dependent on their husbands, whether they are good providers and kind household heads, or ruinous and corrupt tyrants.



## **Conclusion**

During the American Revolution, Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray wrote in favour of independence from Britain. Adams' letters to her husband, Warren's propaganda plays, and Murray's essays shared their perspectives on the Revolution, agreeing with other patriots that George III was a tyrant and, as the Revolution went on, agreeing that separation from Britain was required. These women were not bystanders of the American Revolution, and they did more than merely aid their husbands. Through their writings, they were sharing and advancing ideas too. Further, as their writings indicate, they did not have a female perspective of the Revolution. They understood it and interpreted the political causes and character of the Revolution, especially tyranny, the same way as their male contemporaries. This indicates that they had involvement in and comprehension of the political realm. This supports Mary Beth Norton's argument that class, more so than gender, granted one access to the political realm in the eighteenth century. As contributing patriots in the Revolution, Adams, Warren, and Murray were all active participants in the American Revolution and their words and perspectives helped to shape the Revolution and create a new, independent nation.

Adams, Warren, and Murray were not merely parroting the views of their husbands and fellow male patriots. An analysis of their perspectives of tyranny as they extended it into the domestic realm makes this clear. Utilizing the same language and arguments they and other male patriots used in the Revolution, these three women applied ideas from the political sphere to gender relations within the home. In this way,

Adams, Warren, and Murray all saw the same potential for a king to be a tyrant existed within husbands. Adams, Warren, and Murray may not have known what they would do with these arguments, or how far their ideas would reach, nor were they able to predict what other reformers would do in the future in the interests of women's equality, including advocating for divorce rights, married women's property rights, and, eventually, women's suffrage, but they still provided an innovative perspective of tyranny in the domestic realm. Even if only an intellectual exercise amongst elite women, rather than a feminist movement, their discussion of husbandly and fatherly tyranny within the home was an important first step in women's rights.

With little option but to marry, and with no, or very rare and limited, access to legal rights, wives were placed in a potentially vulnerable position upon marriage. Adams, Warren, and Murray all shared their views on husbands and tyranny in their writings. Abigail ever so famously, was clearly aware that, "all men would be tyrants if they could." As she wrote to her husband, "give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend."<sup>1</sup> Warren's play, *The Sack of Rome*, indicates that she too was cognizant of the potential for tyranny within a husband. Warren provided criticism of the power husbands held, as is evident in the behaviours of various husband characters. Through her play, Warren suggests that a good man may not be a tyrant husband, but the potential was always there. Furthermore, should a man already be tyrannical in other aspects of his life, he would certainly make a tyrant husband. As is clear from her many essays on the topic, Murray in particular was adamant that marriage

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31 – April 5, 1776. MHS, "The Adams Family Papers."

placed women in too powerless a position and argued that better education would help protect women from their husbands.

The power that husbands held, once they became fathers, extended to their children. Here again, Adams, Warren, and Murray recognized that the power imbalance between a father and the rest of his family held the potential for tyranny. As is evident from their writing, coupled with their biographies, all three women recognized the power men held and aimed to curb that power, at least subtly. Abigail, through her letters to John, carefully crafted her responses to manipulate her husband, though benignly and softly, to strengthen her own authority as a wife and mother in the process. In *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of Castile*, Warren utilized her plays to showcase the various ways husbands and fathers, respectively, used their authority and to demonstrate that in the wrong hands, this power could be tyrannical and even fatal. Warren's depiction of a range of husbandly and fatherly behaviour, some acceptable and some not, works to reflect real world relations between men and their households, as husband and wife and as father and child. While her own relationships with her father and husband were supportive and encouraging, Warren recognized the authority both husbands and fathers held, and knew this power could be used to govern tyrannically even if some men would exercise authority benignly or benevolently. With her *History*, Warren gained authority as both a published historian and as a republican mother, both of which increased her power as a mother, and at the same time, therefore better balancing the power dynamic between her and her husband over their children. As her essays indicate, Murray believed marriage had the potential to leave wives vulnerable to their husbands, and that the power

