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America's Forgotten Patriot: Mercy Otis Warren and the Writings that Fanned the Flames of Revolution

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AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN PATRIOT: MERCY OTIS WARREN AND THE WRITINGS
THAT FANNED THE FLAMES OF REVOLUTION

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

Of

American Public University

By

Lewis A. Taylor II

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of

Master of Arts

April 2016

American Public University

Charles Town, WV

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

America's Forgotten Patriot: Mercy Otis Warren and the Writings that Fanned the Flames
of Revolution

By Lewis A. Taylor II

American Public University System

April 27, 2016

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Brett Woods

The following is a study of the life and writings of Mercy Otis Warren. Warren was not only a revolutionary, but was also a writer and political thinker – a satirist, a poet, and a historian – who had watched the sparks of insurrection grow into the flames of a full-blown revolution, and used her writings to help arouse the passions of the citizenry and fan the flames of revolution.

Because she was a confidant to many of the central characters of the American revolutionary period and believing that the colonists were losing their rights and freedoms, she took pen to paper and became a leading advocate of colonial independence in a period where women, for the most part, were not politically active.

Through her satirical plays, her poetry, her voluminous correspondence, and her three-volume history, we can observe the patriot movement from the viewpoint of someone who lived during the period, and just as importantly, through the eyes of a woman – a republican woman.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When observations are just and do honour to the heart and character, I think it very immaterial whether they flow from a female lip in the soft whispers of private friendship or whether they thundered in the senate in the bolder language of the other sex.¹

From 1607 until the time of the American Revolution, the population of the British colonies on the North American continent grew from a handful that arrived in 1607 to more than three million by the time the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1787. During this period, there were many great writers, from John Smith and William Bradford during the early years to John Trumbull and Mercy Otis Warren in the 1760s. These writers, as well as many others, contributed a significant amount of writing which, for the most part, is still available today. The writers of the 17th and 18th centuries produced literature in all of the genres that were available in England except the novel, especially histories, poetry, letters, diaries, and memoirs. Dramatic writings did not develop as quickly in the colonies, and New England even banned the performance of plays. Warren made her mark at a time when the relationship between the two Englands – old and New – were becoming strained, and her poems, dramatic sketches, and correspondence was used as propaganda to help raise the awareness of the patriot movement and not only help fan the flames of revolution, but to keep that flame alive during the formation of the new nation.

¹ Kate Davies, "Revolutionary Correspondence: Reading Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren," *Women's Writing*, Vol. 13, No 1 (March 2006), 89.

There are many books, articles, and web-sites that mention Mercy Otis Warren, her life, and her writings. However, in virtually all of them, Warren is only mentioned in a peripheral way. In fact, the one thing that is missing in the literature is a comprehensive biography of Warren that incorporates not only a detailed biography, but an analysis of her writings from several viewpoints -- political, gender studies, philosophical, and religious, as well as to try to show the influence her writing had on many people. The purpose of this research is to try to fill that void and to look at the possible effects of her writing on her friends, acquaintances, and the general population of Boston, Massachusetts, and the other colonies.

Whenever there is a discussion about the founders of America certain names always come into play – Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton, among others. What is rarely, if ever mentioned is that these men were admirers of a founder that is rarely mentioned in history textbooks, and very few teachers of American history and government have little more than a passing acquaintance with. That founder is Mercy Otis Warren.

Warren was a poet, a playwright, political pundit and propagandist, and historian, as well as “one of the greatest Enlightenment thinkers in America”² in the 1700s. Warren’s satirical plays, letters, poems, and finally her three-volume history of the American Revolution are important because they were written by a woman during a period when women were frequently seen, but seldom heard. Warren’s idea of public virtue was the guiding force of her political compass. She passed judgment on people by their ability to abandon private ambition in favor of the long-term goals of the nation. But as an anti-Federalist, “Warren was a dissenter who wrote

² Therese Boos Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 88.

on the ‘losing’ side of history.”³ When Boston was the center of the revolutionary movement, Warren was, herself, a revolutionary whose political writings were instrumental in the swaying of public opinion. Had the entire Revolutionary War been fought on the battlefield, it may well “have remained beyond women’s scope. But since it came home from the start to women, they were virtually obliged to think and speak out about it.”⁴ While she was not able to be an active participant in the war effort, she was able to voice her opinion, and her “vehicle for political participation [was] through anonymous publications, producing both tragedies and satires on current affairs without revealing herself.”⁵

While Warren has been studied by students of literature and drama, she had been virtually overlooked by students of history until the middle of the 20th century, even though her three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*,⁶ published in 1805, was one of the first histories of the Revolutionary period, and her passion as writer was instrumental in the inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the Constitution. The writings of both John Marshall and David Ramsay have become part of the literature of the Revolutionary period, but “not even one review of Mercy’s work can be found in archives today,”⁷ other than an anonymously printed review in *The Panoplist*⁸ which states that Warren “sometimes

³ Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 84.

⁴ Nina Baym, “Mercy Otis Warren’s Gendered Melodrama of Revolution” Accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.english/illinois.edu/-people-/emeritus/warren.htm>.

⁵ Jeffrey H. Richard, editor, *Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 34.

⁶ Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*, Lester H. Cohen, Editor (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1994),

⁷ Elaine Crovitz and Elizabeth Buford, *Courage Knows No Sex*, (North Quincy, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1978), 48.

⁸ *The Panoplist* was founded by Reverend Jedidiah Morse, a conservative Congregational minister. Its goal was the promotion and defense of “the outworks of Christianity.” It also published literary reviews and biographical sketches. Frank Luter Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741 – 1850*, (New York: D. Appleton & Company), 1930.

exercised that freedom ‘in some instances which a gentleman would not, perhaps, have found prudent.’”⁹ It has been suggested that is because Warren was an anti-Federalist in a state dominated by Federalists or because of her sex. Regardless of the reason for the ignoring of Warren, by the middle of the twentieth century, historians were beginning to take a closer look at this important work, as well as a re-examination of the effects of Warren’s other writings on the pre-Revolutionary War period and the Constitutional period of American history.

During the Revolutionary period, women assisted the war effort and made significant contributions – contributions that “endowed them with a new kind of respect,”¹⁰ and “when American leaders decided to use boycotts in their struggle against Great Britain, women’s domestic roles took on political significance.”¹¹ No American woman was more deserving of that respect than Mercy Otis Warren. Warren’s home was used as a meeting place for many of the early patriots and by 1774, Warren was interested in far more than just the speeches and debates that were taking place throughout the colonies, or that the “Continental Congress clashed in discord on a higher level in Philadelphia.”¹² Warren began using her writing to help fan the flames of the Revolution. As the daughter of one patriot, the sister of another and the wife of a third, Warren was in a unique position. From her vantage point, she not only was able to observe, but to assist in fanning the sparks of an insurrectional movement into open rebellion, and finally to war for American independence from Great Britain.

Without an in-depth study of the letters and diaries of the numerous people Warren corresponded with from the 1750s to 1814, it would be impossible to determine the level of

⁹ Warren, *History*, xxvi.

¹⁰ Theresa Freda Nicolay, *Gender Roles, Literary Authority, and Three American Women Writers: Anne Dudley Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 4.

¹¹ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750 – 1800*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 155.

¹² Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of ’76*, (New York: Hastings House, 1973), 7.

impact her writings had on the patriot movement. There are, in the literature, many references to Warren, her writing, and her intellect, and because of these references, it is safe, I believe, to make an intelligent assumption of that impact by looking at what Warren wrote, where it was published, and who she corresponded with on a regular basis. It is also safe to assume that Warren's letters were shared by the recipient with others and that Warren's views were discussed by many people, not just those within her circle of friends.

This thesis has divided Warren's writing into three groups: Plays and Dramatic Sketches; Poetry and Correspondence; and Historical Writings. A study of all three groups is necessary in order to look at the possible effects of Warren's writings, and while all are important, her "Observations on the New Constitution" and *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*¹³ are her crowning achievements.

Warren's initial public writings were satirical plays (Warren referred to them as dramatic sketches) that were published in newspapers such as the *Boston Gazette*¹⁴ and the *Massachusetts Spy*¹⁵, newspapers that were accessible to a large number of the colonists in Massachusetts, as well as other colonies. Warren's cultivation of that audience caused her to be concerned about whether it was appropriate for a woman to be writing satire, but the gender/genre conflict that she experienced was reconciled by her close friend, John Adams, who "assured her that her work had an immediate and urgent purpose."¹⁶ Through her satirical plays Warren was able to combine her roles as wife and mother with that of a patriot, and as a result, gaining a tremendous amount of respect for her revolutionary (and feminine) voice. Warren also wrote numerous poems and had a large circle of friends with whom she corresponded on a regular basis. These

¹³Warren, *History*.

¹⁴ *The Boston Gazette*, (Boston: B. Edes and J. Gill).

¹⁵ *The Massachusetts Spy* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas).

¹⁶ Nicolay, 4.

poems and letters covered a wide range of topics – from family issues to political issues – another way that Warren was able to shape the opinions of others. Finally, in her later years she published her two important historical tracts, both of which had a profound influence on the thinking of many.

Like Anne Bradstreet before her, Mercy Otis Warren wrote during a time of great upheaval in the colonies. While there were other women writers during this period, none had as great an influence on their time as did Warren, except possibly Catharine Ann Macaulay, who had published a history of the Stuarts in England. Macaulay's eight-volume *History of England, from the Accession of James I to That of the Brunswick Line*¹⁷ was published between 1763 and 1783, and this "account of the Glorious Revolution appeared in libraries and bookstores on both sides of the Atlantic with much acclaim."¹⁸ There is nothing in the literature that indicates Warren read Macaulay's work, but considering its availability, and the fact that John Adams introduced Warren to Macaulay, one can assume that even though Mercy may not have read the entire eight-volumes, she had to be aware of it. This is, perhaps, what convinced Warren that she should start accumulating information regarding the events taking place in the colonies. Warren used this time of social and political upheaval to create opportunities for herself both as a woman and a writer, and like Anne Bradstreet, helped create a new society, and as part of this creation, "were called upon to act as arbiters of morals and manners."¹⁹

As Benjamin Franklin V notes in his *Research Guide to American Literature: Colonial Literature, 1607 – 1776*, "[b]y 1754, ninety percent of the colony's [Massachusetts] men and

¹⁷ Catharine Ann Macaulay, *History of England, from the Accession of James I to That of the Brunswick Line*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company, 1859).

¹⁸ Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *The Libraries, Leadership, & Legacy of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing and the Massachusetts Historical Society, 2010), 165.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

forty percent of its women were literate.”²⁰ This high literacy rate allowed for an increase in the number of newspapers and other types of printed materials, as well as “discussions in taverns, clubs, and coffeehouses,”²¹ as well as the establishment of libraries, not only in Massachusetts but the other colonies as well.

Warren’s writings led John Adams to say that she was “the most accomplished lady in America”, and Thomas Jefferson praised her “high station in the ranks of genius,” and was certain that her work would be “equally useful for our country and honourable to herself.”²² There is little doubt that Warren deserved the compliments paid to her by Adams and Jefferson. She was not only a writer but a political thinker/philosopher as well. The reading of her satirical plays, her poetry, her letters, and her history shows her skill as a writer and her insights into the thinking of the Patriot movement. However, Warren did not continue to hold her “high station” following the end of the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods. A review of the literature shows that while students of literature and drama have studied Warren’s work, as well as those interested in gender studies, she has been virtually ignored by historians. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that historians began re-examining Warren’s work, even though other disciplines had been studying Warren and her writings. This thesis will examine not only Warren’s life and her writings, but also their probable effect on the people of Boston and the rest of the Massachusetts colony, as well as those in other colonies.

