

Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice*:
A Vindication of Social Equality and
Female Liberation

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Degree in English Studies: Language and Literature

Faculty of Philology

2019

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to expose the role of the writer Mary Hays in the feminist literary movement through the analysis of her novel *The Victim of Prejudice* with the support of the theoretical framework of feminist literary theory. Besides, it is a statement of the innovations she introduced in this novel in order to endorse the women's movement and strengthen her appeal for women's rights in the late eighteenth century.

Therefore, this essay consists of three parts in which the different aspects related to Mary Hays and her novel are explored. The first section is focused on the author, her life and publications. Thus, it is an introduction to Mary Hays, to the political and literary circles she was related to, and also to the people she met throughout her life, who influenced her works. Besides, it is an analysis of her contribution to female biographies. She reinvented the way in which women were portrayed by compiling female lives in six volumes. The innovations and the evolution of her writings as well as her role as a female activist are studied here, too. In the second section, the theoretical framework is displayed in order to be taken as a point of reference for the subsequent analysis of the novel. Therefore, feminist literary theory is presented, focusing on its origin and evolution, in the eighteenth century, which set the basis that contemporary feminist novelist followed, for instance, the novel of seduction and the role of the fallen woman in such novels (namely, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*), which Hays opposed in some aspects. The third section focuses on the analysis of the novel *The Victim of Prejudice* and a close reading of some extracts that prove Hays's point of view and her appeal for female education and independence. In this close reading it is also taken into account the theoretical framework of feminist thought and other works by other authors that resemble or oppose Hays's point of view. Therefore, both points in common as well as the innovations that Hays introduced in her composition are highlighted. For example, the alternative ending that Hays writes for her protagonist opposes the usual

conclusion of the novels of seduction, which usually close with the protagonist's death, such as in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*.

The conclusions point out the importance of Hays in the appeal for female rights, especially in education and freedom, taking as an example the novel analysed. This study, together with her social criticism, supports the idea that she should be a revered author together with Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin or other important figures of the feminist movement.

Introduction

The modernist feminist movement started in the late eighteenth century when women began to ask for equal rights in order to have the same power and freedom as men, due to the ideals fostered in France after the French Revolution (1789). In the literary field, many authors, such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), William Godwin (1756-1836) or Eliza Fenwick (1767-1840), manifested their sympathy for those revolutionary ideas that would improve English politics and society. However, many other authors and publications went unnoticed or were silenced through history despite the fact that their contributions were relevant in the attainment of social and political changes. This is the case of the writer Mary Hays (1759-1843). It is for this reason that it is exposed in this paper who this author was and her importance in the feminist literary movement through the analysis of her second novel *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) with the support of the theoretical framework of feminist literary theory. Besides, this essay is a catalogue of the innovations she introduced in this novel in order to endorse the feminist movement and strengthen her appeal for women rights in the late eighteenth century in a different manner that oppose other authors of the same period.

Therefore, in the first section, the life of Mary Hays and her role as an author and female activist is explored in order to present the writer and the social and literary circles to which she was related. In the second section, the feminist literary theory is explored, focusing in the eighteenth century and exemplifying the principles with references to some publications and writers of the period. Then, the third section of this essay is a close reading of the novel *The Victim of Prejudice* that leads to an analysis in which the novel is compared to other publications from different authors, highlighting their similarities and differences.

1. MARY HAYS: Author and Female Activist

Mary Hays was born in a family of rational dissenters, a group that opposed the Established Church of England and suffered discrimination since they could not work in a public service, neither they were allowed to attend to the universities of the Church of England (Cambridge and Oxford) among other impediments (Walker, Introduction 13). However, dissent was supportive of women's education and of equal opportunity, thus Hays received private education and academic guidance by some of her friends, for instance, William Godwin, and some of the leading Nonconformist ministers of her period such as Robert Robinson, Theophilus Lindsey, Hugh Worthington, John Disney and Gilbert Wakefield. After her father's death, when she was 15, she continued her intellectual development and began to be a member of the London radical circle (Brooks 7-8). It was in these radical circles where she met Mary Wollstonecraft, who later would become her mentor and friend —Hays corresponded with Wollstonecraft as can be seen in the book *The Correspondence of Mary Hays (1779-1843), British Novelist* (ed. Marilyn L. Brooks, 2004) where Hays's letters are gathered. Besides, the former wrote the latter's obituary (Hays, Appendix H: Obituary of Mary Wollstonecraft). Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) would become a book of reference for Hays since John Dyer loaned Hays a copy of the book (Brooks 8). It was also in this environment where she learned their revolutionary ideals and got the support she needed to continue as a writer. Despite her limitations as a dissenter and as a woman, she was aware of the ideals and thoughts of her time, not only in literature but also in politics and philosophy —she was familiar with the French philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius's principles and works, as can be observed through her letter "Defence of Helvetius" in the *Monthly Magazine* (1797) (Hays, Appendix C: Articles by Hays in the *Monthly Magazine*) and her allusions to him and his works in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796). For instance, the sentence "His death was the serene

evening of a beautiful day” (Hays, *Memoirs* 52) is very similar to “death was the evening of a beautiful day” written by Helvétius in his *A Treatise on Man, His Intellectual Faculties and His Education* (vol. 2, 256); or “What, in fact, [...] is character? — the production of a lively and constant affection, and, consequently, of a strong passion” (Hays, *Memoirs* 164) which resembles: “In reality great passions only can produce great men” (Helvétius, *De L'esprit* 153). Helvétius provided her with the idea, among others, that female inferiority had to do with environmental determinism rather than to natural inadequacy. This kind of determinism stated that each person is a *tabula rasa* at birth, and so Helvétius argued that “we are what our surroundings have made us, and nothing more” (Craig ed., *Routledge* 345). Therefore, since “the mind is a completely passive recipient of data received through the senses, ... a new environment makes a new person” (Craig ed., *Routledge* 345). Then, this idea would become a philosophical basis to support Hays's arguments.