husbands held over their wives could result in a tyrannical relationship. Furthermore, Murray believed that education and power were connected, and because it was fathers who held the final say in determining their child's education, Murray was sensitive to the degree of power fathers held and recognized the possibility to raise one's children tyrannically or democratically. Murray aimed to point out and fight against this tyrannical power through her essays. A prime genre for persuasion and argument, Murray shared her perspectives on fathers and tyranny in her essays in *The Gleaner*. Murray's decision to publish under a male persona further lent authority to her arguments, as a male author was more likely to be listened to and respected.

Adams, Warren, and Murray were all prepared to write about the tyranny of men, but there is little reference in their writings about women's capabilities for tyranny. Elite women, such as themselves, had social authority over many other people. Just as fathers could be tyrannical to their children, mothers also held power over their children that they could abuse. Similarly, as wealthy, white women, Adams, Warren, and Murray all employed servants, and before that, their families did; Warren's family also owned at least one slave. Even Abigail Adams, who did express anti-slavery opinions, showed limited acknowledgement of her social privilege and power over others. In a letter to John from September, 1774, Abigail wrote that, "I wish most sincerely there was not a Slave in the province."<sup>2</sup> A year later, in October, 1775, Abigail condemned slavery, writing, "the Sin of Slavery as well as many others is not washed away."<sup>3</sup> Abigail also

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<sup>2</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 22, 1774, *Massachusetts Historical Society*. "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive," accessed August 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, October 25, 1775, *Massachusetts Historical Society*. "The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive," accessed August 2019.

briefly acknowledged the hypocrisy of the Revolution, a war supposedly for freedom, while slavery continued to exist within America. As she wrote, “It allways [sic] appeared a most iniquitous Scheme to me – fight ourselves [sic] for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have. You know my mind on the subject.”<sup>4</sup> It is only rarely that Abigail made such comments, though, and these few examples are the clearest admissions of her social rank being above that of others (although, to be fair, Abigail’s phrase, “you know my mind on the subject,” does suggest that it was a topic the couple also discussed in person). Furthermore, Abigail and John’s correspondence does not contain their perspectives on how elite women in particular contributed to the oppression of slaves. While men may have held considerable authority over servants, elite women would have supervised them on a daily basis, and they had power over servants and slaves who were considered below them on the social hierarchy within the family.

Perhaps Adams, Warren, and Murray wrote little about female tyranny because the term “tyranny” was understood at the time to be a male characteristic, due to its traditionally political (and therefore male) application. Furthermore, while “tyranny” may have been viewed as a male trait, notions of virtue and morality were increasingly viewed as female traits. Initially, “virtue” referred to “male public spirit,” but over the eighteenth century it shifted towards a more feminine definition, and came to be equated with modesty, tenderness, and morality, at the same time that women were also growing

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<sup>4</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, September 22, 1774, *Massachusetts Historical Society*. “*The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*,” accessed August 2019.

increasingly viewed as moral instructors and republican mothers.<sup>5</sup> With tyranny traditionally referring to men, and with increasing beliefs of women as virtuous, it is possible that Adams, Warren, and Murray did not write about female tyranny because they genuinely did not recognize the potential for tyranny that they held. Alternatively, it is also possible that these women displayed similar hypocrisy as male patriots, who condemned British tyranny as a form of metaphoric slavery, and yet were complicit with genuine slavery.