²⁰ Benjamin Franklin V, *Research Guide to American Literature: Colonial Literature, 1607 – 1776*, (New York: Facts-On-File, 2010), 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² Marion Rust, *Prodigal Daughters: Susanna Rowson’s Early American Women*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 119.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

America has many a worthy name,
Who shall, hereafter, grace the rolls of fame.
Her good Cornelias, and her Arrias fair,

Who, death, in its most hideous forms, can dare.²³

A review of the primary source literature on Mercy Otis Warren finds that virtually everything is in the form of letters written to and from Warren to various leaders of the revolutionary movement, or her plays, poems, and history. A careful reading of these writings shows how Warren felt about what was taking place in Massachusetts during this period and what she believed her place was in the movement towards American independence. Her satirical plays were meant to stir the passions of the readers of the *Massachusetts Spy* and the *Boston Gazette*, which published them on a weekly basis, and her “Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions”, which, while written to show the failings of the new American Constitution, also highlight her “close study of political theory. . . . her fervent fear of the concentration of power.”²⁴ Warren’s three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations*,²⁵ which was published in 1805, the year she turned seventy-seven-years-old, was the culmination of her literary career.

The earliest biography of Warren, written by Elizabeth Ellet, was published in 1849 as part of her book, *The Women of the American Revolution*. In her book, Ellet “revealed a pride in the active patriotism of many of her subjects,” but her deepest admiration “went to Mercy Otis

²³ Philip Hicks, “Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), 278,

²⁴ Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman’s Power and Woman’s Place in the United States, 1630 – 1970*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 68.

²⁵Warren, *History*.

Warren.” Warren, who was a prolific writer during the mid-1700s, “never neglected her role as homemaker and mother.”²⁶

The first full-length biography of Warren did not appear until 1896 with the publication of Alice Brown’s *Mercy Warren*²⁷. Neither of these biographies can be considered academic studies, nor can the next two that appeared, Katharine Anthony’s *First Lady of the Revolution* (1958)²⁸ or Elizabeth Anticaglia’s *Twelve American Women* (1975)²⁹. In 1968, John J. Waters, Jr. published *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts*³⁰ which, even though Mercy is arguably the best known of the Otis family, mentions her on only four pages. It was not until Rosemarie Zagarrri published *A Women’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*³¹ in 1995 that a full academic biography of Warren appears in the historical literature. Following Zagarrri’s book, it was another decade before Nancy Stuart Rubin’s biography *Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (2008)³² appeared. There was, however, a short biography of Warren written by Lester H. Cohen in the preface of the Liberty Fund’s reprint of Warren’s *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*³³, which was published in 1994.

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

²⁷ Alice Brown, *Mercy Warren*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 1896.

²⁸ Katharine Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, (New York: Doubleday & Company), 1958.

²⁹ Elizabeth Anticaglia, *Twelve American Women*, (Chicago: Nelson-Hall), 1975.

³⁰ John J. Waters, Jr., *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1968.

³¹ Rosemarie Zagarrri, *A Woman’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*, (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Co.), 1995.

³² Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 2008.

³³ Warren, *History*.

Other books that covered Warren's political thought are *The Politics of History: Writing the History of the American Revolution, 1783 – 1815* (1975)³⁴ by Arthur H. Shafer and William Raymond Smith's *History as Argument: Three Patriot Historians of the American Revolution* (1966). Shafer covers historical writings of the Revolutionary period with a "focus on the development of a national historiography".³⁵

Even though there were no full-length books published that were focused on Warren, articles were being published in academic journals, especially *The William and Mary Quarterly*³⁶, *The New England Quarterly*³⁷ and *The American Quarterly*³⁸ by Lester Cohen, Lawrence Friedman and Arthur Shaffer, and Philip Hicks. These articles covered various aspects of Warren's writings as well as a look at her political philosophy and historical theory. Dr. Cohen looks at the Warren's role as a thinker and woman in "Mercy Otis Warren: The Politics of Language and the Aesthetics of Self"; Friedman and Shaffer discuss Warren as a woman who "functioned in the male world of establishment politics and Patriot history,"³⁹; and Philip Hicks shows that Warren tried to exemplify "the Roman matrons [who] were political heroes,"⁴⁰ by adopting the pseudonym Marcia. In 1953, Maud McDonald Hutcheson published what is considered to be the "best short introduction to Warren's thought and writing"⁴¹ in *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

³⁴ Arthur H. Shafer, *The Politics of History: Writing the History of the American Revolution, 1773 – 1815*, (Chicago: Precedent Publishing), 1975.

³⁵ Warren, *History*, xxx.

³⁶ *William and Mary Quarterly*, (Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture).

³⁷ *New England Quarterly*, (Boston, MA: Northeastern University).

³⁸ *American Quarterly*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press).

³⁹ Lawrence J. Friedman and Arthur H. Shaffer. "Mercy Otis Warren and the Politics of Historical Nationalism." *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Jun. 1975), 214.

⁴⁰ Philip Hicks, "Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 62, No 2 (Apr. 2005), 265.

⁴¹ Warren, xxix.

While historians and biographers were, for the most part, ignoring Warren, writers in other disciplines were taking a closer look at her work, especially literary critics and those who study the role of women in politics. Two histories that are considered classics, Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763 - 1789*⁴² and Gordon S. Wood's *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789 - 1815*⁴³, do not even mention Warren. These two books, published as part of the Oxford History of the United States series cover the years that Warren wrote her dramatic sketches, her "Observations" and her *History*, but yet, do not find that Warren or her writings merit mentioning.

Pauline Schloesser writes in *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the American Republic* that the "[r]easons behind Warren's marginality today no doubt relate to the exclusions she experienced in her own day."⁴⁴ Along the same line of thinking, Elaine Crovitz and Elizabeth Buford write in *Courage Has No Sex: A Pioneer Venture in Exploring the Dimensions and Potential of the Female Psyche*, "[m]uch of Mercy's impact on the thinking of her fellow colonists can be attributed to her intelligence and political acumen, but perhaps just as important was the social status she enjoyed in the Massachusetts community."⁴⁵ In 1995, Theresa Freda Nicolay devoted a chapter of her book *Gender Roles, Literary Authority, and Three American Women Writers* to Warren. In this chapter Nicolay begins to look at Warren as a historian, writing that Warren "clearly suggests" that her plays "are intended not primarily to entertain, but rather to instruct Americans in the lessons of the past."⁴⁶ Therese Boos Dykeman

⁴² Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763 – 1789*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2005.

⁴³ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789 – 1815*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 2009.

⁴⁴ Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the American Republic*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 84.

⁴⁵ Crovitz, 47.

⁴⁶ Nicolay, 59.

in *Contributions by Women to Early American Philosophy: Anne Bradstreet, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray*, says “whether it was poetry or political and historical prose, philosophy predominated.”⁴⁷ Two important books on eighteenth-century American women are Linda J. Kerber’s *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*⁴⁸ and Mary Beth Norton’s *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750 -1800*, both of which discuss Warren and her role as an intellectual woman and her conflict “between her own inclinations and prescribed feminine behavior.”⁴⁹

The feminist movement in academia, especially those who study history and writing, have begun taking another look at Warren trying to find “that Warren’s work would overtly connect patriot ideas of liberty to the emancipation of women.... [hoping] to find proto-feminist sentiments in her texts.”⁵⁰ Unfortunately, they have been disappointed because what they have found suggests that “she was a canny, duplicitous practitioner of conventional gender politics.”⁵¹ In fact, their studies of Warren’s writings have found that “there is not much material to work with, and what there is seems to express a gender conservatism that they find distressingly at odds with Warren’s own behavior.”⁵²

Warren’s poetry and plays, when discussed, are usually looked at in the context of the satire and poetry of the eighteenth century. One useful volume would be Moses Coit Tyler’s *The*

⁴⁷ Dykeman, 101.

⁴⁸ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1980.

⁴⁹ Norton, 121.

⁵⁰ Nina Baym, “Mercy Otis Warren’s Gendered Melodrama of Revolution,” Accessed March 5, 2016, <http://www.english/illinois.edu/-people-/emeritus/baym/essays/warren.htm>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

*Literary History of the American Revolution, 1863 – 1783, 2 Volumes*⁵³. Two other books which discuss women poets in early America are *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*⁵⁴ by Emily Stipes Watts and *Women Poets in Pre-Revolutionary America, 1650 – 1775: An Anthology*⁵⁵, edited by Patti Cowell.

One other discipline that has studied Warren and her writings is literary criticism. One author, in particular, Jeffrey H. Richards, has written that one of the problems when writing on Warren is the lack of reliable information. He further says that the earlier studies of Warren were written at a time “when women’s literary accomplishments were devalued and consequently give her little credit for what she wrote; others contain significant gaps or errors of fact....”⁵⁶ Richards, along with Kate Davies, has also delved into Warren’s correspondence, which is quite voluminous. Warren corresponded with many people, but most especially her close friend Abigail Adams and British historian Catharine Macaulay. As Davis writes in her book *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender*, the two ladies “exchanged letters and ideas with one another for almost twenty years” and “they sustained a close friendship that was almost entirely epistolary and dependent upon unreliable transatlantic crossings,” and that “they were drawn to each other by mutual admiration of their republican principles and intellectual abilities.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Moses Coit Tyler, *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763 – 1783, 2 Volumes*, (New York: Frederick Ungar), 1957.

⁵⁴ Emily Stipes Watts, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1943*, (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press), 1977.

⁵⁵ Patti Cowell, *Women Poets in Pre-Revolutionary America, 1650 – 1775*, (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press), 1977.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey H. Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), ix.

⁵⁷ Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

Warren was the exception to the rule in the 1700s. In colonial America, the woman's role "was domestic and private, in contrast to his [the husband] public, supervisory functions."⁵⁸ If the whole of the war for independence were fought on the battlefield, it "might have remained beyond women's scope. But since it came home from the start to women, they were virtually obliged to think and speak out about it."⁵⁹

Warren was an educated woman who was supported in her endeavors by three leaders of the patriot movement: her father, her brother, and her husband. She realized that she was unusual in that she had the benefit of an education that was not available to many (if any) young women of her era. But Warren has been ignored by historians. One reason for this may well be attributed to a comment John Adams made in a letter to Elbridge Gerry: "History is not the Province of the Ladies".⁶⁰

It was not until 1810 that an eighty-two-year-old widowed Warren received due recognition for her *History*. *The National Aegis*, a small publication in Worcester, Massachusetts praised Warren, saying that her *History* "exalts the character of the female and the human intellect."⁶¹

Chapter 3

The Early Years

I am a woman in whom historical events had stimulated to observation a mind that had not yielded to the assertion that all political attentions lay out of the road of female life.⁶²

⁵⁸ Norton, 3.

⁵⁹ Baym, "Mercy Otis Warren's Gendered Melodrama of Revolution."

⁶⁰ Zagari, 162.

⁶¹ Stuart, 260.

⁶² Melissa Lukeman Bohrer, *Glory, Passion, and Principle*, (New York: Atria Books, 2003), 121.

Born in 1728, Mercy Otis Warren was one of the fifth generation of the Otis family living in Massachusetts. While the Otis family was never affluent enough to claim membership as one of the leading families in the colony, their social credentials as early settlers were impeccable. Warren's biographers usually spend a great amount of time on her family history, and it is easy to see why. Warren's mother, Mary Allyne Otis, was a descendant of one of the signers of the Mayflower Compact and on her father's side, the first John Otis came to America shortly after the arrival of the Mayflower. John Otis, after having first settled in Hingham, moved his family to the village of West Barnstable on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and it was here that four generations of the Otis family became known and respected throughout the area. What is interesting is that Mercy, in her writings, never mentioned any particular ancestors, but instead "more assumed her place in America than claimed it by family background."⁶³

James Otis, Sr. was a successful farmer, merchant and attorney. His successful law practice helped him win election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives as the representative of Barnstable County. Otis was not an educated man, and possibly because of this he wanted to be sure that his two sons, James, Jr. (known as Jemmy)⁶⁴ and Joseph, received an education that would prepare them for college. In the 1700s in Massachusetts, going to college meant going to Harvard, and to help prepare the boys, James hired Reverend Jonathan Russell, a maternal relative, to tutor the boys. When it was obvious that Joseph had no interest in academics, Mercy was allowed to take his place. During her time with Russell, Mercy took the same classes as Jemmy (what would be considered today as a college preparatory course) except

⁶³ Richards, 2.