As Eleanor Ty remarks in her introduction (“Introduction”, *Memoirs* xii), Hays moved towards radicalism inspired by the French Revolution. After this revolution, many English intellectuals such as Richard Price, Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft saw the abolition of the monarchy in France as a new period of equality and freedom. Besides, some writers like William Godwin, Robert Bage (1730–1801) and Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809) were referred to as “Jacobin” novelists since they believed that reason must control and decide human affairs and government instead of the power from money, status or gender. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Jacobin” refers to “A. 2. b. *transf.* A sympathizer with the principles of the Jacobins of the French Revolution; an extreme radical in politics or social organization. About 1800, a nickname for any political reformer”. Thus, anti-monarchists in Britain were given that name, which very often had very negative connotations, in order “to smear them with what was happening in France, though many deplored what they saw there” (Joshua, position 208).

Despite the fact that Hays was not directly involved in these debates, she was an active member of this circle, which also included intellectuals such as the writers Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825), William Blake (1757–1827), Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849), Elizabeth Inchbald (1753–1821), Helen Maria Williams (1759–1827) and the painter Henry Fuseli (1741–1825). In the course of time, her circle of acquaintances grew, and it included people from very different fields, such as the clergyman William Frend (1757–1841), the writer and philosopher Thomas Paine (1737–1809), the actress Mary “Perdita” Robinson (1757–1800), the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), the poet Robert Southey (1774–1843), and the writers Charles (1775–1834) and Mary Lamb (1764–1847) (Ty, “Introduction”, *Memoirs* xiii, and Brooks 9).

At this time, her publication of *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793) connected her to this group of people, who also took an active role in politics. Her book was a collection of essays in epistolary form that dealt with civil rights, the dangers of novel reading, female education, friendship and the doctrines of materialism and necessity. Her main aim was to show her indignation about frequent attitudes towards women which are also prejudicial for society (Ty, “Introduction”, *Memoirs* viii).

In the eighteenth century, according to Begoña Lasa Álvarez, the role of women in the literary world was not fully blended with that of male writers unless they had masculine features in their writings (“The Discourse” 33). Despite this, women suffered harsher criticism “due to their lack of modesty for entering in the literary world” (“The Discourse” 36). Critics only praised her works if they could find what they called masculine features in them and, in consequence, these women writers got positive but gender-biased reviews and they were eulogized with masculine vocabulary. Since Hays discovered this fact, she promoted women’s rights through her books and essays, and together with Mary Wollstonecraft, she stated that education was essential for women and demanded better

instruction for them in her compositions. For instance, in *The Victim of Prejudice*, the protagonist can be freer than other women because of her instruction, which was the same education given to men. In her essays and novels, Hays vindicates women's rights emphasizing how prejudice and the distinction of sex affect women's lives. Sometimes, she even uses quotations or references from Mary Wollstonecraft in order to support her point, as she does in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. For instance, she quotes from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) "hanging drapery on a smooth block" (Hays, *Memoirs* 116), "A mysterious and sacred enchantment is spread over every circumstance, even every inanimate object, connected with the affections" (Hays, *Memoirs* 184-185); or "It is necessary for me to love and admire, or I sink into sadness" (Hays, *Memoirs* 175) from Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796).

However, her relationship with Wollstonecraft tagged her as "Wollstonecraftian" (Brooks 8), which affected her in the way she was treated and regarded both as woman and as a writer, especially when anti-Jacobins were at their highest against women. For instance, Reverend Polwhele criticized her in his text *The Unsex'd Females, A Poem* (1798) together with other women (Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Turner Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley, Ann Jebb, Angelica Kauffman and Emma Crewe) because of their relation with Mary Wollstonecraft and their revolutionary ideas based on the French Revolution. For example, his comments on Yearsley and Hays are the following: "And YEARSELY, who had warbled, Nature's child, / Midst twilight dews, her minstrel ditties wild, / (Tho' soon a wanderer from her meads and milk, / She long'd to rustle, like her sex, in silk) / Now stole the modish grin, the sapient sneer, / And flippant HAYS assum'd a cynic leer. [emphasis in the text]" (Walker, ed. *The Idea*, 249).

In the article "Improvements Suggested in Female Education" (1797), published anonymously in the *Monthly Magazine*, Hays criticizes the habit that many families of her

time adopted about marriage, who used to bring up their daughters in order to get them married, although those young women were victimized and helpless in their matrimones. However, Hays states that educated woman would be able to support themselves if they could work or make business, which would allow them not to depend on men. In order to reach this state, she asks for government reforms and policies that focus on individuals not regarding their condition. *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *The Victim of Prejudice* are very clear examples of all the injustices committed to the middle-class women of her time, as the main characters of these two publications, Emma Courtney and Mary Raymond, clearly demonstrate.

In the early nineteenth century, Mary Hays continued to support herself through literary writing. However, her novels became more didactic and conservative. She was influenced by the works of Hannah More, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Maria Edgeworth (Ty, "Introduction", *Memoirs* xxxvi). However, her dedication to feminism was exposed in her two biographical works devoted exclusively to women. She wrote *Female Biography; or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, Of All Ages and Countries* (1803) and *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrious and Celebrated* (1821). The above are collections and compilations of lives of important women. Although, these biographies were not so critical of society or institutions as her previous publications, Hays brings to light the important role that women played in historical, social and cultural spheres, that sometimes were not acknowledged even by their contemporaries.

In *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All ages and Countries. Alphabetically Arranged*, which comprises six volumes, Mary Hays states that it was written in order to improve women's education since these biographies were a source of knowledge to middle-class women: "My pen has been taken up in the cause, and for the benefit of my own sex. For their improvement, and to their entertainment, my labours have