Neither Adams, Warren, or Murray were feminists themselves. They were not concerned with the rights of lower-class women, or of women of colour, nor were they interested in expanding women's rights outside of the home and family (such as through women's divorce rights, property rights, or suffrage). Instead they were concerned only with the rights of other elite, white women. This lack of intersectionality prevents Adams, Warren, and Murray from being feminists. Furthermore, there was no collective feminist movement or sense of female unity at the time that Adams, Warren, and Murray were alive; the concept of feminism did not yet exist. Attempting to fit the opinions of these women into a feminist label or framework is therefore anachronistic, but also potentially reductionist. Trying to classify Adams, Warren, or Murray as either feminist or not is too binary and simplifies their ideas to fit modern understandings of feminism. Still, the arguments that all three women made were in favour of women's rights, (albeit elite, white women), and were adopted by future generations of female reformers. For

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* vol. 13 no. 1 (Autumn, 1987), quote on page 38.

this reason, the arguments of Adams, Warren, and Murray are feminist, even if they themselves were not.

The genre each woman employed allowed Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray the best chance of succeeding with their objectives in writing and publishing. Abigail Adams stayed primarily concerned with her family and the domestic realm; she did not try to publish, or to change anyone's opinion other than her husband's. Through personal correspondence, as well as a close and loving relationship with John, Abigail had the ability and the know-how to manipulate her letters so John would most likely agree with her or respond in a favourable manner. Likewise, Warren's plays allowed her the best opportunity to spread her ideas with her fellow patriots. As Bailyn notes, pamphlets were the best way to spread information during the Revolutionary era.<sup>6</sup> Warren's plays, printed on pamphlets rather than performed, were an excellent way for her to share patriot propaganda, and to do it across classes. Furthermore, plays proved a useful medium for Warren to share her views on husbands and fathers. Because these were radical perspectives, they were dangerous to share. With plays, though, Warren was able to share her views as overtly as she wished, under the guise of fiction. Should anyone object or show offense to the opinions Warren shared, she need only say her plays were intended as dramas. Furthermore, Warren's personal opinions were masked, because one could not know if the views expressed by her characters were her own. Murray, on the other hand, aimed to persuade her readers more directly. For this, essays served as the most effective medium for Murray to utilize. In an

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 8.

essay Murray was able to lay out her argument and her supporting evidence most clearly. Her decision to publish under a male persona further lent legitimacy to her arguments, for as she noted in her final essay, “observing...the indifference, not to say contempt with which female productions are regarded,” a male identity, “would prove favourable to my aspiring wishes.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Murray was primarily concerned with girls’ education. Essays, the argumentative form utilized by students and professors, was therefore highly apropos.

The publications of these women, and the media they employed, are not on their own enough to understand the messages they were trying to convey. It is here that biographies become particularly valuable. Without an understanding of their life experiences and the context in which they were writing, it is not possible to analyze Adams’, Warren’s, or Murray’s writing with much accuracy or very effectively. An understanding of Abigail’s marriage with John, gleaned through her biography, provides the necessary context of a long, companionate marriage with which to analyse their letters. Awareness of Mercy Otis Warren’s relationship with her father, brother, and husband sheds light on why she wrote so passionately about the Revolution (and why she detested Thomas Hutchinson as much as she did.) Knowing Warren’s good, yet complicated relationship with her father and the loving and supportive marriage she had with her husband adds a necessary foundation to analyze her later plays. The benefits and importance of using biography are perhaps most apparent in the case of Judith Sargent Murray. Her own personal experiences, such as her failed first marriage and resulting

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, “Conclusion: The Gleaner Unmasked,” in *The Gleaner*, vol. III, 313.



bankruptcy, no doubt shaped her perspectives, and an understanding of her personal life reveals deeper meaning behind the essays she published and her strong emphasis on girls' education.

Biography, combined with greater context of the time, therefore, can then be used to analyze the written works of Adams, Warren, and Murray. As much as biographies are useful, they also require a degree of caution. For one thing, biographies are easily skewed by their author. In studying a subject's life so thoroughly, a subject who is not alive to personally know, and who cannot speak to the author's accuracy, biographers run the risk of tinting their portrayal with their own, potentially incorrect impressions of the subject's life. Secondly, such a close analysis of one's life can easily create an attachment to a biographer's subject. This can easily result in a glorification or idolization of the subject at the expense of accuracy. However, biographies are also tremendously helpful because they frequently reveal that the lived experience is more complicated than the macro-level trends that are more often the focus of secondary literature, and the way a subject's opinions may evolve, be ambivalent, and thereby defy easy categorization.