⁶⁴ When referring to James Otis, Jr. I will use his nickname of Jemmy so as not to confuse him with James Otis, Sr. or James Warren.

for Latin and Greek, which was not necessary for her since she would not have the opportunity to attend college. Instead, she read the classics in their English translations. It was through Reverend Russell (whose library is supposed to have contained over 200 volumes) that Mercy developed her interest in history by reading Alexander Pope and John Dryden's translations of the classics, and Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*. Another writer who attracted Mercy's attention was John Locke, and it was through his writings that she learned about the governments of Greece and Rome – knowledge that she would later use in her own writing. Russell's teaching, in all probability, also included instruction in writing, rhetoric, and deductive reasoning.

Mercy's "book-learning" did not interfere with her learning the skills that were expected of a young girl, especially the oldest girl in the family, in eighteenth-century Massachusetts. From her mother and the servants, she learned how to cook, sew, and do needlepoint. In all probability, because of the number of younger brothers and sisters that appeared in the Otis home, Mercy had more than her share of housework to do. Even so, Mercy, through her studies with Russell and the use of the books in her father's library, attained what many believe was the equivalent of a college education.

Jemmy's departure for Harvard created a void in Mercy's life that could not be filled by either her brother or sisters. Aware of his sister's capabilities and intelligence, Mercy was Jemmy's confidant while he was at Harvard, and corresponded with Mercy on a regular basis, sending her suggestions for reading. Following his graduation from Harvard, Jemmy returned to Cape Cod to begin studying for a Master's degree, and while doing so, tutored Mercy in her studies, sharing what he learned at Harvard, including possibly the "dialectical, topical, modal, and indirect syllogisms as expounded by Franconus Burgersdicius, who had been a leader of

puritan thought in the seventeenth century.”⁶⁵ Mercy continued her education, even though she never expected to emulate the lofty ambitions of her brother Jemmy. Mercy, like other young women, was looking forward to marriage and her own family and home. Even though she would, as a woman, move into a man’s world with her writing, there was not a feminist mentality struggling to escape the bounds placed on her by society, but rather “[s]he passed her youth in the quiet retirement of her home, in the midst of those duties and employments to which as the eldest daughter . . . she was called.”⁶⁶ The relationship between the Mercy and Jemmy as adults is indicative of an early and profound bonding between the two siblings. It was Jemmy who first stimulated Mercy’s political awareness, and encouraged her to continue her studies.

When Mercy was sixteen-years-old, she made her first trip off Cape Cod to attend her brother’s graduation from Harvard College. It was there that she met one of her brother’s friends, James Warren. There are some who believe that Mercy might well have met James earlier because his father was the high sheriff of Plymouth colony and quite possibly had business dealings with Mercy’s father.

Whether they met at Jemmy’s graduation or rekindled a friendship is not important. What is important is that a relationship began that culminated in their marriage in November of 1754, a marriage that was to produce five sons – James, Jr (1757), Winslow (1759), Charles (1762), Henry (1764), and George (1766) -- and would last for more than fifty years. No one knows for certain why James and Mercy waited ten years to get married, but one possibility is that following their meeting at Harvard they were not in constant communication, and it was only when James set up a law practice in Plymouth, that Mercy had the opportunity to reacquaint herself with Warren.

⁶⁵Waters, 111.

⁶⁶Anthony, 33.

Following their marriage, the Warrens moved to Plymouth, Massachusetts where Mercy would spend the rest of her years. When James's father died, he inherited all of his father's estate and also served, as his father had served, as high-sheriff of Plymouth County – a position that required many days away from home.

Many marriages in the eighteenth-century were marriages of practicality rather than passion. This does not seem to be the case in the Otis-Warren relationship because Mercy, writing in a letter several years later said that Warren “was a powerful magnet, the center of my early wishes and the star which attracts my attention,”⁶⁷ and in her letters she constantly referred to him as the “first friend of my heart” and the “dear companion of my life.”⁶⁸ This same sentiment seems to have been shared by her husband, who wrote, during the Revolution, “I want nothing to keep up my spirits . . . but seeing you in good spirits,” and in a letter written several months later saying that “[n]o husband ever loved and respected a wife more.”⁶⁹

It is assumed that the birth of her son George in 1766 marked the beginning of Mercy's writing of poetry and her correspondence with friends and family. The earliest known letter is one that Mercy wrote to Jemmy in 1769 following his argument and ensuing fight with a Loyalist, during which he would receive a serious head wound – one that would eventually cause him to give up his law practice and eventually drop out of active participation in the revolutionary movement. The episode was terribly upsetting to Mercy because it was Jemmy who had encouraged Mercy to pursue her education and writing. It was also Jemmy who, in a pamphlet published in 1764 asked the pointed question, “[a]re not women born as free as men, . .

⁶⁷ Zagarri, 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁹ Stuart, 20.

. and should not they also have a right to be consulted. . . in the formation of a new original compact or government?”⁷⁰

Warren’s life, while “lived out in one unchanging set of scenes,”⁷¹ was one that was involved in the revolutionary movement from the very beginning. As the daughter of James Otis, Sr., the sister of James Otis, Jr, and the wife of James Warren, Mercy was personally acquainted with many of the distinguished figures of the period. John Adams maintained a regular correspondence with her, and persons such as Samuel Adams, Dr. John Winthrop, Elbridge Gerry, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington all knew her and commented her on her accomplishments. When Warren’s *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* was published in 1790, the subscription list included the president of Harvard College, Dr. Joseph Willard, Henry Knox, James Bowdoin, Paul Revere, President George Washington, and Vice-President John Adams. The Warren home in Plymouth was a meeting place for many of those who were members of the Sons of Liberty, and according to James Bowdoin, who would later become governor of Massachusetts, said that Mercy was a good judge in politics and that many “sage deliberations were held at her fireside.”⁷²

It is not surprising that Warren became a political writer and that her political views were, in all probability, influenced by her family and her circle of acquaintances. Jemmy encouraged Mercy to write poetry – something that he was interested in himself. Perhaps it was this encouragement by her brother and the fact that her father encouraged her education might

⁷⁰ Bernard Bailyn, editor, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750 – 1776, Volume 1*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 420.

⁷¹ Anthony, 13.

⁷² Maud Macdonald Hutcheson, “Mercy Warren, 1728 – 1814.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No 3 (Jul., 1953), 379.

explain why, throughout her life, Mercy remained closer to her father and brother than to her mother.

Warren's brother, Jemmy was, at one time, considered "the most promising and intelligent man in Massachusetts." Known for his opposition to the Stamp and Sugar Acts, Jemmy was one of the first colonists to openly defy British authority and in 1764 published a pamphlet titled *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*. In this pamphlet he kept returning to the issue that "the very act of taxing, except over those who are represented, appears to me to be depriving them of one of their most essential rights as freemen."⁷³ It was also at this time that he wrote "Are not women born as free as men, . . . and should not they also have a right to be consulted. . . in the formation of a new original compact or government?"⁷⁴ This comment is sure to have inspired his sister to continue her education and in all probability was instrumental in her decision to become involved in the revolutionary movement.

While James's star was fading because of his mental issues, his sister was "one of the earliest herself to proclaim independence as the need and logic of events . . ." and that hers was "an intensely patriotic view of the struggle." As Rosemarie Zagarrri points out, Mercy's involvement in politics "might well have remained a private hobby or curious feminine affectation" had Jemmy not been destroyed by mental instability.⁷⁵

Warren's interest in politics began at her home in West Branstable while she was a child, and continued after her marriage to James Warren. Mercy and her husband held meetings at their home in Plymouth, meetings that would lead to the formation of the Massachusetts Committee of

⁷³ "James Otis, Jr., Enrages Colonial Governor, June 21, 1768," *Mass Moments*, Accessed February 28, 2016, <http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=181>.

⁷⁴ Bernard Bailyn, editor, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776, Volume 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 420.

⁷⁵ Zagarrri, 21.

Correspondence. Based on knowledge of Mercy's temperament, it can be safely assumed that she was very active in these meetings and did not just welcome the guests and retire to her room. But Warren was not satisfied to just talk about independence. Through her writings, she became one of the leading propagandists of the period, a period in which the "Coercive Acts made open rebellion in America inevitable."⁷⁶, and as a result was called the "penwoman of the Revolution,"⁷⁷ Maud Hutchinson writes that Warren's plays, "[a]lthough arranged in acts and scenes, her plays are lacking in plot, love interest and women characters. They were rabid conversation pieces, propaganda, intended primarily for reading."⁷⁸

Warren saw herself as a writer "who wishes only to cultivate the sentiments of public and private virtue in whatsoever falls from her pen," and believed that as a poet, playwright and historian, her duty was to "form the minds, to fix the principles [and] to correct the errors of the young members of society," while encouraging them in their quest for pure virtue "instead of the hackneyed walks crowded with swarms of useless votaries, who worship at the pedestal of pleasure or bow before the shrine of wealth."⁷⁹

Chapter 4

The Plays & Dramatic Sketches

Those savage hostile guests to riot there,
To subjugate the state – subvert thy house,
To extirpate thy name, and rudely reign

⁷⁶ Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Coming of the Revolution, 1763 – 1775*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 227.

⁷⁷ Beard, 21.

⁷⁸ Hutcheson, 393.

⁷⁹ Lester H. Cohen, "Explaining the Revolution: Ideology and Ethics in Mercy Otis Warren's Historical Theory", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No 2 (Apr., 1980), 204.

And triumph o'er the West.⁸⁰

In the eighteenth century satire was acknowledged to be a way “to serve the public good by holding public officials to account,”⁸¹ and writers in both the colonies and in England used satire in their arguments both for, and against, the argument for American independence.

According to Jeffrey Richards, “[m]any of the earliest plays written in English-speaking America are political or historical in nature, and frequently satirical.”⁸² It is ironic that the dramatic form was used in New England since the New England Puritans “objected to the cost and lifestyle associated” with the production of dramatic performances.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that when Mercy Otis Warren began writing, she used satirical plays as a medium for trying to get her message to the people of Massachusetts. Even so, she was conflicted about whether the writing of satire was within the realm of a lady, a conflict that was eased somewhat by support from both John Adams and her husband. Warren told his wife that “God has given you great abilities. You have improved them in great Acquirements....They are all now to be called into action for the good of Mankind, the good of your friends, for the promotion of Virtue and Patriotism.”⁸³

Even though Warren probably never saw a play performed she was familiar with drama. Her education introduced her to the plays of Shakespeare, Moliere, and Addison. She read Dryden and Pope, and it is from them that she seems to have developed her satirical style. It is possible that Warren turned to satire following the beating of her brother Jemmy in a saloon in Boston. There was already bad blood between the Otis and Hutchinson family so the dramatic

⁸⁰ Richards, 118.

⁸¹ Richards, 94.

⁸² Ibid., 84.

⁸³ Zagarrri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 74.

sketches attributed to her may have been her way of “getting even.” At the same time, both James Otis Sr., and Jemmy were being regarded as opposition leaders by the governor and his staff, as well as the British press. As Jemmy’s mental situation worsened, Mercy began to see herself as the one to carry on his crusade, and began to devote herself to promoting the defense of American liberty.

Warren did not put her name her work, preferring anonymity. She was hesitant about speaking out, worried that discussing “war, politicks, or anything relative thereto,”⁸⁴ was outside the bounds for women. Notwithstanding, she is credited with the writing of three dramatic sketches, *The Adulateur*, *The Group*, and *The Defeat*, as well as the possible author of two additional ones, *The Blockheads: or, The Affrighted Officers* and *The Motley Assembly*. Some historians believe that Warren was not the author of either *The Blockheads* or *The Motley Assembly*. However, Katharine Anthony is convinced that Warren “wrote these bawdy, rowdy, and unfeminine pieces.”⁸⁵ She is also known to be the author of two plays, *The Ladies of Castile* and *The Sack of Rome*.