been devoted” (ed. Walker, 2013, V: 3-4). It was a compilation of the lives of legendary women, written by a woman and mainly for a female target audience (Lorenzo Modia, “Mary Hays’s Biography” 12). In this book, Hays’s aim was to show her convictions about female’s capacities and abilities and demonstrate her contemporaries that women have participated intellectually, culturally and politically through history and they were admired because of their contributions. Thus, these biographies are in accordance with the tradition of the “Female Worthies” (*Biographium Faemineum: The Female Worthies, Or, Memoirs of the Most Illustrious Ladies of All Ages and Nations Containing (exclusive of Foreigners) the Lives of Above Fourscore British Ladies. Collected from History, and the Most Approved Biographers, and Brought Down to the Present Time, 1766*) which was a publication in which “those various female monarchs, warriors, saints, and savants distinguished by her rank, talent, piety, or otherwise noteworthy contributions” (Chernock 115) were gathered together. In this book chastity and piousness were venerated qualities in women. Hays follows this disposition and, thus, she repeats conservative comments about women’s role in society in her depiction of an ideal woman, such as women’s virtue and piousness, the exemplariness of daughters, wives and mothers who were courageous. For instance, this happens in the entry Hays created for the historian and political activist Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791) without the support of previous sources. She gathered the necessary information from oral sources which were first-hand connoisseurs of Macaulay’s life and persona. Despite her progressive entry in Hays’s *Female Biography*, she eventually closes Macaulay’s biography hailing her female value and exemplarity which were settled on domestic virtues. Therefore, some descriptions included “some sort of self-denying accomplishment, which was a prerogative of women’s private roles as mothers, daughters and wives.” (Lasa, “Mary Hays” 86). Thus, despite her radical feminist view in her previous works, Hays eventually moved towards a more conservative perspective and tone in conformity with the current atmosphere in Britain.

Among the different reasons that might have influenced her to take this initiative, there might be the poem “Unsex’d females” by Reverend Polwhele, which was mentioned above.

Despite the fact that the main aim of the *Female Biography* was to work as an enumeration of exemplary women, Hays also provided her feminist view in some of the entries. In this way, she included reprehensible women who were linked together with worthy examples of her sex due to the alphabetical arrangement of the entries. The innovation provided by Hays in her *Female Biography* is that of incorporating women who were regarded as inappropriate for either sexual or political causes. These women suffered marginalization through their lifetimes, but also through history. For instance, Hays provides the biography of María de Estrada, a Spanish woman who took an active role in the conquest of America in the Hernán Cortés expedition (Lorenzo Modia, “Mary Hays’s Biography”), or that of the Catalan ladies Isabella de Rosares and Isabella de Josa, who were famous for developing female learning in the sixteenth century in Italy and in Spain (Lorenzo Modia, “Mary Hays and Learned Women”). Therefore, Hays included biographies of courageous women who fought to acquire an education and to share their talent as writers in a literary world which was predominantly male. Moreover, her activist role also stands up in resisting men’s authority by adding some comments in specific entries and footnotes. In this manner, Hays defended some harassed women like herself —she was related to her character Emma Courtney— by giving the point of view from which those women were criticized.

In this publication, Hays condemned the double-edged nature of women writer’s biography because female writers’ lives became public and, thus, their works were reviewed and read biased by their authors’ biographies (Lasa, “The Discourse” 27). Besides, this assured that these women’s lives were more severely observed and studied than those of men writers. In addition to this gender discrimination, biographies also used to combine fiction and reality as Hays points out in the footnote: “and if they cannot find any real blemishes in her

conduct, they are ingenious to substitute fiction for facts; the more absurd, the more credible and the more eagerly received” (qtd. in Walker, *Memoirs*, vol. 10, 180). Hays resort to this in her biography of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), which is embellished by an excerpt of Behn's *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* (1688), when she describes the landscape of Surinam. Aphra Behn, prolific dramatist, fiction writer and translator of the Restoration, was one of those women who were not considered a good example to emulate because of her licentiousness and lack of virtue. However, Hays points out that “the manners of the times ... and the contagion of the court” (qtd. in Walker, *Memoirs*, vol. 5, 385) are the causes of the censorship upon Behn's works. Behn's publications were well received in her time but the eighteenth-century construction of the Restoration period condemned her to be avoided and ignored. These negative portrayals in Hays are repetitions of those conservative comments about women's role in the public sphere from the sources she used to gather information for such biographies.

Hays's *Female Biography* becomes her ideological declaration on education, although she wrote other essays on this topic, such as *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798). Hays based her position about female education on the learning equality assured by the philosopher Helvétius, and therefore she declared that knowledge was not determined by gender and that distinctions between sexes were not related to sexual causes, but to the effects of situation and education. This statement firmly opposed the educational systems proposed by Rousseau and Hume which proclaimed that girls' education was based on “the association of women's nature with lesser virtues, such as delicacy, smoothness, beauty and dependence” (Lasa Álvarez, “The Discourse” 37-38) and due to this reason girls were incapable of receiving the same education as boys.

Hence, if we take into consideration all her works and the environment of her time, Mary Hays's importance lies in her contribution to history, not only in literature but socially

and politically. She promoted toleration to include women; she fostered female education; she translated Enlightenment ideas for a middle-class female audience; she dealt with theological issues; she reinvented “female biography”; and, she manifested her point of view through experimental fiction (Walker, Introduction 21).

2. Feminist Literary Theory

The French Revolution and its fostered ideals prompted the first wave of feminism and feminist writers who demanded women’s rights and equality with men through a change in legislation. In Britain, the main aim of the first wave feminist movement was to get the vote for women, access to education and the professions, to have rights of property ownership, rights in marriage and divorce as Pilcher and Whelehan expose (53). Thus, those first feminists fought against the affirmation of sex/gender distinction which was used in order to “argue that the actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better than suited to “‘domestic’ roles” (Pilcher & Whelehan 56). In the literary field, one of the first and most remarkable feminist authors was Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and which became “the first substantial and systematic feminist treatise” (Pilcher and Whelehan 52).

According to Mary Eagleton (1-4), literary production had been mainly exclusive for men in England from the French Revolution backwards. Though there were some women writers, —for instance, the writer Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), the poet Isabella Whitney (1548-1573), the rhetorician Mary Astell (1666-1731) or the dramatist Elizabeth Polwheele (c. 1651 – c. 1691) — their work and themselves were silenced and excluded from literary history. Thus, literature was sex and gender biased, but also there were racism and homophobia even among women.

