THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ENGLISHWOMAN

THESIS

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The present study investigates the failure of the Enlightenment to liberate Englishwomen from the prejudices society and law imposed upon them. Classifying social classes by lifestyle, the roles of noble, middle-class, and criminal women, as well as the attitudes of contemporary writers of both sexes, are analyzed.

This investigation concludes that social mores limited noblewomen to ornamental roles and condemned them to exist in luxurious boredom; forced middle-class women to emulate shining domestic images which contrasted sharply with the reality of their lives; subjected women of desperate circumstances to a criminal code rendered erratic and inconsistent by contemporary attitudes, and impelled the Enlightenment to invent new defenses for old attitudes toward women.
PREFACE

Modern man recognizes a number of historical periods as turning-points of Western values and attitudes, priding himself on the extended scope of his society at each milestone. While religion, politics, economics, art, science, and social structure have been rearranged during each cultural movement, the Enlightenment has been credited with generating some of the most cherished ideas of Western man: equality, political liberty, and emancipation from superstitious beliefs and social prejudices. If the eighteenth century deserves to be called the Age of Reason, why did custom and law of that period not free women from the unreasonable limitations that had kept them in subservience for centuries?

England was fertile ground for Enlightenment tenets, accepting new approaches in philosophy and the physical and social sciences so readily that the island kingdom has often been consigned to a minor role in the movement by those who overlooked or forgot that Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke had paved the way in the previous century. England had a limited monarchy, having accomplished this revolution while most of Europe served absolute monarchs, and many considered the English to have a model society.
Why, then, did England not make reforms in favor of sexual equality?

English society was ordered, though the separation of classes were neither mutually exclusive nor absolute. With a rising standard of living, each social element assumed some of the outward trappings of the next higher level, and the middle class proved to be the most dynamic of all. How did women of each social class fare during the eighteenth century? And more important, how did these women react to the prevailing conceptions of their positions?

Many twentieth-century historians, who should have known better pointed proudly to the Enlightenment, concluding that since mankind had made great strides, womankind surely must have done likewise. These writers have cited such notable females as Queen Anne and Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, or Fanny Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft, disregarding the seventeenth-century origins and exceptional circumstances of the first two and failing to understand that if their society indeed had liberated women, the latter two would not have been exceptional. The skeptic is reminded of the annoyance of the anonymous feminine essayist who wrote An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (London, 1696), in which she complained:

He levels his Scandal at the whole Sex, and thinks us Sufficiently fortified, if out of the Story of Two Thousand Years he has been able to pick up a
few examples of Women illustrious for their Wits, Learning or Vertue. . . .

The eighteenth century left a wealth of material that enables the modern historian to examine the lifestyle of each social class, from the diaries and letters of the nobility to the novels and essays of the middle class, and even, if the destitute or criminal elements of society lacked the literacy or the means to leave such records, the works of reform-minded individuals like Thomas Coram and Jonas Hanway and the social commentaries of Daniel Defoe and the Fieldings, who detailed the quality of life at the bottom of the social strata. A variety of secondary material also is available, no doubt due to our adulation of the Enlightenment and vain search therein for the origins of equality between men and women.

The eighteenth century was a time of fluid economics, when industrialization and colonial enterprise changed the fortunes of many. Consequently, modern writers have devoted much labor and thought to separating, or lumping together and classifying aristocracy and gentry, professional and shopkeeper groups, or city and country poor. For purposes of examination, the present study has delineated classes according to the lifestyles of the women involved, not by the economic status of their male family members. Women played roles that were decorative, domestic, or desperate, according to their particular circumstances, which
determined the extent to which they became involved in domestic affairs or in just managing to survive.

Due to the narrow scope of this investigation, many fascinating aspects of eighteenth-century womanhood must be omitted from these pages, though many questions impel further study. Until twentieth-century women understand the historical background of sexual bias, a more genuine Enlightenment cannot take place.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE ...................................................... iv
PROLOGUE .................................................... 1

Chapter

  I.  THE NOBLEWOMAN ..................................... 13

  II. THE MIDDLE-CLASS MAID AND MATRON ................ 29

  III. THE CRIMINAL AND PROSTITUTE ..................... 50

RETROSPECT .................................................. 76

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................... 79
THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ENGLISH WOMAN

Whatever undomesticates a woman, so far unmakes her, as to all the valuable purposes of her existence, and is at once the bane of her usefulness, her happiness and virtue.

John Bennett, 1795

The changes in European thought and attitudes which deified Reason, Natural Law, and Equality and led Man to place himself at the center of the universe made Woman the slave of domesticity. The idea that women were inferior, of course, was not new. In Western Europe before the Enlightenment, women were regarded as the potential undoers of mankind--weaker and smaller, but cunning and subversive seductresses who led men away from spiritual matters and into defilement. The New Testament blamed Eve for the fall of Man and so condemned women to silence and submission. Even so, large numbers of aristocratic women in the Renaissance and the Reformation were highly educated, including Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, Marguerite D'Angoulême, and the daughters of Henry VIII, who became Mary I and Elizabeth I of England. During the century known for its luminaries and revolutions, however, women were demystified and disarmed. With the idealization
of Woman's role in nature, Man stopped regarding her with suspicion and often stopped regarding her at all.

Lawrence Stone has written, in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, "at the root of all the most significant changes of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries lies a progressive reorientation of culture towards the pursuit of pleasure in this world, rather than postponement of gratification until the next."³ With the acceptance of mankind's rights to pleasure, women were caught in ironclad stereotypes as existing only to serve as the instruments of that pleasure.

What did it mean to be a woman in eighteenth-century England? Men wrote most of the period's history, but from their writings about women and the publications of a few of their female contemporaries, one can postulate an answer. A woman could be a wife, a mother, a mistress, a servant, or even a spinster, but the position in life of each was judged from her relationship to a man.

With few exceptions, women were excluded from positions of power. There were some professional women, school-mistresses, writers, actresses, and keepers of brothels, but the closest a woman could come to exercising any authority was to be the wife of a powerful husband. Europe had experienced several queens within the preceding two centuries, though in 1795, John Bennett, the author of
Strictures on Female Education, excused these phenomena by stating, "The reign of queens has generally been a burlesque upon government. . . ." Whenever the English were displeased with a king or politician, they looked behind the scenes for evidence that a woman was guiding him.

Men were considered capable of achievement in business, war, and science, but women were thought capable only in maternal, housewifely, or decorative arts. Bennett firmly believed in female inferiority:

But whether it arises from an original defect in their frame and constitution, whether it is that an unquiet imagination and ever restless sensibility afford not opportunity or leisure enough for deep meditation, it is very certain, that they cannot, like the men, arrange, combine, abstract, pursue, diversify a long train of ideas, and in every thing, that requires the more substantial talents, must submit to a strong and a marked inferiority.

Earlier in the century, Lord Chesterfield had confided to his son that women "are only children of a larger growth . . . for solid reasoning, good sense, I never knew in my life one that had it. . . ." Chesterfield's efforts to turn his son into a man of polish repeatedly led him to emphasize the importance of women in that task. At one time, he even urged the youth to take an older woman as his mistress, so that he could benefit from her guidance.

Women were regarded as larger versions of children, persons so concerned with beauty and grace that they could not tolerate the absence of either and so could turn callow
youths into gentlemen by their proximity. Their supposed distaste for the unattractive led Immanuel Kant to state in "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" that women avoided evil because it was ugly, not because it was wrong.9

Virtue and beauty were their only ends, and women were always reminded to think of how they appeared to men. A young woman's father might arrange her marriage, with money and position the main considerations, but after the marriage her possessions and even her clothing belonged to her husband, as did she herself. Her husband was responsible for her behavior, and in England he could beat her so long as the stick used was no larger around than the circumference of his thumb.10 In the upper classes, women had little to do with rearing their children; thus they spent hours each day at the activities left open to them: their toilettes, shopping, paying and receiving calls, and in town, endless social affairs and fashionable flirtations. The uselessness of such an existence was noted by Mary Wollstonecraft, who stated in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1792,

Women are . . . rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright.11
To be alluring was essential, for a noblewoman was groomed her entire childhood for marriage. Spinsterdom meant failure and the possibility of playing governess or housekeeper to one's brother's family. Girls were crushed in corsets, straightened in steel braces, encouraged to be pale and delicate. Stone has compared the "cultivation of feminine debility" with the foot-binding of upper-class Chinese women.¹² The decrease, during the century, in the number of arranged marriages meant more competition for suitable husbands, which in turn encouraged the practice of pursuing poor health in order to appear more feminine.

Richard Steele bemoaned in The Spectator the education of young girls simply to catch husbands. On May 16, 1711, he lamented:

When a Girl is safely brought from her Nurse, before she is capable of forming one simple Notion of any thing in Life, she is delivered to the Hands of her Dancing-Master; and with a Collar round her Neck, the pretty wild Thing is taught a fantastical Gravity of Behaviour, and forced to a particular Way of holding her Head, heaving her Breast, and moving with her whole Body; and all this under Pain of never having an Husband, that she is every Moment told of, and for whom she seems to be educated. Thus her Fancy is engaged to turn all her Endeavours to the Ornament of her Person, as what must determine her Good and Ill in this Life . . .¹³

After attaining the state of Marriage for which she had been groomed, a young woman was obliged to bear children, run a household, even if only by directing the servants, and
to make her husband's private life comfortable and his social life (in as much as she was included) admirable.

If he were pleasant or absent, and if his finances were ample, her life might be not-too-uncomfortable. She usually had years of non-stop childbearing and miscarrying ahead of her, but if her husband's attention were diverted by a mistress, these demands could be lessened. If he were a tyrant or a drunken ne'er-do-well, the best she could expect, however, was early widowhood. Under English common law, married women had no rights over their children or property. Divorces were rare, requiring a private Act of Parliament; a husband could divorce his wife for adultery, but a wife could not divorce her husband on the same grounds.