For Warren, history could be seen as “three fundamental conflicts: a political conflict between liberty and arbitrary power; and ethical conflict between virtue and avarice; and a philosophical conflict between reason and passion.”⁸⁶ These conflicts were the basis of her satirical dramatic sketches and suggest that Warren “viewed history as a vast morality play.”⁸⁷ The “major literary and political aims [of Warren’s writing was] to form minds, fix principles,

⁸⁴ Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 22.

⁸⁵ Tice L. Miller, *Entertaining the Nation: American Drama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), 26.

⁸⁶ Warren, *History*, xviii.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

and cultivate virtue,”⁸⁸ and the three dramatic sketches – “*The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group*. . . are representative examples of early American political satire and well-timed propaganda.”⁸⁹

The dramatic sketches are so named because it implies that they are part of a larger body of work, possibly an unfinished play. This was not the case. This misconception may come from the fact that a five-act version of *The Adulateur* was published a year after Warren’s dramatic sketch, a version that included some changes as well as two additional acts. Warren denounced this expanded version as a plagiarism and indicated that it was not entirely her work.⁹⁰ Warren’s first three sketches have one thing in common: the subject is “the evils of Tory administration in Massachusetts.” While her main antagonist is Governor Thomas Hutchinson, Warren also attacks “other American Tories, British officials, or Whig turncoats.”⁹¹

Warren’s first sketch, *The Adulateur*, was written in blank verse and published in two installments, March 26 and April 23, 1772, in Isaiah Thomas’s *Massachusetts Spy*. There was an “advertisement” located on the next to last page of the March 26th issue stating: “To be exhibited for the entertainment of the public, at the grand parade in Upper Servia. *The Adulateur* – A Dramatic performance, consisting of three Acts, and as a specimen of this work, we have excerpted the following passages.”⁹² Even though the advertisement says that the play will be performed, it never was, nor was it ever intended to be. The entire sketch consisted of just two short scenes with stage directions that would have been impossible to perform. In fact, the sketch only took up two columns in the paper.

⁸⁸ Ibid., xvii.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Sandra J. Sarkela, "Freedom's Call: The Persuasive Power of Mercy Otis Warren's Dramatic Sketches, 1772-1775," *Early American Literature*, 44:3 (2009), 543.

⁹¹ Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 85.

⁹² *Massachusetts Spy*, March 26, 1772, Massachusetts Historical Society.

In May, 1773, *The Defeat* was published in the *Boston Gazette*, along with a few lines introducing the “play.” Warren began by saying “As many of your country readers have been out of the way of Theatrical amusements of the last Season, it may perhaps be some Entertainment to them to see a few Extracts from *The Defeat*, a Dramatic performance lately exhibited.”⁹³ *The Defeat*, like *The Adulateur* was never performed in public, but in a new twist, Warren turned her pen against Americans who complained about the personal sacrifices that they were asked to make to support the Patriot cause.

The Adulateur, as well as *The Group* and *The Defeat*, focused on the political situation in Boston at that time and the ongoing dissension between the Loyalists and the Whigs, and the characters and events “directly reference the newspaper content in which they are embedded.”⁹⁴ Warren’s intention was to attack what she perceived to be British tyranny and to rally support for the Patriot cause. Abigail Adams praised Warren for her writings saying [Her] poetical pen has no equal that I know of in this country.”⁹⁵

Warren, as well as other Whigs, were upset with Governor Thomas Hutchinson for his appointing of Loyalists to key public offices – appointments that Warren saw as “a direct attack against the liberties of citizens and the independence of Massachusetts as a political entity.”⁹⁶ Warren never directly mentions any of the principal characters of her sketches but instead assigns names like Rapatio (Thomas Hutchinson) and Hazelrod (Peter Oliver). These men, as well as others, were men who had betrayed their country, or in the words of Arthur Quinn, “sold

⁹³ *Boston Gazette*, May 27, 1773, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 541.

⁹⁵ Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 59.

⁹⁶ Richards, 86.

their birthright for an office.”⁹⁷ Warren saw a duplicitous nature in Hutchinson, the only Royal Governor born in America. On the one hand, he appeared to be supportive of the colonist’s position, while on the other hand, he was taking the Crown’s side in his correspondence with England. Warren’s issues with Hutchinson were more than just his cronyism or his duplicitous nature; there had been bad blood between the Otis and Hutchinson family for many years.⁹⁸ Exactly when the feud between the Otis’s and Hutchinson’s began is open to discussion, but by 1760, there was an open and abiding hostility between the two families.⁹⁹ Warren was probably aware of the “self-tormenting uncertainty and complexity of her brother [Jemmy’s] inner psyche, cast him as Brutus”¹⁰⁰ in *The Adulateur*. As drama, *The Adulateur* was lacking, but as propaganda, it was quite effective.

Warren’s next sketch, *The Defeat* was published in 1775 in the *Boston Gazette*. The catalyst for this play was a group of letters that Thomas Hutchinson wrote to Thomas Whatley, a former secretary to George Grenville. In these letters, Hutchinson wrote that “if the colonies’ connection with England were to be maintained, ‘an abridgement of what is called English liberty’ might be necessary.”¹⁰¹ This sketch again cast Hutchinson as the arch-villain (a role that Warren would continue in her *History*), but she added a new villain to this writing – “the wretched Scribbler, bartering for Gold. This was, almost without a doubt, Jonathan Sewall, a Loyalist journalist. The year following the publication of these two sketches saw Governor Hutchinson being recalled to England. Again, Warren did not develop characters or a conflict

⁹⁷ Arthur H. Quinn, “Representative Plays by American Dramatists, 1765 to 1819, Volume 1,” *A History of the American Drama: From the Beginning to the Civil War*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), 40.

⁹⁸ For a summary of the feud between the Otis and Hutchinson family, see John J. Waters and John A. Schutz, “Patterns of Massachusetts Colonial Politics: The Writs of Assistance and the Rivalry between the Otis and Hutchinson Families,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol XXIV, No 4 (October, 1967), 532-544.

⁹⁹ Gipson, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Waters, 133.

¹⁰¹ Zagarri, 60.

between the characters but instead continued to use her sketches primarily as propaganda – trying to raise the passions of the people of Massachusetts. It is not known for certain how much influence Warren’s sketches had, but it is certain that they were both widely read not only in Massachusetts but the other colonies as well. Newspapers from Maine to Georgia were known to have reprinted articles from Massachusetts newspapers.

The third and final sketch, *The Group*, was published in two parts in 1775, just before the battles at Lexington and Concord. The first part, which was published in the *Boston Gazette* on January 23, 1775 and in the *Massachusetts Spy* on January 26th of that year, contained one act and one scene, the second part, published a couple of months later consisted of several scenes with several new characters. The entire play was published as a pamphlet in Boston and Philadelphia following the events at Lexington and Concord.

This sketch focused on a group of individuals rather than Hutchinson, who had left the colonies for England and replaced by General Thomas Gage. The individuals Warren targeted were those who accepted appointments to the Massachusetts Council, men who were native-born Americans who, Warren believed, should be supporting the colonies rather than selling out for positions of status and money. The king had repealed the colony’s charter, dissolved the Council, and would not let the colonists elect their representatives. Instead, the members of the Council were appointed by the Crown, or “Friends of Government.” Warren’s characters were not just abstractions, but rather they were satirical portraits of the men who took these positions. Using pseudonyms, parodies, and little-known facts about the men, their personalities, and their families, Warren was able to provide a word picture that made it easy for the reader to know the true identities of her players. Because she was a propagandist, Warren was loose with the facts and made sure that the characters were assigned traits that were not positive ones, but rather that

they were corrupt and reprehensible individuals. Because Daniel Leonard (a Loyalist attorney) was known for his foppishness, Warren gave him the name “Beau Trumps.” Timothy Ruggles, who was a general during the French and Indian War, and noted for his irascible disposition was given the name “Brigadeer Hate-all.”

Like all of the sketches, *The Group* was not meant to be acted out on a stage. There was no plot, no meaningful dialogue, no stage directions, nor any of the other things that would be needed to perform them on a stage. *The Group* was, like the other sketches, an attack on an individual or a group of individuals. Also, as Benjamin Franklin V states, Warren’s political plays “lack character development, richness of plot and adequate structure.”¹⁰²

The two plays that have been attributed to Warren, but have not been definitively linked to her are *The Blockheads* and *The Motley Assembly*. *The Blockheads* was written in response to a farce written in 1775 by General John Burgoyne titled *The Blockade of Boston*. Burgoyne’s farce was an attempt to ridicule the patriot cause, and *The Blockheads* returned the favor by ridiculing the Loyalists. *The Motley Assembly* did not ridicule any particular person but instead ridiculed those in Boston who patronized the British officers and their elegant lifestyle.

Two additional plays written by Warren were published in her 1790 book, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, which she dedicated to George Washington. The first play, *The Ladies of Castile* “is a historical drama about political rebellion in sixteenth-century Spain.” The second, *The Sack of Rome*, “is a tragedy about the end of the Roman Empire.”¹⁰³ In the introduction to *The Sack of Rome*, Warren says “theatrical amusements may, sometimes, have been prostituted to the purposes of vice..... [but] the exhibition of great historical events, opens a

¹⁰² Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 84.

¹⁰³ Miller, 26.

field of contemplation to the reflecting and contemplative mind.”¹⁰⁴ This suggests that Warren believed that plays could be a medium for teaching history and morality. Warren sent a copy of *The Sack of Rome* to John Adams while he was in London. Her hopes were that he could help her get it produced. Adams replied that there was, in England, no interest in anything American.¹⁰⁵ Alexander Hamilton, after reading Warren’s book sent her a note saying “It is certain that in the ‘Ladies of Castille,’ the sex will find a new occasion of triumph. . . . female genius in the United States has outstripped the male.”¹⁰⁶

Although Warren’s dramatic sketches are considered propaganda because they are one-sided arguments playing to the emotions of the reader, the patriots believed that the real propaganda “was coming from local government in speeches, newspaper reports, and pamphlets supporting the Massachusetts royal governor Thomas Hutchinson and his policies.”¹⁰⁷ Warren assumed that many, if not most of the readers of her sketches would be acquainted with those being satirized, and without this “familiarity on the part of the audience, much of the fun of the pieces – the disguised characterizations, the obscure reference, the private jokes, the numerous innuendos – is lost.”¹⁰⁸ Warren’s sketches and plays were the work of a “skilled propagandist who may have been most effective as an agitator whose words helped mobilize a complacent public into action.”¹⁰⁹

From the publication of *The Adulateur* in 1773 to the publication of her *History* in 1805, Warren saw the potential for political corruption. Her dramatic sketches were full of references

¹⁰⁴ Mercy Otis Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren*, (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, MDCCXC), 11.

¹⁰⁵ Miller, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 363.

¹⁰⁷ Sarkela, 562.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 251.

¹⁰⁹ Sarkela, 562.

to the personal ambition, greed, tyranny, and despotism of public officials. Warren believed that the public interest needed to be led by virtue and political morality, not personal ambition.

Throughout Warren's plays, sketches, and poems, her vision of honor and republican virtue is evident, and is saddened that Great Britain, once revered, is now the enemy of liberty and virtue.

As an ironic footnote, following Hutchinson's self-imposed exile to England, James and Mercy Warren purchased his home in Milton, MA from the Commonwealth. It was in Hutchinson's former home that Warren wrote much of her *History*.

Chapter 5

Poems and Correspondence

The study of human character opens at once a beautiful and a deformed picture of the soul. We there find a noble principle implanted in the nature of man, that pants for distinction.¹¹⁰

In 1848, Elizabeth Ellet wrote that “[Mercy Otis Warren’s] correspondence with the great spirits of that era, if published, would form a most valuable contribution to our historical literature.”¹¹¹ Ms. Ellet would be pleased to know that most of Warren’s correspondence is now available to the historian. Unfortunately, much has not been fully analyzed or cataloged. Jeffrey Richards writes that “[o]ver a period of forty-five years....[Warren] extolled, educated, preached, prayed, raged, and wept in her letters.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Warren, *History*, 3.