Therefore, women writers found the strength to impose themselves in the literary world under the French Revolution ideal of equality which stated that women should have the same rights and freedom of expression as men. However, women authors found themselves in a tense atmosphere, since they were threatening the convention of what is appropriate for women, but also what was seen as a male environment. If they wrote about women, they would be labelled as “partial”, “narrow”, or “a woman’s book” author (Eagleton, M. 66). Besides, if sexual issues relating to the female body were dealt in their writings, these writers would be arising the conflict between the “traditional female functions” and “the subversive function of the imagination” (Rich, Adrienne. qtd. in Eagleton, M. 66). Hence, according to Mary Eagleton, female writers and their writings were confronted in three different ways: women writers were labelled as unfeminine and presumptuous, society might ignore and marginalize their publications, and authors would be bounded to rigid sex stereotyping (67).

This issue is also discussed in *The Madwoman in the Attic* when Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that male sexuality was “the essence of literary power” (4). Literary creation is compared with procreation, so “the text’s author is a father, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. Moreover, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim” (6). Thus, “not only is a ‘woman that attempts the pen’ an intrusive and ‘presumptuous Creature’, she is absolutely unredeemable: no virtue can outweigh the ‘fault’ of her presumption because she has grotesquely crossed boundaries dictated by Nature” (8) and consequently female writers could not be part of the literary production.

Nevertheless, the female writer found her voice in the eighteenth century and gradually got more presence in literature. Many authors got the support they needed to publish their work from the “Bluestockings”. The Bluestockings was a group of wealthy and

educated women who held meetings in their houses in the style of the seventeenth-century French courtly salons. This group was formed by Elizabeth Montagu (1720-1800), Elizabeth Vesey (1715-1791), Hester Chapone (1727-1801) and Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806). According to Janet Todd, they took “the sentimental notion of woman as refining agents of coarse masculinity and set about purifying the manners of actual society” (124). They promoted intellectual activity among women but without “disturbing the hierarchies of gender and class” (124). Therefore, this group supported and sponsored intellectual women who needed to publish in order to live. They mostly patronized poetry, translation and other types of nonfiction under subscription. In this way, they encouraged women from all social classes but they did not intend a hierarchical change (134).

In the mid-eighteenth century, it was very popular among women writers to publish compilations of letters or, in the case of novelists, they wrote sentimental books which were about love in some ways but also included realistic elements. They are examples of this literary fashion the epistolary publications *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) by Samuel Richardson. However, by the late eighteenth century, “a sympathy grew for victims of society, including fallen women, and as sensibility more clearly came to encompass a measure of sexual desire, the adulteress could no longer easily be a central character and she was kept for the margins.” (Todd 144). And, it is also at this time when the posthumous publication *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman* (1792) by Wollstonecraft saw the light. This book makes the reader sympathize with the adulteress and question the notion of adultery. Thus, this book followed the arising feminist movement that was getting stronger by the latest part of the century.

Despite the fact that feminist thinking was spread among woman writers and the possibilities reached in favour of women intellectuals, women were “barred from much entrepreneurial activity by the marital laws that gave financial power to the husband and they

were urged away from the principles of economic philosophy by an education that stressed their sentimental importance within the family, not their potential position within society” (Todd 202). So, women still were marginalized and bounded to morality, although many of them helped their fathers and husbands in business. Therefore, marriage became an institution of male tyranny upon woman as Mary Astell expresses in her book *Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) and in which woman suffers from personal degradation when they live with brutalising men. So, according to Spender, “brutalising circumstances can produce brutalised human beings” (257) and “while ever women are *reduced* to marriage, there is no hope” (254). For this reason, Wollstonecraft encouraged woman to leave bad marriages, and as a result, she began to be used to “symbolise the worst of womanhood” (260).

Although women rose up in order to get more work opportunities, there was the fear that lack of jobs would lead women to prostitution and “since it includes both street walking and cohabitation with a man without marriage, is most frequently seen as a resort not of the lower but of the lower middle class ... and the genteel education of girls with insufficient means to support their pretensions is constantly blamed for the sexual fall” (Todd 204). Thus, female independence was seen as a necessity, as the result of the failure of the man who had to provide for her, or of the woman to provide a husband. At this point, it is interesting to point out that spinsterhood greatly increased in the last years of the century.

In literary works, almost all writers accepted the marriage in which there would be affection and esteem but “the sentimental concern for the fallen woman tended, as Mary Ann Radcliffe suggests, to give way in women writers to an emphasis on the economic causes of prostitution” (Todd 209). However, there were two types of reactions to the fallen women in literature: she might be pitied if she was thoroughly repentant, although she could not be rehabilitated, or she might be forgiven, as Mary Wollstonecraft remarked, since it is an error to label many girls because they are judged before “they know the difference between virtue

and vice” and “it is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world!” (qtd. in Todd 209). This statement also condemns the double-standard of chastity, when men’s promiscuity is overlooked but women’s is severely punished.

Therefore, in order to prevent woman degradation and marginalization, almost all women writers asked for a rational education for women opposing that specifically feminine education exposed by Rousseau in *Emile, or On Education* (1762) based on gender differences. Rousseau asserted that the intellect was gendered. Therefore, by 1790s it was thought that “if gender differences are natural, then education should stress them and intellectual advancement for women should and could go only so far; if there are no differences in intellect according to gender, then environment and education can accomplish everything” (Todd 211). However, these writers and intellectuals rejected this affirmation with the statement that the mind is not gendered nor the soul. For instance, Mary Astell advocated for female academies in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of their true and greatest Interest. By a Lover of Her Sex* (1694) and in *A Serious Proposal, Part II* (1697) in the late seventeenth century, or Sarah Fielding, who exposed the advantages of female schools in her *The Governess or Little Female Academy* (1749). Besides, Wollstonecraft stated that the mind and the soul are corrupted by ignorance and lead to weak women (Spender 252). Thus, from now on women accomplishments were both “useless and necessary” (Todd 212) since they were indispensable in order to get a husband or get a job as governess, but also useless because women would not have procured them a living.