In a letter to his wife, John Adams responded to Abigail's request to "remember the ladies" by writing that, "your letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull [sic] than all the rest were grown discontented."<sup>8</sup> John was referring to women as a "tribe," that posed a greater threat to his way of life than the Indigenous populations or the Intelligentsia. John was joking, but his choice of words reveals a genuine concern. The American Revolution was fought to liberate patriots – or

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<sup>8</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776, MHS: "The Adams Family Papers."

more specifically elite, white, male colonial politicians - from the oppression they believed they faced, but it was not a revolution that changed the social structure significantly, or at least it was not intended to do so. Although patriots removed the king, and spoke of a more egalitarian society, the Revolution largely only benefitted white men. Women and people of colour saw little to no improvements. In questioning the hierarchy of society as the Revolution did, though, it is reasonable that women also questioned the hierarchy that placed men above the rest of society. Furthermore, it is logical that women would see parallels between a tyrant king and husbands and fathers; they were repeatedly told, after all, about the shared similarities in the power between kings and the head of the household. As Filmer posited, fathers were kings in miniature.<sup>9</sup> In patriot assertions about tyranny and governance, these women recognized in their husbands and fathers (both their own and their children's) the same potentially threat that they saw in George III. Transposing patriot claims into the domestic realm, as they did, was a highly innovative and radical argument that, depending on the traction it received, could question the foundational hierarchical order of society. Elite men, as part of Adams', Warren's, and Murray's social circle, and as leaders of American government, were aware of these contentions and, like John indicates, were wary of the views expressed by their wives and daughters. These men had every reason to be concerned; the social power they held was beginning to be questioned by a greater majority of the population, and, as historians recognize, revolutions rarely ended well for those who held power in the beginning. In the period directly after the Revolution, where Norton,

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 295.

Kerber, and Zagarri all note greater political involvement from elite women, the French Revolution was also occurring. Even before the French Revolution, John Adams was aware of the potential for a democratic revolution to be turned against its own leaders, and it is no wonder he was concerned.

At the same that Adams, Warren, and Murray expressed these opinions on husbands and fathers, however, opinions that went against the existing social order, they tempered their views. On the one hand, because the views she shared were so radical, and indeed, even anti-patriotic in nature, Adams reassured her husband that she wanted nothing more than to be a housewife; Warren published her beliefs as fiction, thereby avoiding responsibility for the arguments she posited; and Murray wrote in her essays about how she was content with the current social structure, reassuring her readers that women would stay within their inferior social position, even if they did get better access to education, as Murray wanted. Tiptoeing around male concerns and insecurities, all three women fell short of advocating fully for women's rights. At the same time, they also stopped shy of proposing a disruption to the social order because they recognized that it was in their best interests to keep the hierarchical world order they had. In the eighteenth century in particular, as Norton argues, and their biographies further support, Adams, Warren, and Murray, as elite women, *had* access to the political and public realm. They could not vote or hold office, but they had real political influence as well-educated, elite, white women and as authors. The limitations to elite women's rights that would form in the nineteenth century did not yet exist when Adams, Warren, and Murray were alive and writing. For them to push for greater social change would have cost them