¹¹¹ Ellet, 1:94.

¹¹² Jeffery H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris, eds., *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xi.

Following Mercy's marriage to James Warren and the move to Plymouth, it can be assumed that she wrote letters to her family on Cape Cod, although no letters from this period have been located. At that time, the trip from Plymouth to West Barnstable took most of one day, and one did not make a trip like that unless the visit was going to last several days, so it is quite probable that Warren wrote many letters to her family.

Warren, like Abigail Adams, was solidly upper class, and both were enthusiastic letter writers, and both wrote in "an ornate eighteenth-century prose."¹¹³ More than 300 of Warren's letters, as well as the draft versions of many of those letters, survived the years and are now safely ensconced in libraries such as that of the Massachusetts Historical Society. What has been determined from the study of Warren's letters is that she took her letter writing very seriously and in her *History* notes that "[n]othing depicts the characters, the sentiments, and the feelings of men, more strongly than their private letters at the time."¹¹⁴ Whether Warren meant for the term "men" to apply to women as well is not clear, but the statement certainly applies to her.

During her life, Warren corresponded with many people. As Jeffery Richards writes, there were three major categories: immediate and extended family; men in the professional class (ministers, politicians, intellectuals, and military officers); and women of her same social status who were quite often the wives and/or daughters of the men she corresponded with,¹¹⁵ and in all probability the content of these letters was shared with many other people. The correspondence between Warren and Patriot leaders such as Samuel and John Adams, Thomas Jefferson Elbridge Gerry, Henry Knox, and others has been preserved and is now available for the historian to study.

¹¹³ Matthews, 66.

¹¹⁴ Warren, *History*, 2:234.

¹¹⁵ Richards, 29.

Warren had one thing that many other women did not have – a role model, Catharine Ann Macaulay, the British historian and radical Whig, who published *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Revolution*. Warren and Macaulay corresponded for more than eighteen years. In their correspondence, they discussed “ideas, military engagements during the war, the character of George Washington and the fate of the young nation.”¹¹⁶ The importance of the Macaulay/Warren friendship is shown in a passage from one of Warren’s letters where she said, “You see madam I disregard the opinion that women make but indifferent politicians. It may be true in general, but the present age has given us an example at least to the contrary.”¹¹⁷ This attitude is reflected in a letter from Abigail Adams to Warren in 1773: “You, madam, are so sincere a lover of your country, and so hearty a mourner in all her misfortunes, that it will greatly aggravate your anxiety to hear how much she is now oppressed and insulted.”¹¹⁸ When Warren began corresponding with Macaulay “she drew the most famously politicized woman in the Atlantic world into her circle of Massachusetts readers and writers.”¹¹⁹ In one exchange of letters between Warren and Macaulay, Mercy asked, “whether the genius of Liberty has entirely forsaken our devoted isle [England], and Macaulay’s response was that the Intolerable Acts were the answer to her question. However, Macaulay also told Mercy not to lose hope because there are still many “who strenuously and zealously defend the injured rights of your countrymen.”¹²⁰ Even though Warren was hopeful that Macaulay was correct, she answered, saying “American

¹¹⁶ Matthews, 66-67.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), Accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.therivers.hms.com/amwomenwarr.htm>.

¹¹⁹ Davies, 81.

¹²⁰ Walter R. Borneman, *American Spring: Lexington, Concord, and the Road to Revolution*, (New York: Little, Brown, & Company, 2014), 66.

stands armed with resolution and virtue, but she still recoils at the idea of drawing the sword against the nation from whence she derived her origin....”¹²¹

Warren covered many topics, everything from politics in letters to her husband and John Adams and, in the case of Abigail Adams, comments about child rearing and compliments on the management of the Adams farm. The correspondence between Abigail and Mercy also helped Abigail develop her political philosophy and to become more confident in expressing them. This development was important because “[a]s a practical matter, John depended on Abigail’s political observations.”¹²² Adams, in a letter to Abigail “[i]f I could write as well as you, my sorrows would be as eloquent as yours, but upon my Word, I cannot.”¹²³ It is quite possible that Abigail’s correspondence with Mercy is what helped her to improve her writing skills to a level which would generate such a compliment as the one she received from her husband.

At one point, both Abigail and Mercy adopted Roman pen-names – Abigail was “Portia” and Mercy was “Marcia” – quite possibly because like Roman women who had made contributions to the Roman republic, these two American women “discovered stirring examples of learning, courage, and patriotism – and a precedent for their own empowerment.”¹²⁴ In one letter to Abigail, Mercy expressed her concerns over what was beginning to look like an open rebellion against Great Britain. In this letter Mercy writes, “No one has at stake a larger share of Domestic Felicity than myself, I see no Less than five sons who must Buckle on the Harness And perhaps fall a sacrifice to the Manes of Liberty.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Lynne Withey, *Dearest Friend: A Life of Abigail Adams*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 73.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Philip Hicks, “Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770 – 1800,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), 265.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 67.

Mercy and Abigail corresponded for over forty years. Some years there were very few letters, other years averaging more than two per month, and finally following the publication of Warren's *History*, the correspondence stopped, not to be resumed until 1812.

Warren, while visiting her husband in Cambridge met, and visited with George and Martha Washington. Writing to Abigail about her meeting with Martha Washington and her grand-daughter, Nelly Calvert Custis, Warren described Nelly by saying that "a kind of Languor about her prevents her being so sociable as some ladies." Warren, who toured the "Deserted Lines of the Enemy and the Ruins of Charleston" wrote that Martha Washington's "affability, Candor and Gentleness Qualify her to soften the hours of private Life or to sweeten the Cares of the Hero and smooth the Rugged scenes of War."¹²⁶ Mercy also said that "I took a ride to Cambridge and waited on Mrs. Washington at 11 o'clock, where I was receiv[e]d with that politeness and respect shown in a first interview among the well bred and with the ease and cordiality of friendship of a much earlier date."¹²⁷ In a letter to her husband, James, written later, she recalled Washington, saying how "in his character was blended a certain dignity with the appearance of good humor."¹²⁸ In a letter to Mrs. [John] Hancock in April, 1776, Warren described Martha Washington by saying that "Mrs. Washington is amiable in her deportment and sweet in her manner and I am very glad [the General] has had her companionship so well qualified to soften the cares and toils of war."¹²⁹

Warren also received letters from Martha Washington. One letter from Martha, who was not overly political, said "I hope and trust that all the states will make a vigorous push this spring

¹²⁶ Flora Fraser, *The Washingtons: George and Martha, "Join'd by Friendship, Crown'd by Love,"* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 139.

¹²⁷ Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 219.

¹²⁸ Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington, A Biography: Volume Three, Planter and Patriot*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 505.

¹²⁹ Freeman, *George Washington, A Biography: Volume Four, Leader of the Revolution*, 77.

. . . and thereby putting a stop to British cruelties.”¹³⁰ Another letter, written after Washington had returned home following the war, Martha told Mercy that she did not believe “that any circumstance could possibly happen to call the general into public life again” and that she “anticipated that from that moment they should have grown old together in solitude and tranquility. This, my dear madam, was the first and fondest wish of my heart.”¹³¹ For George and Martha, growing old together in “solitude and tranquility” was not to be. Writing from New York, Martha (who was not terribly excited about her role as first lady) wrote to Mercy, telling her that she could not blame her husband “for having acted according to his ideas of duty in obeying the voice of his country.”¹³² Martha also wrote to Warren about her husband’s illnesses in 1789 and 1790, saying “[b]ut for the ties of affection which attract me so strongly to my near connection and worthy friends, I should feel myself indeed much weaned from all enjoyments of this transitory life.”¹³³

Warren’s letters to her husband James would tell of her fears, but would “reassure [him] that what he was doing was extremely important for the future of the country.”¹³⁴ Warren’s stilted, or more formal style of writing in her letters (as well as in her other forms) can, quite possibly, be attributed to her tutoring by Reverend Jonathan Russell whose sermons, which Mercy read, were written in the same style. An example can be found in a letter to Sarah Walter Hesilrige, her brother Joseph’s sister-in-law, who was living in England. Mercy writes, “Happy indeed should we all feel, had we no self upbraidings, but what arise from such small causes, as a

¹³⁰ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 330.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 464.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 571.

¹³³ Harlow Giles Unger, *The Unexpected George Washington: His Private Life*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 201.

¹³⁴ Crovitz, 58.

deficiency in the etiquette of an epistolary intercourse.” In this letter, Warren also refers to Phyllis Wheatley and her brother Jemmy’s psychological issues.¹³⁵

Many of Warren’s letters to family members – her father, brothers, husband, each of her five sons, nieces, nephews, and other family members survive. One surviving letter, written to her brother James, shows her strong attachment to him. In a letter written following James’ beating at the hands of Loyalists, Warren writes, “[y]ou know not what I have suffered for you within the last twenty four hours – I saw you fallen – slain by the hands of merciless men – I saw your wife a widow, your children orphans.”¹³⁶ In a letter to her niece, Rebecca Otis, Warren says to “[p]ay attention to the ‘faithful monitress in every bosom’ and control passions; cultivate ‘Sweetness of temper, and gentleness and delicacy of manners...’”¹³⁷ However, women must never give up the belief that they can be “equal in all mental accomplishment...and reach the most masculine heights,”¹³⁸ affirming her belief that education is valuable to women as well as to men.

Lester Cohen wrote that Warren “specifically identified the role of mother with the preservation of republican principles,”¹³⁹ and in letters to her sons James Jr. and Charles, who were attending Harvard, there were warnings about succumbing to temptation and avoiding studies, as well as passing on news about the family. The bulk of Warren’s letters to her children are those written to Winslow. One of those letters was an attempt to convince Winslow, who was a handsome young man who was very impressionable. Warren attacked “the pernicious effects of *Letters Written by the Late Right Honorable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield to His*

¹³⁵ Richards, 21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁹ Lester H. Cohen, “Mercy Otis Warren: The Politics of Language and the Aesthetics of Self.” *American Quarterly*, 1983, 35 (5): 495.

Son, Philip Stanhope.”¹⁴⁰ In *Letters*, Chesterfield argues for an amoral conduct of individual self-interest, and Warren’s letter tries to convince Winslow not fall prey to Chesterfield’s writing. This letter was published in Boston’s *Independent Chronicle* on January 18, 1781, as “A Letter from an American Lady to her Son.” It was also republished two more times – in *Boston Magazine* in 1784 and again in *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1790. The fact that the letter was published three times is indicative of the interest, and probable effect, of Warren’s writing on the general public.¹⁴¹

Other surviving letters, both to and from Warren, concern the issues of the time. In a letter Warren received from Hannah Winthrop (wife of John Winthrop, a Harvard professor and member of the Governor’s Council), the topic is the patriot cause. In this letter Winthrop writes, “That grand Superintendent of the Universe is the only firm Foundation for us to Build our hopes upon, our Cause is righteous. Let us Possess our Souls in Patience.... The preparations on Boston neck, the Assembled multitude lately at Cambridge, with many other Circumstances give me a painful Idea of the Horrors of Civil war.”¹⁴² In another letter to Warren, Winthrop refers to Governor Hutchinson as “the First Personage,” also saying that the threepenny tax on tea was “the unconstitutional revenue,” and those to whom the tea is consigned are “pusillanimous sons of avarice and ambitions.”¹⁴³

In a letter to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, a Loyalist friend, Warren states that “every mind of the least sensibility must be greatly affected with the present distress, and even a female pen

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴¹ Warren, *History*, xxxiv.

¹⁴² Hannah Winthrop, “Letter to Mercy Otis Warren, September 27, 1774”, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=514&img_step=1&mode=transcript#page1.