In the nineteenth century, it was thought that women should be morally educated rather than getting intellectual instruction according to the constraints of Christianity. However, although the female role in society was subordinated to men, the belief in female intellectual inferiority had reduced considerably. Then, the feminist movement —now considered the second wave— shifted towards more social and political rights requests after

Wollstonecraft's death. They aimed the freedom of female body itself (Pilcher and Whelehan 145). Thus, women should not hide their intellect but accept society as it was. Female superior morality should be their predominant feature and so be inspiring rather than pleasant to men. Despite this fact, women would still need male protection due to their "mental weakness" (Todd 217). Nevertheless, many authors fought against this fashion and became moral commentators by creating practical cases yet fictional where women would face these moral issues, as many authors already did. For instance, Wollstonecraft's Mary in *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), Mary in Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice*, or Richardson's Clarissa in the eponymous novel, who expose "the hypocrisy involved in using female chastity for further family ambition" (Spencer, iii). Nevertheless, this feminist fight will continue up to the present with the support of important figures such as George Eliot (*Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*, 1871-1872) or Virginia Woolf (*A Room of One's Own*, 1929).

3. *The Victim of Prejudice: Female Education and Independence*

The Victim of Prejudice (1799) is Hays's second novel, in which "she explored the social consequences of rape and woman's refusal to collude with a society that elevates female chastity into woman's sole currency by insisting on her acting out the inevitable position socially required of her" (Brooks 12). It can be classified as a re-writing of the novel of seduction, which aimed to "attack on the double standard which demanded chastity of woman, but not of men" (Spencer 112). This novel narrates the life of Mary Raymond, the illegitimate daughter of a prostitute, who lives under the guardianship of a cultivated man, Mr. Raymond. Mary is raped and then, she feels the prejudice against her from society. It should be pointed out that the eighteenth-century society considered that women had not an identity of their own, so their identity was defined by their relationship with men (relational identity). Consequently, in the case of single mothers, this condition was inherited by their

children. Their daughters would suffer disadvantages with regard to marriage because their honour was lost since birth according to society and they were treated consequently. Thus, those women were not allowed to freely choose their partner or have sexual intercourses, since they were punished by the patriarchy although they might only be suspected of such actions (Lorenzo Modia, "Rosalia"). In this way, the tagged woman suffered a blurred identity, such as in the case of Mary's mother, and even if she married, she would be "emotionally blackmailed ... into even deeper bondage to her husband" (Eagleton, T. 16). In this novel, the heroine fights against the ideals of the society and she is true to herself despite everything she has to endure.

According to Walker in *Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Woman's Mind* (2006), this novel's heroine, Mary Raymond, is based on Godwin's heroine, Emily Melville, from his novel *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Emily Melville asserts that "you may imprison my body but you cannot conquer my mind" (qtd. in Walker, *Mary* 193) on which Mary Raymond supports herself in order to claim her freedom.

The title of this novel is also relevant, since *Victim* is a suggestive title that reveals which are the themes and the aim of this publication. According to Ty, *The Victim of Prejudice* is a hopeful writing about the changes that the French Revolution would bring to England, and also a "catalogue of possible "wrongs" or acts of social injustice upon eighteenth-century middle-class female[s]" ("Introduction", *Victim* xv). These "wrongs" are related to those exposed in Wollstonecraft's novel *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*. In Richardson's *Clarissa*, the protagonist fights these wrongs with her death, which is a "political gesture" (Eagleton, T. 74) but also the only way to achieve Clarissa's liberation. It is for this reason that "Clarissa's death signifies ... an absolute refusal of political society: sexual oppression, bourgeois patriarchy and libertine aristocracy together" (Eagleton, T. 76). However, Hays's heroine fights patriarchal society not with her death, but through her

constant efforts to be independent and esteemed. So, Hays's heroine is used as an instrument to demonstrate "her views of gender and class inequality" (Ty, "Introduction", *Victim* xxiv) and to request a social change in regards to women, especially on education and virtue. In the same way, Hays's novel uses the tragic events that happen to Mary Raymond to illustrate the injustice of late eighteenth-century society, the laws and the abuse of patriarchy. The theme of prejudice was also explored by Jane Austen in her writings, such as in *Pride and Prejudice*. According to Lloyd W. Brown, "it is in *Pride and Prejudice* that we are most aware of a conscious, and extended, preoccupation with conflicting concepts of education for women — and the relationship between that education and marriage" (328). The aim of the novel of prejudice is to expose social injustice that is not questioned because its power lies in cultural traditions and, therefore, it seems evident. Thus, Sarah Winter remarks the following.

The novel's characterization of prejudice as complicit with social injustices and thus as morally compromising was also based on an empiricist presupposition that because they are merely automatic and often irrational assumptions instilled through education and custom, prejudices can be overcome through counter-evidence, concerted mental retraining, or the activation of a just conscience. (77)

In the first chapter, Hays deals with education and presents us the character of Mary Raymond, who is a well-educated woman and in equal terms as men. Mary is cultivated in body and mind: "I was indebted for a robust constitution, a cultivated understanding, and a vigorous intellect" (Hays, *Victim* 5). She grew up physically strong but also intellectually, since he was taught "French, Italian, and Latin, languages; in the elements of geometry, algebra and arithmetic" (Hays, *Victim* 6). This kind of instruction was usually for men, whereas women were taught in morality, virtue, housework, manners and beauty. However, Hays creates a heroine who is taught in equality with men in order to build up an independent

and qualified woman. Mary analyses her strength when she was playing with one of the boys under Mr. Raymond's tutelage, William Pelham.

We laughed, wrestled, romped, contended in various sports and feasts of activity, in the boldness and agility of which I emulated my companion, while my daring stimulated him to greater exertion. If I found myself foiled by his superior strength and stature, yet, in courage, in spirit, in dexterity, and resource, he was compelled to acknowledge he had met with no contemptible rival. (Hays, *Victim* 9)

This appeal for equal education for both sexes is also present in Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, on which Hays based Mary's model of education. Wollstonecraft states the following.