The subject of the tyrannical husband was addressed in March, 1710, by Isaac Bickerstaff, Steele's fictitious spokesman in *The Tatler*, a predecessor of *The Spectator*. In a conversation with a friend, unhappy in her marriage to a difficult husband, Bickerstaff said, "Madam, . . . . The Affliction you mention is the greatest that can happen in Humane Life, and I know but One Consolation in it, if that be a Consolation, that the Calamity is a pretty General One."14 The role of dependent gave a woman little hope of solution for such an "affliction." Until she was widowed, or unless she died, exhausted by years of pregnancy, she was
expected "to Sigh when she is not concerned, and to Smile when she is not pleased...".15

Daniel Defoe, known for his sympathy for the plight of women, wrote that "A woman's case can hardly be so bad with a husband but it will be worse with her to leave him."16 Though England took great pride in being an enlightened nation, "a paradise for women and hell for horses," the styles of living open to Englishwomen and the attitudes they faced were common across Europe.17 In France, where women were lauded as the hostesses of salons, where advanced and scientific ideas were discussed, these bluestockings really served only as decorative audiences as the attendant males propounded their own views. The only freedom Englishwomen seem to have enjoyed that their counterparts in the rest of Europe did not was their increasing voice in the selection of marriage partners, which Stone shortsightedly has attributed to changing attitudes toward companionate marriage and the relaxation of economic motives for marriage in the course of the eighteenth century.18 This change probably resulted from Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, which required the publishing of banns, thereby reducing parents' fear of clandestine marriages.

Parental control apparently remained strict in France until sometime during the nineteenth century, and eastern
and northern European women of the eighteenth century suffered under "the most rigid of patriarchal attitudes."\textsuperscript{19}

Concerning women, Denis Diderot observed: "The only thing they are taught is to carry well the fig-leaf they have received from their first ancestress."\textsuperscript{20} By 1772, when he wrote "On Women", the duties and rights of females had many champions and detractors, but advocates idealized only their limited role. Thomas Hobbes had denied that the male, because of his physical strength, had a greater claim to lordship than the female, but even he believed that in the matrimonial agreement, the woman turned domestic control over to her husband.\textsuperscript{21} David Hume in "A Treatise of Human Nature," suggested that traditional demands on women stemmed from man's need for assurance that the children he supported were really his own, and so shame must be attached to infidelity and chastity must be praised.\textsuperscript{22}

In the previous century, John Locke had considered men and women to be equals, at least where their children were concerned.\textsuperscript{23} Jean Jacques Rousseau, however, disagreed; for him the male was supreme:

In the first place, the authority ought not to be equally divided between father and mother; the government must be single, and in every division of opinion there must be one preponderant voice to decide. Secondly, however lightly we may regard the disadvantages peculiar to women, yet, as they necessarily occasion intervals of inaction, this is a sufficient reason for excluding them from this supreme authority; for when the balance is perfectly even, a straw is enough to turn the scale.\textsuperscript{24}
And, like Hume, Rousseau argued that the husband should be able to supervise his wife's conduct, so that he could be sure that any children he acknowledged were his own.25

Even women regarded as renegades in their time had traditional biases toward their own sex. Mary Wollstonecraft lamented the poor quality of education available to females on the grounds that better education would make them better wives and mothers. In response to Rousseau's ideas on the training of women, Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she posed the question: "Whilst... women live, as it were, by their personal charms, how can we expect them to discharge those ennobling duties which equally require exertion and self-denial?"26 In another essay, she commented: "In a comfortable situation, a cultivated mind is necessary to render a woman contented; and in a miserable one, it is her only consolation."27

What, then, did it mean to be a woman in eighteenth-century England? To quote Diderot:

What is a woman then? ... a nothing in society. ... In almost all countries the cruelty of the civil law is at one against women with the cruelty of nature. They have been treated like imbecile children. In organized countries there is no vexation man cannot safely practise on woman."28
In summary, the Enlightenment did almost nothing to better the position of women in England. Even the era's foremost thinkers had decidedly rigid views on the roles of women, and in the Eighteenth Century's idealization of these roles, women were subjected to as many limitations as before.
DOCUMENTATION


2 1 Timothy 2:11-15.


4 Bennett, Strictures, p. 93.


6 Bennett, Strictures, p. 88.


12 Stone, Family, p. 446.

13 The Spectator, 16 May 1711.

14 The Tatler, 23 Mar. 1710.

15 The Spectator, 16 May 1711.

11


CHAPTER I

THE NOBLEWOMAN

The noblewoman of eighteenth-century England had two responsibilities in life: she was, first, a dynastic pawn for her father, and later, was obliged to produce an heir for her husband. Once her "brilliant" match was concluded and a son was born, she would enjoy the respectful neglect of those men, a situation which provided more freedom than that which befell the lot of lower-class women. This freedom, however, afforded a negative pleasure at best; aristocratic women actually were more limited by mores than their social inferiors were by their circumstances. Because noblewomen were not expected to achieve in any of the fields open to men, and because their own expectations were limited to the ornamental and domestic roles sanctioned for them, they often were left with nothing to do and a whole lifetime in which to do it.

Lady Georgiana Spencer, for example, was awakened early on a June morning in 1774 with the news that she would be married that day. She had known for some time that her parents planned her marriage to the fifth Duke of Devonshire, but their determination to keep the information from the London gossips had led them to keep the chosen date
secret even from the sixteen-year-old bride; thus one of the events for which she existed occurred with her own role limited to a passive presence. After Georgiana, as Duchess of Devonshire tardily but dutifully presented her husband with a male heir in May, 1790, she became free to spend the rest of her life in gambling, love affairs, and a giddy search for diversion.¹

Earlier in the century, Lord Lansdowne married off his niece Mary Granville to Alexander Pendarves, an elderly, disagreeable friend of his who was repugnant to the seventeen-year-old bride. She spent the next seven years serving her gouty husband as a handmaiden, while fending off the unwelcome advances of gentlemen much nearer her own age. Though she was left almost penniless when he died, she was quite content with her freedom and the anticipation of a happier second marriage at some future time. Mary Granville Delaney, as she became known due to a second marriage, was most unusual in that she did not remarry for nineteen years after the death of her first husband.² Marriage, after all, was the goal for which women of her class were groomed.

Lady Mary Pierrepont eloped after months of introspection and soul-searching, because her father insisted that she marry a man she disliked. She married instead Edward Wortley Montagu for love, though the affection waned. After her children had reached an
independent age, she followed a faithless lover to the Continent, where she remained. Her letters to friends and family in England provide as perceptive a view of English society as they do of her self-imposed exile.

The lives of these aristocratic Englishwomen furnish the opportunity to scrutinize their society. The Devonshire House "Set" was notorious for the excesses of its members; Mary Granville Delaney was a model of propriety at the Georgian courts; and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was considered a bluestocking with an independence uncharacteristic for her century. Each of these women was educated by her family to be a good and virtuous wife and mother; intellectual achievement played no part in their families' designs. As children, they were taught music, drawing, needlework, and French. Lady Mary had thrice-weekly lessons with a carving master who taught her the proper way in which to carve a joint of meat. But dissatisfied with such a bland education, she also took advantage of her father's extensive library and taught herself to read Latin and Greek. The more submissive Mary Delaney wrote of the aunt who supervised her education:

Her penetration made her betimes observe an impetuosity in my temper, which made her judge it necessary to mortify it by mortifying my spirit, lest it should grow too lively and unruly for my reason . . . . The train of mortifications that I have met with since convince me that it was happy for me to be early inured to disappointments and vexations.
The success of this "mortification" can be seen in Mary's resignation in accepting marriage to a man she found disgusting.

Years after her own marriage, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu bemoaned the system that trained all girls to be fine ladies, when so few of them would ever do so. Her own clever granddaughter was not a pretty girl, and Lady Mary, despairing that she would ever make the "brilliant" match, suggested to her daughter Mary, Countess of Bute,

No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting. She will not want new fashions nor regret the loss of expensive diversions or variety of company if she can be amused with an author in her closet.

Unlike their brothers, girls usually were educated at home, consigned to a procession of nurses, governesses, tutors, and dancing masters, all of whom were supposed to teach their (often limited) knowledge under the supervision of a watchful mamma or aunt. Virtue, grace, and conduct becoming in a lady were their goals. French, the language spoken at Court, was absolutely necessary, though some feared that it would enable their daughters to indulge in undesirable reading. Appropriate schoolroom reading included sermons and allegorical tales, chosen to instill proper principles in the young charges, though Dr. Johnson's "Bellaria" doubted the value of such an education. She declared that adults "fill our imaginations with tales of
terror only to make us live in quiet subjection." At fifteen, Bellaria insisted that despite her mother's wish that she love books, her days were too full of more important matters to leave time for reading. As she put it:

There will always be gardens and a park and auctions and shows and playhouses and cards; visits will always be paid and clothes always be worn; and how can I have time unemployed upon my hands?

Notwithstanding the belief held by some that if a bridge were built from England to the Continent, "all the Women in Europe would flock into England," Lady Mary thought the English treated females with more contempt than any other people in the world. She called it "the highest injustice... that the same studies which raise the character of a man should hurt that of a woman." She cautioned her granddaughter to hide her intelligence as she would a deformity. The alternative would be to draw on her the envy, and consequently the most inveterate hatred of all he and she fools, which will certainly be at least three parts in four of all her acquaintance. The use of knowledge in our sex (beside the amusement of solitude) is to moderate the passions and learn to be contented with a small expense, ... and, it may be, [is] preferable even to that fame which men have engrossed to themselves and will not suffer us to share.

