

“Genius equall to that which wrought another most beautifull Poem”:
Classical Communication in the Writings of Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray

by

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Abstract

This research examines how two colonial American women, Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray, utilized classical history and literature within their own writings before, during, and after the War for Independence. Through their poems, plays, and essays, they sought to both rally and educate the masses. Warren hoped to inspire colonists to fight against tyranny while maintaining their virtues and Murray used the momentum of the war to fight for equal education opportunities between the sexes. This paper analyses the specific works containing references to ancient Greek and Roman literature and history to better understand the comparisons and allusions being made within each text

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mom, dad, and sister who always believed in me and encouraged me to pursue my love of history. And to all my professors who guided me along my academic journey.

Introduction

The study of classical literature became deep-seated in the culture of the colonies from the time the first grammar schools and universities were created in the seventeenth century. Only men, typically of the upper and middle class, were allowed to gain a formal education, but this did not stop white women like Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray from developing and utilizing an understanding of Greek and Roman history. Classical literature was deeply ingrained in colonial society especially amongst the social elite. This became critical in the decades when the American people questioned and later separated themselves from England. Leaders of the independence movement drew on themes from classical history and literature to justify their revolution, and they became the basis of Warren and Murray's writings in support of revolutionary ferment.

These two women believed their works could make an impact on those who were privileged enough to understand the classics, specifically those who had the wealth and political influence to shape wartime decisions and establish a government. Warren used ancient Greek and Roman literature and history within her writings, and Murray took what she knew about the classics and put them into her own works so that she too could communicate with a wider audience. However, rather than promoting political ideas in the years leading up to and over the course of the American Revolution the way Warren had, Murray wrote essays about women's rights and equality between the sexes after the war. She published her most famous work, *The Gleaner* (1798), under the pen name Constantina. Similarly, Warren, between 1774 and 1789, was a bold but anonymous writer in a protest movement that would lead to the American Revolution. In 1790, however, she began to publish her work under her own name as she

diagnosed the problems within the new republic and what it might face if they did not continue to live up to their professed values.

In the centuries since the American Revolution, historians have studied why people in the founding generation signed letters and other writings with pseudonyms derived from the classical period: Brutus, Diana, and Portia, for example. They have found that colonists held a passion for the writings and histories of those who fought to preserve republicanism thousands of years in the past. Scholar Eran Shavel, for example, argues that colonists drew comparisons between certain events in the ancient world and their own increasingly tense relationship with England.¹ They drew inspiration from the classical authors, political figures, and mythological heroes with whom they most identified. By analyzing the names used and the context of the pamphlets they were associated with, Shavel theorizes that historians might be able to not only decode a cipher hidden in the writing, or understand an author who was able to fully express their opinion through the safety of anonymity, but also offer an insight into the minds of those scholars known to have used these pen names. Historians Bernard Bailyn and Stanley Burstein similarly explain how classical literature provided colonists with numerous examples of rebels fighting against tyranny in antiquity, although they primarily focused on the Roman Revolution in the first-century C.E.² Because the classics were so ingrained into their culture, Americans would have been able to make connections between their conflict with the British King and Parliament, and an ancient civilization fighting for their republic. All three authors argue that colonists found inspiration from the classics for their bold political moves.

¹ Eran Shalev, “Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms during the American Revolution and Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 2 (2003): 151–72. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3125034>.

² Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*; Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge: Mass., 1967); Stanley M. Burstein, “The Classics and the American Republic,” *The History Teacher* 30 (1): 29-44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/494218>.

Elite young men were introduced to classical literature and history from an early age. They derived inspiration from important political figures of the ancient era and attempted to embody these teachings as they built their own republic. In his article “Leadership in Eighteenth-Century America and Today,” Henry Steele Commager explains how “the young had an avid sense of duty and civic virtue. The Fathers, we remember, were brought up on Plutarch and Cicero, and read Locke and Montesquieu and Cato’s Letters.”³ He illustrates how the founding generation took a special interest in fifth-century Athens, a time period often described as a golden age, as the country was at its height of cultural, intellectual, and commercial power. In *Ancients and Axioms: Secondary Education in Eighteenth-Century New England*, Richard Middlekauff supports this by illustrating how colonial tutors knew that colleges required students to understand the classics which led to them primarily teaching Greek and Latin literature, history, and languages to their young scholars.⁴ Historians Meyer Reinhold and David Wiesen further this topic in their essays, “The Classics and the Quest for Virtue in Eighteenth Century America” and “Ancient History and Early American Education,” respectively, published in *The Usefulness of Classical Learning in the Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented at the 107th Annual Meeting of The American Philological Association*, by explaining how colonists looked to ancient moralists such as Plutarch, who was a favorite among Americans, and took his words

³ Henry Steele Commager, “Leadership in Eighteenth-Century America and Today,” *Daedalus* 90, no. 4 (1961): 652–73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026683>.

Susan Ford Wiltshire, *The Usefulness of Classical Learning in the Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented at the 107th Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1984), 9.

⁴ Robert Middlekauff, *Ancients and Axioms: Secondary Education in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Salem, N.H: Ayer Co, 1988).

of using history as a mirror to improve and design their own form of government and society to heart.

Colonists consciously made the choice to embody classical virtues and cast themselves as the leaders of an independence movement and architects of a new democratic republic. In his book *First Principles: What American Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country*, Thomas Ricks describes how the Founding Fathers were able to incorporate ancient virtues. For example, he explains how George Washington “managed to become the exemplar of the classical Roman values that meant so much to elite colonial society.”⁵ Likewise, John Adams shaped himself into a modern day Cicero because he was influenced by “the parable of Cicero’s triumph over the Catilinarian conspiracy in 63 BC,” which “was the essential political narrative for the Revolutionary generation.”⁶ Ricks argues that the founding generation attempted to emulate the classical heroes because they embodied the virtues that would help them build their own democratic republic. Scholar Gordon Wood illustrates a different opinion on how colonists incorporated morals and ethics from antiquity into their everyday lives. He explains that “classical virtue had flowed from the citizen's participation in politics,” yet “for many in the eighteenth century, virtue now flowed from the citizen's participation in society, not in government.”⁷ Colonial Americans lived very different lives compared to those who lived in ancient Greece and Rome. This led to them creating what Wood describes as softer and more feminine ideals that women could also embody as they were asked

⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, *First Principles: What America’s Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country* (Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company, 2020), xx.

⁶ Ricks, *First Principles*, xx.

⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969), 7.

to step into a more active and public sphere in the years during and after the Revolution. He argues that classical virtues were too harsh and masculine for the developing nation as the ancients valued self-sacrifice in the name of patriotism. Americans needed a society that valued compassion and cooperation rather than strict service to the government.⁸

Classical literature and history tremendously impacted colonial Americans, especially as they declared independence from Britain. Political figures from antiquity became role models while the various forms of government that evolved throughout the millennia became the building blocks of a new nation. Historian Richard Gummere illustrates this in his book *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition; Essays in Comparative Culture*, by explaining how colonial Americans “took from the past whatever was relevant to their own concerns and transmuted the material into their own language.”⁹ While colonists utilized classical literature and history in their everyday lives, they only selected what they believed to be relevant or attempted to shoehorn antiquity’s lessons into whatever situation they found themselves in. Meyer Reinhold supports this in his book *Classica America: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* by claiming that “their knowledge of the ancient world was not only limited by their biases but was very slender.”¹⁰ Tutors and colleges focused on moralist and political histories with the occasional reading of Vergil or Homer’s poems because they offered some instructions in ethics. Reinhold argues that with the picking and choosing of

⁸ Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787*, 8.

⁹ Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Comparative Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963), viii.

¹⁰ Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 20.

classical texts, the founding generation limited their education by prioritizing their political heroes rather than studying the whole of the ancient world.

After colonial Americans fought for their independence from the British Empire, they then had to create a government for the new nation, one that ensured equality and autonomy for its citizens. They looked into history for inspiration, particularly the Ancient Greeks and Romans, as they had been the focus of their education. Historian Joyce Appleby explains in her book, *Liberalism and Republicanism In the Historical Imagination*, how colonists utilized both classical republicanism and a more contemporary liberalism as Federalists and Jeffersonians clashed over the creation of new laws and policies.¹¹ However, they would soon abandon what they were taught about classical government as “classical republicanism offered only a language for lamenting, as opposed to understanding, commerce.”¹² Appleby states that colonists turned to liberalism as it better served their expanding economy. In his book, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, historian Carl Richard strongly disagrees with Appleby and states that “classics exerted a formative influence upon the founders, both directly and through the mediation of Whig and American perspectives. The classics supplied mixed government theory, the principal basis for the U.S. Constitution.”¹³ Ancient Greece and Rome supplied the founding generation with a sense of identity, one outside of the British Empire and “offered the founders companionship and solace, emotional resources

¹¹ Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 323.

¹² Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, 335.

¹³ Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Omaha, NE: The Legal Classics Library, Division of Gryphon Corporation, 1994), 7.

necessary for coping with the deaths and disasters so common in their era.”¹⁴ Richard explains that colonists would not let go of their classical education because it provided comfort while they fought for their independence and formed their new government because they were not the first to do so.

Scholar Caroline Winterer supports this claim in her book *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* by illustrating how even women with no formal education could come to rely on the classics for comfort and use their knowledge to communicate their thoughts to others. She explains how “classical female icons, far from being barricades of exclusion, in fact became women’s portals of entry into public life.” Eliza Lucus Pinckney went so far as to risk her life and run into a burning house to save her beloved copy of Plutarch’s work. “Women,” Winterer argues, “grabbed onto classical tropes and symbolism once dominated by men to make claims for political rights in a public discourse still saturated with classicism.”¹⁵ The classics facilitated communication between the sexes which became incredibly important in the years leading up to and during the American Revolution as many colonists strove to fight for freedom.

My research differs from some historians’ work as I specifically look into Warren and Murray’s essays and poems that include classical references. As seen above, numerous scholars have written about how ancient Greek and Roman literature influenced colonial Americans. They used it to justify a Declaration of Independence and influence their newly formed government. Women’s history has become an increasingly popular topic in the last few decades,

¹⁴ Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, 8.

¹⁵ Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 9.

inspiring historians to look into lives, letters, and works of women such as Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, and, of course, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray. However, their writings were, for the most part, looked at as a whole rather than the individual essays and poems. I chose these two women because of how they use their knowledge to communicate with the public, they understood that the majority of their target audience had an insight into the classics. They aimed to guide the social elite into making decisions that would benefit the new nation both politically and culturally. The two recognized that they had to use the language of the ancient world if they wanted to catch the eye of readers and ensure their messages were decoded. Warren and Murray wanted to have a voice in the public sphere and to make a contribution to their society, although one writer was more successful than the other. The former's goal was to influence the policies enacted before, during, and after the American Revolution, and, to some extent, she was successful. Warren had the attention of male revolutionaries such as John Adams and George Washington who encouraged her efforts. Her published poems were meant to warn her readers about the looming revolution and guide them into making virtuous choices during the war. Murray, on the other hand, was less influential. Her works were intended to sway the new nation toward gender equality of the upper class through her plays. Unfortunately, theater was not popular in Boston and the progressive movement that sparked the American Revolution quickly died out after the war was over. However, these women were determined to communicate with the public through the use of classical literature within their writings.

Judith Sargent Murray was born in 1751 into a wealthy merchant family from Massachusetts which allowed her a modest education in reading and writing. This, however, was not enough for her as she argued that her schooling should not be limited by her gender. She used her station in life to purchase or borrow books so that she could give herself the teaching

she believed she was owed. In her work *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence*, historian Sheila Skemp explains how Murray saw herself as “a true “Wollstonecraftian,” and “was both a contributor to and a product of the transcontinental conversation about gender issues that permeated elite public discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”¹⁶ She educated herself partially out of spite and would use her anger as motivation while writing her books, essays, and plays. After the Revolutionary War, Murray became a Federalist, a group that supported states falling under the power of an overarching central power. Many scholars, including Sharon Harris in her article “Judith Sargent Murray (1751-1820),” claim that Murray was the first prominent American feminist writer, known for her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes” and her book *The Gleaner*.¹⁷ Therese Boos Dykeman explains in her book, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy*, how Murray hoped “for laws to improve so that women could better survive” because she had experienced what life was like for women who were in debt without the means to pay it off.¹⁸ She understood that women were not protected by the law and wanted to call attention to the issue with her own publications. Murray used her works as a call to action for women’s rights, her concern for the rise of political parties, and lack of virtue amongst Americans. Dykeman states that “it is in reading Judith Sargent Murray as a philosopher, that her many seemingly disparate essays, poems, and dramas, become intelligible and consistent in promoting views based on her principle

¹⁶ Sheila L. Skemp, *First Lady of Letters: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence* (Philadelphia, PA: Univ. of Pennsylvania Pr., 2009), x.

¹⁷ Sharon M. Harris, “Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820),” *Legacy* 11, no. 2 (1994): 152–60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25679133>, 152.

¹⁸ Therese Boos Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray* (Lewiston etc.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 172.

and method,” and that “her metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, and political philosophy come together in an idea- pragmatic feminism: ideal truth and what truth works for women as well as society.”¹⁹ She argues that readers did not truly appreciate Murray’s publications in the eighteenth-century because she was writing during a time where both laws and culture benefited men who did not entertain the idea of changing their society.

Murray understood that if she wanted to bring awareness to her desire for gender equality, then she would have to connect with her readers in a way that they could comprehend. With Ancient Greek and Roman literature and history taught almost universally throughout grammar schools and colleges, she would use this as her medium of communication. Winterer explains how “although no record is left of Murray’s precise classical reading, her publications show that she was a reader of Plutarch’s *Lives* in English translation. She explicitly mentions Plutarch and even quotes him outright in her essays as a source of timeless wisdom.”²⁰ Murray understood that others of her economic class had the power to make social and political change and that the best way to reach them was through their shared understanding of the classics. Dykeman argues that Murray introduced a new ideology to the colonies. She claims that “what Murray introduces to the philosophical canon is a feminist epistemology that is both idealist in the tradition of Plato and pragmatic in the sense of the not yet formulated tradition in American philosophy.”²¹ In doing so, she was able to take the information she learned in spite of the lack of formal education so that she too could have the tools to communicate the need for equal rights for the sexes with others.

¹⁹ Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy*, 176

²⁰ Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 77.

²¹ Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy*, 176.