¹⁴³ Nick Bunker, *An Empire on the Edge: How Britain Came to Fight America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 215.

might be excused for touching on the important subject.”¹⁴⁴ In another letter to Lincoln, Warren is offended that a “gentleman acquaintance” told Lincoln not to discuss politics with her. Warren had no regrets about discussing an issue that is “so much out of the road of female attention.”¹⁴⁵

In the 1790s, Warren began corresponding with Sarah Gray Cary, who was twenty-five years younger than Warren. The letters between these two ladies show a different side of Mercy – a more open and affectionate style. Cary admired Warren and showed concern for the older woman. The two discussed many different aspects of their lives – everything from family issues to political philosophies and thoughts on female education. This friendship continued until Warren’s death in 1814.

Finally, there was a group of letters between Warren and John Adams that were basically an ongoing disagreement regarding Warren’s treatment of Adams in her *History*. In a letter from Adams on August 3, 1807, he writes, “I cannot but admire the wonderful fluency and the dear delight with which those Soft Expressions “Not beloved” “thwarted,” “ridiculed,” “viewed with Jealousy” “hated” “Frigidity and Warmth” are rolled along by Mrs Warren and applied to her old Friend who has been all his lifetime more tender of her reputation and that of her Husband than his own. What have I done to deserve this?”¹⁴⁶ At first Mercy made an attempt to smooth over the disagreement by writing about the “difficulty and delicacy of drawing living characters.” But, she said that she wrote “under a strong sense of the moral obligation of truth, adhering strictly to its dictates according to the best of my information, which I endeavored to draw from the purest

¹⁴⁴ Mercy Otis Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, September 3, 1774, Richards, *Selected Letters*, 34.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “John Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 3 August, 1807”, *National Archives: Founders On-Line*, Accessed January 14, 2015, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5201>.

source.”¹⁴⁷ Adams wrote many letters to Warren that criticized her characterization of him in her book; in many cases writing a second letter before Mercy had an opportunity to answer the first.

Warren’s poems were both the short verses written by a lady marking a death, birth, wedding, eulogies to her son, General Joseph Warren, or some other event, and poems such as “A Political Reverie” which was published in January 1774, “previous to the breaking out of the Civil War, while America was oscillating between a Resistance by Arms and her Ancient Love and Loyalty to Britain.”¹⁴⁸ Other poems written in the 1750s spoke of her loneliness during times when she was separated from her husband because of his political duties.

Many of Warren’s early poems were inspired by her Puritan upbringing. The deaths of three of her sisters and the marriage of a friend were what prompted poems on life. In 1770 Warren wrote “A Thought on the Inestimable Blessing of Reason” in which “she conveys an unbending faith in God, her belief in the Enlightenment concept of reason, and gratitude for her own mental faculties.”¹⁴⁹

One particular poem, “The Squabble of the Sea Nymphs, or the Sacrifice of the Tuscararoroes,” was inspired by the Boston Tea Party. Warren wrote this poem in response to a request from John Adams who, in a letter to Mercy’s husband, asked that “a poetical Genius . . . describe a late Frolic among the Sea Nymphs and Goddesses,” and then added, “I wish to See a late glorious event, celebrated, by a certain poetical Pen, which has no equal that I know of in this country.”¹⁵⁰ In the introduction to the poem, Warren acknowledged Adams’ involvement by

¹⁴⁷ Zagarri, 156.

¹⁴⁸ Warren, “Poems,” 188.

¹⁴⁹ Jeffrey H. Hacker, *History Through Literature: Colonial Roots, Settlement to 1783*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 170.

¹⁵⁰ Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, 170.

saying that it was “written at the request of a particular friend, now in one of the highest grades of American rank.”¹⁵¹

It was with the publication of *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* in 1790 that Warren “made known to the public at large that she was a writer, that she was a poet and dramatist.”¹⁵² In *Poems*, there are pieces that show Warren’s Christian beliefs, philosophical writings, and “a poem on the decaying morals in post-Revolutionary War America.”¹⁵³ John Winthrop had asked Mercy to write a poem about the indulgence, of both men and women, in the luxuries of tea and other goods imported from England. In 1774 she accommodated him with “To the Honorable J. Winthrop, Esq.” In it, she does as Winthrop requested, and then ends by celebrating those who “spurn the yoke.”¹⁵⁴

Emily Stipes Watts writes that Warren’s poems and drama show an “analytic and educated mind attempting to solve the moral and social crises of her day,” and then continues by saying that “as such, her poetry is no less poetically interesting than the later, discursive verse of T.S. Eliot, or W. H. Auden’s political verse.”¹⁵⁵ Edmund Hayes takes this one step further by saying that “Warren’s appeal is almost always to reason and logic. One does not read her for lyric beauty or for the well-turned image.”¹⁵⁶

Warren’s dramatic sketches were written for the masses, meant to inflame the passions needed to promote the patriot movement. Her poems, on the other hand, were written for those

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Edmund M. Hayes and Mercy Otis Warren, “The Private Poems of Mercy Otis Warren,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vo. 52, No 2 (Jun., 1981), 199.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 200.

¹⁵⁴ Mercy Otis Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous by Mrs. M. Warren*, (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, MDCCXC), 208.

¹⁵⁵ Emily Stipes Watts, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 42.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 200.

who she “expected...to be as intellectually critical as she was.” Emily Watts also wrote that “Warren particularized freedom and, at the same time, gave it a scope of intellectual foundation simply not evident in the poetry of the men in her day.”¹⁵⁷ Warren also believed that she was God’s servant and that “He would inspire her to discover and articulate his truths.”¹⁵⁸ Mimicking the style of Pope and Dryden, Warren was “influenced by the ornate literary fashion of the day, and her poetry reflected “her devout Puritanism, as well as her pursuit of democracy.”¹⁵⁹

During her life, Warren was the recipient of recognition for her poetry. In 1790, the year she published *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, “she was a subject for half of the 12 issues of *Massachusetts Magazine*.”¹⁶⁰ The greatest praise that Warren received was from another poet, Sarah Wentworth Morton. Wentworth tells Mercy “These are thy boast, and these shall grace thy name / Beyond the glories of a deathless fame.”¹⁶¹ Thomas Jefferson wrote Warren a letter thanking her for sending him a copy of *Poems*, saying that it was “proof Americans could excel at poetry”, and suggested that “the superiority of her verse refuted the hypothesis that ‘supposed a degeneracy even of the human race on this side of the Atlantic.’”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Watts, 44.

¹⁵⁸ Hayes, 200-201.

¹⁵⁹ Anticaglia, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Richards, 81.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Kevin J. Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 395-396.

Chapter 6

Historical Writing

The decline of health, temporary deprivation of sight, the death of the most amiable of children, ‘the shaft flew thrice, and thrice my peace was slain.’¹⁶³

Following the conclusion of the American War for Independence, Warren took a brief hiatus from writing, other than her on-going correspondence with Abigail Adams, Catharine Macauley, her family, and a few female acquaintances. This respite ended when Warren began learning about the new Constitution that was being written in Philadelphia.

During the debate over the U.S. Constitution in 1788, Warren issued a pamphlet titled “Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions,” written under the pseudonym, "A Columbian Patriot." This pamphlet, which was originally thought to have been authored by Elbridge Gerry, opposed ratification of the document and advocated the

¹⁶³ Warren, *History*, xlii.

inclusion of a Bill of Rights. There were less than five hundred copies of “Observations” published in Boston, but more than sixteen-hundred copies were printed in New York “to deliver to their local county committees in preparation for the New York debate on the adoption of the constitution.”¹⁶⁴ If Warren’s dramatic sketches were written to help fan the flames of revolution, her “Observations,” and later her *History*, were meant to help keep those flames burning.

In a letter to Catharine Macaulay, Mercy expresses displeasure with the secrecy of the meetings in Philadelphia, saying that the “busy geniuses now plodding over untrodden ground, and who are more engaged in the fabrication of a strong government than attentive to the ease, freedom, and equal rights of man.”¹⁶⁵ Warren lists eighteen issues she has with the Constitution as it is being presented. These issues included “concerns” over freedom of the press; no defined limits on judiciary powers, the 6-year term limit for Senators, the lack of a Bill of Rights, and that congress had control over its own salary level. Although John Adams was not present in Philadelphia for the writing of the Constitution, the basic structure of the document reflected his thinking, his writing, and the constitution he had drafted for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, so it is not surprising that Warren had issues with the new document. Long before this, in 1780, Mercy had written to Adams (who was in the Netherlands trying to obtain loans and secure a treaty) that he should return as soon as possible because “We need the steady influence of all the old republicans to keep the principles of the revolution in view.”¹⁶⁶

Warren then reminds the reader that the Governor of Massachusetts (and here she is referring to Thomas Hutchinson) told the people of Massachusetts “in all the soft language of

¹⁶⁴ King Dykeman, “Introduction to the Work of Mercy Otis Warren, 1728 – 1814,” Accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.samizdat.com/warren/generalintroduction.htm>.

¹⁶⁵ Janis L. McDonald, “The Need for Contextual ReVision: Mercy Otis Warren, A Case in Point”, *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, Volume 5, Issue 1, 1992, 208.

¹⁶⁶ Warren, *History*, xx.

insinuation, that no form of government, of human construction can be perfect, that we had nothing to fear, that we had no reason to complain.... Yet we soon saw armies of mercenaries encamped on our plains, our commerce ruined, our harbours blockaded, and our cities burnt.”¹⁶⁷

Warren saw the Constitution as failing to meet “the standard of pure republican principles”, and that “the document was not the product of the Revolutionary generation, but of younger men who saw opportunities for advancement and power.”¹⁶⁸ And even though Warren believed that the new government was, in all probability “a threat to liberty,” it did not stop her from writing that “[p]erhaps genius has never devised a system more congenial to their wishes, or better adapted to the condition of man, than the American Constitution.”¹⁶⁹ This is not terribly surprising, because Warren was a diehard nationalist, and by 1805, the year she published her *History*, the Constitution “had become the symbol as well as the reality of union.”¹⁷⁰ In her *History*, however, Warren reminds the reader that there were some who believed that “the secret transactions of the convention at Philadelphia” did not consider “the greatest happiness of the greatest number . . . the principle object of their contemplations when they ordered their doors to be locked [and] their members inhibited from all communications abroad.”¹⁷¹

In 1805, Warren published one of the earliest histories of the American war for independence, the three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*. This was also the first history of the American Revolution authored by a woman.

¹⁶⁷ Mercy Otis Warren, “Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions. By a Columbian Patriot,” Reprinted in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States, Published During Its Discussion by the People, 1787 – 1788*. Accessed October 15, 2015. <http://oll.libertyfund.org>.

¹⁶⁸ Larry M. Lane and Judith J. Lane, “The Columbian Patriot: Mercy Otis Warren and the Constitution”, *Women & Politics*, Volume 10, No. 21 (1990), 22.

¹⁶⁹ Arthur H. Shaffer, *The Politics of History: Writing the History of the American Revolution, 1783 – 1815*, (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1975), 149.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Warren, *History*, 657.

Warren had been taking notes as events occurred throughout the revolutionary period, and for more than twenty-five years she wrote and revised what would be her greatest work. Warren's goal in writing her history was the same goal she had in writing her poems and dramatic sketches – she wanted to influence future generations to remain true to America's republican identity. Warren's *History* was published twenty years following the end of the war, even though it was complete prior to the end of the 18th century. There are a couple of possible reasons why Warren delayed publication. First, the history was very definitely an anti-Federalist tract and would not have been well received during a time that was controlled by the Federalists, and secondly, the death of her son, Winslow, totally devastated her. Winslow had been providing his mother with the encouragement she needed to continue with the project and had even sent her additional material that he had put together.