If they be really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves; or, like the brutes who are dependent on the reason of man, when they associate with him; but cultivate their minds, give them the salutary, sublime curb of principle, and let them attain conscious dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God. Teach them, in common with man, to submit to necessity, instead of giving, to render them more pleasing, a sex to morals. (146-147)

Besides, she adds:

But I still insist, that not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, if not in degree, and that women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavour to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being

educated like a fanciful kind of half being —one of Rousseau's wild chimeras. (150)

Nevertheless, Hays acknowledges that women are condemned until society and its rules change. As the protagonist claims when she states that “while the practice of the world opposes the principles of the sage, education is a fallacious effort, morals an empty theory, and sentiment a delusive dream” (Hays, *Victim* 33). Despite the fact that Mary had an excellent education, the reader knows that she is condemned to suffer. An example of this is the comparison between her and the biblical episode when Eve stole the apple. Mary is tagged as “a true daughter of Eve” (Hays, *Victim* 14) and, after that, her idyllic life turns into a life full of distress because of the constant harassment she suffers from Sir Peter Osborne. For instance, Mary reports the episode when Sir Peter Osborne

[...] seized me, and clasping me in his arms, kissed me with an odious violence. I shrieked, struggled, and fought, with all my strength. William, seeing me so freely and roughly treated, snatched the whip of my persecutor, which, in the contest, had fallen to the ground, and assaulted him with fury. Obligated to relinquish his prey, he turned to defend himself from the attack of my champion, whom his companions, with difficulty, released from his vengeance. (Hays, *Victim* 22)

In this quotation, Mary is labelled as a prey, which foreshadows Osborne's intentions, and her end. Despite the obstacles the heroine finds through her life, she is determined to be independent with disregard of the consequences. Mary Hays reflects her belief in female independence through Mr. Raymond's statement: “amidst the vicissitudes and the calamities of life, a firm and an independent mind is an invaluable treasure and a never-failing support. The canker [sic] most pernicious to every virtue is *dependence* [emphasis in the original]; and

the most fatal species of bondage is subjection to the demands of our own imperious passions” (Hays, *Victim* 38). Mary tastes independence eventually when she works for a short period of time, as Walker asserts (Walker, *Mary Hays* 194).

Nevertheless, Mary Raymond cannot fight against her fate even though she has been educated in order to be independent. She was predestined to suffer injustice since she was born, even though she did not know that until she is told her mother’s story in chapter XII. Hays’s introduces Mary Raymond’s mother’s story in an epistolary form which is told to Mary by Mr. Raymond. In her letter, Mary (whose surname is symbolically unknown) tells her experience when she was raped, first by Mary Raymond’s father, and then, a second time, by a friend of hers after knowing that, presumably, she had been promiscuous. This series of events leaves her in a vulnerable situation, which leads her to prostitution as the only way to survive. Despite the fact that she fought against these humiliations, society tagged her as a prostitute, and did not allow her a choice in life other than harlotry. Mary narrates how society conventions changed her life without any possibility of salvation.

I perceived myself the victim of injustice, of the prejudice, of society, which, by opposing to my return to my virtue almost insuperable barriers, had plunged me into irremediable ruin. I grew sullen, desperate, hardened. I felt a malignant joy in retaliating upon mankind a part of the evils which I sustained. My mind became fiend-like, revelling in destruction, glorying in its shame. Abandoned to excessive and brutal licentiousness, I drowned returning reflection in inebriating potions. The injuries and insults to which my odious profession exposed me eradicated from my heart every remaining human feeling. I became a monster, cruel, relentless, ferocious; and contaminated alike, with a deadly poison, the health and the principles of those unfortunate victims whom, with practised allurements, I entangled

in my snares. Man, however vicious, however cruel, reaches not the depravity of a shameless woman. *Despair* shuts not against him every avenue to repentance; *despair* drives him not from human sympathies; *despair* hurls him not from hope, from pity, from life's common charities, to plunge him into desperate, damned, guilt. (Hays, *Victim* 66-67)

With this statement she condemns the double standard in society when men's promiscuity is forgiven, whereas women's promiscuity condemns females to isolation and a life of recrimination. In addition, Mary claims that this is not an isolated case, but a worldwide concern.

Boast not, vain man, of civil refinements, while in the bosom of thy most polished and populous cities, an evil is fostered, poisoning virtue at its source, diffusing through every rank its deadly venom, bursting the bonds of nature, blasting its endearments, destroying the promise of youth, the charm of domestic affections, and hurling its hapless victims to irremediable perdition. (Hays, *Victim* 67)

Then, once again in chapter XIII, the protagonist denounces this injustice stating the following.

Assailed by prejudice, betrayed by sophistry, distracted by contradiction, entangled in error, he exchanges the simple dictates of artless youth, the generous feelings of an uncorrupted heart, the warm glow of natural affections, for the jargon of superstition, the frigid precautions of selfishness, the mask of hypocrisy, and the factitious distinctions of capricious folly: reason is perverted and fettered, and virtue polluted at its source. (Hays, *Victim* 71)

Hays highlights this idea of women corruption several times throughout the novel, first with the rape of Mary Raymond's mother and then with that of the protagonist. So, this becomes a firm statement to ask for a social change, as well as for women's independence, and for the recovery of their virtue when they have been outraged.

At this point, Mary already knows her background and Mr. Raymond informs her that she will have to fight against prejudice when he dies because, as an illegitimate child, she will face injustice and recrimination. So, according to Spencer, "the belief that illegitimacy is a stain is the first prejudice which causes trouble for Mary" (131). This "stain" is closely related to marriage opportunities and how Mary Raymond faces love. According to Lorenzo Modia in "Reason and Matrimonial Politics in the Long Eighteenth Century" (2015), in this period "the social pressure put on women to accept unequal alliances with men through marriage is so strong that it cannot be avoided" (64-65). Thus, since marriage was a social issue and illegitimacy was regarded as a fault, women might face unjust marriages or, in the best cases, spinsterhood. However, the latter was usually a matter of necessity rather than a choice, so it was considered a luxury for those women who were wealthy enough to get their independence through these means. If their economic circumstances were not so favourable, they would be a burden for their families, since spinsterhood only assured their independence if they could sustain themselves. It is for this reason that those women stained by illegitimacy were not allowed to believe in love or experience it. Nevertheless, Mary not only believes in love, but she also bases her decisions on reason and virtue. Due to this, she asserts that "I cannot, I ought not, to bestow on any man a reluctant hand with an alienated heart. It is not necessary that I should marry; I can exert my talents for my support, or procure a sustenance by the labour of my hands. I dare encounter indigence; but I dare not prostitute my sincerity and my faith" (Hays, *Victim* 99). This proclamation foreshadows her brief independence when she has a job, but also her final resolution rejecting her rapist. Furthermore, it is because of prejudice

upon her since birth and fewer opportunities to get a good marriage that Mr. Raymond provided her with a good education and the means to be a self-sufficient woman. This contrasts with her mother's fate. She did not have a defined identity, as we can observe in her letter (mentioned above, p. 20) because of the lack of a surname. Society snatched her identity from her and converted her into a victim of the patriarchal system.