The literature of Greece and Rome became an integral part of colonial society and aided in communicating ideas and arguments. People of the founding generation utilized classical writings to get the point of their various tracts and pamphlets across to those who understood classical history. Mercy Otis Warren was one of the small number of successfully published female writers. Historian Rosemarie Zagarri explains in her book *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* that Warren, often described as a genius among men and an inspiration for women by those who read her works, wanted to get her message out to anyone who would listen and utilized the classics to do so. Kate Davies argues in her work *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren the Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender*, that due to her level of unofficial education, Warren felt that she had the duty to insert herself into the political debate and began to publish pamphlets, poems, and letters which were met with varying interest.²² Zagarri outlines the complications a political woman would face in the eighteenth century: “unlike her male counterparts, she had to overcome her sex in order to become a patriot. As a woman, she was neither expected to join nor automatically welcomed into the resistance movement. But she persisted and made an important, unique contribution.”²³ Due to the fact that most Americans knew of and understood classical literature, Warren and others like her believed that they had an obligation to inform the reading public in the politically complex world colonists found themselves in the decades leading up to, during, and after the Revolution.

²² Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren the Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender*, Oxford :: Oxford University Press, 2005.

²³ Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1995), xvii.

Due to her upbringing, Warren had a keen understanding of the politics taking place leading up to the American Revolution and the chaos that erupted after independence was declared in 1776. She eventually became a staunch Anti-Federalist who believed that states should be able to self-govern without the interference of a national organization. Her brother's tutor, the Reverend Jonathan Russell, allowed her to pick books from his library, and her father, a well known lawyer, who encouraged her pursuit of learning law, literature, and politics.²⁴ In her article "Mercy Warren, 1728-1814," (1953) Maud Macdonald Hutcheson attributes this to her ability to understand the political chaos that took place in the years leading up to and during the American Revolution. She states that a reader of Warren's "works will find her style artificial and her expression abstract, for this was the prevailing mode. In her language, correspondence became 'epistolary intercourse,' a house was a 'habitation.'"²⁵ Her style of writing and her deep awareness and analysis of what was happening within the colonies led to others looking to her to spread their own messages to the public. Warren felt conflicted about publishing her works, even more so about adding her own name to the poems and plays in spite of receiving praise from friends and family. She firmly believed in traditional gender norms and was inspired by the ideals of ancient Sparta. The women offered a perfect example of republican virtue, they would bravely send their men off to war in order to maintain their way of life. Carol Berkin states in her book *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (2005), that "John Adams reveled in the damage that her characterizations did to the reputations of such royal officeholders as Governor Thomas Hutchinson or Attorney General Jonathan Sewell, who

²⁴ Maud Macdonald Hutcheson, "Mercy Warren, 1728-1814," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1953): 378-402, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1917481>, 380.

²⁵ Hutcheson, "Mercy Warren, 1728-1814," 379.

supported British policies.”²⁶ By publishing her works in newspapers, Warren reluctantly entered the public sphere which had previously only allowed men to share their thoughts and opinions with the masses. She justified her ability to do this because she believed in her own genius, that she was a special circumstance and that it was her duty to spread awareness to the public. Warren received praise for her work from her family and friends who encouraged her to share her political opinions through her use of her classical knowledge by publishing them in local newspapers, even if she did so anonymously.

In chapter one of this thesis, I analyze four of Warren’s poems, choosing from both poems written in the pre-war years and during the war, where she finds her voice with the support of her close friends and family. Two of the works were written in response to the Boston Tea Party while the third was released months before the war began. Throughout these poems, Warren warns of future battles and bloodshed as well as a rallying call to protest the Tea Act of 1773. This became a cause that affected everyone, including women, so they were asked to do what they could against the unjust taxes. Mercy Otis Warren was asked to write by her friends and family who believed her to be a genius and trusted her to spread their message. Beginning with her first published work, the “Squabble of Sea Nymphs,” which was commissioned by John Adams as a way to encourage colonists to purchase smuggled tea, the goddesses representing America and Britain argue over access to their preferred drink of choice. A year later in 1775, “Political Reverie” appeared in the *Boston Gazette* as war loomed on the horizon. The poem begins begging people to listen to the history and mythology of Ancient Greece and Rome, of the battles fought and the lives lost. However, the tone becomes more hopeful as Warren believed

²⁶ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 16.

that someday America would be its own republic. Thirdly, “To Hon. J Winthrop, Esq.” was written at an unknown date but is believed to be a response to her friend John Winthrop as he creates a track listing the different ways women could be involved in the protests after the Association Boycott of 1774. This was a call for colonists to fight for their freedom and independence, one that was not put in jeopardy by the English Parliament. Written in 1779, “Simplicity” condemned the wealthy elite for returning to their lavish lifestyles by purchasing goods from Britain. Only the virtuous, those who abstained from buying foreign items, supported the revolution and would lead the colonies to freedom.

I will also be examining sections of Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Gleaner*, in the second chapter of this thesis, which she published in 1798 at the encouragement of her ill husband to ensure that she would receive an income after he died. Between 1792 and 1794 she published independent but connected essays in the *Massachusetts Magazine* and then compiled into a three-volume book that she would send to family and friends such as George Washington and John Adams. In Volume 1 Essay 24, Murray explains how the theater should be utilized to educate the next generation of Americans so that they would be able to take the new nation into a brighter future. Like the ancient Greeks and Romans who used the stage to spread political or personal messages to the public, so too could colonial playwrights encourage youths to better both their government and society so that America could truly be equal for everyone. Her goal in Volume 1 Essay 25 was to compare classical mythology and biblical scripture, having studied both in her youth. This allowed her to draw connections and spot similarities between the two because of her devotion to God and her respect for religion from antiquity. Volume 2 Essay 45 is a letter addressed to one of Murray’s characters, Margaretta, from her adoptive mother Mary Vigillius, who made it her mission to ensure that daughter had a proper education so that she

would not be forced to live a monotonous life. In her letter, Mary describes the lives and accomplishments of classical politicians who embodied characteristics that young Americans should take inspiration from so that they would be able to promote progress in the new country. Murray's ultimate goal with her essays was to promote education via the theater, virtue, and gender equality.

Chapter 1 - Mercy Otis Warren

There is an eerie stillness in the air that leaves a feeling of unrest in soldiers returning to their camps and commanders convening to determine their next course of action once the shaky truce with the enemy falls apart. The fighting has gone on longer than anyone would care to remember, and the loss of life has been far greater than was expected. Men gather, evincing “scarce a trait that speaks the species man, except the semblance of the human form.”²⁷ This is not a battle that took place during the American Revolution, but rather a scene depicted by revolutionary-era writer Mercy Otis Warren in her play, *The Sack of Rome* (1790), in which the Roman army attempts to hold off attacks brought on by Attila the Hun. The piece was not written for entertainment and was never publicly performed, despite the effort the author put into the dialog and details. She wrote this as a warning to the American people, whom Warren believed to have become too selfish and overindulgent in the years following the war for independence. It was too soon after the establishment of the newly formed nation for Americans to become frivolous in their lifestyles and lackadaisical in securing the government and its laws.

For nearly twenty years Warren published warnings and propaganda in the form of poems and plays in the hope that colonists would realize what was required of them to fight for and maintain independence. She reminded her readers about how, after years of defending their colonies from Native American tribes and French invaders from the north during the French and Indian War, the British Parliament struggled to refill their coffers. In April of 1773, they passed the Tea Act, which challenged protesters’ belief that only the colonial government should decide on local taxation. They protested this as they felt that Britain was levying unconstitutional taxes

²⁷ Mercy Otis Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope* (Printed at Boston: by I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews. At Faust's Statue, no. 45, Newbury Street, 1790), 15.

against them. This, as historian Mary Beth Norton states, was the turning point for colonists as they felt that this was a direct attack on their liberties. Colonists reacted with boycotts and outrage at the East India Company ships that brought the dutied tea to Boston and other colonial ports. In response to this, on December 16, 1773, colonists in Boston, disguised as Tuscarora Indians, stormed ships docked in Boston Harbor and dumped over 300 chests of tea into the ocean, destroying over one million dollars' worth of product in 2015 money.²⁸ Norton describes this as the turning point within the colonies when lines were drawn, and sides were chosen. Both she and historian Woody Holton argue that even though colonists lacked unity as of 1773 – some holding steadfast to their loyalties to England while others called for stiff resistance from what they believed to be a tyrannical government – the destruction of the tea was a defining moment. Many within the colonies believed that what would later be called the Boston Tea Party was a step too far in protesting the taxes levied on the North American Territory as they knew the king and Parliament would call for reparations on the lost cargo. They feared that soldiers would be sent to control the uprisings and laws would become more oppressive. Between 1774 and 1775, during escalating tensions, Mercy Otis Warren published two free-standing poems, “The Squabble of Sea Nymphs; or the Sacrifice of the Tuscararoës” and “A Political Reverie,” both intended to encourage people to protest unconstitutional taxation. Over the course of the revolution, she released “To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq” and “Simplicity” in which she encouraged her readers to live virtuously and boycott British made goods.

²⁸ Mary Beth Norton, *1774: The Long Year of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2020), 30.

“The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs”

Warren would later, with the encouragement of her husband and friends, incorporate the stories of empires and republics, of heroes and villains, into her writings and publications in order to reach her target audience. For this, she won praise from several influential figures. John Adams, in a letter written days after the Boston Tea Party to Warren’s husband, James Warren, requested that his colleague’s talented wife use her literary skills to celebrate the recent destruction of the tea by placing it into a mythological setting:

make my compliments to Mrs Warren and tell her that I want a poetical Genius to describe the Frolic among the Sea Nymphs and Goddesses ... The sirens should be introduced somehow. I cant tell how and Proteus, a son of Neptune, who could sometimes flow like Water, and sometimes burn like Fire bark like a Dog howl like Wolf, whine like an Ape, Cry like a Crokadile, or roar like a Lyon. But for want of this Same Poetical Genius I can do nothing. I wish to See a late Glorious Event, celebrated, by a certain poetical Pen, which has no equal that I know of in this Country.²⁹

Adams believed that Warren was capable of creating a work that incorporated several mythological figures and would comment, in a humorous but pointed way, on the fate of the tea. Such a poem could put on display the superior wit and wisdom of those who

²⁹ Mercy Otis Warren, “Adams Papers Digital Edition,” Adams Papers Digital Edition - Massachusetts Historical Society, January 19, 1774, <https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/ADMS-06-02-02-0002#sn=5>.

spoke truth with their bold deed. Adams also took this as an opportunity to mock Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his council as they met to determine the consequences of the Boston Tea Party. Historian Mary Beth Norton explains that there was a lack of unity throughout the colonies. Bostonians, for example, attempted to induce ships carrying tea to leave the harbor by approaching custom officers, ship owners, and their governor to encourage them to return to England without paying the duty or unloading their cargo. Many believed that this was the perfect moment for Americans throw off the yoke placed upon them by Britian. Abigail Adams, in a letter to Warren, wrote about she was thrilled at how quickly the boycott movement spread stating that “the flame is kindled and the Lightning it catches from Soul to Soul.”³⁰ However, people in Charleston were unable to come to a consensus of whether to sign a nonimportation agreement while merchants refused to participate until dutied and smuggled tea were banned. During this time, authors began to publish poems and articles encouraging Americans boycott British goods. John Adams commissioned a poem from Warren because he wanted to applaud the men who participated in throwing hundreds of tea chests into the Boston Harbor. Conflicting opinions surrounded the politically charged destruction of the tea, some Americans believing that provoking England would only make matters worse while others feeling encouraged and inspired by the dramatic protest. Adams’s requested piece was one of Warren’s first published writings to feature classical history as the colonies faced their own impending revolution.

In a letter from Warren to Abigail Adams, dated January 19, 1774, she brought up John’s request for a mythologically-based work, and assured her friend of her eagerness

³⁰ Norton, 1774, 27.

to oblige: “if there was any body in this part of the World that Could sing the Rival Nymphs: and Celebrate the Happy Victory of Salacia in a manner that would Merit Mr. Adams’s approbation he may be assure’d it should immediately be Attempted.”³¹ She was honored to have a poem requested by someone of such talent as John Adams, himself known for his writing prowess; however, she understood that Adams might have only commissioned her because he felt that to write using references to classical mythology was beneath him or that he was simply too busy with other much more important matters:

But if he thinks it would be too Great Condescension in him to Associate much with the Muses while under the direction of Apollo his time is so much more usefully and importantly filld up, a particular Friend of his would be glad of a little clearer Explanation of some of his Characters, she not being well Enough Versed in ancient Mytholigy to know who is meant by the son of Neptune (who can so Easily transform himself into the Mischevious of Every species) as there are several Modern Proteus’s to whom this Docility of temper is Equally applicable.

Men, in literature and with regard to the history of Ancient Greece and Rome, typically preferred to reference governmental or military tales and figures rather than mythological heroes and monsters, which were often utilized by women in their letters

³¹ John Adams to James Warren, 22 Dec. 1773 [electronic edition], Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive, Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/ADMS-06-02-02-0002#sn=5>.

and poems.³² Within the text, Warren explains that while she was willing to take up the task of writing the poem due to Adams's time being taken up with more important matters, she was worried about aligning figures in mythology to the wrong contemporary politicians. Proteus, known as an ever-changing sea god, could represent multiple colonial officeholders.

In February of that same year, Warren wrote to Abigail Adams in hopes of a reaction from John concerning the draft she had sent to him before publication in March on the front page of the *Boston Gazette*. She feared that if she had not received praises for her work by that time, then perhaps it had been unsatisfactory and disappointing, and if that had been the case then she swore to lay aside her pen and never attempt to write again: "If he is silent I shall Consider it as a certain Mark of disapprobation, and in despair will for the future, lay asside the pen of the poet."³³ Notably, Warren showed less interest in knowing the opinion of her female friend, Abigail Adams, even if she did possess taste and education, which can be seen in a letter Abigail wrote to Mercy expressing her own thoughts on the behavior of the British king and Parliament. Adams equated the ambition of Alexander the Great, who wept "for more Worlds to conquer," and Julius Caesar, as he would "rather be the first man in a village than the second in

³² Commager, "Leadership in Eighteenth-Century America and Today."

³³ "Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 27 February 1774," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0072-0001>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, *December 1761–May 1776*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 99–100.]

Rome.”³⁴ Abigail felt that the English government would ruin their colony and oppress their people only to face defeat in the aftermath of a rebellion. Alexander, she wrote, would have done better to listen to the subjects in the kingdoms he conquered rather than whimper when facing the consequences of disregarding the wisdom of those who possessed a deeper understanding of the people and politics of the territories.

In spite of this example of Abigail’s education and understanding of classical history, Warren only valued John’s opinion on the poem: “For I will not trust the partiality of My own sex so much as to rely on Mrs. Adams judgment though I know her to be a Lady of taste and Discernment.”³⁵ Perhaps she believed that she did not require Abigail’s thoughts on the work because it was politically focused, which fell firmly in the male sphere of influence.

Although Warren was modest about her skill at landing satirical barbs on Boston’s royalist officials, her frontpage poem gained readership and did not miss its mark. Warren introduces her work by stating that the act and the consequences should never be forgotten in the events leading up to the American Revolution. She begins with the sea god Poseidon calling for all river and lake deities to meet in order to find something that would replace their beloved nectar as its stream dried up. Here Warren was depicting the American people attempting to make do without the English tea that

³⁴ “Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 27 February 1774,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0071>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, *December 1761–May 1776*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 97–99.]