During the twenty-five years that Warren accumulated information, made notes, and began writing her History, she consulted public records, the letters and memoirs of eye-witnesses, and even asked friends to check the accuracy and validity of what she had written. Eventually, Warren's eyesight became so bad she was no longer able to read and write on her own. At that time her son, James, Jr. copied her letters, under her supervision, into a letterbook, and finished transcribing the final version of her history, readying it for publication. James Winthrop, Jr., son of Mercy's friend Hannah Winthrop acted as a critic and worked to encourage subscribers, and Elbridge Gerry read the final manuscript and worked to obtain subscribers in New York. It was, however, an old family friend, Reverend James Freeman, who convinced Warren to submit her *History* for publication and handled the negotiations with Ebenezer Larkin, the publisher. The final product was just under thirteen hundred pages and included thirty-one chapters in three volumes.

The purpose of Warren's *History* was not to inflame the passions of the colonists, but rather to provide a scholarly examination of the American Revolution. It is, however, quite evident that Warren's personal bias and patriotic fervor had not eased. If anything, her *History* provided a platform whereby she could continue her attack on Thomas Hutchinson and other Loyalists. From the earliest pages of her *History*, Warren leaves no question as to her feelings about Hutchinson. "He was dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty, and ambitious, while the extreme of avarice marked each feature of his character. His abilities were little elevated above the line of mediocrity...."¹⁷²

The first volume of *History* traces the rise of the Revolution from the reactions and protests to the Stamp Act of 1765 until Washington's winter encampment at Valley Forge in 1777. Warren specifically mentions the formation of the Committees of Correspondence and how her husband, James Warren, had broached the formation of a Committee at his home in Plymouth. It is more than probable that Mercy was aware of this because of her involvement in previous meetings at her home.

The second volume continues a description of the battles of the Revolution, characterizes the personalities involved in the campaigns and concludes with the events leading up to the Battle of Yorktown. Warren writes that "[i]t is enough to observe, that by the correspondence of the general officers, afterwards published in England, it clearly appears, that they did not harmonize in opinion: their councils at this time were confused, and their plans indecisive."¹⁷³

The last volume begins with a description of the forces that were involved at this point; the contemplation of an attack on New York; the Battle of Yorktown; and finally the Paris Peace

¹⁷² Warren, *History*, 45-46.

¹⁷³ Warren, *History*, 465.

Treaty. Volume three is also a commentary on the world situation from the successful completion of the Revolution until the close of the century. Warren knew that the road to independence and the building of a nation had been a long and difficult one, and that arousing antagonisms in her *History* “might endanger the nation’s and the society’s fragile cohesiveness.”¹⁷⁴

The preamble to Warren’s *History* has been interpreted by some as a “pseudo-apology for her gender effrontery or a hypocritical ploy to secure the role of historian for herself by implicitly agreeing that it is not appropriate for other women.”¹⁷⁵ In her second paragraph, Warren agrees that no history of war can be written without the description of battles, “and though her female heart ‘trembled’ and her hand ‘shrunk’ at the challenge of the task of describing the battlefield ‘the work was not relinquished.’”¹⁷⁶

Warren describes foreign attitudes toward the revolution and their acceptance of the new American republic. She also comments on the climate of opinion in America after the war and emphasizes the necessity of preserving those ideals which prompted the satisfactory separation from the perceived tyranny of Britain. Warren shows in her writing that she was aware of “the importance of Canada, the Indian question, the evils of paper money, America’s into the family of nations, [and] the first feeble strivings toward international organization.”¹⁷⁷

Warren’s theory of republicanism came from her interpretation of classical political philosophy and the first principle “was that the government was the servant and not the master of the people,” and that the republic had to be small in order to maintain its community solidary and

¹⁷⁴ Shafer, 151.

¹⁷⁵ Nina Baym, “Mercy Otis Warren’s Gendered Melodrama of Revolution,” Accessed October 13, 2015, <http://www.english.illinois.edu/-people-/emeritus/baym/essays/warren.htm>.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Hutcheson, 398.

commonality of interest.”¹⁷⁸ Her vision of the United States was more along the lines of the classic city-state.

Warren did not use political party names. She referred to the Federalists as monarchists, and the Republicans as those who upheld the principles of the patriot movement. Warren saw the American Revolution as an example of the workings of Providence, “reveal[ing] a moral, reasonable people, whose social organization approaches the state of natural equality, throwing off despotic rule...”¹⁷⁹

Warren’s *History* was definitely written from the point of view of a Republican. There was an obvious criticism of George Washington (something that was virtually unheard of at the time). Warren attacked his presidency for “his ‘partiality for monarchy’ and aristocratic elitism.” Warren believed that it was obvious “that dignified ranks, ostentatious titles, splendid governments, and supernumerary expensive offices, to be supported by the labor of the poor, or the taxation of all the conveniences, were not the objects of the patriot.”¹⁸⁰

Many historians believe that Mercy Otis Warren's description of John Adams in her *History* was fair and perceptive, but her old friend was unhappy with the portrayal. Beginning in July 1807, he sent Warren a series of letters in which he called the work fiction and insulted her family. His letters became angrier and crueler. Warren wrote several letters in response, expressing her shock, hurt, and anger at his opinions. She reminded him that the book described him as being an upstanding citizen and complimented his genius and integrity. But she had challenged some of his political opinions. She observed that he had "pride of talents and much

¹⁷⁸ Lane, 20.

¹⁷⁹ William Raymond Smith, *History as Argument: Three Patriot Historians of the American Revolution*, (The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1966), 118.

¹⁸⁰ Zargarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 87.

ambition" and that in his later years he may have "forgotten the principles of the American Revolution" and "discovered a partiality in favor of governments ruled by royalty."¹⁸¹

Warren targeted several of Adam's comments in particular. At the Warren home in Plymouth. Adams had said, "For my part, I want Kings, Lords, and Commons." Adams shrugged this off saying that he had meant "only a balance of power as the Constitution contained." Another comment, made over breakfast at his home, Adams said: "We are like other people, and shall do as other nations, where all well-regulated governments are monarchic."¹⁸²

Adams's attacks on Warren's portrayal of him in her *History* grew more intense with each letter. At one point Warren replied: "Though I am fatigued [tired out] with your repetition of abuse, I am not intimidated,"¹⁸³ and she continued to defend herself. Unfortunately, Adams saw Warren's criticisms as a personal betrayal because he had encouraged her to write such a history. Many of the friends they shared believed that Warren had written as objectively as possible and that Adams's complaints lacked merit.

Warren's *History* was not well received, and the only review known is by an anonymous reviewer who said that she "had not yet yielded to the assertion that all political attentions lay outside the road of female life," and that Warren's "portrayal of the actors in the drama of the Revolution was something 'a gentleman would not, perhaps, have thought prudent.'"¹⁸⁴ This anonymous reviewer was, in a way, very much on target. Warren's description of General

¹⁸¹ "Mercy Otis Warren," Barbara Bigelow, Stacy A. McConnell, and Linda Schmittroth, eds., *American Revolution Reference Library. Vol. 2: Biographies* Detroit: UXL, 2000. 468-477. *U.S. History in Context*. Web. 4 Apr. 2016.

¹⁸² William B. Warner, "Communicating Liberty: The Newspapers of the British Empire as a Matrix for the American Revolution," *English Literary History*, 72.2 (2005), 351.

¹⁸³ Bigelow.

¹⁸⁴ Cokie Roberts, *Ladies of Liberty*, (New York: William Morrow, 2008), 137.

Charles Lee was that he was “plain in person even to ugliness, and careless in his manners to a degree of rudeness,” even though he was “a bold genius and [had an] unconquerable spirit.”¹⁸⁵

In time, Adams's anger cooled down somewhat, but their relationship never returned to its former closeness. It was not until 1811, mainly through the efforts of Elbridge Gerry did correspondence between these two old friends begin anew, and they then “joined influences among their Massachusetts constituencies in support of the extremely unpopular War of 1812. In 1813, after re-reading Warren’s *History*, Adams acknowledged that “in spite of their faults – the ‘Little Passions and Prejudices, want of Information, false Information. . . and frequent Partiality’ – did contain, he admitted, ‘many Facts, worth of Preservation.’”¹⁸⁶ Adams’ main complaint was how Warren portrayed him after the revolution – during his years of service in Europe as a representative of the United States – not her portrayal of him as an early leader of the patriot movement. Adams challenged Warren’s history and “object[ed] to her writing a classical narrative of acts of living statesmen since she was not one of them and could not know from her own experience.”¹⁸⁷

Warren could have ended her *History* at the end of the war and avoided the confrontation with Adams, however, that would have left things unsaid that she believed important. In fact, Adams suggested as much saying “after the termination of the Revolutionary War, your subject was completed.”¹⁸⁸ As Jean Fritz writes, “she wanted to set the record straight.” That included writing about her family’s “position in regard to Shay’s Rebellion, the Constitution, and more recently the French Revolution.”¹⁸⁹ It would have been impossible for Warren to “publish a

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Fritz, *Cast for a Revolution, 1728 – 1814*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1972) 316.

¹⁸⁷ Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, 177.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

history that ended in 1783 when ‘the contrast’ between the virtuous generation of the Revolution and the ‘degenerate, servile race of beings’ which was succeeding it was so obvious to her.”¹⁹⁰

Warren sent Jefferson a prospectus of “her work of bold ambition,” and Jefferson, the head of the Republican Party “applauded the publication . . . and helped with her subscription efforts.” Jefferson, in a letter to his secretary of the navy wrote, “[i]f you have not subscribed for Mrs. Warren’s book, I must tax you for a subscription.”¹⁹¹ When Warren’s *History* was published she sent copies to Jefferson and after they were received Jefferson replied to Warren with praise “of a work which taking truth both of fact and principle for it’s general guide will furnish in addition original matter of value not before given to the public.”¹⁹²

Today Warren’s *History* is studied, not “because it is the most complete account of the American Revolution.”¹⁹³ Instead the fascination with Warren’s work is because we can study the period in the first-person. “We do not simply read *through* Warren’s *History* to the historical world to which it points. We read Warren *in* her *History*, constantly aware of the narrative voice that presents the world beyond the words.”¹⁹⁴ The concepts of patriotism that Warren espoused in her writings are still, today, the core of our American idealism.

¹⁹⁰ Mercy Otis Warren, *History*, Vol. 1, xxv.

¹⁹¹ Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, 172-173.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Chapter 7

The Later Years

I have used my pen with the liberty of one, who neither hopes nor fears, nor has any interest in the success or failure of any party, and who speaks to posterity – perhaps very far remote.¹⁹⁵

Warren realized that the almost ten years of her efforts and those of her family in trying to persuade their fellow countrymen to come together in opposition to Great Britain were much more gratifying than those that followed the Declaration of Independence. The ability of the Whigs to develop institutions of self-government were demoralizing and upsetting. Mercy was initially unable to comprehend the fact that there was a degree of corruption growing within the nascent republic.

Following the end of the Revolutionary War, Mercy and James pretty much retired to their home in Plymouth. James served as Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1787 but was defeated in his quest for the office of Lieutenant Governor. Both of the Warrens fell out with many of their friends: James, for his support of Daniel Shays (there were some people who believed that the Warrens had a hand in Shay's Rebellion, but there has been no concrete evidence discovered to support this thesis) and his rebellion in Western Massachusetts; Mercy for her comments regarding John Adams in her *History*.

During this period John Adams turned down both Henry and James Warren for government positions, something Mercy never forgot. However, Thomas Jefferson, cognizant of the Warren's republican loyalty appointed Henry customs collector for Plymouth and Jemmy as

¹⁹⁵ Warren, *History*, xlii.

the Plymouth postmaster in 1803, and in 1804 appointed James, Sr. as a presidential elector from Massachusetts.¹⁹⁶

In the decade following the American Revolution, Warren faced the mental breakdown of her son George and her health problems, including exhaustion, depression, and severe headaches. She took comfort in the beauty of her family's large, tree-shaded house in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where she lived for the rest of her life.