Mary Hays clearly criticizes society and patriarchy twice in her novel: the first time with Mary's mother's rape and the second is the protagonist's rape by Sir Peter Osborne. Mary Raymond's education was planned by Mr. Raymond for her not to follow her mother's steps. However, inevitably, she lives the same experience as her mother, but, on the contrary, Mary refuses to accept the future that society and prejudice has chosen for her. This is the case when Sir Peter Osborne, after having raped her, asks Mary to be his wife claiming that she has lost her honour and she would not have any other options.

To whom and where would you go, foolish and unhappy girl? — Let not passion and woman's vengeance blind you to the perils of our situation! — I dare not deceive you; the measures I have been partly driven and partly betrayed into, from which, upon my soul, had I not hoped a better issue, should never have been put in practice, have, I fear, already irretrievably injured your reputation.... What will you do with the freedom for which you so vehemently contend? — Your beauty and unprotected situation may, perhaps, but still farther provoke the lawless attempts of our sex and oppose the sympathy of your own. No one, I doubt, will now receive you in the capacity in which you had proposed to offer yourself, even were it more worthy of you; such are the stupid prejudices of the world. What is called, in your sex, honour and character, can, I fear, never be restored to you; nor will any asseverations or future watchfulness (to adopt the cant of policy

and superstition) obliterate the stain.... Accept my honest contrition and the affluence I offer; reign uncontrolled mistress of my fortune as of my heart.

(Hays, *Victim* 118-119)

Now, Mary, unlike her mother, is sure about herself and her honour, and for this reason she refuses his proposal. She responds to him that “my spirit, superior to personal injury, rises above the sense of its wrongs, and utterly contemns you! I spurn the wealth you offer, the cursed price of innocence and principle, and will seek, by honest labour, the bread of independence. You have afflicted, but you cannot debase me” (Hays, *Victim* 119). After her allegation, Hays writes: “Saying which, he held open the door, whispering to his servant as I ran, or rather flew, through the passages, panting and breathless, into the street” (Hays, *Victim* 120). Therefore, for the first time, a woman character is able to run away from his stalker and rapist towards her freedom, even though it becomes a tough journey in her life.

The idea expressed in this episode, related to the strength given by education and the threat of violation by men, is also reflected in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* when Wollstonecraft writes that

A woman who has lost her honour, imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away. Losing thus every spur, and having no other means of support, prostitution becomes her only refuge, and the character is quickly depraved by circumstances over which the poor wretch has little power, unless she possesses an uncommon portion of sense and loftiness of spirit. Necessity never makes prostitution the business of men’s lives; though numberless are the women who are thus rendered systematically vicious. This, however, arises, in a great degree, from the state of idleness in which women are educated, who are always taught to look up to man for a

maintenance, and to consider their persons as the proper return for his exertions to support them. Meretricious airs, and the whole science of wantonness, have then a more powerful stimulus than either appetite or vanity; and this is lost that is respectable in woman. Her character depends on the heart — is love. Nay, the honour of a woman is not made even to depend on her will. (Wollstonecraft 190)

The protagonist's attitude towards society and her identity changes after this episode. She shows her self-determination and her will to fight against social precepts in order to make a living of her own, despite the fact that she has already been dishonoured twice. Mary believes in her future, even though it may be difficult to achieve, when she affirms: "Go! be prosperous, be happy *if you can!* Leave me to my fate. With a mind, a resolution, yet unimpaired, I do not, *indeed I do not*, yield to despair" (Hays, *Victim* 128 [Emphasis in the text]). She also dismisses love in order to achieve her freedom, although she must break her relationship with William Pelham. Therefore, Mary writes her decision to Pelham.

"It is not without anguish," said I, "that I resolve on separating myself from you; it would be temerity to expose myself to a renewal of the preceding evening's conflict. Attempt not to trace my steps; your search would be vain, or productive only of mutual distress. The path to which duty points I am determined to pursue; nothing shall divert my course; neither poverty nor shame can appal me. I will at least have the glory of deserving, though I cannot command, happiness. The money I received from you last night, with a view to my present purpose, to which it was indispensable, the first fruit of my labours shall repay you: for the expense attending my illness, I fear I must be longer your debtor. — *Farewell!* You have taught me, that to

confide in the heart of *man* is to lay up stores for sorrow: henceforth I rest on myself". (Hays, *Victim* 130 [Emphasis in the original])

This statement is also a proclamation of her break with the patriarchal society and her dependence on men, both socially and economically. It does not only concern her love for Pelham, but it is reinforced by the several denials of Osborne's proposals. Her determination is rewarded when she is hired in a print-shop and she reports that "I returned with my patterns to my humble lodging, with light spirits and a beating heart, anticipating the dignity of INDEPENDENCE [emphasis in the text]" (Hays, *Victim* 138). However, this utopic situation comes to an end and she must strive to survive by her own means and avoid the same fate as her mother. It is for this reason that Mary expounds her criticism on social values and asks for an equal rights existence.