At least two of these eighteenth-century ladies achieved fame during their lifetime. Lady Mary was hailed as a poet and writer, though many of her works were published by others, without her permission. The Duchess
of Devonshire achieved a notoriety for her privileged excesses, though her escapades were typical of the behavior of many of her contemporaries.

Called "the empress of fashion" by Horace Walpole, Georgiana gambled too much, wore too many plumes in her hair, drank too much, and her closest friend became her husband's mistress.¹² Notwithstanding that extra-marital sex was commonplace among the aristocracy, the menage à trois of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Elizabeth Foster evoked much animated comment in the ranks of the beau monde. Since divorces were uncommon, many a great house held a hodgepodge of children, legitimate and bastard. The Duke and Duchess reared together his child by a former mistress, his two children by Lady Elizabeth, who lived with the family, and their own three offspring. A child of the Duchess by Charles, the second Earl Grey was adopted by his family and was brought up elsewhere.¹³

The aristocracy's illegitimate children were so numerous that Joseph Addison suggested early in the century that "this infamous Race of Propagators" be sent to increase the population of the American colonies.¹⁴ But what else was a lady to do, besides engage in clandestine amours and thinly-veiled flirtations?

In marriage, she belonged to her husband, along with any goods or property she had possessed before she was wed.
Her father had given her with a dowry to her husband who in return provided her with an allowance, all in accordance with a previous arrangement. She had no rights over her children, and if her husband decided to banish her from his home, she could be kept from seeing them again. Before she could even make a will, she had to have her husband's approval, and when she died, her husband could have it set aside. Legally, "In marriage husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband."\textsuperscript{15}

As the century progressed, so did the domestic situation of the aristocratic lady; she relinquished the last of her housewifery to servants and became freer than ever to indulge in the Enlightenment-made offices of femininity: she paid and received calls, attended to her toilet for hours every day, and had fits of "the vapours." She could choose between enforced boredom or adultery, or, if she were daring, she could venture into the fringes of a male-dominated literary world by writing a novel, which would appear under a pseudonym.

By the middle of the century, booksellers, circulating libraries, and bookclubs had become numerous.\textsuperscript{16} A number of high-born women wrote, though their usual offerings were court memoirs or novels of manners and morals. The Countess of Bute occasionally sent boxes of the latest publications
of this genre to Lady Mary, who frequently reviewed them in her letters as "intolerable."\textsuperscript{17}

Lady Mary's own literary interests included poetry, scathing essays, drama, and for a few months, a periodical, none of which appeared under her own name.\textsuperscript{18} Though regarded as a wit and a formidable critic, she probably never intended her writings to be anything other than a means of personal expression. Her brilliant and entertaining letters are still read, revealing in their contents and refreshing literary style. Even the modern reader must laugh at her description of the romance between two aging members of society: "I wish I could send you the particulars of this \textit{amour}, which seems to me as curious as that between two oysters, and as well worthy the serious inquiry of the naturalists."\textsuperscript{19}

Mary Delaney also has become known for her letters, which describe life in noble society and at court, as well as high fashion. In a letter of February, 1741, she wrote admiringly of the attire of Catherine, Duchess of Queensbury at a court ball:

... white satin embroidered, the bottom of the petticoat brown hills covered with all sorts of weeds, and every breadth had an old stump of a tree that run up almost to the top of the petticoat, broken and ragged and worked with brown chenille, round which twined... all sorts of flowers. ...\textsuperscript{20}
Beyond such amazing description, Mary Delaney included her own views of society's faults, noting in one instance that if she slew all dishonorable men, very few of the sex would be left on earth. She lamented the toleration of their "unreasonable license," and she quite approved of the restrictions under which her own sex lived. 21

Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, epitomized the foibles of her class and travelled in circles known for their extravagance and excessive behavior. Often "busy all day long doing nothing at all," even the idealized duties of a mother were denied her by her high station, regardless of the flock of children under her protection. According to Fanny Burney, Georgiana's son, the longed-for heir, had an establishment of his own, though only fourteen months of age! 22

When in town, Georgiana attended balls and gambling parties that often lasted throughout the night, after which she slept until noon, rode in the afternoon, and then repeated the pattern. After some weeks of this frenetic pace, she and her retinue would be off to Bath, Tunbridge Wells, or to a Continental resort like Spa, to drink the medicinal waters, lose weight, and recuperate in a social environment which rivaled the previous one.

The Duchess probably endowed several charities, as ladies of her rank were expected to do. Her mother,
Lady Spencer, was benefactress of a school for poor girls at Bath, and on the occasion of her granddaughter's sixth birthday, she presented six of the little girls with new clothes and toys. According to Fanny Burney, who attended the ceremony, Georgiana was present, and upon being reassured that the little beneficiaries were not diseased, she accompanied her daughters into the garden to see them.23

Georgiana took an interest in politics, even if only as another sort of diversion, soliciting votes for her friend Charles James Fox in his 1784 Parliamentary campaign. Her canvassing in London made her the subject of much criticism, a number of political cartoons, and some bawdy songs. Polite society was scandalized by her bold exchange of kisses for votes.24

Men had long acknowledged the potential political power of women in one sphere, believing that "the Authority of the Curtain-Lecture" (the bedtime admonishments of a woman) could influence the political affiliations of a husband or lover.25 Early in 1716, when the Whig party enjoyed favor at court and Whig-Tory enmity was heated, the partisan sympathies of ladies of the Court drew the attention of Addison, who urged them to use their charms to further the Whig cause. Since "Ladies are always of great use to the Party they espouse, and never fail to win over Numbers to it," he encouraged them to defend the king with "Tongues and
Hearts, . . . Eyes, Eye-Lashes, Favourites, Lips, Dimples, and every other Feature, whether natural or acquired."26 Within a few months, however, the hostility between Whig and Tory ladies had grown so severe that Addison begged them with jocularity to adopt a "Cartel" to end animosities and to include "several Rules suited to the Politest Sex. . . ."

Among his proposals were:

That in the Course of the [Political] Engagement, if either of the Combatants . . . shall proceed to personal Reflexions or Discovery of Secrets, they shall be parted by the Standersby.

That when both Sides are drawn up in a full Assembly, it shall not be lawful for above Five of them to talk at the same Time.

That none be permitted to talk spightfully of the Court, unless they can produce Vouchers that they have been there.

That when a Woman has talked an Hour and a half, it shall be lawful to call her down to Order.

Through these lines, it is easy to recognize the stereotyped view of women that Addison held. Illogical, temperamental, "spightful," and constantly chattering, it seems very likely that some women indeed came to fill the very caricature drawn of them. In 1711, Addison had written that a woman became too zealous over an issue to temper her actions with the "Caution and Reservedness which are requisite in our Sex."28 Even seventy-three years later, the Duchess of Devonshire must have been seen as an illustration of his words. In the minds of men, women
existed as one of two creatures: either the soft, submissive wife and mother, or the ugly harpy. Georgiana herself, frequently became depressed at her failure to meet the standards of the gentler role.

Society regarded the departure of any woman from the accepted track of domestic duties with annoyance and disbelief. Men were fond of arguing that they had shouldered all burdens and had left nothing but peace and tranquillity to the "Fair Sex." Samuel Johnson's statement, "We have all the labour and the danger, and the women all the advantage," was accepted with his assertion that women should not be artists, much less portrait painters, because "staring in men's faces, is very indelicate in a female." Johnson was, however, receptive and complimentary to the small number of women reputed to be learned and accomplished. Among his "circle" of literary friends were Hester Lynch Thrale, Fanny Burney, and Elizabeth Montagu, all of whom qualified as "bluestockings." These ladies, however, appear to have enjoyed a condescending fame, being celebrated as novelties because they were women who wrote despite society's limitations, not because they excelled at their craft. When Johnson, for example, was told of a woman who preached, he commented that a female's preaching was like a dog's walking on its hind legs; that it was not done well, but that one was surprised to find it done at all,
sentiments which expressed what most of his male contemporaries thought.  

There were a few women of the upper classes, however, who objected to their unequal treatment. In 1696, an anonymous lady had written to Princess Anne of Denmark (later Queen Anne of England), An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex, in which she suggested that men had subjected women "to Ease and Ignorance" out of jealousy and fear that women would otherwise dominate them. Another accusation appeared anonymously in London in the August 26, 1758 issue of the Universal Chronicle. Entitled "The Female Complaint," the poem decries "Custom" for unfair treatment of women:

Men to new joys and conquests fly,  
And yet no hazards run;  
Poor we are left, if we deny;  
And, if we yield, undone.

Then equal laws let custom find,  
Nor thus the sex oppress;  
More freedom grant to woman-kind,  
Or give to mankind less.

But protests were few, and for every lady who objected, there were dozens more who accepted and even defended the limitations under which they lived. Even the "Queen of the Bluestockings," Elizabeth Montagu commented that "the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity." This lady also criticized her kinswoman Lady Mary Wortley Montagu for travelling without her husband.
Even less understandable is the assumption made by Mary Delaney, acclaimed by many as well-bred and intelligent, that a newly-married friend would surely have a happy marriage, since her house was furnished with the finest things. The credulous acceptance of contemporary mores by these women did nothing to lift the restrictions imposed by that biased society.

In retrospect, it is apparent that women of wealth and position in eighteenth-century England were no closer to freedom from artificial restraints than were their counterparts in other classes. Though their lives were physically more comfortable due to the luxuries enjoyed by their class, and despite the profligacy of much of their society, strictures placed on their behavior and idealized views of their roles kept high-born women enthralled throughout the century. The Age of Reason simply bypassed them.