Warren's life was filled with great tragedy, but she tried to accept this "as stoically as the heroines of her verse drama accept theirs."¹⁹⁷ Three of Mercy and James Warren's sons died during the couple's lifetime. Winslow was killed by Indians at the Forks of the Ohio, Charles died in Spain, and George died in Maine. Both Charles and George died of illnesses. Warren's oldest son, James was both a teacher and a postmaster. He also helped his mother write her History because of her failing eyesight. Henry became a farmer and had eight children which allowed Mercy to enjoy her later years as a grandmother. Mercy and her sons remained close, writing quite frequently when they were not together. In 1783, Mercy's brother, Jemmy, died after being struck by lightning. In 1808, after a fifty-four-year marriage, James Warren died. Mercy had lived through two wars, and now another had broken out which put Plymouth into a dangerous position, but even so, she did not want anyone to think she was "alarmed by womanish fears or the weaknesses of old age."¹⁹⁸

In her old age, Warren began to speak out about the restrictions that were imposed on women, focusing on securing educational reform for young girls. She remembered that when she and Jemmy were being tutored she was not allowed to study Greek and Latin. She argued that

¹⁹⁶ Robert C. Baron and Conrad Edick Wright, 284.

¹⁹⁷ Hayes, 202.

¹⁹⁸ Hutchinson, 401.

young women should be allowed to obtain an education and that artificial restraints were harmful. This topic, as well as others, were discussed by Warren in her correspondence with Sarah Gray Cary. As she aged, Warren “became something of a guide to women of a new generation.” Her letters, many of which had been “passed around and copied, often among young women or from older to younger.”¹⁹⁹

Interestingly, one of Warren’s last battles was “a fight for her own identity.”²⁰⁰ In August 1814, she was told that the Boston Athenaeum was attributing *The Group* to another writer. Mercy contacted John Adams and asked if he would contact the library and verify that she was the author. Adams, even though he was going through the grief of losing his daughter, went to the Athenaeum, located the pamphlet and “[o]n one leaf he scribbled that The Group was indeed written by Ms. Mercy Warren.” On the back of the same leaf he added “Whose energies and abilities were exerted by the use of her pen on all occasions and in various shapes in promoting the principles that resulted in the Independence of America.”²⁰¹

Throughout her fifties and sixties, Warren continued to work on her *History*. The notes she had taken during the Revolution, along with correspondence she received from various people during the period were now put together into what she understood was the goal of a historian. For Warren, history was, as Lord Bolingbroke had written, “philosophy teaching by examples, inculcate[ing] images of virtue and vice.”²⁰² Warren was seventy-seven-years-old when her greatest achievement was finally published.

¹⁹⁹ Richards, 21.

²⁰⁰ Anticaglia, 36.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Warren, *History*, xxi.

As she grew older, Warren was afraid that, along with her eyesight, she might lose her mental faculties, refusing to succumb to what she referred to as “womanish fears or the weakness of old age.”²⁰³ Warren surrounded herself with young people, “writing often to young women advising a productive life and to young men seeking political counsel.” When she was eighty-four, she was “vocal in her support of the government in the War of 1812,”²⁰⁴ even though she was in the minority in New England. Warren was, however, convinced that “the genius of America was bold, resolute and enterprising” and “they [were] determined to defend to the last breath the invaluable possession.”²⁰⁵

Mercy Otis Warren fell ill and died on October 19, 1814, at age eighty-six. On her final day Mercy wrote that “we are hourly expecting the depredation of the British.”²⁰⁶ Her son Henry, in a letter to Mary Otis, said “the last fail reed was broken.... My dear and respected Mother left us this morning and took her flight for heaven.”²⁰⁷ On the day of Warren’s funeral, a regiment of British soldiers who had been sent to Boston in June, unknowingly formed “an honor guard for the patriot’s coffin going past.”²⁰⁸

Mercy Otis Warren was a woman who had learned to live within the established roles granted to women of the eighteenth century, yet she indirectly challenged those roles through her writings. She had found a way to combine her writing talent and political beliefs, while being a wife, mother, and grandmother, to become the first female historian of America.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Crovitz, 70-71.

²⁰⁵ Warren, *History*, 87.

²⁰⁶ King Dykeman, “Introduction to the Work of Mercy Otis Warren, 1728 – 1814, Accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.samizdat.com/warren/generalintroduction.html>.

²⁰⁷ Henry Warren to Mrs. Mary Otis, October 19, 1814, *Mercy Otis Warren Papers, 1709 – 1841*, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁰⁸ Anthony, 247.

The literature is fairly quiet about Warren's years following the publication of her History. It seems that following the death of her husband in 1808, Warren spent much of her time alone. Granted, she did have two sons and some grandchildren, but it was not the same as the time she spent with her "dearest friend," James. Perhaps there is much to be discovered through a thorough reading of her letters, and possibly the discovery of more information on Warren through the letters of others. Considering her importance during the revolutionary period, reliable information on Warren's early, as well as her later life "contains significant gaps or errors of fact."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Richards, ix.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Seldom had one woman, in any age, acquired such an ascendancy over the strongest by the mere force of a powerful intellect, and her influence continued to the close of her life.²¹⁰

Warren received many accolades for her writing during her life, but she constantly struggled “throughout her long career as a pamphleteer and historian with the discomfort caused by the ambiguity inherent in her status as an intellectual woman.”²¹¹ Even though her husband had supported her endeavors, his comment that she had “Masculine genius,” as well as a “Weakness which is the Consequence of the Exquisite delicacy and softness of her Sex,”²¹² probably added to her discomfort. Her old friend John Adams saw their argument as a male/female issue rather than as a private disagreement. In 1775, Adams had “formally exempted her from the limits placed on others of her sex,” but by 1813 “he had firmly put her back in her place.”²¹³

Warren was strongly committed to her ideals and “she drew from those ideals the validation for public activity by a woman,” leading her “down the path of what we would now call a feminist ideology.”²¹⁴ Warren was certain that “the republican form of government was the only political system that valued women,” and “the idea that women had no stake in politics and

²¹⁰ Anthony, 12.

²¹¹ Norton, 121.

²¹² Ibid. 121.

²¹³ Ibid., 123.

²¹⁴ Matthews, 68.

government was, from her perspective, absurd.”²¹⁵ Warren’s circle of friends “had a sense of their elite distinction, and regarded marriage with men of similar status in terms of its affectionate attachment and intellectual equality,” but they also “considered masculine and feminine roles to be separate in highly normative and conservative terms.”²¹⁶ They believed that domestic and intimate relationships were what “defined their identities,” and they would “describe themselves as wives and mothers, sisters and friends before they represented themselves as women of learning and ‘daughters of liberty’”²¹⁷

Warren’s plays, while attacking the officials of Massachusetts, carried an additional message. In her biography of Warren, Nancy Stuart Rubin writes that [there was] a strong pro-female message that lamented the hardships of war forced upon women married to greedy husbands.”²¹⁸ Warren was aware that the public, in general, frowned on women being involved in politics, so she attempted to place women’s interest in politics and their discussion of it within the principles of freedom of speech. She also believed that women needed to have an awareness of politics in order to better serve her family and home. And even though later in her life she was critical of the fact that young women were denied a formal education, she felt that the primary focus of a woman’s life should be her domestic responsibilities.

Warren’s beliefs, both political and personal were strong, and reflected her interpretation of the revolutionary period, and her *History* illustrates how “a commitment to republican ideology and a concern for its future generated an ethical theory of history,” making *History* “not merely a reflection of her personal concerns and convictions; it is also a work of moral art.”²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Baym.

²¹⁶ Davies, 82.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Stuart, 67-68.

²¹⁹ Cohen, 203.

Warren's interpretation was a "pure Republican interpretation, which also the version embraced by the Republican party and therefore later called the Jeffersonian interpretation." Warren saw the American Revolution "as a liberation movement, a clean break not just from English domination but also from the historic corruptions of European monarchy and aristocracy."²²⁰

Although luminaries such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and countless other leaders of the patriot movement, held Warren in high esteem, today she is just a footnote in the biographies of these men and books about the American Revolution, "while studies of her life are usually confined to college seminars, academic biographies, and the rare book rooms of libraries."²²¹

The treatment of Warren by historians and historiographers "is less a reflection of Warren's own life and work than of the general historiographic attitude towards the American Revolution at any given time."²²² Instead, historians had defined Warren first as a woman, and secondly as a historian who happened to be a woman. This allowed them to downplay her contributions and "obscure her political thought."²²³ Yet *The Group*, arguably one of the most widely read pieces of propaganda against the Loyalist regime in Massachusetts, "Observations on the New Constitution and on Federal and State Conventions", and *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* should generate a serious academic audience among historians for Warren's writings. Warren was a witness to the events of the period, a personal acquaintance of many of the men who shaped the revolution, and as such, was well positioned to record the sentiments of both the patriots and the Loyalists. Warren's writings

²²⁰ Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 13-14.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

²²² Markowitz, 10.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

give us a dramatic insight into the issues that caused conflicting interests to develop in the colonies – allegiance to the Crown, or allegiance to their country.

Today, Warren’s plays have only an academic appeal. However, during the time they were written, they were expressions of an opinion that was shared by many members of colonial society. Warren’s objective was not only to foster patriotism and encourage bitter feelings towards the Loyalists and those political people who Warren believed had turned their backs on their country, but also to promote lessons of morality and virtue. It is reasonable to assume also, that based on the number of people that Mercy corresponded with, the number of published plays, poems, and historical writings, Warren’s writings impacted a large number of people. It is impossible to estimate the number of people who were affected by Mercy’s writings. However, the literature shows that not only were her letters shared by the recipients, but also her dramatic sketches were published outside of Massachusetts, as was her “Observations on the New Constitution.” Warren sent copies of her History to Thomas Jefferson hoping that “his perusal of them may serve as an interlude in some leisure hours, when detached from the momentous avocations which occupy [his] important life.”²²⁴

There is an enormous amount of material available that has not been thoroughly examined by historians, especially Warren’s letters. While feminist writers such as Nina Baym do not believe there is much information available, this is not the case. Warren’s letters, for example, seem to have been “cherry-picked” looking for references to certain people and/or events, but not studied in their entirety. Historians, for the most part have relegated Warren to a secondary position in their tomes, rather than making her the subject. What is definitely missing from the literature is a full-length, academic study of Warren’s life and her writings, a volume

²²⁴ “To Thomas Jefferson from Mercy Otis Warren, 14 April 1806,” Accessed February 10, 2016, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-04-01-02-3569>.

that combines all of the research that has been done by the various disciplines, as well as an in-depth study of Warren's correspondence.

Warren's contributions were summed up by Alice Brown in her biography when she wrote that "the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts."²²⁵ This assessment is backed up by a careful study of Warren's correspondence, her dramatic sketches, poetry, and historical writings.

Mercy Otis Warren is buried in Burial Hill, Plymouth, Massachusetts. Her headstone is quite plain and reads: Mercy Warren, Born 1728, Died 1814. Wife of James Warren, Daughter of James Otis, Sister of James Otis, Jr. The stone does not mention anything about her forty-plus years of commitment to the revolutionary movement and the formation of the United States and her role as a patriot and a scholar. But her husband's stone lists him as a patriot and scholar – Mercy Otis Warren is the forgotten patriot.

In 2001, a statue of Mercy Otis Warren was unveiled in front of the Barnstable County Court House just down the road from where Mercy was born and raised, and in 2002 Mercy Otis Warren finally received recognition for her contributions to the Patriot movement when she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. When Warren died in 1814 she was remembered in Boston and Plymouth as "one of Plymouth's great contributors to the ideological war for American independence."²²⁶

In 1808, the *Independent Chronicle* of Boston published a poem written by Warren for her late husband:

²²⁵ Brown, 312.

²²⁶ Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris, eds., *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xvii.

A judgment sound and understanding clear
Replace with knowledge and a heart sincere
Ever with generous heart aids the distress'd
No more I'll say time shall tell the rest.²²⁷

Though Warren wrote this for her husband, the same could easily be said about her.

Mercy Otis Warren belongs in an elevated position in the history of the United States, and a very strong argument can be made that not only was she one of the most remarkable women of her period, but also that her writings influenced many people during the Revolutionary period and beyond --- even to today.

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²²⁷ Zagari, 160.

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