³⁵ Mercy Otis Warren, “Adams Papers Digital Edition,” Adams Papers Digital Edition - Massachusetts Historical Society, February 27, 1774, <https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/ADMS-06-02-02-0002#sn=5>.

was being boycotted as a principled objection to parliamentary taxation. This sparked an interest in readers, as their struggles were masterfully translated into classical references. Although education in the classics was typically reserved for those in the middling and upper classes, the popularity of the subject had a trickledown effect leading to working and lower-class citizens understood the mythology and history of ancient Greece and Rome.

Colonist Harbottle Dorr, a shopkeeper who kept every edition of the *Boston Gazette*, penciled in his own ideas as to what and who Warren was referring to within her poems, clearly recognizing it as a satire on the despotic nature of the British Empire. Dorr equated the Titans and Goddesses to England's Parliament, as they met to determine how best to refill their stream of nectar, or their coffers, after numerous wars and skirmishes left them empty. Dorr understood that the aggressor was meant to be the British Parliament in Warren's description of how they "travail o're Columba's Coast, propos'd to rob and plunder, ev'ry neighboring Vine, regardless of Nemesis sacred shrine. Nor leave untouch'd the Peasant's little Store."³⁶ Regardless of economic status, no colonist, no matter how humble, would be spared, as tax collectors pillaged their way across the American coast. For Dorr and many in the protest movement, the conduct of Parliament was tyrannical. Taxes placed upon them by a distant government infringed on the rights of those who lived within the colonies and should enjoy the rights of Englishmen..

Scholar T.H. Breen explains that never before had some two million people across the colonies banded together in protest, as they did with the boycotts that had

³⁶ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 21 March, 1774, in "The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.," Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

begun with the Stamp Act. Like the creatures in the poem, colonists who believed the taxes to be unconstitutional became outraged as they found they could not consume their desired beverage in good conscience. By 1774, Breen explains, many refused to accept luxury items sold by England, believing that by denying themselves they were preserving their virtue. Some went so far as to see drinking tea as a symbol of slavery due to the control the British maintained over trade. These items became politicized by Parliament, and therefore Americans looked to other countries for their everyday items such as tea, paper, and sugar.³⁷ Nymphs in the poem, who are historically depicted as feminine creatures of varying elements, gave approval for all who joined the gathering “as females have their influence o’er kings, nor wives, nor mistresses, were useless things, ev’n to the gods of ancient Homer’s page; then sure, in this polite and polish’d age, none will neglect the sex’s sage advice.”³⁸ Women became essential to the colonists’ boycott movement as they were the ones who controlled what was brought into the home. Merchants were unable to sell their cargo of teas because wives and mothers were welcomed into the first stages of revolution. Warren wrote this to stress the importance of republican motherhood and the benefits of men listening to the advice of their virtuous wives. In writing a letter to her friend Hannah Winthrop, she addresses her husband John as the first-century republican Stoic Helvidius, she emphasized the classical female role models that could inspire colonial women not only to give up luxury items like tea but also their lives for the betterment of their beloved country.³⁹

³⁷ T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, no. 119 (1988): 73–104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651021>.

³⁸ Mercy Otis Warren and Benjamin Franklin, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren : Facsimile Reproductions*, Delmar, N.Y: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980, 203

³⁹ Richards, *The Founders and the Classics*, 58.

As the poem progresses, Amphitrite, goddess of the sea and one of the wives of Poseidon, becomes enraged with the lack of nectar offered to her, and refuses a substitute, as many Americans did. Here she associates anyone who refused to honor the destruction of the tea and stop consuming it. Warren states that “while faction reigns, and tyranny presides, and base oppression o’er the virtues rides,” there must be unity amongst colonists as only together can they successfully force change.⁴⁰ Warren envisages the minor deity and goddess of salt water, the second wife of Poseidon, as a representational figure of the American patriots, and has her suddenly appear and refuse the tea offered to everyone at the gathering. Many colonists had indeed refused to buy British tea because of the taxes placed upon them by the Tea Act of 1773. Salacia ultimately rejected the tea given to her by the sea nymphs and remained steadfast in her refusal, just as the patriots did, believing that their protests would bring about change in the colonies. The poem continues to describe “the fair Salacia, victory, victory, sings, in spite of heroes, demi gods, or kings; she bids defiance to the servile train, the pimps and sycophants of George’s reign.”⁴¹ This other faction of nymphs who support Salacia are openly defying those who would agree with whatever the king decreed in order to maintain or rise in status, much as the hated Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his Massachusetts council had been seen as doing. Warren had been writing satirical works about Hutchinson and his supporters for several years, starting with her plays. Dorr believed that the author of the poem mocked the governor in this poem by describing how the sea nymphs sang

⁴⁰ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren : Facsimile Reproductions*, Delmar, N.Y: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980, 204.

⁴¹ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 205.

triumphantly and spread confusion around “Nepotist Hill,” or rather Hutchinson’s residence in Milton, Massachusetts.⁴² The shopkeeper continues to infer that because Americans refused to buy British tea, they found other ways to get their hands on their preferred drink. Duty-free tea became popular, much to the chagrin of English merchants, who took their complaints of lost revenue and taxes to Parliament. Historian Mary Beth Norton argues that only ten to twenty-five percent of the tea purchased had been imported legally into the colonies. The other seventy-five to ninety percent was all illegally brought into the North American territories, typically by Dutch traders. This caused further disagreement because some believed that colonists should not consume any tea, whether it be dutied or smuggled.⁴³

Warren applauded the men who threw expensive tea into the ocean, seeing it as a victory of sorts because it brought attention, both national and international, to their cause. However, they had to tread carefully as their actions would draw the ire of the powerful English king and Parliament, which would do nothing but hinder any possible peaceful protest movements in the future. A month after the poem was published, Warren finally received the glowing review she had hoped for from John Adams, who characterized the work in a letter to her husband as “one of the most incontestable Evidences of real Genius, which has yet been exhibited.” Adams was particularly impressed by how Warren had taken “the Clumsy, indigested Conception of another and work it into so elegant, and classicall a Composition,” a feat that he admired because it

⁴² Richards, *The Founders and the Classics*, 55.

⁴³ Norton, 1774, 7.

“requires Genius equall to that which wrought another most beautifull Poem.”⁴⁴ Only her close friends and family knew of her authorship, as she did not publish any of her poems or plays under her own name until after the war ended. Many believed that the well-respected and popular pieces read in the *Boston Gazette* were the work of a man, as history and publication fell into the masculine sphere. However, due to the encouragement she received from her husband and a select few, Warren would go on to release numerous works in the newspaper as well as her own books.

“To the Hon. J. Winthrop, Esq”

When it was declared that all commerce between America and England be suspended in an effort to protest the treatment colonists were receiving from the King and Parliament, people became wary about the effect this would have on their daily lives. In 1774, Warren published “To the Hon. J. Winthrop” in *The Boston-Gazette*; she later dedicated the poem to her friend’s husband, John Winthrop. The eighteenth-century man was known for his active role in organizing and formulating boycotts against Britain, and believed that they needed to stand firm in the belief that the North American territories were to be a beacon of light for the rest of the world to look to as an example of greatness and freedom. In doing this she was not only calling on women to reject British goods but is also reminding men to trust their wives. The decision to cut economic ties with their mother country was not an easy one; however, the increased taxes forced upon them left them with little choice. As Winthrop prepared and formulated plans to

⁴⁴ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

boycott British made goods and asked women to do their part. For a man to bring women into the movement was bold as the fairer sex had never been directly included in any previous. However, many saw that they were just as affected by the taxes and rising tensions as their husbands, fathers, and brothers. Historian T.H. Breen explains that colonists had become dependent on British merchants for what they believed to be necessities, the things that pulled them out of their drab lives and made them more fashionable.⁴⁵ They believed that the empire relied on and maintained power through the commerce system between America and England. However, this changed once taxes were placed on their beloved teas, clothes, and art. The members of the newly formed argued amongst themselves over the details of the boycott movement, especially after they realized that southern colonies feared they would lose profits from rice and tobacco sales.⁴⁶ They drew up a program called the Continental Association that went into action on December 1, 1774. When the campaigns of non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation went into effect, congress encouraged local committees to enforce the boycotts.⁴⁷ Parliament changing what many colonists thought to be a working economic arrangement was met with resistance as this led to many questioning their rights and liberties within the British Empire.⁴⁸ Warren writes about patriots campaigning against tyranny and “with all the rhetoric of ancient schools, despise the mode, and fashion’s modish fools; or shew fair liberty, who us’d to smile, the guardian goddess of Britannia’s isle.”⁴⁹ If they were to

⁴⁵ Breen, “Baubles of Britain”.

⁴⁶ T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 325.

⁴⁷ Benjamin L. Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party & The Making of America* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), 199.

⁴⁸ T.H. Breen, “Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1993): 471–501. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2947363>.

⁴⁹ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 208.

give in to England's demands rather than fight for freedom, then the colonies would only be taken advantage of in the future and would become enslaved by Parliament and used to fill their coffers. Warren once again approached the topic of women's involvement in the boycott movement as never before were they allowed to participate in political crusades. However, many believed them to be not only the driving force of the action but also the most affected.

The definition of virtue had shifted between the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans to something that aligned with Christian morals of modesty. Warren used her poem to remind her readers of the characteristics their society admired in classical texts by stating "let us resolve on a small sacrifice, and in the pride of Roman matrons rife; good as Cornelia, or a Pompey's wife, we'll quit the useless vanities of life."⁵⁰ These classical women were perfect examples of the virtues revolutionary wives and mothers should embody as war loomed over the budding nation. When they chose not to purchase goods, ranging from teas to fine dresses and makeup, women were sacrificing their comforts for a cause that they had such great faith in. Men had to be reminded of the impact their wives, sisters, and daughters had on the protests as they were given a much larger role than previously allowed. Ladies were invited into the revolutionary movement by the men in their lives, they were asked to participate in boycotts and to sign agreements of non-consumption.⁵¹ Women had just as much at stake as their male counterparts, their god given right to freedom and economic security were in danger the longer England held control over the colonies. Here Warren is stressing this point in explaining "her good Cornelias, and her Arrias fair, who, death, in its most hideous forms, can dare, rather than live vain fickle fortune's sport,

⁵⁰ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 210.

⁵¹ Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 201.

amidst the panders of a tyrant's court."⁵² It was not only men who believed that to face death would be better than to live under the thumb of a cruel King and Parliament. By providing examples of freedom, enslavement, and risks of war through the lens of classical history and mythology, Mercy Otis Warren reminded colonists that their own experiences were not unique and that they had a fighting chance of independence from tyrannical reign just like their Greek and Roman ancestors.

“A Political Reverie”

A mere two months before the battles at Lexington and Concord began the inexorable march to war, on February 13, 1775, Warren published in *The Boston Gazette* “A Political Reverie,” a darker play written in response to the rising tensions that plagued the colonies. It depicts bloody battlefields and tragedies at every corner and yet still maintains hope as to the prospect that America would become the new home of freedom and liberty. Many colonists were wary of an impending war, unsure of what side they should choose: independence or historic loyalties to England. However, Warren endeavored to show those who were undecided what their future would look like should a war break out. Within her poem, she drew from Greek and Roman history as well as referencing Homer's *Illiad* and the writings of John Locke, a seventeenth-century philosopher who held great influence over colonists. Warren warned that what was once believed to be a “squabble” that had the possibility of being easily settled could, and most likely would, turn into a full-blown battle for independence:

⁵² Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 212.

Let Grecian bards and Roman poets tell, how Hector fought, and how old Priam
fell; Paint armies ravaging the 'Ilian coast, shew fields of blood and mighty
battles lost; led mad Cassandra, with dishevell'd hair, with streaming eye, and
frantic bosom bare, tell dark presages, and ill boding dreams, of murder, rapine,
and the solomn themes, of slaughter'd cities, and their sinking spires, by Grecian
rage warp'd in avenging fires.⁵³

With her political connections as well as living through the events, Warren had a better understanding than most of the tensions and hostilities between Britain and America. In this case, she might have seen herself as a Cassandra, an oracle who could predict the future but was cursed by the Greek god Apollo so that no one would believe her true prophecies. The Hector in her poem does not represent a person but rather the American colonists who had begun the rebellion by destroying hundreds of chests of tea in the Boston Harbor. Many people, as of 1774, had yet to decide which side of the war they would choose. If they did not heed her warnings, then they would watch their America, equated to Priam, who was a legendary king of Troy as well as Cassandra's father, fall into the hands of a greedy and selfish Parliament.

Warren utilized her poems to caution colonists about the battles yet to come and hoped that she would not be ignored or dismissed because people either did not want to believe in the possibility of war or because she was a woman. She believed in a brighter future for America, that it would become a great country without conquering and oppressing others like England had

⁵³ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in "The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.," Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

done to the colonies. Warren did not want to depict a grim future, rather choosing to leave those to the tragic poets of the past claiming “To bolder pens I leave the tragic tale, While some kind muse from Tempe's gentle vale, With softer symphony shall touch the string, And happier tidings from Parnassus bring.”⁵⁴ She is attempting to make herself out to be a kinder poet, not unlike Orpheus from the Vale of Tempe or the nine Muses from Parnassus, rather than one that only depicts doom and misery in her works. There was a war looming on the horizon, one that she was desperate to ensure her fellow colonists understood the magnitude of. America was declaring independence from the greatest empire of the modern age. She claimed that this “Shall be the Subjects of my warbling Lyre; For yet I see Persepolis on fire.”⁵⁵ Warren understood the risk that America could be defeated by England in the same way that Alexander the Great captured and ransacked the Persian capital of Persepolis. Should they win the war, however, then the colonies would be taking power back from Britain which would inspire other occupied territories around the world to also fight for their own freedom. Warren resolved to praise only those of political virtue and to heap “scorn” on those who wreaked of tyranny: “no bold destroyers of mankind I sing; these plunderers of men I’ll greatly scorn, and dream of nations, empires yet unborn.”⁵⁶ The poem might come across as bleak with its talk of battles and danger, but it was important for the American people to be optimistic that their God-given rights to freedom would prevail. Many thought England and America could still resolve their issues peacefully rather than go to war.

⁵⁴ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁵⁵ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁵⁶ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 189.