2 Mary Granville Delany, *Mrs. Delany at Court and Among the Wits* (London, 1925).


7 Ibid., p. 224.


10 Ibid., p. 237.

11 Ibid., p. 245.

12 Calder-Marshall, *Duchesses*, p. 43.


14 *The Spectator*, 23 October 1711.


18. Ibid., p. 4.

19. Ibid., p. 132.


21. Ibid., p. 79.


23. Ibid., pp. 246-247.

24. Masters, Georgiana, pp. 120-126.

25. Addison, The Freeholder, p. 73.

26. Ibid., p. 52.

27. Ibid., pp. 136-137.

28. The Spectator, 5 May 1711.


30. Ibid., p. 327.


32. Universal Chronicle, 26 August 1758.

33. Porter, English Society, p. 36.


35. Delany, Mrs. Delany, p. 34.
CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE-CLASS MAID AND MATRON

The women of England's "middling" classes were more affected by Enlightenment concepts of feminine roles than were those of the upper or the lower levels of society. The eighteenth-century cult of domesticity proclaimed that nature had designed Woman to bear and nurture children and to provide a calm and peaceful haven for her husband. Many learned members of the middle class debated the "woman question," but in the end, they failed to initiate positive reforms, a neglect which condemned nineteenth- and twentieth-century women to inequality.

The inadequacy of viewing any society in three neat divisions is apparent, perhaps even more than usual in eighteenth-century England, where industrialization and commercial enterprise enabled many merchants and tradesmen to enjoy lifestyles hardly distinguishable from those of the nobility. For purposes of comparison, however, social classes have been determined herein by manner of living, not the occupation of the male head of the household. "Middle" class, therefore, is used to describe the woman who played an active role in household activities, though her household may have included a small number of servants, and who also
had the means to become involved in social activities. The
education, marriages, and lifestyles of such women can be
distinguished easily from those of noblewomen, who seldom
took an active part in "domestic economy," and they clearly
would be different from women of the lower classes, whose
lives focused on the subsistence of their families and whose
illiteracy or poverty shielded them from popular ideas and
contemporary literature.

Early in the century, Jonathan Swift wrote "A Letter to
a Very young Lady on her Marriage," which contained
instructions on the proper behavior of a married woman.
Amid directions, Swift stated his overall opinion of women:

I cannot conceive you to be human creatures, but a
sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey;
which has more diverting tricks than any of you;
is an animal less mischievous and expensive; might
in time be a tolerable critic in velvet and
brocade; and, for aught I know, would actually
become them.

Swift's misogyny did not keep him from hoping that the
young woman would prove a worthy companion to her husband,
and incredibly, did not prevent young women from reading his
instructions. As late as 1782, Elizabeth Griffith, a
literary figure in her own right, referred to Swift several
times in her "Letters Addressed to Young Married Women,"
calling him the foremost authority on human nature.  

At the end of the century, Thomas Gisborne produced An
Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, in which he
stated that the rise of nations from barbarism could be measured by their steps toward gentler treatment and more reasonable attitudes toward women. In Gisborne's opinion, women were important in three areas: in their continuous contributions to the comfort of their families, in shaping and improving the manners and conduct of men by their society and examples, and in training the minds of the children in their care. Providence has determined these areas of endeavor, wrote Gisborne, for, scriptures reveal "Divine Will" in such matters. Accordingly, God has assigned to men:

the science of legislation; of jurisprudence; of political oeconomy; . . . the inexhaustible depths of philosophy; the acquirements subordinate to navigation; the knowledge indispensable in the wide field of defence; . . . and other studies, pursuits, and occupations [which] require the powers of reasoning."

The entire progress of the English during the eighteenth century, then, is measured in Gisborne's allowance that God has then granted the same gifts to women, but "with a more sparing hand." This opinion, of course, did not raise women from their status of inferiority, but he at least did not view them as "hardly a degree above a monkey." From Swift to Gisborne, therefore, the avowed purpose of women, and the goal for which they were groomed, was marriage.

Unlike the aristocracy which arranged marriages for dynastic and political reasons and thereafter left women to
their toilettes and romances, the middle class expected the wife to continue her role as housekeeper/mother. Believing, as Hester Chapone did, that "The principal virtues or vices of a woman must be of a private and domestic kind," the parents or guardians of girls educated them in arts that would make them both marketable and useful.  

Boarding schools were available for those who could afford them, but whether educated at home or at school, girls were taught drawing, singing, dancing, deportment, needlework, and, in varying amounts, reading, French, and arithmetic. By the middle of the century, however, many writers (some of them women) had concluded that girls were educated to avoid serious matters, and this observation spawned a number of opposing views about the curriculum. Dr. William Alexander complained in *The History of Women From the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time*, that "we sow weeds and expect to reap corn." Why teach girls drawing, music, dancing, and the like, when they must relinquish these activities once they became matrons? But Alexander did not suggest that they be taught to use their minds, since the "proper office" of middle-class ladies was "the care, inspection, and management of everything belonging to the family."  

In "A Father's Legacy to His Daughters," Dr. John Gregory emphasized religious instruction for girls, since
religion would check dissipation and the "rage for pleasure," but he refrained from recommending reading material, since he thought girls should read where "genius or accident" led them. Gisborne suggested books on Christian good works and the scriptures, as well as history, biography, and poetry. By contrast, he deplored the corrupting power of novels, claiming that they tempted girls into unfortunate attachments, which in turn led to unhappy marriages. Gisborne opposed female boarding schools since they provided no safeguard against unsuitable companions, but he advocated the study of grammar, geography, "select parts of natural history," history, "popular and amusing facts in astronomy," French, and "domestic education."

The suitability of boarding schools was a controversial subject. Supporters declared them better equipped to educate a girl than her busy (and possibly uneducated) parents would be, while detractors claimed they encouraged pedantry or loss of virtue. The scientist and inventor Erasmus Darwin drew up A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools for his illegitimate daughters, the Misses Parker, for whom he also opened a school at Ashbourne in Derbyshire. In his outline, published in 1797, Darwin stressed that children learned more easily when in the company of other children, and that the older students helped the younger ones to learn. Young ladies "of more
inquiring minds" should pursue studies in botany, chemistry, and experimental philosophy, and tours of cotton works, iron foundries, and various "manufactories," he thought, were beneficial. \(^\text{12}\)

Darwin, moreover, analyzed the nature of the female character, the best course of artistic, moral, and physical instruction, and how to encourage erect posture. He recommended "an elegant simplicity of dress . . . in preference to that superabundance of ornament, where the lady herself is the least part of her."\(^\text{13}\) For all his advanced views, however, Darwin still maintained:

The female character should possess the mild and retiring virtues rather than the bold and dazzling ones; great eminence in almost any thing is sometimes injurious to a young lady; whose temper and disposition should appear to be pliant rather than robust. . . . \(^\text{14}\)

In tract after tract and essay upon essay, women were bombarded with the idea that they should be soft and warm, pliant and mild, virtuous and compassionate. The Enlightenment, therefore, subjected women to an ideology which was Pauline.

Mary Wollstonecraft's contemporaries denounced her as a radical with outrageous ideas for condemning the "disorderly kind of education" provided for girls and advocating coeducational schools. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, indeed impelled Horace Walpole to call her a "hyena in petticoats."\(^\text{15}\) Many others,
nonetheless, joined Wollstonecraft in appealing for empathy for women; when women learned to reason, they became better friends and companions to their husbands and ceased to be only mistresses.\textsuperscript{16} Whether this justification should be regarded as Wollstonecraft's bow to contemporary thought or whether it reveals her underlying domesticity, many of her peers perceived her reaction as unfeminine.

Young women received much advice on how to attract the affection of a husband. In her essays, Hannah More counseled that women enjoyed protection and security in their weakness, like fine porcelain.\textsuperscript{17} Swift advised them "to be very slow in changing the modest behaviour of a virgin" once married, and emphasized that none must display "the least degree of fondness to your husband, before any witness whatsoever."\textsuperscript{18} Elizabeth Griffith lectured them on a good wife's attributes, but her statement "Men are naturally tyrannical; they will themselves have pleasure and liberty and yet always expect we should renounce both" deviates from the normal reaction.\textsuperscript{19}

Mrs. Griffith's essays are striking in their sarcasm, though her real message may have been missed by many eighteenth-century women. In a letter on "Charity," she related the tale of a wife who took in her husband's bastard children and faced the adulterer with only a "mild reproof": did he think her so hard-hearted as not to be interested in
whatever was his? Mrs. Griffith also admonished her readers to ignore whatever follies and caprices they discovered in their husbands, reminding them that such were part of human frailty. Her assertion that women should "overcome evil with good," however, reveals the negative opinion that she had about men and their capacity for reasonable behavior. She advised each young woman, moreover, always to give credit to her husband for her own management and economy, no matter how foolish he actually was. Mrs. Griffith's attitude toward marriage seems to have stemmed from the perceived necessity of manipulating a stupid and ill-natured man--perhaps the "Total Woman" approach of the eighteenth century!

Gisborne, too, dealt with the possibility of an unpleasant husband, stating that a wife's security lay in the knowledge that Scripture guided her husband's treatment of her. If she married a man without first determining that he would be thus influenced, her unhappiness would be her own fault. Gisborne also instructed his readers to accept gratefully the criticisms made by their husbands, as the least sign of indignation or resentment could discourage such loving and constructive help in the future.