the privileges their wealth, connections, and status provided. So why argue for improved women's rights at all? They all had (seemingly) loving and supportive husbands, and their fathers facilitated and encouraged their education and their written pursuits. What were they hoping to achieve, and why were they concerned with rights they already had? They were not concerned about their own lives, but that of their daughters and of future generations of girls. This is evident in Adams' letters to her husband, and her attempts to have Nabby learn Latin and Greek. Warren, who did not have any daughters of her own, argued in her publications for future generations of daughters and wives. She provided in her plays a critical commentary of the social hierarchy that placed women below men, and in Warren's *History*, she looked forward to the future, by telling a narrative of America's past as the *progress* of America. Warren was concerned with how American would continue to take shape, and where women fit into this vision. Murray too, was concerned with the future of America and the space that girls and women might occupy in the near future. Murray also had a daughter whom she was no doubt thinking of as she argued for greater education. She almost explicitly says as much in her essays when she wrote, that she would "give my daughters every accomplishment which I thought proper."<sup>10</sup> That Murray was looking forward to her daughter's adult life and the potential education and future generations of women is supported by the optimism with which she spoke of the future.

The added importance that post-Revolutionary society gave women, as republican mothers, magnified their political influence as educators of their children and thereby

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<sup>10</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. 1, No. XVII, 167.

gave legitimacy and greater authority to their political identities. Republican motherhood, at the same time that it aided women, though, also meant that mothers had to be confined to the domestic realm, so that they would not be corrupted by the public realm.<sup>11</sup> By the time of Jackson's presidency, Zagari argues, women were even more confined to the domestic realm and kept rigidly separate from the political world.<sup>12</sup> This is in keeping with Norton's argument too, that stricter gender roles came into play in the nineteenth century and women, even elite women, were no longer able to participate in politics.<sup>13</sup> Afraid of the arguments women were making in the years immediately after the Revolution, in a period of optimism and hope for America's future, men placed higher importance on strict gender separation. Zagari refers to this as a backlash, a step backwards from the improved access to the political realm that existed in the eighteenth century. Yet the writings of Adams, Warren, and Murray reveal that this backlash was perhaps less of a hinderance than Zagari implies. While none of these women were still alive by Jackson's presidency, the period Zagari suggests this backlash began, their writing still reveals perspectives on tyranny within the home that were both highly political and important, for they provided critical commentary on the tyranny underlying these accepted institutions. These women, wrote patriot writings that showed their concern with the public, formal political realm, but much of their written work also focused squarely on the domestic realm. For them, the domestic realm was not apolitical,

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<sup>11</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011).

but the epicenter of the power imbalances between men and women, and this structural imbalance mirrored the problems of inequality within society. Commenting on these imbalances was not secondary to concerns about equality within formal political institutions, therefore, but rather a critical first step in improving women's rights.

Adams, Warren, and Murray took the patriot arguments against George III and transposed them into the domestic realm. The arguments they were making were about husbands and fathers. This then raises the question: was Zagarri's backlash truly a setback for women's rights? Norton, Kerber, and Zagarri all argue that this backlash period saw restrictions on women's rights and equality, for they had less power in the public and political spheres, but these women had not been writing exclusively about formal politics and its institutions. Instead, Adams, Warren, and Murray had shifted their focus to the domestic realm, and to women's equality within the home. Zagarri's backlash, therefore, is not so much a setback in women's rights, but a shift in the arena to the home. Furthermore, these were women who were already accustomed to the domestic sphere as their political arena.

Adams, Warren, and Murray all wrote from home and their writings were about politics – that is, power imbalances that were acceptable and unacceptable - within the home. Warren and Murray, had they lived longer, may not have been able to continue publishing their work, but for Adams her entire political involvement had always been from within the home. Greater confinement to the domestic realm would have had only a minimal impact on Adams and would not have prevented any of these three women authors from continuing their fight for greater equality; they were perfectly positioned by

commenting on home life and the power of husbands and fathers to make an important argument about reforms necessary for women's rights. One of the alleged drawbacks of republican motherhood was the confinement to the home, but upon analyzing their writings, the home was perhaps not so much a place of retreat or defeat, as it was perceived by them to be a vital area of reform. Neither Adams, Warren, or Murray are considered feminists today. They were too cautious to disrupt a social system that privileged them above other women and lower-class men. That being said, they laid the groundwork for future women, women who *would* be called feminists, to take up the mantle.

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