The King and Parliament were so geographically distant from North America that many felt they had no right to create and enforce laws and taxes because they were so out of touch with the colonies. Should Britain be allowed to maintain its ironclad grasp over America, then freedom and liberty would be destroyed. Colonists, in Warren's opinion, had to find the courage and strength to fight for their God-given rights because to them the idea of absolute authority, of not having their needs represented within Parliament, infringed on their civil liberties. She believed that America had the potential to be a new type of society where justice, merit and truth would reign supreme, and there would come a time "When Justice holds her Sceptre o're the land, And rescues Freedom from the Tyrant's hand; when Patriot States in Laurel Crowns, And only Merit bears away the Prize; When truth's bright Banners shall be here display'd, and Virtue rear her long dejected Head."⁵⁷ Warren, along with many within the colonies, felt that the treatment the British colonies had endured from the King and Parliament over the previous decade was meant to oppress and take away their rights. Colonists wholeheartedly believed that they were exploited by England, and that the truth of the matter could not be denied by the King, Parliament, or any other country. Americans were on the side of virtue. Should they go to war against the largest empire in recent centuries, there was the possibility of inspiring other countries to rally with them and fight against the tyrannical leadership of Britain. While her poems were reprinted in other newspapers there is no evidence that they reached as far as France or Spain. However, other countries would soon hear about America's Declaration of Independence and would, hopefully, join the colonists against their common enemy. They believed justice to be on their side like their Roman ancestors, who challenged and defeated their own oppressive empire. Warren thought that when England's heavy yoke was removed, the

⁵⁷ Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions*, 189.

colonies would be able to progress into a new age. She stated that America's "standards plant beneath the'e gladned Skies. Commerce revive, and Arts and Sciences rise, While Empires lofty spreading Sails unfurl'd, Roll swiftly on towards the Western World."⁵⁸ France, Spain, and other foreign countries would look to the colonies as a source of societal evolution and would want to imitate the newly independent nation, if only to take advantage of England losing their dominant position in the world's economy. Trade between America and other European powers would now be open and would allow all to expand their commerce without interference from Britain.

The increase of taxes on items colonists could only legally purchase from Britain led them to believe that their liberties were in danger and that they would become slaves to the King and Parliament. Americans felt that the price they were required to pay was too high and that, as Warren artfully described, "In Britain's Lap the rich produce was pour'd, which Heaven benignant plentifully shower'd; 'till she ungrateful join'd an umpious band, and chains of thralldom forg'd with gildy hand."⁵⁹ Colonists thought themselves to be taken advantage of by the English government, and if they were to continue to give in to Britain's demands, then the virtues of the Old World would stifle the values and growth of America. Warren acknowledged that some would grieve the severance of the ties with the country they had looked to for safety and guidance for over a century, but she assured them that this "mother" had become a monster: "The cruel Parent suck'd her Children's Veins. And the life blood the monster Mother drains: broke the firm Union whence her Vigour grew; dissolv'd the bands, and cut the Sinews

⁵⁸ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in "The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.," Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁵⁹ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in "The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.," Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

through.”⁶⁰ Mothers are nurturing figures who care for their children. Instead of the guiding presence it was supposed to be, Britain had become an imposing and oppressive force that took what it wanted and never gave in return. Warren, who had children of her own, might have seen this as a familial betrayal of the highest order and wanted to portray that to her readers.

Parliament asked too much of Americans, who believed that they were incapable of affording the increased taxes and that they had been betrayed by the very entity that was supposed to keep them safe and help them flourish in the New World.

In spite of war looming on the horizon, Warren attempted to remain optimistic that virtue and justice would prevail. With their victory, America would be a beacon of progress that the rest of the world would strive to follow. They would create a better society than the one forced upon them by England, one of equality and integrity. She claimed that “this far distant corner of the Earth, Shall boast her Decii’s and her Fabii’s birth.”⁶¹ In ancient Rome, the Decia was a plebeian family that was famous due to its members willingly sacrificing themselves in order to preserve their great empire. On the other hand, the Fabia was a wealthy and politically important patrician family that had a long history of serving the Republic from its earliest days. Even though these two families were economically and socially different, they were both incredibly patriotic in their dedication to Rome. By referencing these two families, Warren claimed that people of all classes would be valued, as long as they fought for America with the same devotion. England and America did not appreciate their citizens in the same way; Parliament only sought to collect more colonies in order to place heavy taxes upon them to fill their coffers.

⁶⁰ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁶¹ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

They valued treasure over human life, wealth over virtue. In her poem she described how current events would eventually be perceived: “When the young Heroes wond’ring shall be told, That Britain barter’d worth for thrift of Gold.”⁶² England traded its morality for wealth, and by doing so it had lost the respect and affection of Americans. There had been a time where the colonists loved Britain because they were given the opportunity to own land and establish homes while also expanding the empire.

Colonists knew that war was imminent, and should they be victorious in achieving independence, they would be an example to the rest of the world that freedom was obtainable. The British Empire was an age-old enemy to Spain and France, one that they had battled against for centuries and was thought to be invincible. However, should the Americans win, then it might destabilize England enough to loosen their iron grip on the rest of the world. In her poem Warren described how “Tyrants trembled on the tot’ring Throne; And haughty Monarchs fear’d Britannia’s frown.”⁶³ Colonists believed that Parliament had taken control away from the King, someone they thought had absolute power. An American victory would diminish England’s trade with the western world. Warren stated that “The Mistress of the Seas no more commande, Her floating Towers quit the naked Strands The weeping Neriads leave the dismal Shore, And Neptune’s Sons their wat’ry Dirges roar.”⁶⁴ The American colonies were one of Britain’s most profitable trading posts due to the fact that the empire held control over what goods were

⁶² *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁶³ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁶⁴ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in “The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

imported and exported. While England would still have other colonies and countries to make a profit from, they would take an economic hit. In her poem, she illustrates how the people of Britain, described as Neptune's sons, would lament the death of their income. Now that England was no longer trading with America, this opened up the possibility of France, Spain, and other countries doing business with the new nation. Warren described how "Traffick wasted on the Eastern Gales, Leaves the proud Thames and spreads her whiten'd Sails From Florida to Nova-Scotia Shores, They pour their Treasures and unlade their Stores."⁶⁵ She explained that now England no longer controlled the flow of goods going in and out of the colonies, other countries could trade directly with America.

Founding Father Thomas Paine claimed much had been said by British loyalists about the strength of a united English empire and that other colonies would be inspired to fight for their own independence. However, he argues by asking

what have we to do with setting the world at defiance? Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of all Europe; because, it is the interest of all Europe to have America a FREE PORT. Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her from invaders. I challenge the warmest advocate for reconciliation, to shew, a single advantage that this continent can reap, by being connected with Great Britain. I repeat the challenge, not a single advantage is derived. Our corn will fetch its price in any market in Europe, and our imported goods must be paid for buy them where we will.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *The Boston-Gazette, and Country Journal*, 13 February, 1775, in "The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr, Jr.," Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. 4: 668, <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/4/sequence/753>.

⁶⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, (Philadelphia: W. and T. Bradford, 1776), Project Gutenberg's Compilation of the Writings of Thomas Paine, 2003.

The possibility of economic autonomy would not only benefit the new nation but other European countries who would earn direct profits instead of going only through Britain. When England went to war with France or Spain, all trade between the colonies and the foreign nations came to a standstill leaving Americans with limited import and export opportunities. While their messages were similar, they had very different methods of communicating with their readers. Paine preferred a straightforward approach while Warren hid hers in classical allusions. Throughout “Political Reverie” she cautioned that America’s retaliation against England’s tyranny would inevitably lead to war.

“Simplicity”

1779 marked the halfway point of the Revolutionary War as morale and supplies reached devastating lows for colonists. The depreciation of American currency led to the scarcity of even the most basic provisions, such as bread, for both civilians and the army. The Continental Congress printed millions of dollars paper currency at a time in order to pay for their war. However, this currency had no financial backing at that time, only a promise that it would hold worth in the future.⁶⁷ Because of this, sellers would charge an exorbitant amount for what would normally be cheap goods or refuse Continental currency all together. In June, James Warren wrote a grim and exacerbated letter to John Adams about the situation, stating that tea had been priced at forty dollars per pound, Indian corn for forty dollars per bushel, and meat was six to

⁶⁷ E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse a History of American Public Finance* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1961), 29.

eight dollars per pound.⁶⁸ And to make matters worse, in spite of John Winthrop's declaration in 1774 that suspended all trade and purchase of British goods, many Americans had continued to buy luxury items from overseas. He claimed that "if the Subject was not serious and melancholy, it would be laughable to hear the rates of Gauze and other Geugaws, and to see the eagerness with which they are purchased, and to observe the Vanity, Folly and Extravagance which infests all ranks of People in their Dress, and Liveing"⁶⁹ Wealthy men and women could still be seen wearing fine and extravagant clothing that defied the spirit of shared sacrifice and community that was supposed to be at the heart of the revolutionary movement. For years the non-consumption movement allowed women to participate in the war by making homespun clothes, which were typically simply compared to the fine gowns and shirts imported by merchants.⁷⁰ This was doubly a betrayal because not only were these commercial turncoats still purchasing goods from the empire that revolutionaries were actively fighting for freedom from, but they would also have had to use British currency to obtain these items.

In July 1779, Mercy Otis Warren wrote to Adams, who, having been appointed commissioner to France in 1777, had just returned from a year long trip abroad to fill him in on how several of the social elite had abandoned what could be described as an "anti-fashion" movement.⁷¹ She claimed that "Some Deify the phantom Fashion, whether she appears in a French, a British, or American Dress: while others Worship only at the shrine of plutus."⁷² The

⁶⁸ Mercy Otis Warren, *Warren-Adams Letters: Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren* (Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1925), 105.

⁶⁹ Warren-Adams Letters, 105

⁷⁰ Jennifer González, "The Hands That Spun the Revolution: In Custodia Legis," The Library of Congress, October 25, 2022, <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2022/10/the-hands-that-spun-the-revolution/>.

⁷¹ Warren-Adams Letters, 113

⁷² Warren-Adams Letters, 114

1774 boycott had urged women to either sew their own clothes or purchase them from within their community so that they might support the local economy. The colonists' fabrics would have been simpler and less colorful due to their limited resources compared to the fine fabrics that could be found on British trade ships. Elite and common folk alike were loath to give up the excitement that foreign goods brought into their lives. Within the letter, Warren references a play about the Greek god Plutus, who was described as the personification of wealth. She compared Plutus's devotees to those who had forsaken simple republican dress in order to purchase British goods so that they might flaunt their riches and class status. In the play, the classical author Aristophanes wrote about the divine being who had been cursed by Zeus to be blind in hopes that wealth would be distributed indiscriminately. The god was discovered by Athenian citizens that claimed to be poor but virtuous and they promised to him they would help him restore his sight so that riches could be given to only those who truly deserved them.⁷³ In the final act of the play, Plutus's sight was restored and he blessed only those who he believed to be deserving of his gifts, causing chaos as many were given nothing leading to protests as many thought they were being cheated out of their wealth. Other gods also objected to Plutus's actions as many of their worshipers abandoned them in favor of a deity promising treasures.

Many colonists continued to consume English goods despite the war.⁷⁴ Warren condemned those who had turned their backs on what she considered to be a noble and virtuous cause, however there were still some "old Republicans, (a solitary few) with decent solemnity and confidence still persevere, their Hands unstained by Bribes, though poverty stares them in

⁷³ Aristophanes and N. G. Wilson, *Aristophanis Fabulae* (Oxonii Oxford: Oxford University Press; Oxford Classical Texts, 2007).

⁷⁴ Norton, 1774, 315.

the face, their hearts unshaken by the Levity, the Luxury, the Caprice or Whim, the Folly or ingratitude of the times.”⁷⁵ In her letter to Adams, Warren commended the colonists who stood firm in their refusal to purchase or sell English goods. Buyers and store owners alike who supported the Revolution struggled to procure local or non-British made items that provided the same luxury that they previously experienced. Instead, they were left with plain clothes and smuggled goods. Businessmen faced the possibility of bankruptcy as they were unable to safely sell duty-free items without facing backlash from British army men and Loyalists. In his responding letter, Adams assured Warren that “The Follies and Frivolities of our Countrymen, are too Serious to be ridiculous. Time however, and the Perseverance of the few who now, disapprove them, may produce a Cure. We shall find, by and by, that those who corrupt our Symplicity, will be restrained.”⁷⁶ Adams agreed that colonists were quickly abandoning the boycott, however he was hopeful that those who still supported the ban on English goods could influence them to give up their luxury items. In her July letter, Warren assured Adams that she had no expectation of a response, knowing that he had received numerous correspondence sent to his Boston residence while he was away in Paris. He assured her that he “shall never have so many Correspondents as to make me neglect the Letters of a Lady, whose Character I revere so much and whose Correspondence I prize so highly.”⁷⁷

Inspired by Adams’s response, Warren wrote the poem “Simplicity” in October of 1779. She published this in hopes of warning colonists of the mistakes they were making in purchasing British goods and living extravagantly. Using both Biblical and classical imagery, she depicts an

⁷⁵ Warren-Adams Letters, 114

⁷⁶ Warren-Adams Letters, 120

⁷⁷ Warren-Adams Letters, 119

honorable modest society led by a beautiful goddess who had “Virtue, at once her ornament and shield, And Truth the trident that the goddess held.” These were the characteristics that her subjects also attempted to follow as it was “Beneath her reign, behold a happy race, Who ne'er contested titles, gold, or place.”⁷⁸ Warren implored colonists to hold fast to the boycotts, especially women whose battlefield became the marketplace. The protest was how women were able to take part in the revolution as they could not join the men in active war zones and seeing women once again dressing in silk and velvet gowns was disappointing to Warren. Like the people in her poem, Americans could also find joy in the simple things: the goods that were made within the colonies rather than the extravagances from abroad. The people Warren wrote about were content to live simply with their locally made items, exactly how colonists should have been before they were seduced by luxury:

Ere commerce' whiten'd sails were wafted wide, And every bosom caught
the swelling pride of boundless wealth, surcharg'd with endless snares,
exotic follies, and destructive cares; ere arts, or elegance, or taste refin'd,
and tempting luxury, assail'd mankind;⁷⁹

Communities, both within the poem and in real life, were corrupted by pride as they desired to flaunt their ability to purchase expensive foreign clothes, coaches, chaises, teas, and more.

Warren held onto the hope that many would remain loyal to Winthrop's movement and they

⁷⁸ Mercy Otis Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope* (Printed at Boston: by I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews. At Faust's Statue, no. 45, Newbury Street, 1790), 229.