Since Gisborne's Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex appeared in 1797, his advice shows how little matters had progressed since the first half of the century, when The
Female Spectator had included an essay entitled "A Mirror for True Beauty," dated September 16, 1745. In this discourse, "Philocletes" had judged the most deserving of chaste wives to be one "in whom the greatest provocations of an ill and cruel [husband] cannot excite even the most distant thought of injuring his interest, honour, or reputation. . . ."24

The Female Spectator, edited by Eliza Haywood, also detailed the inspiring story of "Jemima," mislead into a sham marriage by "Lothario," only to be left penniless with two small children. After many heart-rending trials, Jemima finally is rescued, and she discovers that Lothario has been seriously ill and is now overcome with grief at his base treatment of her. The tragic pair are reunited. Lothario establishes the validity of their marriage, grants a jointure to Jemima, and makes provision for their two children (the amounts of his generosity are fully disclosed in a rather un-allegorical manner), and after leaving everything he owns to them in a newly-made will, he dies. The faithful and tragic Jemima swears never to remarry and lives out her life in a state of virtue and wealth.25

Though the twentieth-century reader may applaud Jemima's decision for different reasons, the eighteenth-century reader obviously was supposed to be inspired to new heights.
of virtue and martyrdom. The message was that even a wicked man should be rewarded with loyalty and submission.

Upon achieving the honorable state of Marriage, the bride must understand that the Creator had endowed her husband with the greater share of reflective and comprehensive judgment, thereby giving him pre-eminence, since equality in marriage would lead to endless bickering. According to Gisborne, the issue was nondebatable:

> Whether marriage establishes between the husband and the wife a perfect equality of rights, or conveys to the former a certain degree of superiority over the latter, is a point not left among Christians to be decided by speculative arguments. The intimation of the divine will, communicated to the first woman immediately after the fall, is corroborated by various injunctions delivered in the New Testament.

Thus relieved of these matters which her husband was better equipped to handle (notwithstanding Elizabeth Griffith's advice), the young matron could attend to her domestic economy and to the rearing of children.

Even in a household which included a few servants, the housewife involved herself in domestic activities. The Compleat Housewife; or, Accomplished Gentlewoman's Companion was in its fifth edition by 1742, no doubt made popular by the author's inclusion of directions for all sorts of useful concoctions along with recipes for every type of culinary delicacy. The following directions for "A Soop or Pottage" are typical:
Take several Knuckles of Mutton, a Knuckle of Veal, a Shin of Beef, and put to these twelve Quarts of Water, cover the Pot close, and set it on the Fire; let it not boil too fast; scum it well, and let it stand on the Fire twenty four Hours; then strain it through a Colander, and when it is cold take off the Fat, and set it on the Fire again, and season it with Salt, a few Cloves, Pepper, and Blade of Mace, a Nutmeg quarter'd, a Bunch of sweet Herbs, and a Pint of Gravy; let all these boil up for Half and Hour, and then strain it; put Spinnage, Sorrel, green Peas, Asparagus, or Artichoke bottoms, according to the Time of Year; then thicken it with the Yolks of three or four Eggs; have in Readiness some Sheeps Tongues, Cox combs, and Sweetbreads, sliced thin, and fried, and put them in, and some Mushrooms, and French Bread dried and cut in little bits, some forc'd-meat Balls, and some very thin Slices of Bacon; make all these very hot, and garnish the Dish with Colworts and Spinnage scalded green. Since "soop" probably constituted only one course of the meal, one can imagine the amount of time spent in preparations such as this one. The Compleat Housewife also included a recipe entitled "To recover Venison when it stinks," which shows just how economy-minded the eighteenth-century housewife must be in order to make her husband's fortune "seem double what it is."28

In addressing the woman's duty as family nurse, The Compleat Housewife called for such ingredients as dried millipedes in a medicinal recipe to prevent "Fits," snails in a recipe to treat consumption, four hundred wood lice and an ounce of crabs' eyes in "A Milk-Water for a Cancerous Breast," and shavings of tin or pewter in a potion "For any Man or Beast bitten by a mad Dog." Dried and powdered hen's
dung, blown into the eyes at bedtime was the recommended practice for clearing the eyes, and the remedy for rheumatism was a liquid which included beer and horse's dung. For cosmetic purposes, the housewife was told to wear a thin piece of lead under a cloth bound around her head, in order to make her forehead smooth and plump. And in the interests of homey comfort, the author provided directions for mixing paint (with lead) and for ridding beds and bed-clothes of bugs.

Housewifery gained new importance during the century, since it represented an area in which the woman devotedly served her husband and family. As mothering, too, gained new consideration, a number of books appeared which, like Hugh Smith's *Letters to Married Women on Nursing and the Management of Children*, entreated women to end the custom of hiring wet-nurses for babies and to breast-feed their own.29

The dangerous state of child-bearing is recalled by *The Compleat Housewife*'s recipe entitled "The Fever Water:"

Take of Virginia Snake-root six Ounces, Carduus seed four Ounces, and Marigold flowers four Ounces, twenty green Walnuts, Carduus Water still'd two Quarts, as much hot Poppy-water, two Ounces of Hart's-horn; slice the Walnuts and steep all in the Waters a Fortnight; then add to it an Ounce of London Treacle, and distil it all in an Alembick pasted up; three Drops of Spirit of Amber in three Spoonfuls of this Water will deliver a Woman of a dead Child.

It was not unusual for a woman of any class to have one or two living children and a long history of miscarriages
before reaching middle age. Indeed, the likelihood of living long enough to grow old was slim for a woman, though becoming worn-out and exhausted was common. Men frequently outlived a succession of wives, whose burdens grew to be more than the human body could withstand.

In the ignorance that accompanied eighteenth-century medical treatment, childbirth was often the cause of death or of physical conditions that must have made life hard to bear. Infections, ruptures, torn sphincters, and the occasional prolapsed uterus which drooped outside the body were rewards for devotion to conjugal bliss. The virtuous wife wasted away in pain, and from all that she was told or could read, it was the purpose for which she was designed. The dismal reality of suffering for one's sexuality found expression in the surge of novels written by women during the century.

Woman's duty supposedly was to provide love, emotional and physical. But sexuality within or without marriage brought about the same end: total destruction, thus creating a dilemma. Sexuality was seen as a weakness, and women knew that they were weak. Patricia Meyer Spacks has written in *Imagining a Self, Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*:

> Many eighteenth-century narratives by women share the theme of self-punishment. Although some conclude in happy marriages, the events that precede those alliances and the illustrative
episodes that cluster about the main plot insist on the desperation of women's condition. And quite commonly the account of an imagined woman's career will end not in happy marriage but in happy death. As in the story of "Jemima" and "Lothario," the women in novels frequently faced physical misfortunes for being weak and sexual, though in some of these tales, the continuously-victimized women manage to end up with honestly-acquired money and power enough to control the rest of their lives. In others, according to Spacks, women are depicted as strong, independent heroines who may be fluent in languages and in "understanding," but who, in the final chapters, get husbands, thereby proving themselves to be conventional, domestic creatures beneath their peculiarities. As Elizabeth Griffith's instructions to young married women show, ambivalence and anger are just beneath the surface.

The proliferation of literary women during the second half of the century has been cited repeatedly as proof that feminism was born in the Enlightenment. In reality, however, these women were treated as novelties by condescending men who believed, as Dr. Johnson did, that it was a wonder that they wrote at all. The women, sadly enough, echoed male sentiments in their own disclaimers. Each composition was accompanied by its excuse: The writer did so only to amuse, to support the sick, to share a hard-learned lesson. In begging to be forgiven for such presumption, they acknowledged
what they had learned—that a woman was a silly, wicked creature incapable of serious or scholarly thought, and that any deviation from the appointed role was "unnatural" in an age when Nature was a deity. The masochistic pattern provided no means of escape. They were women, so they were weak; because they were weak, they were sexual; because they were sexual, they must suffer. To be a woman, then, was to suffer, and nothing else was acceptable.

In the event that a woman failed to marry, few occupations were open to her. In some instances, women ran small businesses, shops, inns, or taverns, taken over when a father or husband died, though maintaining a family concern was certainly not a matter of choice. For many unmarried women, the only available employment was a position as governess, a social step above household servants. But not considered the equal of her employers, the life of a governess usually was rather lonely. She was not paid well, according to Lawrence Stone, who has cited a range of twelve to thirty pounds sterling a year, with the rare amount of one hundred pounds for a governess with French, and "the right graces and connections."34 The employers of governesses expected a great deal for the salaries they paid. Mary Wollstonecraft quoted a letter received by her brother from a woman seeking "a person who is perfect mistress of music, drawing, dancing, geography, writing, arithmetic and
French," as well as being "a gentlewoman in her manners, well-read, well-principled, and very good-tempered. . . ."

Her brother purportedly answered that if by chance he discovered such a rare individual, he would be more likely to marry her at once than to recommend her for employment.  

Wollstonecraft demanded changes in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, urging that women be allowed to:

study politics, and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis; . . . . Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner. . . . Women would not then marry for a support, as men accept of places under government, and neglect the implied duties; nor would an attempt to earn their own subsistence, a most laudable one! sink them almost to the level of those poor, abandoned creatures who live by prostitution.  

But they were not given these opportunities, and Wollstonecraft complained bitterly that Woman "was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused."  

Despite these arguments, feminism as a movement did not originate during her century; women indeed did as little as men to see that "the weaker sex" received more freedom. Society condemned Mary Wollstonecraft again when, pregnant by intellectual William Godwin, she married him, though both had denounced marriage.  

Her contemporaries construed this action as proof that her ideas were humbug.
Why did the middle class of eighteenth-century England cling to and even reinforce their restrictive views of women? And why, despite the critical examination of many traditions by the literate public, did the domestic roles of women become idealized to the point of eclipsing other possibilities? First, "natural law" theories stressed sexual differences at a critical moment in the diffusion of Enlightenment literature, and secondly, women channeled their anger and resentment into oblique protests. Rousseau's Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise, (1761), and his Emile, (1762), were popular in England, in part due to the availability of inexpensive literature which brought Enlightenment tenets to the reading public. Whatever changes in women's roles may have been possible among the middle class, the spread of Rousseauian ideas on the education of girls and the "natural" domesticity of women came to the defense of old practices and countered attitude changes on a large scale. If, for instance, Erasmus Darwin had not come under the influence of Rousseau, perhaps the educational reforms he suggested would have been based upon the individual merits of girls, rather than being undermined by his frequent acknowledgements of their differences in "temper and disposition."