I resolved in my mind, selected, and rejected, as new obstacles occurred to me, a variety of plans. Difficulties almost insuperable, difficulties peculiar to my sex, my age, and my unfortunate situation, opposed themselves to my efforts on every side. I sought only the bare means of subsistence: amidst the luxuriant and the opulent, who surrounded me, I put in no claims either for happiness, for gratification, or even for the common comforts of life: yet, surely, *I had a right to exist!* [Emphasis in the original]— For what a crime was I driven from society? I seemed to myself like an animal entangled in the toils of the hunter. My bosom swelled with honest indignant pride: I determined to live; I determined that the devices of my persecutors should not overwhelm me: my spirit roused itself to defeat their malice and baffle their barbarous schemes. From the deplorable circumstances in which I felt myself involved, I seemed but to acquire new

strength and courage: I exerted my invention, and called every power into action. (Hays, *Victim* 141)

Despite the fact that the protagonist suffers the same social injustice and prejudices as her mother and other characters in previous novels, such as *Clarissa*, Hays's heroine is the first character to put up resistance for first time in these biographical novels. Mary opposes her mother when she does not let herself be wretched by her situation and social environment. The protagonist finds herself "involve[d], as by a fatal mechanism, in the infamy of my wretched mother, thrown into similar circumstances, and looking to a catastrophe little less fearful" (Hays, *Victim* 168). Although, she remains strong and has "still the consolation of remembering that I suffered not despair to plunge my soul in crime, that I braved the shocks of fortune, eluded the snares of vice, and struggled in the trammels of prejudice with dauntless intrepidity" (Hays, *Victim* 168). However, her strength is not enough to fight against the moral standards of a society in which prevails a male supremacy, so she cannot avoid to "sink beneath a torrent, whose resistless waves overwhelm alike in a common ruin the guiltless and the guilty" (Hays, *Victim* 168). It is for this reason that she eventually chooses a life of retirement, like the heroine of Wollstonecraft's first novel, and she "longs for death and that heaven where there is 'neither giving in marriage nor marrying'" (Walker, *Mary Hays* 194).

Nevertheless, Hays also proclaims that death is not just the culmination of prejudiced women, but the aspiration of those women that lived under male dominance and after their husbands' or fathers' death, they fall into despair, since they do not have the means to reach independence. Hays reflects this idea when Mrs. Neville wrote to Mary: "You, my beloved Mary, ... will not long survive your friends: over your stronger mind, *injustice* has triumphed, and consigned you to an early grave; while I sink a feeble victim to an *excessive*, and therefore blameable, tenderness". Shortly after, she states that "LOVE was the vital spark that

animated my frame, that sustained my being; it is extinguished, and *I follow to the tomb its object*" (Hays, *Victim* 172-173 [Emphasis in the text]). This statement condemns a social system where women held the lower position and are ranked by their class without regard to their personal qualities. Whereas Mary is repudiated for her social stain although her education, Mrs. Neville would endure the same fate because of her instruction in morality and virtue, that enabled her to reach independence.

Hays concludes her novel appealing for a change in society in order to get equality among men and women. Although the protagonist's miserable end, she sets forth her last statement about her condition, condemning society and explaining her case as an example.

The vigorous promise of my youth has failed. The victim of a barbarous prejudice, society has cast me out from its bosom. The sensibilities of my heart have been turned to bitterness, the powers of my mind wasted, my projects rendered abortive, my virtues and my sufferings alike unrewarded, *I have lived in vain!* unless the story of my sorrows should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claims of humanity and justice. From the fate of my wretched mother (in which, alas! My own has been involved,) let him learn, that, while the slave of sensuality, inconsistent as assuming, he pours, by *his conduct*, contempt upon chastity, in vain will he impose on *woman* barbarous penalties, or seek to multiply restrictions; his seductions and example, yet more powerful, will defeat his precepts, of which *hypocrisy*, not virtue, is the genuine fruit. Ignorance and despotism, combating frailty with cruelty, may go on to propose *partial* reform in one invariable, melancholy, round; reason derides the weak effort; while the fabric of superstition and crime, extending its broad base, mocks

the toil of the visionary projector. (Hays, *Victim* 174-175 [Emphasis in the original])

This last paragraph summarizes the whole novel, but also its purpose. According to Spencer, “*The Victim of Prejudice* is a study of the obstacles in the way of female independence” (132), and they are clearly exposed in this last report.

Conclusions

The relevance of *The Victim of Prejudice* is outstanding as part of the feminist literary movement, although it is not one of the better-known female books, such as those by Mary Wollstonecraft, George Eliot or Virginia Woolf. Despite the fact that Hays follows Wollstonecraft's steps, she goes further and writes in a more critical manner. She reiterates several times her point of view in her publications, but also her requests and the social criticism she makes about the conventions of her time concerning women. In *Victim*, the aforesaid is exposed through the diverse speeches throughout the novel, but also in its conclusion. Both the heroine's resolution and strength are exposed through her actions but also in her statements about virtue, freedom, and equality.

Thus, Hays's importance lies on the determination she exposes in her writings, and her appeal for a real social change. Her role in the demand of equal rights, especially on education and independence, is remarkable, as can be inferred from this novel. She believed in the equality of sexes, and as a consequence, in the inadequacy of the patriarchal system in which women were subdued to men —mentally, physically and socially. It is for this reason that she chose the topic for her novel concerning the wrongs that women suffered in her time. Although this theme was already dealt in Wollstonecraft's publications, Hays's approach leads to a stronger vindication of female rights. She introduced a great innovation in contrast

to the previous novels of seduction —Hays's heroine is the first character who refuses to suffer the same fate as Richardson's Clarissa or Wollstonecraft's Mary. Then, Hays exposes a case in which she studies another option for the fallen woman, which is opposite to that of the despair of the protagonist. In *The Victim of Prejudice*, death is not an option for Mary Raymond, so she would fight against all the prejudices that society tries to impose on her.

Hays's efforts on the appeal for a female education in equal terms to men must be highlighted. Most of her works request improvements in the educational system, rejecting those proposals by Hume and Rousseau, whose ideas undermined women's capacities and provided women with useless abilities that left them in a weak position regarding social and economic circumstances. Therefore, Hays's demands of a better education for women is not only a solicitation for equality in instruction, but also as a means for female liberation in a patriarchal society. Hays believed that female liberation could be achieved through education, which would lead to equal opportunities for both sexes in order to live freely.

Despite the fact that Hays does not provide a decisive solution to change the female status, her contribution is a step forward to achieve a real improvement in female rights. Although, her publications and her voice had been silenced through history because of the radicalism they promoted, she might be taken as a reference author within the feminist literary movement. Besides, her publications, and especially, her second novel might be considered as relevant as those written by revered authors who also played an important role in the appeal of equality.

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