⁷⁹ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, 229.

would be able to influence the deserters to once again abstain from living in luxury. Within her poem, one of the characters who happily remained in his “humble hamble” was described as someone “Whose heart, unblacken'd by so mean a vice, As lust of gold, or carking avarice; No guilty bribes his whiten'd palm possess'd, No dark suspicion lurk'd within his breast: Love, concord, peace, and piety and truth.”⁸⁰ Wealthy colonists, described by Adams as “gamblers and stockjobbers,” once again held lavish parties and events as they grew annoyed with the four-year-long boycott.⁸¹

Adams agreed that the elite put their own desire for material comforts over their common goal of colonial independence. For four years they had lived with basic garments and necessities rather than the fine dresses and fancy events that they had grown accustomed to before the war. However, comfort and luxury were not the only motivation for acquiring foreign goods. Colonists utilized their ability to buy items from overseas to show their higher status within the colonies and separate themselves from the ordinary people. Warren describes how their “Pride blazes high, and clamours loud for more— More shining pomp, more elegance and zest, In all the wild variety of taste;” and argues that “Peace and contentment are refin'd away, And worth, unblemish'd, is the villain's prey.”⁸² The elite should have made do with locally sourced goods to project an image of unity within the colonies. They deviated from a necessary, and in her opinion natural, simplicity as a fancy lifestyle only created more wants and wishes that controlled the mind.

⁸⁰ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, 230.

⁸¹ Warren-Adams Letters, 120

⁸² *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, 231.

Warren then compares the colonial elite's desire for consumerism to that of Rome. She claimed that while the ancient civilization had at one point been great and awe inspiring, the empire fell due to citizens' need for an extravagant lifestyle. In her poem, Warren equated luxurious living with vice and corruption:

Rome, the proud mistress of the world, displays A lasting proof of what
my pen essays; High wrought refinement - usher's in replete, With all the
ills that sink a virtuous state; Their sumptuary laws grown obsolete, They,
undismay'd, the patriot's frown could meet; Their simple manners lost—
their censors dead, Spruce *petit maitres* o'er the forum tread.⁸³

She compares Winthrop's boycotts to the sumptuary laws of Rome as they were both put in place to regulate the purchasing of extravagant expenditures of clothes, food, and furniture. Dependence on consumerism and the feeling of living in luxury corrupted both societies and then led to the sinking of the ancient empire. Warren alludes to the fact that the same fate could happen to the American colonies. She firmly believed that by continuing to purchase British goods and demonstrating that they would rather have material comforts rather than freedom the colonial elite would become corrupt like the very people colonists were fighting against. Like the Romans, the colonies would also lose their powerful leadership, ones who fought for the betterment of their society, and be stuck with weak and easily influenced replacements.

⁸³ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, 232.

Commerce, according to Warren, caused the downfall of Rome because the ancient citizens essentially sold themselves to buy new and exciting things. They believed that owning luxurious foreign made items was more important than demonstrating patriotism by purchasing locally manufactured goods. The ancient historian Livy promoted this view in his own work, *The History of Early Rome*, where he encourages his readers to follow the example of their ancestors. He believed that while Rome was a great and powerful empire, wealth had led to the decline of morals and ethics. Livy claims that “none has been free for so many generations from the vices of avarice and luxury; nowhere have thrift and plain living been for so long held in such esteem. Indeed, poverty, with us, when hand in hand with contentment.”⁸⁴ The early Romans, according to the ancient scholar, had integrity that was not found in his time. To live simply was to live happily and morally. In her poem, Warren claimed that the once dominating empire was ruined by commerce, to the point that there was nothing left of Rome, both in terms of the stability of the country and the ethics of its people. She describes how the citizens made their homes and buildings beautiful with “paint and sculpture, elegance and song,” and how they “Were the pursuits of all the busy throng; When silken commerce held the golden scales, Empire was purchas'd at the public sales: No longer liv'd the ancient Roman pride, Her virtue sicken'd, and her glory di'd.”⁸⁵ Warren feared that elite colonists refusing to make do with locally made items would mean the death of American pride and glory. The Revolution began because they believed that they were being taken advantage of by the British Parliament. Increased

⁸⁴ Livy, and Aubrey De Selincourt, *Early History of Rome*, Penguin Books Ltd, 2002, 4

⁸⁵ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

taxes had been levied against them and they were prohibited from crossing the Proclamation line in order to claim what they thought to be their God given right. Their cause was virtuous, however, if the colonists continued to be influenced by consumerism then the purpose of the war was moot. While cautioning the dangers of consumerism, Warren asked in her poem “What blotted out the Carthaginian fame, And left no traces but an empty name?— Commerce! The source of every narrow vice, And honour, barter'd at a trivial price.”⁸⁶ By continuing to encourage trade between the colonies and England, the wealthy elite were selling their honor in order to maintain their luxurious lifestyles. Warren practiced domestic economy taking wool from her family’s farm and spinning it into skeins to use for herself and to give to friends. She believed that supporting local commerce and industry would lead to a strong, independent nation. However, by not purchasing foreign goods while farmers joining the army led to difficulties in finding commodities. However dedicated Warren was to promoting local economy, many became disillusioned after going without necessities and minor indulgences.

Warren alludes to the idea that the difference in status between the upper class and the rest of the colonists caused the former to be indifferent to the sacrifices made by those willing to fight for freedom. Their vanity would be their downfall as they flaunted their expensive foreign made clothes and held lavish events. The wealthy were at risk of repairing history. Warren states that “From age to age, since Hannibal's hard fate, From Caesar's annals to the modern date, When Brunswick's race sits on the British throne,

⁸⁶ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

And George's folly stains his grandsire's crown.”⁸⁷ In Roman history, many elites who believed themselves to be above criticism and the rest of society were struck with disaster by the people they lorded over. According to Warren, King George was experiencing the consequences of his recklessness when he tightened his grip on the colonies by increasing taxes in order to increase his wealth. The colonists were encouraging this with their purchasing of British goods. She nearly begged, within her poem, for them to return to a simpler lifestyle, to demonstrate that the spirit boycott was not something that would be abandoned because they were impatient to return to their opulent lifestyle. Warren believed that a more humble way of living, the kind that the working class were experiencing as a result of the war, would lead to freedom. She wrote that “Affronted virtue mounts her native skies, And freedom's genius lifts her bloated eyes; As late I saw, in sable vestments stand, The weeping fair, on Britain's naked strand.”⁸⁸ Freedom could only be saved by the virtuous, those who stayed loyal to the spirit of Winthrop’s boycott. Warren wanted to make clear to the wealthy that their actions, no matter how small they seemed, still hurt the revolution.

Should Americans win the war for independence, Britain would not only lose political power over their colonies but also economic control with the loss of forced trade. The colonies would no longer be required to buy all goods from England, which would inevitably lead to a loss of commerce. Warren highlights this by stating “Proud Thames deserted—her commercial ports Seiz'd and possess'd by hated foreign courts; No

⁸⁷ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

⁸⁸ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

more the lofty ships her marts supply,”⁸⁹ While she supported the idea of free trade, she did not like the spirit of capitalist consumption that it began to unleash. Once the revolution ended with the colonies being victorious, Americans would be able to turn to other countries, those who allied with them during the war, for goods that they had previously imported from England. This would create a shift in power as colonists would then control the majority of trade in the west, encouraging relationships with other international superpowers. Warren wrote that “Grey Neptune rises from his oozy bed, And shakes the sea weed from his shaggy head; He bids adieu to fair Britannia's shore, The surge rebounds, and all the woodlands roar; His course he bends towards the western main, The frowning Titans join the swelling train,” Neptune represented the power that Britain held over the rest of the world for so long as he slowly rose from his bed that he had been in for centuries and taking the support of other countries with him. By diminishing the influence England had on the rest of the world, America would be restoring balance to the world. For too long Britain had held other countries and countless colonies in an iron grip. In her poem, Warren describes how Neptune and the Titans were “In haste to hail the brave Columbia free: Ocean rebounds, and earth reverberates, And Heaven confirms the independent states.”⁹⁰ Should the Americans win the war for independence, which they believed was a cause approved by God himself, then they would become an equalizing presence on the international stage. Warren then finishes her poem with a warning that history will repeat itself as all great nations, at some point in their long reign, collapse for one reason or another. She states that “While time rolls on,

⁸⁹ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

⁹⁰ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

and mighty kingdoms fail, They, peace and freedom on their heirs entail, 'Till virtue sinks, and in far distant time, Dies in the vortex of European crimes.”⁹¹ One of the main causes of the Revolutionary War was that the British Parliament set taxes centrally in a way that eroded the local autonomy that the colonies had become accustomed to. Warren described how America will enjoy their independence and power until they once again fall to consumerism and lose their virtue, which she equates with buying foreign made goods in excess. She wrote “Simplicity” to shame wealthy colonists who had begun purchasing goods from Britain as they were actively fighting for freedom from the empire. Warren believed in a Socratic definition of virtue, wealth and luxury created conditions that could lead to corruption. In order to maintain their morals and ethics colonists had to permanently abstain from purchasing goods from England. It also serves as a warning to future Americans in hopes that they would not fall victim to consumerism.

Conclusion

The years leading up to the American Revolution inspired thousands of people in different ways, but many focused their newfound feelings on protesting how the British Parliament infringed on their freedoms and liberties. The Tea Act and Townshend Duties had left colonists disgruntled as they believed that the government of a faraway island nation was infringing on their constitutional and God-given rights. Mercy Otis Warren was one such person, a woman who took the education she acquired when she sneaked into her brother’s lessons. She,

⁹¹ *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren. Two Lines from Pope*, 233.

at first hesitantly, used what she had learned about the history and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome as a way of informing the reading public of the implications of revolutionary events, such as the Boston Tea Party and Association Boycott. The classics had become ingrained in society over several generations as schools and universities taught their students of the brave heroes who fought for the republic that they would later attempt to model their own after. Warren integrated literature and history from antiquity because she understood that this was a way to communicate her political beliefs, as well as those of her friends and family, to the public. It also allowed her to fit in with the revolutionary elite, those making changes within the community and the government. Her goal for her poems was to encourage and inspire Americans to fight for their freedom and autonomy that England had denied them for so long. She was determined to keep John Winthrop's British goods buying boycott alive years after the Revolution began when she saw that many social elites, those of her same social class, abandoned it in favor of living in luxury. Warren contributed to the war effort in a way that placed her somewhere between the public and private, the masculine and feminine, spheres as her writings were published with the encouragement of her friends and family but she did so anonymously. She believed that by putting her name on her publications she would be seen as a brash and meddlesome woman. However, the support she received from her husband, who eagerly shared her poems and plays with friends, and friends such as John and Abigail Adams encouraged her to continue writing. The acknowledgement of her writing skills and intelligence lead Warren to consider herself not only a genius but also a guardian of virtue. This validated her desire to step out of the feminine sphere and offer her opinions regarding the morality her fellow colonists whether that be the masses or the founding fathers. Her poems inspired people to think

about the world around them as shopkeeper Harbottle Dorr demonstrates in his numerous annotated copies of the *Boston Gazette*.

Having published numerous poems, plays, and essays for personal and political reasons, Warren found herself an admirer in young Judith Sargent Murray. The two women came from different backgrounds, Murray from a merchant family while Mercy's father was a judge. They held different political and social beliefs; Judith was a Federalist who thought that men and women should be afforded the same education and opportunity to share their opinions. Mercy, on the other hand, was an Anti-Federalist and thought that she was intellectually superior to most men and women, firmly believed in traditional gender norms. In spite of this, Murray felt a kinship with the older woman. She wrote letters praising Warren's work and even referenced her "excellent tragedies that abound with the pathetic, the beautiful, and the sublime" within her one of her "Gleaner" essays.⁹² She declared Mercy a literary genius as her work was regarded by both men and women as the cornerstone of traditional American literature. Inspired by Warren, Murray would go on to write dozens of essays and poems in the years following the American Revolution so that she too could share her political and social opinions with the masses. Female authors, Murray claimed, who were ardently devoted to their craft could only take pride in their writing with Warren's approval.

⁹² Rosemarie Zagari, *A Woman's Dilemma : Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*, 119.

Chapter 2 - Judith Sargent Murray

Who will Eliza Clairville marry? Will she find love with any of the men attempting to court her? Will she actually achieve equality with them, or will she remain subordinate to them? These were the questions Judith Sargent Murray hoped the audience thought about as they watched her first comedy *Virtue Triumphant* when it premiered at the Federal Street Theatre on March 2, 1795. The plot of this play is not overly complicated; in fact it is constantly brought to attention by one of the characters, Mr. Ralph Maitland Sr. He believes that everyone should find a happy medium in life rather than going to extremes. Much to his dismay, the people in his life constantly keeps them out of balance. Murray believed in utilizing the theater to educate the masses, similar to the ancient Greeks and Romans whom she drew inspiration from. This was controversial as there were antitheater feelings in the colonies, specifically in Boston where she and her family moved to in 1793. Mythology and history from antiquity can be seen throughout her works and in *Virtue Triumphant*, and she gave Captain Flashet, who has been described as an empty-headed and most interesting character within the play, the most lines with classical references. While he is the silliest character and does not understand when the people around him make fun of him at his expense, Flashet would make comments such as: “a stratagem, Charles — a mere stratagem. *Hector surprised and captivated Troy by stratagem*. You are to know that I am an immense favourite with the ladies at Bloomville's.”⁹³ He appears to be educated due to his classical knowledge, the same education the majority of white colonial society received and, in

⁹³ “To George Washington from Judith Sargent Murray, 29 March 1798,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0140>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, vol. 2, *2 January 1798–15 September 1798*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, pp. 162–164.]

spite of it all, he is a happy man who loves to boast of his various relationships with the women of the town. This is how Murray wanted to communicate with the rest of society and did so in the only way she knew how, through the use of the theater and the classics. Unfortunately, *Virtue Triumphant* was not as successful as she hoped it would be.

America won its independence in 1783, leaving the new nation to create a new government and society without interference or influence from England. They began with the Articles of Confederation in 1777, but this first form of government was set aside in 1787 in favor of a more centralized U.S. Constitution that granted tremendous military and economic power – even the power to tax – to the federal government. “We The People” was written boldly across the top of the document to demonstrate clearly that the Founding Fathers were creating a new government for the people, by the people, with the intention of ensuring everyone was equal in the new America. Except, as many people within and without the budding nation pointed out, the only citizens who were afforded every inalienable right were white, landowning men. However, the wealthy elite were not the only demographic that influenced the creation of the Constitution. Farmers, according to scholar Woody Holton, and their riots forced Founding Fathers to ratify the document into make what he calls “an underdogs’ Constitution.”⁹⁴ Historian Carol Berkin states that “for a brief but intense postwar moment,” the intellectuals of the time “engaged in a lively debate over what in the next century came to be called ‘the woman question.’ In their arguments, these women and men wove together prewar trends and postwar possibilities.”⁹⁵ Men involved women in the war effort; they had been left to run households and

⁹⁴ Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 277.

⁹⁵ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 149.

businesses, which gave them a taste of independence that they had never had. Many were resistant to hand the power back over to their husbands when the war was over, especially elite women. When white women thought about others who aided in the Revolution, they did not picture those who actively participated on the battlefield. Instead, they pictured women like Abigail Adams who effectively stepped into her husband's role as the financial provider and head of the family. Scholar Woody Holton explains how women's participation in the war provided concrete evidence that they were able to make rational and virtuous judgments, when it was previously believed that they were too weak-willed to handle tough and demanding situations.⁹⁶ The war changed how elite white women thought of themselves; they understood that they were capable of tasks that were typically designated to men. Judith Sargent Murray understood how these developments could impact society and lead to a progressive society. She used her writings to instill in her readers the idea that equality between the sexes was possible should they act on these changes inspired by their victorious revolution.