Women themselves have provided one of the biggest stumbling blocks to egalitarian reforms. The ambivalence
felt by eighteenth-century women found an outlet in the novels and essays produced in the second half of the century. From Fanny Burney's *Evelina* to Elizabeth Griffith's essays and *The Female Spectator*, women labored to suppress their frustration and convince themselves of the assuaging power of virtue. Because they would not declare themselves in the style of Mary Wollstonecraft, women actually strengthened their societal fetters and so continued to live as subordinate creatures, servants with no claim on Reason.


4 Ibid.


7 Ibid., p. 99.

8 Dr. John Gregory, "A Father's Legacy to His Daughters," in Lady's Pocket Library, pp. 89, 100.

9 Gisborne, Enquiry, p. 156.

10 Ibid., pp. 39-41.


12 Ibid., pp. 40-43.

13 Ibid., p. 81.

14 Ibid., p. 10.


16 Wollstonecraft, Vindication, p. 204.


19 Griffith, Letters, p. 22.

20 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

21 Ibid., pp. 52, 37.


25 Ibid., pp. 155-205.

26 Gisborne, Enquiry, p. 166.


28 Haywood, The Female Spectator, p. 58.


30 E. Smith, Housewife, p. 145.


33 Ibid., p. 59.

37. Ibid., p. 47.
CHAPTER III

THE CRIMINAL AND PROSTITUTE

An examination of crimes committed by women in eighteenth-century London and the punishment of female offenders reveals the most discordant elements of England during that era. As the volume of criminal law increased, the ruling classes sought to protect their property and preserve the peace, while usually ignoring the underlying problems.

Eighteenth-century London was unlit, unpolic ed, secretive, and fearful of authority. The era has been described as "the golden age of felony, and the London of the same period as the happy hunting ground of the habitual criminal." Writing of the felon in London, George Paston said,

His position might be compared to that of a cunning old fox, who, inhabiting a country riddled with earths, rather enjoys the excitement of the chase, well knowing that, as soon as it becomes too hot for pleasure, he can dive down a friendly drain, and lie perdue till the danger is over.

Though Paston does not mention the man or woman forced by necessity to turn to crime, London teemed with these, as well as with the habitual criminal.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, London grew enormously in population, and the metropolis spread
westward. The opening of new residential areas ensured the expansion of a network of merchants, craftsmen, servants, and skilled/unskilled workers. The south bank of the Thames, moreover, became highly industrialized, while the increasing demands of the urban population supported intensive agricultural activity in the surrounding regions. The variety of industries created work opportunities that attracted thousands to London. Since the availability of suitable work for women was always limited in rural areas, this sex was disproportionately represented in the stream of immigrants to the city.

Between 1700 and 1750, the population of London increased from 575,000 to 675,000, because of this migration. Records kept by a Dr. Bland at Westminster General Dispensary, 1774-1781, indicate the proportion of native female Londoners to immigrants toward the end of the century. Of 1,618 women treated at the dispensary, 495 were born in London, 917 in other areas of England and Wales, 74 were born in Scotland, and 13 were foreign. Unfortunately, there never was enough work for all of the migrants.

"Even at the best of times underemployment was the common situation for many women in the city. The clothing trades were severely overstocked and domestic service was glutted." Much of the available work was seasonal, such as employment in the market gardens and the distribution network that depended on them. The clothing trades, too,
faced a decline during the summer months, when the Court and much of London's wealthy left the city. Such irregularity of employment and the extremely low wages paid to women made their subsistence very precarious. While married women, whose husbands often suffered from unemployment, had problems enough, single women, including widows with children and women who had been deserted by their husbands, were usually left with no family or friends from which to get help.

Women who had no means of employment had few choices. England's Poor Laws were notorious for penalizing those who most needed them, so relief usually was not available. Under such circumstances, a woman could survive by illegal activity, such as theft or prostitution, or she could starve to death.

The incidence of crimes of violence (murder, assault) during the eighteenth century does not appear to have risen appreciably during times of economic fluctuation; however, the level of crimes against property (robbery, burglary, theft, and related offenses) committed by women seems to have been directly affected by such factors as the price of consumer goods, particularly food, and the availability of work.6

Boom periods were produced by the material demands of England's wars, drawing more people to London; but when
these conflicts had ended, large numbers of sailors and soldiers were discharged there without further provision. London thus was flooded repeatedly with casual and unskilled labor; women, of course, had little chance of finding employment when the streets were full of unemployed men. During such times, crime rates involving women dramatically increased.

In J. M. Beattie's studies of records of eighteenth-century urban Surrey, which includes the borough of Southwark and several parishes on the Thames's south bank, she writes, In years of economic difficulty caused by high prices or unemployment it was mainly increased prosecutions of single women and widows that accounted for the sharpest changes in the number of cases brought to the Surrey courts. This is the case, for example, in the deepening economic crisis of the 1690s; following the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713; again (after apparently reaching low levels during the war in the 1740s), in the years following the peace in 1748; again, after further very low points during the Seven Years' War, in the gradually worsening economic circumstances of the 1760s, after the peace in 1783-84; and finally, in the 1790s. The latter case provides perhaps the clearest clue to the economic pressures that encouraged theft in the city, for though the level of property crimes committed by single women and widows rose in the last few years of the century when prices climbed very steeply, it did not increase with startling swiftness until 1802, the year of the peace, when it leapt dramatically.

From the beginning of the century, English criminal law was increasingly severe. The property-conscious oligarchy apparently believed as did John Locke, when he stated in
"The Second Treatise of Government" a few years earlier, that "Government has no other end but the preservation of property." The resulting legislation increased the number of capital offenses from about fifty to over two hundred between the years 1688 and 1820, almost all of them concerning offenses against property. Capital offenses came to include picking pockets, stealing sheep, damaging Westminster Bridge, impersonating a Chelsea pensioner, consorting with gypsies, and setting fire to hay.

The courts aimed at impressing onlookers with a combination of terror and the power of government, implying that the death sentence came from God and Justice. Judges often wept at sentencing, and the would-be felon was encouraged to take note of such legislation as the " Murder Act" of 1752, which added dissection by the Royal College of Surgeons and public exposure of the corpse to the punishment of hanging.

The severity of these laws actually led to an increase in crime. Serious crimes multiplied when harsh punishments were attached to slight offenses, since a thief, aware that she would be hanged if caught, might commit murder rather than let a witness survive.

Corporal punishment, too, was meted out heavily, though often to little avail. Though London's Lord Mayor and Aldermen repeatedly tried to clear the streets of
prostitutes by sending the worst offenders to be whipped, London is said to have maintained at least fifty thousand throughout the last half of the century.¹¹

Prostitution claimed hordes of the women who came to London in hopes of finding work. Many of these were actually met at coach-offices by procuresses, who offered them employment and then introduced them to life as streetwalkers or in brothels.

The Covent Garden area, teeming with prostitutes and pimps and brothels, "closely resembled a Puritan's idea of Hell. Quite apart from its other cesspools of vice, the brothels--open or disguised--catered in profusion for the sins of the flesh."¹²

Sir John Fielding, the blind Bow Street magistrate wrote in 1776 in A Brief Description of the Cities of London and Westminster that,

Covent Garden is the great square of Venus. . . One would imagine that all the prostitutes in the kingdom had picked upon that blessed neighborhood for a general rendezvous, for here are lewd women enough to fill a mighty colony. . . Here is a great variety of open houses, whose principle employment is to minister incitement to lusty rakes and shameless prostitutes. There and the taverns afford ample supply of provision for the flesh, while others abound for the consummation of desires which are thus decided. For this design,¹³ the bagnios and lodging houses are near at hand.

Fielding, with his half-brother, novelist and magistrate Henry Fielding, began in 1750 the police system which became known as the Bow Street Runners, in the first
serious attempt to combat crime in London. Bow Street, at Covent Garden, was next to the infamous Seven Dials district, an area which thronged with thieves and cut-throats, partly because the taverns and coffeehouses had special licenses that enabled them to stay open all night.

Some of the "madams" of Covent Garden became quite famous. Betty Careless ran a Tavistock Row bagnio on the southeast side of Covent Garden in 1734 and 1735 and was featured in one of the prints of Hogarth's "Rake's Progress." Another madam, "Mother" Douglas, also known as "Mother Cole," took over the same bagnio in 1739, eluding prosecution and the dissolution of her establishment, and ended up with a large fortune. Mother Douglas kept decoys--several of her most attractive prostitutes--as milliners in her Covent Garden hat shop. About her was written,

Near, D**s still maintains her ground,
Empress o'er all the bawds around;
Where innocence is often sold
Hard case! For shining, sordid gold,
By craft she draws th'unwary in
And keeps a publick mart for sin.

Daniel Defoe addressed the problem of London's prostitutes in Augusta Triumphans, or The Way to Make London the Most Flourishing City in the Universe, which was published in 1729.