In the 1790s, Murray began to publish her essays and plays to communicate with the public as well as earn extra income to support her family. Unlike Mercy Otis Warren, whose goal was to encourage colonists to support the American Revolution and later pinpoint the ways to maintain virtue within the new country, Murray's messages were more personal. She strongly believed in white women's civil rights after being denied the education she thought she deserved, all the while seeing her brothers take their schooling for granted. She and her brothers were tutored by the local clergy and would have learned some Latin and Greek. Through her brothers, she was able to understand what was taught at grammar schools and universities, so she was able to follow along with their curriculum as much as she was able. Murray understood that classical

⁹⁶ Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, New York, NY: Free Press, 2009.

history and literature were taught to those of her social class which allowed her to have a sense of how to best communicate with them. She incorporated tales from antiquity into her works so that she could reach a wider audience, especially those who came from influential families. Her goal was to educate the public so that they would be able to create and encourage progress for their new nation.

Judith Sargent Murray was the daughter of Winthrop Sargent, a well-respected ship owner and successful merchant from Gloucester, Massachusetts, where the community still held close ties with England. Generations had been taught to respect the mother country which left many feeling hesitant to join the war. Ultimately Murray chose to side with the revolutionaries like other members of her family, her father having worked in a government agency during the war and later was selected as a delegate to the Massachusetts convention. One of her brothers, Winthrop Sargent, Jr. served in the Continental Army, was named Secretary of the Northwest Territory in 1787, and was then given the position of first governor of the Mississippi Territory in 1798 by President John Adams.⁹⁷ Her family being so deeply involved with local and national politics allowed Murray a deeper understanding of the goings on within the colony. Years later she would use the momentum attached to the feelings of justice and freedom that remained after the war to influence young Americans. In 1788, she married the Universalist minister John Murray. Universalism is the belief in salvation for all souls, and historian Sheila Skemp claims that religion rather than the war influenced Murray's opinions on women's rights. This religion motivated her to question social and cultural norms; and inspired her to go on to fight against

⁹⁷ Pauline E. Schloesser, *The Fair Sex : White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic*, New York: New York University Press, 2001.

marginalizing perceptions of women and restrictions on their education and capabilities.⁹⁸ She possessed a confidence that many other women lacked as well as an anger that drove her to write and publish dozens of essays in the *Massachusetts Magazine* from 1792 to 1794.

In 1798, Murray compiled her essays into a multi-volume book. Scattered across the essays in *The Gleaner* were letters written to and from the fictional Margaretta whose life, education, and marriage were the focus of Murray's twenty-seven pieces throughout the three-volume novel. The average reader was more invested in fictional stories, rather than real life issues. George and Martha Washington, who had been in correspondence with Murray, became subscribers to her work. She was determined to make and maintain connections with influential individuals such as the Washingtons as well as Benjamin Franklin and his daughter, Sarah Bache. In the 1790s, Murray sent letters asking for their patronage for her plays and essays, and even went so far as to send two copies of *The Gleaner*, a collection of her essays, to the Washingtons, due to their friendship. They replied cordially: "the Books - which were received in very good order, and have been read with great pleasure - came at the times, and in the manner you directed, and are entitled to my best thanks."⁹⁹ Her commitment to bringing awareness to the injustices and lack of opportunity women faced led her to publish her works in hopes that she could educate the next generation of Americans so that they could lead their new country into a brighter future. While both Murray and Warren utilized classical allusions within their works, their motivations and goals were very different. Warren published the bulk of her writings before

⁹⁸ Sheila Skemp, *First Lady of Letters : Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Independence*, 7.

⁹⁹ "To George Washington from Judith Sargent Murray, 29 March 1798," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-02-02-0140>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Retirement Series, vol. 2, *2 January 1798–15 September 1798*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, pp. 162–164.]

and during the American Revolution, she strove to influence those primarily involved in the political sphere, the ones who could make governmental changes. Murray, on the other hand, released her works in the years following the war. She wanted to connect with those of her own economic status and encourage them to make social changes. Her vision for the nation was one of equality between the men and women of her social class. However, she was not as successful as Warren in terms of connecting and influencing the public. I have selected essays from *The Gleaner* that best reflect Judith Sargent Murray's desire and determination to ensure that women received the same education as men, and that they were taken seriously in their society. Unity between the sexes would lead to not only a better domestic life, but a healthier political one as well.

Volume 1, Essay 24

Judith Sargent Murray believed that the theater was a crucial tool in educating the new nation's youth in the ways of ethics, morality, law, and patriotism. Her goal in this essay was to remind her audience that a stage-play, as long as it was appropriately licensed, could be used to communicate with a larger audience compared to small schoolhouses and private tutoring. Like the ancient Greeks and Romans, the theater was used as a primary source of entertainment. Many of antiquity's plays were created with the patronage of a wealthy elite or government approval in order for their messages to be broadcast to the masses. However, the city of Boston, where Murray was living, did not have a robust theater community, thanks to the Puritans who originally sailed to the colonies. Historian Jonas Barish explains that "the Puritans rejected theaters and theatricalism" and that they "gladly adopted the figure of the theater as a metaphor

for the condition of sinful man.”¹⁰⁰ Now that the war for independence was won, Murray was concerned that the young men and women of America were no longer being held to the ethical standards that those who fought in the war maintained. The fighting generation believed that they had the moral obligation to declare independence from Britain and held themselves to those convictions. By utilizing the theater as a form of communication as well as entertainment, Murray believed, similarly to Warren, that young people could be kept from immorality and disgrace. She claimed “that those evenings which are immolated at the shrine of Baccus, which are loitered in a tavern, in unnecessary gossiping, cards, scandal, and the numerous vagaries of fashion, will be *comparatively redeemed*, if marked by an entertainment so incontrovertibly rational.”¹⁰¹ Murray feared that the next generation of Americans would not uphold the virtues that had won the war for independence due to their lack of education which would lead to the nation’s downfall. Should they succumb to the Roman god of wine and abandon the values of the founding generation, then the Revolution would have been fought for nothing.

Historian Joyce Appleby explains how in this new age of Enlightenment many within the budding nation were eager for new opportunities. However, the American North and South held different opinions on what their government, social norms, and religious practices should entail.¹⁰² In order to reach the largest audience to spread the teachings of morality and the importance of freedom, Murray thought it was necessary for plays to be licensed to ensure that the proper message was taught to the audience without infringing on freedom of speech. For playwrights to understand what virtues they were required to portray to the masses, they would

¹⁰⁰ Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 165.

¹⁰¹ Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner a Miscellaneous Production in Three Volumes*, (3 vols, Boston: by I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, 1798), 1, 226.

¹⁰² Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution : The First Generation of Americans*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

have to insert themselves into the community they hoped to reach. Murray claimed that “Socrates, Cicero, and even Cato, have mingled with the audience in a theater.”¹⁰³ The social and political elite would need to interact with the masses in order to understand what lessons should be taught. The Romans and Greeks utilized plays as forms of propaganda to gain influence with the people, and Murray hoped that the tradition would be emulated in their new nation’s culture. She was worried that the next generation of Americans, those that were too young to fight in the Revolution, did not understand what it took to fight for a cause. The process of creating a society and government that was both equal to but different from England was a daunting task. Historian Keriann Yakot, for example, how difficult it was for leading political figures in the new United States to define what it meant to be an American, while¹⁰⁴ Joyce Appleby explains how those coming of age with the young nation were able to experience open opportunities and personal independence that allowed them to strike out to accomplish their own achievements.¹⁰⁵ While the public prospered due to individual initiatives, Murray feared that this new self-sufficient generation would fail to understand the importance of a unified society. The plays created to educate the youths would ensure that they could lead the new nation into a brighter future. Comedy held no place in a conversation involving what she believed to be ethical and legal issues. She believed that dramas were the key to this education rather than “the buffoonery of Aristophanes” which would “not be tolerated upon an American stage.” The Greek comedic playwright crafted works exploring sex and sexuality while also ridiculing the social elite, the

¹⁰³ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 228.

¹⁰⁵ Joyce Appleby, 2000, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Keriann Yakot, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation*, 2011. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated.

same class Murray herself was a part of.¹⁰⁶ These topics were not what she believed to be entertainment appropriate for the younger generation.

Murray advocated for American youths to be educated politically within the theater. She referenced great political and philosophical leaders whose surviving works and histories that playwrights of the new republic could draw inspiration from for their own theatrical productions. By learning from antiquity, the next generation of Americans would become “the Pompeys of our day, it is to be hoped, will learn many a useful lesson; they will commence students in the school of the *rights of man*.”¹⁰⁷ The Roman statesmen aided in the transformation of Republic to great empire, which was the opposite of what the United States hoped to achieve as the new nation had just freed itself from England. Murray believed that American youths would become “proficients in the laws of equality and nature, like the Roman general,” and that they would “retire from the theater, converts to the virtuous and impartial designations of equality.”¹⁰⁸ Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were what colonists understood to be unalienable rights and what had become the rallying cry for independence. Should the new country attempt to achieve greatness, then it should strive for equality both domestically and internationally. This could be accomplished by the next generation of Americans if they were properly educated and inspired to furthering the interests of the budding nation.

Murray was also attempting to carve out a place for herself and her works. She wanted Americans to remember the reasons they fought for independence and how they needed to maintain those values. In her essay, Murray claims “to Athens and to Rome, the theater became a

¹⁰⁶ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 228.

¹⁰⁷ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 228.

¹⁰⁸ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 228.

source of information, refined perception, and genuine morality.” By utilizing this method of teaching in America, playwrights and moralists would be able to reach larger audiences. She boldly states that they “have only to avoid the causes which finally produced its degeneracy in the elder world, to continue it among us in these States, an excellent exemplar and preservative of rectitude.”¹⁰⁹ The next generation was tasked with not only facilitating the expansion and betterment of the United States, but also remedying mistakes made by the founding fathers’ negligence, both culturally and economically.

In the wake of achieving independence from England, the new nation began to rebuild and establish new laws that claimed to benefit Americans. However, in reality, women continued to be neglected and left out of consideration when legislation was passed. Murray was a staunch supporter of women’s rights, and she was frustrated that her gender had been excluded from receiving the same education as her male peers and the ability to voice her political opinions. In her essay “On the Equality of the Sexes,” published in 1790, she states “how is the one exalted, and the other depressed, by the contrary modes of education which are adopted! the one is taught to aspire, and the other is early confined and limited. As their years increase, the sister must be wholly domesticated, while the brother is led by the hand through all the flowery paths of science.”¹¹⁰ She hoped that by educating the next generation of Americans through the theater that they would be motivated to declare men and women as equals. Murray stated that “the sons and daughters of fancy, the sentimentalist, and the moralist; these will engage in the interesting competition,” and that “they will consider that their productions are not intended barely for the

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 228.

¹¹⁰ Judith Sargent Murray, on the equality of the sexes (1790), accessed September 18, 2024, <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/murray/equality/equality.html>

amusement of a solitary hour; that the Drama, pointing every excellence, will imprint upon the heart the sentiment of worth.”¹¹¹ While many thought of the theater as a place of entertainment, Murray believed that the young men and women would be inspired to be productive members of society by partaking. At the same time, she voiced her concerns about Americans loosening their morals and turning away from God. She believed that the youths were spending too much time in bars and parties rather than becoming leaders. The next generation possessed the power to right the wrongs of those who came before them. Murray emphasized this by stating “that it may be in their power to fashion, and to lead, a *national taste*; that by *exalting virtue, and adorning religion, rendering vice disgusting, and stigmatizing infidelity*.”¹¹² Through licensed plays, young Americans could understand that they were ethically bound to encourage social progress for the betterment of the United States. Murray created female characters who demonstrated emotional strength, sound judgment, and self-assurance. They were able to maneuver within the feminine sphere and express their opinions while still maintaining societal norms. This demonstrated how women could still be educated alongside their male counterparts, could be able to have political opinions, without compromising propriety and virtue.¹¹³ By controlling what was shown to the masses, it could be ensured that the theater was being used for educational means.

Remaining determinedly optimistic throughout her essay, Murray believed that through proper education via the theater, the youths of America would not only lead the new nation into a

¹¹¹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 229.

¹¹² Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 229.

¹¹³ Leopold Lippert and Ralph J. Poole, *The Politics of Gender in Early American Theater: Revolutionary Dramatists and Theatrical Practices*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022,

¹¹³, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839452530>

brighter future but also better themselves. She feared that without this, they would turn to debauchery and drunkenness. After winning the war for independence, the majority of the population was left without a righteous cause that would keep them on the right path. However, in order to extend the education of the next generation to ensure that they understood what was required of them in society, Murray claimed that by being educated in the theater, “young persons will acquire a refinement of taste and manners; they will learn to think, speak, and act, with propriety.”¹¹⁴ Cultural change was just as important as legal change, and the youths would need to be able to articulate their values should they desire to verbally battle the founding generation who still held onto outdated ideas. In order for progress to be achieved, the majority of society would have to collectively push for any kind of evolution.

Murray believed that gender equality in education would be beneficial in many ways, it could encourage a stronger, happier relationship between spouses. She claimed that when a woman “is most unhappy; she feels the want of a cultivated mind,” and that she would want to be “united to a person whose soul nature made equal to her own, education hath set him so far above her, that in those entertainments which are productive of such rational felicity, she is not qualified to accompany him.”¹¹⁵ It was a mortifying experience for an uneducated woman to be in the company of learned men, to be unable to understand the conversations taking place around her. However, Murray argued, as men and women attended the theater, both genders would have equal opportunity to learn what was required of them to better their community. While women were seen as physically weaker than men, Murray argued that they were capable of intellectual equality. By watching the licensed dramas, the audience would be forced into developing critical

¹¹⁴ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 230.

¹¹⁵ Judith Sargent Murray, on the equality of the sexes (1790).

thinking skills which would encourage discussion with their peers. She claimed that “a thirst for knowledge will be originated; and from attentions, a first, perhaps, constituting only the amusement of the hour, they will gradually proceed to more important inquiries.”¹¹⁶ Murray hoped that young Americans would question why the older generation claimed to have fought for freedom and civil rights for all and yet women, people of color, and the working class were still being neglected. Wealthy white men created the laws of the new nation and, she believed, by facilitating conversation between the genders, men and women would come to understand that they could work together to create a new and prosperous society that acknowledged equality for every American citizen regardless of gender.