... I am sure it is high time to begin the work, by cleaning the public streets of nightwalkers, who are grown to such a pitch of impudence, that
peace and common decency are manifestly broken in our public streets. I wonder this has so long escaped the eye of the magistrate, especially when there are already in force laws sufficient to restrain this tide of uncleanness, which will one day overflow us.15

Defoe actually expressed some sympathy for the women so involved, declaring the cause of the large incidence of prostitution to be ". . . that neglect of matrimony which the morals of the present age inspire men with."16

John Fielding also addressed the problem, proposing a public laundry, in which girls who would become prostitutes could be apprenticed to learn the trade, later to be placed with employers.17 Jonas Hanway called for marriage portions to be given to poor girls and converted prostitutes who "excelled in virtue", and encouraged the establishment of an asylum for repenting prostitutes.18

Defoe reserved stronger criticism for the servant-turned-prostitute, also writing in Augusta Triumphans,

. . . A girl quits a place, and turns whore, if there is not a bastard to be murder'd, or left to the parish, there is one or more unwary youths drawn in to support her in lewdness and idleness; in order to which, they rob their parents and masters, nay, sometimes any body else, to support their strumpets; so that many thieves owe their ruin and shameful deaths to harlots. Not to mention the communication of loathsome distempers, and innumerable other evils, to which they give birth.19

Defoe was rather hard on the female servant, for the occupation and its associated ill-treatment were responsible
for introducing many women into illicit activity. Servants and apprentices were quite often subjected to unbridled abuse by their employers, and as late as 1748, when Elizabeth Dickens murdered her apprentice girl by beating her, such abuses went unpunished and attracted little attention. The changing attitudes toward brutality to such dependents is reflected when, later in the century, the similar cases of Elizabeth Brownrigg and of Sarah Metyard and her daughter aroused public horror. These villainous mistresses were executed at Tyburn in 1767 and 1768, respectively. It is likely, however, that many more like them were never exposed and thus the number of crimes committed by servants against their employers is not surprising.

The lot of a female servant was frequently an unhappy one. Forbidden to marry, though in close association with the male members of a household, both employer and staff, it is this class of Londoner most often connected with the crime of infanticide.

In eighteenth-century England, unwed motherhood meant immediate dismissal to a servant, usually without a character reference, which gave little chance of being taken into service again. After being so stigmatized, the young woman's only choices for employment would be the most menial or casual labor, unless she turned to some sort of social
deviance. Even if parish relief was available, to get such relief would mark her as a pauper, and particularly with a bastard child, her marriage chances would be poor. The best that the average eighteenth-century female could hope for was a dependent relationship with a father, master, or husband, and "such dependence was seen as greatly preferable to the hopelessness, the lack of standing and the humiliation which unwed motherhood implied." When such an unwanted pregnancy occurred, the desperate mother in many cases concealed her condition from family, friends, and employers, giving birth alone in some isolated place, and then killing or abandoning her baby.

Infanticide was a crime associated with unmarried or widowed women, and the majority of suspected or convicted females were servant maids or had just left service. Infanticide within marriage, though it undoubtedly occurred, was largely undocumented, and men were implicated, even as accomplices, in only a small minority of recorded cases.

The legal basis of trials for this crime was an Act of 1624 (21 James I, c. 27), which focused on the fact of concealment, not on the actual killing of a newborn infant, which was hard to prove. This statute allowed guilt to be presumed on the basis of specified circumstantial evidence, stating,

Whereas many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid shame and
to escape punishment, do secretly bury, or conceal the death of their children, and after if the child be found dead the said women do allege that the said children were born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (although hardly is it to be proved) that the said child or children were murdered by the said women their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement; For the preventing therefore of this great mischief, be it enacted . . . that if any woman . . . be delivered of any issue of the body, make or female, which being born alive, should by the laws of this realm be a bastard, and that she endeavor privately either by drowning or secret burying thereof, or any other way, either by herself or the procuring of others, so to conceal the death thereof, as that it may not come to light, whether it be born alive or not, but be concealed in every such case the mother so offending shall suffer death as in the case of murder except such mother can make proof by one witness at the least, that the child (whose death was by her intended to be concealed) was born dead.

The law concerning infanticide drew much criticism, especially in the late eighteenth century, but attempts to repeal it in 1772-73 were unsuccessful. It was finally removed from the criminal law in an Act of 1803 (43 George III, c. 58), though it had become largely disregarded by the reign of George II. In fact, the statute was specifically mentioned in only one of the 61 infanticide trials at Old Bailey in the years 1730-1774.24

Juries tended to be sympathetic, grasping at any doubt of the woman's guilt. Presence in the defendant's effects of any sort of child "linen" was often reason enough to find her not guilty, supposedly proof that she had intended to keep and nurture her child. It is therefore of little
surprise that 46 of the aforementioned cases were found in favor of the defendant.²⁵

The infrequency of convictions in England for this crime contrasts sharply with results of similar cases in other European nations. In 1777, Frederick the Great wrote to Voltaire that there were more executions in Germany for infanticide than for any other crime.²⁶

The alternative to the murder of an unwanted baby was "dropping," or abandonment, which occurred frequently in London. During the first half of 1743, a dozen infants were abandoned in the parish of St. George's, Hanover Square, alone, and many other parishes dealt reluctantly in large numbers of unclaimed infants.²⁷

The mortality rate for infants left in parish care was quite high. Parliament investigated the problem as early as 1715, finding that about 900 of the 1,200 children born in St. Martin-in-the-Fields parish every year and left (under a variety of circumstances) in the care of parochial authorities died shortly after birth.²⁸ Many of these children were undoubtedly offspring of parents imprisoned or executed.

The problem so appalled Thomas Coram, a sea-captain, that he worked for seventeen years to establish a foundling hospital. In 1739, Coram sent two lists of signatures, one male and one female, to George II requesting a charter,
which was granted, in spite of the opinion of the public that such an establishment was likely to become a refuge for bastard offspring and a convenience for social vice.29

With the founding of the hospital, the death rate of foundlings decreased, with just over half of those admitted dying between 1741 and 1756, while only 3 or 4 percent would have survived if put in workhouses or if sent out by parish officers to nurse with the women employed for that purpose.30

In 1756, the government made a grant from public funds, on the condition that the limited reception of foundlings be changed to admit children from all over the country. This stipulation ultimately led to the demise of the foundling hospital, as

Children who would have stood at least some chance of surviving in the purer air of the country were brought to London, and dumped, often more dead than alive after the rigours of the journey, into the basket that hung by the Foundling's gate. For just under four years the stream of babies came, and during this period the death rate rose to some seventy per cent.31

By 1760, the Foundling's reputation had suffered so that Parliament withdrew its grants, and the hospital was closed.

The women who kept their illegitimate babies, the widows left without support, and even the married women with too many children to feed were time and again compelled to steal to keep their families from starving. London abounded with thieves, pickpockets, and the like, and though not all
female practitioners of such arts had starving children at home, the lack of any better way to make a living must surely have encouraged countless novices to continue in their misdeeds.

One infamous pickpocket was Mary Young, also known as "Jenny Diver," who was a member of a large gang of thieves "... who strove with no little ingenuity, to make crime progress with the advance of mechanical inventions." Jenny Diver masqueraded as an invalid accompanied by a maid and a footman, who settled her into whatever church or inn she chose for her escapades. She appeared to be quite bulky, and she kept her hands crossed on her knees, so that the casual observer saw the invalid make little or no movement. Her real hands, however, were busy under the artificial bulk, robbing those around her. Jenny Diver was quite successful at fairs and in gatherings, and though she was transported twice, both times she managed to get back to England. Finally, she was caught again, given the death sentence, and was executed on March 18, 1740.33

"Betty the Cook," or Elizabeth Boile, was hanged in 1714 for stealing two gold rings. Betty's fury at a friend who would not visit her during her stay at Newgate led her to curse him from the gallows, swearing that she would haunt him after death.34
In sad contrast to such bold characters was Mary Wotton, a nine-year-old apprentice who ran away in 1735 after stealing 27 golden guineas from her mistress. Mary was caught and sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{35}

Some offenders fared slightly better. A January 6, 1785 edition of \textit{The Times} stated that

A poor girl was brought before the Alderman for picking a hairdresser's pocket of a handkerchief. The prosecutor did not appear. The girl, in her defense, said the hairdresser had given her the handkerchief, and as a further mark of his generous disposition, presented her fourpence. She is re-committed to Bridewell for gentle correction.\textsuperscript{36}

The system which "re-committed" this offender even though the prosecutor failed to appear was also peculiarly lenient with women in some circumstances. On January 15 of the same year, \textit{The Times} mentioned a case concerning a married couple named Sloper, who had been accused of stealing boots. The Court Recorder announced that wives who committed a crime other than murder or treason in the company of their husbands were by law exempted from sharing in the punishment, "... because they were supposed to be acting under the influence of their husbands, whose orders the law did not suppose them daring enough to resist. ..."\textsuperscript{37}

This idea of Woman's submission is also apparent in the use of the statute concerning "petit treason." This law, dating back to Edward III, likened the treason of a servant killing his master, a wife killing her husband, or a secular
or religious follower slaying his prelate with the high treason committed when a subject killed his king. Until 1790, a woman found guilty of the murder of her sovereign lord and master whether her employer or her husband, could still be burned at the stake.38

According to L. O. Pike, who wrote A History of Crime in England in the 1870s, "The fact that the law of treason was considerably modified in the reign of William III for the purpose of securing a fairer trial, and that yet the punishment for women was not abolished, is one proof the more of the excessively slow growth of civilization."39

Rebecca Downing was sentenced in 1782 to be drawn to the place of execution and there burned for poisoning her master.40 Mary Bayley, who murdered her husband with the help of John Quin, a laborer, was in 1784 condemned "to be drawn on a hurdle to the place of execution on Monday the eighth of March, and burned with fire until she be dead."41

The custom had been gradually adopted for the executioner to strangle the criminal before the fire was lit, but in the case of Catherine Hays, who murdered her husband after getting him drunk and who then chopped the body up, throwing the head into the Thames, the flames rapidly became too high before the executioner could reach her, and so Mrs. Hays was not spared the agony of being
burned alive. Hanging for murder was finally substituted for burning by a statute passed in the reign of George III.