Providing evidence that the theater could inspire a desire to learn and better oneself, Murray recounted the real experience of Clarinda Meanwell. Her father was a wealthy merchant who provided her an education, one that many women her age were not fortunate enough to receive. Yet Meanwell held no motivation to understand the world around her and learn from her teachers and books. Murray described how her “education hath been upon the very best plan,” and that it “continued nevertheless, for the first twenty years of her life, without manifesting the smallest literary curiosity. It was impossible to interest her, even in the pages of a novel.”¹¹⁷ Any knowledge Meanwell possessed came from circumstances where it was forced upon her rather than her voluntarily seeking to better herself intellectually. Even when given the best opportunities by her father, she refused to take a deeper interest in what could only be found in books and through academic lectures. However, proving Murray’s claim about educational

¹¹⁶ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 230.

¹¹⁷ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 230.

dramas, this would change when a traveling theater group visited her town. In her essay, Murray describes how Meanwell was inspired by a theatrical production to improve herself:

in the course of the day preceding a theatrical entertainment, that she might the better comprehend the several parts, the play-book was in her hand, a laudable spirit of inquiry obtained in her bosom, and with amazing rapidity she ran through, and compassed the sense of every volume within her reach. History, geography, astronomy - in all these her proficiency is prodigious; and, in one word, I hardly know a better informed, or more amiable young woman in the circle of my acquaintance.¹¹⁸

Meanwell was not the only youth Murray witnessed being influenced by the theater to explore the world, leading them to the critical thinking skills required to better not only themselves but also their community. Like the ancient Greeks and Romans who used the theater as a primary source of entertainment as well as propaganda, Americans could do the same in order to better guarantee the moral and intellectual education of the next generation.

Volume 1, Essay 25

¹¹⁸ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 230.

Religion was a driving force for Puritans seeking refuge from religious persecution during the early seventeenth century. It continued to play a prominent role in the lives of colonial Americans for the generations to follow. Judith Sargent Murray was raised in the First Parish Church in Gloucester, Massachusetts, which practiced Calvinism before turning to practice Universalism after John Murray, who has been called the “Father of Organized American Universalism” and would become her husband in 1788, settled in New England.¹¹⁹ She was a devout follower of God, which can be seen throughout *The Gleaner*, but this is especially clear in the twenty-fifth essay of the first volume where she compares ancient mythological history and people to those written in the Bible. She explains how she had often thought “that serious and well-disposed believers of the heathen mythology, must have found themselves wonderfully impelled to acts of devotional piety.”¹²⁰ While not approving of the religious practices of the Greeks and Romans of antiquity, Murray commended them on their steadfast faith in their gods and traditions. Different from her own God who was one omnipotent power controlling the heavens and earth, the ancients believed in many gods and goddesses as well as creatures such as nymphs, centaurs, monsters, and so many more. Each deity controlled specific domains, for example, “Neptune grasps his trident, and holds dominion in the vast world of waters,” while “Pluto, borne in his sable chariot, bears the keys of ages and of death.”³ Murray described how “the empire of fancy is thronged by personified ideas; the prosopopoeia is easy, and the gods and goddesses cluster in every walk.” The poet “Hesiod, in his genealogical history of the heathen deities, delineates thirty thousand of these dignified beings, and an indulgent imagination readily

¹¹⁹ Bonnie Hurd Smith, “John and Judith Sargent Murray,” *Harvard Square Library*, August 29, 2012, https://doi.org/https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/search_gcse/?q=John-and-Judith-Sargent-Murray-by-Bonnie-Hurd-Smith, 3.

¹²⁰ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 240.

invests them with their peculiar properties and offices.”¹²¹ The ancients saw their gods and goddesses throughout the world around them, from the winged Zephyrus in the gentle breezes to a sighing river nymph in a murmuring stream, their deities and mythologies were heavily involved in their everyday lives.¹²²

While staying true to her Christian upbringing, Murray appreciated the beauty in believing and respecting the gods of antiquity. She believed that there was nothing inherently wrong in allowing them to exist in stories and the minds of those who were interested in mythology, as long as readers remained true to God and His teachings. Allowing other religions and belief systems to maintain popularity amongst the ancients and modern-day people was seen as a part of His plan. Murray explains how “the sincere votary of this mythology, I say, must have been continually stimulated to acts which his directory assured him were proper and necessary.”¹²³ She was of the opinion “that however fanciful *reason* may consider this fabulous hierarchy, I see no impropriety, in still allowing it, in the works of imagination, a *visionary being*,” and also in “poetry, certainly, even to the present era, gathers some of its most ornamental flowers from this magical, or legendary garden of antiquity.”¹²⁴ The mythology of ancient Greece and Rome had survived millennia and brought inspiration to generations of poets, authors, and artists around the world. Murray understood that there was very little chance of what she called pagan deities fading into obscurity when mentions of them could be seen almost everywhere. She explains how “the history of the heathen gods and goddesses is so interwoven with the occurrences of ancient times, that it is impossible to peruse those venerable pages with

¹²¹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 241.

¹²² Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 240.

¹²³ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 242.

¹²⁴ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 242.

advantage, without a competent knowledge of their various characters and powers.”¹²⁵ Readers of ancient history and literature have been left with stories of men battling monsters, gods seducing mortal women, and armies with impossible numbers of soldiers for the era. Fact and fiction were so tightly woven together that it is difficult to untangle the two in order to uncover the accurate tale. Literacy rates were on the rise in the years following the War for Independence, historian Ruth Bloch explains, an event that she calls a reading revolution, one that women wholeheartedly took an interest in.¹²⁶ However, devotional religious texts quickly became less popular, which would have alarmed Murray as she was devout to her Universalist practices. By incorporating both classical and biblical references, even going so far as to compare them, was a way to ensure that her readers remained faithful. In her essay Murray claimed that “if we trace the traditionary fables which make up the bulk of the pagan system, we shall generally find they originate in some momentous and incontrovertible truth.”¹²⁷ However fantastical and adulterated the history, they still maintain a kernel of truth.

In her essay, Murray continued to emphasize the similarities between Greek and Roman mythology and the teachings of Christianity. Having spent her childhood studying the two religions, she felt confident in her comparisons and came to the conclusion that several of the stories found in antiquity and within the Bible were based on the same events. She claims that “through the labyrinth of error, the scripturarian often follows a clew, which leads him directly to the fundamental principles of that *revealed religion*,” which would be “reverences as of God, which he believes to be most holy, and which he receives as the ground of his present tranquility,

¹²⁵ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 241.

¹²⁶ Ruth Heidi Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 127.

¹²⁷ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 242.

and his future hopes.”¹²⁸ While Murray was not the first to find similarities between the mythological and biblical stories, she was excited to discover the overlap between the ancient legends she had studied in her youth and the Christian scriptures taught through her church. She did not argue which version was recorded first in her essay, rather she drew connections between the two. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod recounted the genealogy and origins of the Greek deities. Murray analyzed his work and described how “chaos, which Hesiod dignifies by the appellation of The Father of the Gods, Moses simply calls *The earth, without form and void*.”¹²⁹ The creation of humanity and their gods has been an interest of scholars for millennia, often leading to different versions of what many believe to be an identical legend. The ancient poet and Moses were ultimately writing about the same source of the universe, what came before the gods or God that they believed in and came to the conclusion that there was pandemonium before a stronger power called them to order. Murray claimed that “Hesiod’s relation is undoubtedly an allegorical account, wherein the various parts of nature are personified, of that history of the creation, which the Hebrew writer, in language natural and beautifully sublime, so inimitably narrated.”¹³⁰ The two authors crafted similar origin stories despite living centuries apart which showed the universal nature of their stories.

Having identified similarities between classical mythology and biblical scripture, Murray went on to analyze specific examples within her essay. She began with the story of Deucalion, son of Prometheus, the king of Phthia, found in *Metamorphosis* written by the Roman poet Ovid, and compares it to the story of Noah’s Ark. The king of the Greek gods, Zeus, believed that

¹²⁸ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 243.

¹²⁹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 243.

¹³⁰ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 243.

humans had become corrupt and wicked and made the decision to wipe the slate clean by sending a great flood. Murray quotes the Roman Syrian satirist Lucian who states ““that the Greeks assert in their fables, that the first men being of an insolent and cruel disposition, inhuman, inhospitable, and regardless of their faith, were all destroyed by a deluge - the earth pouring forth vast streams of water.””¹³¹ Similarly, in the book of Genesis, God had become outraged and disappointed with humanity because they had strayed from his teachings. He too sent a flood that would destroy life on earth except for the devout Noah. Murray explained, the two men survived these catastrophic floods through divine intervention. Both exhibited devotion to their gods and they, along with their wives, were shown visions that lead to the men building large ships. In her essay she continues to describe how ““Deucalion alone, saved himself and family in the ark: That two of each kind of wild and tame animals ... that this Deucalion floated upon the waters, until they became assuaged, and that he then repaired the human race.””¹³² Likewise, Noah was also tasked with carrying two of all animals on his ship. The similarities, however, do not end there. Both men were instructed to release a dove every day in hopes that they would return with a sign that flood waters had receded and land was once again available to inhabit. Rainbows were also seen in both fables, for Noah they symbolized a promise made by God to never flood the earth again while they could be seen by Deucalion as the messenger goddess Iris flitted across the sky. Studying these similarities allowed Murray to better understand how these different religions overlapped and how the ancient Greeks and Romans were dedicated to their own gods just as she was devoted to her faith. She wanted her readers to maintain the same faith that both she and the ancients held for their respective gods.

¹³¹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 244.

¹³² Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 244.

Universalism became incredible important to Murray and she never missed an opportunity to share its teachings with anyone who would listen.

Murray then moves onto the story of Pandora, the woman who famously opened a box and released all of earth's evils. She was created by Zeus to be the perfect woman and was given to Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, as a wife. However, she was actually made as a trick and punishment for Prometheus for daring to give humans fire. In her essay, Murray explains how Pandora had "beauty, wisdom, various intellectual endowments, matchless eloquence, and harmonic powers, with every other combining charm" and she was "so eminently distinguished that accomplished vision, are picturesque of the assemblage of the graces that dignified and adorned our general mother, while yet, arrayed in spotless innocence."¹³³ She drew comparisons between Pandora and Eve, the first woman according to the Bible. Both women were created by a god for the sole purpose of being wed to a man. They were designed to be perfect and obedient to their gods and their husbands. Yet, Murray explains, Pandora and Eve rebelled against what they were told to do, and what they were created for, and fell victim to temptation and curiosity. She justifies this analysis by stating that "the mischief consequent upon the disobedience of the first woman, are exactly figured by the catalogue of ills which followed the opening of Pandora's box."¹³⁴ All of humanity was left to face the consequences of these women's choices. Pandora opened a box containing disease, sorrow, violence, greed, old age and death, all of the world's evils infested what had once been paradise. Eve took a bite from a forbidden apple which led to all of mankind being barred from the Garden of Eden, a place that knew no pain or violence or suffering. However, hope, Murray states, was all that remained in both tales, whether it rested at

¹³³ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 244.

¹³⁴ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 244.

the bottom of a box or in people's hearts as everyone strove to survive in a more dangerous world.

Murray continues to compare the mythological Mycenaean king Agamemnon to the biblical patriarch of the Israelites, Abraham. Both of the men, she claims, were put into a difficult position by their gods when they demanded that the men sacrifice their child. Agamemnon had been preparing to join the war in Troy when he and his army incurred the wrath of the goddess Artemis. Their ships were unable to leave the harbor and in order to end the curse, a prophet declared that he would have to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. In Aeschylus's play *Agamemnon*, the king exclaimed that "a grievous doom is disobedience, and a grievous doom it is if I massacre my daughter, the pride of my house, polluting with streams of slaughter maiden's blood a father's hands hard by the altar."¹³⁵ The king was left with no choice but to sacrifice his daughter, as was ordered by a goddess, for the greater good. While there were similarities between the ancient myth and the biblical tale, Murray explains, the motivation behind the sacrifices differed. God had promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a son and after many years they were blessed with Issac. Yet their joy was short lived when the Lord then asked that they sacrifice their son in order to show their devotion to Him. Murray states that this "vitiating tradition of that illustrious period in the life of the patriarch Abraham, which exhibits him as preparing, at the command of the Almighty" to kill his beloved son.¹³⁶ The gods demand piety from their followers and in these specific tales the children are the price to be paid. For Abraham, he willingly prepared his son to be killed at the instruction of the Lord without hesitation because he trusted in God's plan. Agamemnon, on the other hand, did not have a

¹³⁵ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 240.

¹³⁶ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 1, 245.

choice but to sacrifice his daughter; otherwise, he would have been unable to join the war in Troy. Murray respected the devotion that the ancient Greeks and Romans held for their gods as it was so similar to her faith to her own God. Although on the surface the two religions appeared to be radically different, she describes how closely the tales resemble each other. She understood, based on her own limited education, that the majority of middle- and upper-class citizens would have a basic understanding of the classics. Murray compared classical deities to her God as a way of communicating with her readers.

Volume 2, Essay 45

In her works, Murray used her characters as the vehicle to deliver her messages as a way to ensure her audience understood what she had to say. She created a life for her female lead that she wished she had in the form of Margaretta. This character was raised by the Vigillius family after being orphaned as a child. Her adoptive father assures readers that “in the receipts of cookery she is thoroughly versed, and our linens never received so fine a gloss as when it was ironed, and laid in order by Maragretta.”¹³⁷ It was important to him that she knew the basics of women’s chores if she were to fit into society and also find a good husband. Her adoptive mother, Mary, on the other hand, ensured that Margaretta was provided the best education possible, one that Murray herself was unable to have, so that she would not be forced to live with the monotony of needlepoint for the rest of her life. She was taught several languages along with

¹³⁷ “The Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum 1792-09: Vol 4 ISS 9 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming.” Internet Archive, September 1, 1792. https://archive.org/details/sim_massachusetts-magazine-or-monthly-museum_1792-09_4_9/page/550/mode/2up.

history, geography, and natural philosophy, but was not so educated as to step out of the feminine sphere. In her own letters it is clear to readers that Mary is knowledgeable in classical history, and it can be assumed that she based Margaretta's education on her own. In her letter to her adoptive daughter, she begins by describing "though frequent crimes deform the Grecian page, And Roman annals often blush in gore, Yet let me contemplate the virtuous sage, The patriot's beamy steps untir'd explore."¹³⁸ The majority of the letter Mary wrote to Margaretta describes the great exploits of politicians, generals, and philosophers of antiquity as she believes it important that she better herself and hopes that the success of the ancient Greeks and Romans inspire her.