Executions were a major event for the public, who turned out in droves to enjoy the occasion. The condemned were taken in a procession of open carts every six weeks from Newgate to the gallows at Tyburn, where they were cheered or hissed by the crowd of onlookers according to their personal charisma or their ability to entertain with gestures and speeches. Many of London's fashionable met for breakfast together, the meal to be followed by a jaunt to see an execution at Tyburn.

These processions of condemned men and women were a major source of disorder. In 1783, the Tyburn spectacles were stopped, and the site of execution was moved to the confines of Newgate prison. Though the executions were still public, the change of site ended the processions, and so was a step toward privately-inflicted punishment.

A felon's capture was not always followed by conviction. As with the cases concerning infanticide, the well-known harshness of the laws pertaining to minor offenses made judges and juries overly sympathetic and frequently served to keep victims from prosecuting. In addition, "the anomalous condition and cumbrous machinery of the penal laws gave a clever Old Bailey lawyer every opportunity to quibble his client of a scrape."
False witnesses pursued their trade at Westminster Hall, and for certain crimes, "benefit of clergy" could be claimed, allowing the offender to be punished by merely being burned in the hand.

As convicted criminals were either hanged or transported, the prisons were full of debtors, persons awaiting trial, and felons awaiting punishment. Minor offenders, such as the young girl who supposedly filched the hairdresser's handkerchief, were committed for "gentle correction" to bridewells, where they were detained unoccupied, with the sexes separated only at night, thus giving these houses of correction the nickname of "houses of corruption."  

The unsupervised contact between male and female prisoners in most of London's prisons enabled many women to escape the death penalty, as pregnancy enabled the female felon to "plead her belly." Jonas Hanway wrote of Bridewell Prison that "the objects sent out from their imprisonment are generally reputed to be much less moral than when they came into it." Deploring the indiscriminate mixing of prisoners, he called for "separation under imprisonment, whether for great crimes, or little ones; before trials, or as punishments after them." Newgate Prison, as well, was rife with corruption and abuse, though in Jonathan Wild,
Henry Fielding wrote ". . . we will agree that there are, without those walls, some other bodies of men of worse morals than those within, and who have, consequently, a right to change places with its present inhabitants."

Within Newgate, food was insufficient, sanitation virtually nonexistent, and diseases known as "putrid fevers" were horrifyingly common. Doctors normally refused to enter the confines and warned of the particularly virulent form of typhus that occasionally spread to the city from the prison. In May, 1750, this "gaol" fever did spread, carried undetected in a group of 100 prisoners taken to Old Bailey for trial. The trials session was infected, and some forty people died, including the Lord Mayor, several judges, and other court officials.

Eighteenth-century Newgate could comfortably hold 150 at most, but usually about 250 prisoners were held at a time, and it was common for thirty prisoners to occupy a ward measuring 32' x 26'. Though the average prisoner stayed one week to three months awaiting trial at Old Bailey, some stayed for years, and tales of acquitted prisoners remaining because of inability to pay gaolers' "fees" were not uncommon.

Old ships on the Thames, called "hulks," were used to lessen the overcrowding of London's prisons, but conditions on the hulks were quite as dismal as in the prisons.
Of 632 prisoners, 176 died between August 1776 and March 1778 because of the overcrowding and lack of sanitation on these floating prisons.  

John Howard, a philanthropist who visited city and country gaols and bridewells and who wrote *State of the Prisons* in 1777, campaigned for years to better the conditions he saw. Howard did much to encourage legislation to end the collection of gaolers' fees and to improve sanitary conditions in the hulks and the prisons. The Gaol Distemper Act (14 George III, c. 59) was passed as a result of Howard's efforts, and though the statute was not always obeyed, it required that paid surgeons be appointed for the prisons and that prisons be cleaned, whitewashed, and ventilated.

Reprieved felons and those ordered for transportation were shipped to America before 1776, and to Australia after the war with America. In the system of transportation, a contractor took convicts to their destination and once there, sold them as laborers to planters and others, to serve out the terms of their sentences. From 1769 to 1776, an average of 240 women were transported each year, about one-third the number of men being transported.

The French had rejected any comparable sort of banishment as being counterproductive, though in sending convicts to the galleys, they certainly practiced forced labor as
punishment. Unlike the English, who sent many convicts out over a period of years, the French believed that to remove a convict from familiar surroundings was often to guarantee a change for the worse. The English seem to have been most concerned about ridding themselves of the offender.

France, however, did not wait until the nineteenth century to begin serious reforms. By the Revolution, reform of the criminal justice code was "one of the most pressing issues demanding attention." The English, on the other hand, learned slowly. In An Essay on Crimes and Punishments, published in 1764, the Marquis Beccaria stated, "It is an old observation, that a man, after he in hanged, is good for nothing; and that punishments intended to benefit society, should, at the same time, be useful to society."

Not until the nineteenth century did reforms of England's penal code gain serious momentum. The stocks were last used in 1826, the pillory in 1837. The public whipping of women ended in 1817, but private whippings continued until 1830. In 1819, a House of Commons committee recommended repeal of the death penalty for many offenses, and in 1823, Sir Robert Peel succeeded with five acts which abolished capital punishment for about one hundred felonies. Peel also organized London's first police force early in the century.
Why did reform take such a long while in England? One answer could be the impossibility of actually "policing" the population without an organized police. The suggestion has also been made that a reform movement in England had barely taken root when it was cut short in the panic spread by the French Revolution. Nevertheless, the efforts of Defoe, the Fieldings, Hanway, Coram, Howard, and others, while they were not immediately successful, definitely played a role in the penal reforms of the next century. As one historian has said, "Of these early philanthropists we may say that, if they could not save the eighteenth century by their energy, they helped to save the nineteenth by their example." It is certain that many social reforms which would better the plight of female indigents had to wait for changes in the overall attitude toward women. The nineteenth century brought about reforms in the treatment of female felons, but throughout most of the century, did little to remedy the difficult plight of women.

2 Ibid.


6 Ibid., p. 103.

7 Ibid., p. 107.


9 Ibid.


11 Ibid., p. 18.


13 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

14 Ibid., p. 25.


22. Ibid., p. 192.

23. Ibid., p. 196.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 191.

26. Ibid., p. 189.

27. Ibid., p. 188.

28. Speck, Stability, p. 64.


30. Ibid., p. 155.

31. Ibid.


36 The Times – London, 6 January 1785.


38 Cowie, Hanoverian England, p. 16.

39 Pike, Crime, p. 289.

40 Ibid., p. 379.

41 Ibid.

42 McAdoo, Tyburn, p. 39.

43 Burton, Georgians, p. 279.

44 Hay et al., Albion's Fatal Tree, p. 67.

45 Paston, Side-Lights, p. 105.

46 Ibid., p. 109.


48 Ibid., p. vii.


51 Ibid., p. 231.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 322.


58. Ibid., p. 416.


60. Ibid.
A RETROSPECT

The Enlightenment did nothing to relax the strictures which limited English women to positions of subservience. By studying the wealth of literature, including letters and essays, produced during the period, the modern historian can reconstruct the rigid attitudes that stood between women and equality. Few women recognized the irony: that by complying with these mores, they would ensure the continuation of sexual bias. At every level, society identified them with their male connections, and neither wealth nor poverty enabled them to escape prejudice and irrationality.

Noblewomen were pawns in the dynastic schemes of their fathers, who bargained daughters away to their own advantage. After providing heirs, aristocratic ladies usually ceased to occupy any important position in the lives of their husbands. Few options were open to them; even an interest in politics was construed as unfeminine and was met with derision. Bored noblewomen frequently accepted the dissolute behavior of their class, though some tried to combine an ornamental role with an interest in intellectual matters. Male contemporaries rewarded the most successful of these "bluestockings" with condescending approval and
professed amazement at the novelty of women who tried to reason. Others, however, in compliance with the orthodox demands of society, censured any of their sex who dared to be unconventional, thereby reinforcing the oppression of their own kind.

Middle-class women were most affected by the negative achievements of the Enlightenment, since the glorification of "natural law," by idealizing the offices of Wife, Mother, and Housewife, provided a new justification for confining them to their homes. Thus the same idealization which created a new awareness of the importance of female domestic roles also became a source of frustration. Women had difficulty in reconciling flawless images with the reality of their day-to-day lives and human frailty. Pretentious male authors bombarded them with advice on suitable behavior and pursuits, while sanctimonious goodwives lectured them on "virtue," notwithstanding that their essays showed signs of the same ambivalence that they felt.

Thousands of hopeful men and women streamed into eighteenth-century London, hoping to find work, but limited opportunities, low wages, and a harsh criminal code which punished even minor offenses with death frustrated the hopes of most of them. The desperate circumstances of poverty and prejudice drove countless Englishwomen to crime and prostitution.
English courts treated female felons with peculiar turns of leniency and harshness; e.g., they would judge a woman who committed a crime in the presence of her husband as innocent and find him guilty. A wife who murdered her husband suffered the same fate as a subject who killed his king. The severity of penalties, crowded and disease-ridden prisons, and failure to recognize women as rational and productive beings, all constituted blights upon the Enlightenment. Major legislative reforms did not occur until the nineteenth century.

The century of the philosophes witnessed no real change in the status of women. Instead, superficial justification glorified the old roles, leaving a wake of frustration and restraint, and consigning the talents and intelligence of many women to obscurity. The priggish morality of Victorian England provided new readers for the works of Hester Chapone, Hannah More, and John Gregory, and the myths regarding women were further embellished. The twentieth century reluctantly has acknowledged the economic necessity of out-of-home employment for women, but continues to idealize their domestic roles. The failure of the Enlightenment to recognize the irrationality of beliefs which made females the slaves of males had effects that continue today.
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