Mary begins by describing the Greek philosopher Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, also known as *Plutarch's Lives*. The work is a biography of forty-eight remarkable Greek and Roman citizens who lead their countries into greatness. This substantial work contains an incredible amount of information not only about the people but also the culture and society they lived in, allowing for a better understanding of ancient times. Mary explains that "Plutarch, after carefully collecting the materials for the lives which he hath written; after weighing every circumstance," and that "digesting them with that admirable regularity in which they are handed down to us, is often at a loss to estimate the comparative excellence of his heroes."¹³⁹ She understood that the ancient philosopher dedicated a great deal of time to *Parallel Lives* and that each person he selected was carefully considered. The work, Mary believed, should be studied because of these purposeful decisions; there were lessons that Plutarch wanted future readers to understand. He stated that "it must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the

¹³⁸ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 115.

¹³⁹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 115.

most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men.”¹⁴⁰ Plutarch did not choose the best of antiquity’s heroes simply because they achieved greatness but because of their morals and ability to truly aid their country. He explained that “sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever.”¹⁴¹ Their character and personality were more important to Plutarch than their heroic actions. By utilizing this example within the letter, Mary told Margaretta that who she is as a person rather than her actions are more significant to not only their society but to history as well. She states that “he narrates particulars, places them in a parallel view, and seems rather to leave the decision to his readers.”¹⁴² Throughout her essays, Murray repeatedly tells her readers that virtue and ethics are what would lead America into greatness and allow for a nation supporting equality amongst every citizen. She wanted young men and women to read and understand the classics and interpret the important lessons found within the ancient texts.

Classical Greece and Rome were full of politically and militarily influential men whose great tales have survived millennia. Their achievements have been recounted by scholars in order for future generations to remember the heroic actions of the men who built and defended their countries. In her letter, Mary declared that “the heroes of antiquity, grouped together, may be considered as a splendid constellation, illumining those tremendous periods, which, fraught with blood and murder, unveiled scenes that seemed to threaten the universal wreck of nature!”¹⁴³ Throughout history there were periods when chaos ran rampant as nations fell and others rose in

¹⁴⁰ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

¹⁴¹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

¹⁴² Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 115.

¹⁴³ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

their place or groups split off from their mother country, similar to the new America. She references Lycurgus, the legendary Lacademonian legislator who brought order to Sparta via the creation of a constitution. Mary explains that it is “evinced his integrity in the most arduous actions of his life; no difficulties were too great for his enterprising spirit.”¹⁴⁴ The Spartans had begged Lycurgus, who had gladly renounced his kingship and left to travel the Mediterranean, to return as he was the true ruler in their eyes. However, when he came back, instead of taking up the crown he completely rewrote the law system of the city-state. He is described in the letter as “zealous for his country’s weal, he endured every hardship; visiting the learned men in various cities” in hopes that he might collect their wisdom.¹⁴⁵ Lycurgus created several bold reforms, including encouraging women to exercise the same as men to strengthen their bodies for childbearing and to ensure that their offspring were born strong. He also stated that they should not be hidden away in their homes but be allowed to walk around naked and dance with young men at festivals. While this might not have been the gender equality that Murray hoped for, it was an example of how in Spartan society women were respected and valued.

Mary continues the letter by briefly describing the works of another classical politician and lawmaker, Solon, who was credited with laying the foundation of Athenian democracy. Born into an aristocratic family, he was chosen to be a chief magistrate, which would allow him to put reforms in place. Mary explains how he “united wisdom and clemency; his philanthropy was demonstrated by his *remission of debts*, and his exempting the *body from seizure in cases of influence*.”¹⁴⁶ Solon’s choice to wipe out all debts within Athens supported the economy as those

¹⁴⁴ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

¹⁴⁶ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

who had previously been working off what they owed were able to find other work and put that money back into local markets. This would have resonated with Murray, over the course of her life she would see her brother and father struggle to pay back money they owed or make up for money lost in business ventures. She experienced the same situation during her first marriage and at the time of her second she was attempting to add to the household income by publishing her works. Over the course of the revolution, many American families went into debt as trade and business was disrupted by the war. By introducing a reform similar to Solon's, the new nation would be able to thrive. The ancient politician, Mary states in her letter, also "abrogated the bloody laws of Draco, and equity was the basis of his proceedings: He ordained, also, that no one should *speak evil of the dead*."¹⁴⁷ The Draconian Laws were incredibly harsh and noteworthy because nearly every crime was punishable by death. Solon abolished every one of the blood statutes, except for legislation involving homicide. In their place, he established laws that would encourage equality within the Athenian legal system. As the new American government created its own constitution and as the next generation began to enter positions of power, Murray hoped that they would take Solon's reforms and expand on them in order to ensure civil rights for every citizen.

For nearly a decade Americans fought the British Empire for freedom, battlefields covered the colonies, and uncertainty about which side would win the war ran rampant. However, in 1783 when England retreated, and the colonies became a new independent nation, the next conflict became internal as a young government set out to create legislation. This was not too dissimilar from early Rome, according to Mary. She explains that "Numa Pompilius was a virtuous prince. He seemed born to humanize the ferocity of the Romans; he cultivated the arts

¹⁴⁷ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

of peace,” and that “his supposed intercourse with the goddess Egeria, giving him the ascendancy over the minds of the people, he became indeed a sovereign, and he employed his power for the emolument of his subjects.”¹⁴⁸ Asked to be their next king, Numa refused the offer, he claimed that Rome under Romulus was still a country of war and needed someone capable of leading their armies. Eventually he was persuaded to accept the proposal and led the nation into a brighter future. Plutarch describes him as “universally celebrated for justice and piety,” he would go on to create the majority of Rome’s most important religious and political institutions such as the Roman calendar, the Vestal Virgins, and the Cult of Jupiter.¹⁴⁹ Numa is also credited with writing Rome’s early legislation, transitioning the country from being strictly military based to having an actual government. Mary claims that “his acceptance of the royal dignity was in conformity to their preserving importunity, and he justified their utmost confidence.”¹⁵⁰ Murray would have found the ancient king to be an excellent example of how a developing country could transition from being reliant on a warlike mentality to a successful world power. By adding Numa into Mary’s letter, she is informing her readers that what America was experiencing in the aftermath of the Revolution was not entirely unique and that they could find similarities in literature and history of antiquity should they require guidance or inspiration.

After America became independent from the British Empire, it was left to its citizens to remain loyal to the new country. Dedication to the betterment of the nation as well as the desire to promote progress were required in order to ensure that they would remain free. In her letter to Margaretta, Mary explains how Marcus Furius Camillus provided an excellent example of

¹⁴⁸ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

¹⁴⁹ Livy and Aubrey De Selincourt, *Early History of Rome* (Penguin Books Ltd, 2002).

¹⁵⁰ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 116.

patriotic devotion. She explains how he “bore many honourable offices under the Roman commonwealth. Perhaps, if we except the Decii and the Regulii of the Roman history, it records few, if any lives, that exhibited more uniform and glowing patriotism” and how he was “five times chosen dictator; and his deeds of worth rendered the family of Furia illustrious.”¹⁵¹ The ancient Roman statesman was respected for his military and political prowess having been elected to be a military tribune multiple times as well as dictator in order to ensure the preservation of his country. After the American Revolution, citizens were able to vote for their own government officials without interference from Britain. By mentioning Camillus’s accomplishments, Murray was encouraging young adults to take a deeper look into who was campaigning for offices in order to determine who was worthy of holding political power and facilitate progress in the new nation. She encouraged Federalist politics, believing in order and propriety but frowned upon egalitarianism. In 396 BCE, the Roman people, primarily the working class, began to lose faith in Camillus and believed that he was keeping the army at Veii so that they would be unable to vote for the next year’s Senate. They accused him of distributing the goods from Veii inappropriately and brought charges against him. In her letter, Mary describes how

Camillus, at a period when he was involved in the deepest domestic calamity, when the cheek of the warrior was wet with tears which fell over the early grave of the son of his bosom, became the victim of ingratitude! Arraigned by the ill-founded malice of the people, he anticipated judgment, and only escaped an ignominious sentence, by submitting to voluntary banishment. But, unlike

¹⁵¹ Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 118.

Coriolanus, during his exile, his good genius still hovered round the city of Rome, and, as her guardian angel, he watched over her for good. The Gauls attacked and destroyed the city, massacring the senators in their robes of dignity; but the exiled hero was fruitful in resources, and his most arduous efforts were embodied for the relief of his desolated country.¹⁵²

Camillus remained loyal to Rome despite being exiled by his people. When he learned that the Gauls had attacked and captured the city he gathered an army and reclaimed his beloved Rome. This level of dedication was what Murray hoped that young Americans would find inspiration from and also look for this trait in the men running for a government position. The youths of the new nation did not experience the Revolution in the same way that the founding generation had and therefore did not have the same unbreakable devotion.

Conclusion

For the majority of her life, Judith Sargent Murray angrily protested her inability to attend grammar school and college simply because she had been born a girl. She took her education into her own hands by borrowing or purchasing books similar to the ones that were used in grammar schools and colleges. Taking what she learned about classical history, Murray utilized her knowledge to connect with the public, specifically those of the upper-middle class as it was assured that they were taught ancient Greek and Roman history and literature. This became particularly important in the years after the American Revolution, when she witnessed

¹⁵² Murray, *The Gleaner*: 2, 118.

the building of a new nation and found it lacking. For nearly a decade the colonies fought against the British Empire in order to obtain independence and equality. However, ultimately what many believed to be God-given rights only applied to upper-middle class men. Murray thought that, at the very least, women should be afforded the same rights as their male counterparts and was offended that she was being discriminated against simply based on her gender. Having published her many essays in the *Massachusetts Magazine* and plays in a Boston theater, it was her goal to communicate with young Americans who would soon find themselves in positions of power. She believed that the next generation could rectify the mistakes of their fathers and grandfathers but only if they had a proper education. The theater was her preferred mode of teaching and by incorporating classical history and literature into her plays, she could ensure that the majority of the audience would be able to understand the lessons put forward by the characters. She hoped that by having men and women in the theater that they would be encouraged to discuss what they had seen and could come together as a united community that valued virtue and equality.

Chapter 3 - Conclusion

The American colonies experienced great uncertainty in the years before the American Revolution: people were forced to choose whether to support the British Empire or fight for independence. Throughout this time, many political figures began to publicize their opinions in order to draw more colonists to their cause. Mercy Otis Warren was one such person; before and during the war she would write poems that promoted her own as well as her friend's viewpoint. She incorporated classical literature and history into her works because she believed it would help her effectively communicate with the public. In 1773, the British Parliament passed the Tea Act which led to protests as the colonists believed them to be unfairly taxed by a distant government power. In response to this, John Adams commissioned Warren to write a poem that encouraged colonists to purchase smuggled tea rather than tea sold by English merchants. "Squabble of Sea Nymphs" was one of her first published works which told the story of goddesses, representing America and Britain, arguing over how best to access their favorite drink. In 1775 Warren wrote "Political Reverie," a response to the impending war that was meant to be a warning to her readers. She pleaded with colonists to heed history's lessons as she listed the great and bloody battles found in Ancient Greece and Rome. The ending, however, was hopeful as she believed that America would someday be free. Warren's third poem, "To Hon. J Winthrop, Esq." is believed to have been written in response to her friend John Winthrop's death. When the boycott against British made goods was declared, he encouraged women to join the cause as they were the ones making purchases for the home. This drew women into the war effort, which they had previously been kept separate from. Halfway through the Revolution, the wealthy elite returned to their former lives of luxury by buying goods from England again. In

1779, she released “Simplicity” to shame them for turning their backs on the boycott movement and their country’s freedom. Warren was a well-educated woman who was surrounded by supportive friends and family. Due to her numerous political connections she, better than most, understood the colony’s situation. She knew that the majority of the social elite had been classically educated and that its popularity led to a trickle down effect which meant most of the population had a basic understanding of the ancient world. Using this to her advantage, Warren incorporated literature and history from antiquity into her works to better inform the public of what was needed of them, and to inspire hope in their darkest days. Mercy Otis Warren believed strongly in the American Revolution and in the republic the nation would one day become. She inserted herself into the war effort by using her writing skills to inspire her readers to fight for their freedom.

In 1783 America defeated the British Empire and won their independence. The new nation was forced to rebuild itself and to create a new government, one that was meant to inspire the rest of the world into following their path. However, Judith Sargent Murray found the fledgling legislature lacking. Between 1792 and 1794 she published essays in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, she would later compile them to create a three-volume book that she would call *The Gleaner*. In Volume 1, Essay 24, she tells her readers how the theater could be used to educate young Americans and prepare them for the future. Murray used the ancient Greeks and Romans as an example as their primary source of entertainment and method of spreading political or personal propaganda to the public. Her goal with this essay was to encourage the next generation to educate themselves so that they could facilitate progress for America. The next essay, Volume 1, Essay 25, drew similarities between classical mythology and biblical scripture. Murray had studied both in her youth which allowed her to compare the two different religions. She

respected how devoted many people still were to the tales of Ancient Greece and Rome but hoped that they would stay true to their Christian upbringing. Rather than one of her usual essays, Volume 2, Essay 45 is a letter from one of her characters, Mary Vigillius, to her adoptive daughter Margaretta. Mary was highly invested in Margaretta's education, one that she clearly based on her own, and while Mr. Vigillius ensured that she was taught the womanly arts, her mother did not want her to live in obscurity. Throughout the letter, she described the accomplishments and character of ancient politicians as they were the perfect example of who the next generation of Americans should take inspiration from. Murray's goal with her essays and plays was to ensure that the new nation's future was bright and progressive. She believed that the Founding Fathers had neglected women, whom she had long believed to be equal to men. Murray feared that the next generation lacked the motivation and morals needed to maintain their independence and promote political and social evolution. It was her hope that her readers would find inspiration and knowledge within her works to continue advancing the developing nation.

Classical literature and history were deeply ingrained in the education, and therefore culture, of eighteenth-century America. Yet only men of the upper and middle class were allowed to attend grammar schools and universities. However, after decades of this, knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman mythology and history became deeply ingrained in society. Mercy Otis Warren and Judith Sargent Murray were ambitious women who were eager to learn more about the world around them and its history. They developed an understanding of the classics and learned how to use what they learned to communicate their opinions, political and social, to the public. This became especially important when the American colonists declared independence from England having taken inspiration from classical history. Primarily targeting

the wealthy and influential, Warren and Murray published essays, poems, and plays incorporated with ancient Greek and Roman history in order to reach a wider audience with the encouragement of their friends and family. However, the two women differed in what messages they wanted to share with the public. Warren promoted her and her friends' political beliefs leading up to and during the Revolution. She wanted to use her voice to encourage colonists to join the war effort, whether it be on the battlefield or by boycotting British goods. Originally, she published anonymously only claiming her works in the 1790s. Murray, on the other hand, wrote about women's civil rights, or lack thereof, after the war. Also releasing her work under a pseudonym until 1798, her goal was to encourage the next generation of Americans to facilitate progress for the young country by establishing equality for all citizens. The classical literature and history used by the two authors opened a mode of communication that had previously been denied to their sex. They took what they learned on their own and successfully published their works in newspapers, magazines, and later their own book.

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