

Revolutionary Women:  
Literary Performativity, Classical Pseudonyms, and the Public Sphere in the Correspondence of  
Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren

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For Dr. Jessica DeSanta,

A teacher, mentor, role model, and friend, whose radiant passion for English continues to inspire me to always be intellectually curious and to share this curiosity with others

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## Remember the Ladies?

While many scholars are familiar with Abigail Adams's momentous March 31, 1776 "Remember the Ladies" letter to John Adams during the American Revolution, far fewer know about her subsequent, unfiltered April 27, 1776 letter to Mercy Otis Warren. At first glance, this letter appears to reproduce her "Remember the Ladies" letter, with a large portion of the letter being a precise paraphrase of her letter to her husband. For instance, Adams reasserts that "the Laws of English" give "such unlimited power to the husband to use his wife ill" and summarizes her request to John Adams "that our Legislators would consider our [women's] case" and establish "some Laws in our [women's] favour upon just and Liberal principals."<sup>1</sup> However, my eye ultimately gravitated towards a significant textual outlier, or a sentence and sentiment that was intentionally unpenned to her husband but written to Warren: "So I have help'd the Sex abundantly, but I will tell him I have only been making trial of the Disintrestedness of his Virtue, and when weigh'd in the balance have found it wanting."<sup>2</sup> While this line showcases Adams's personal desire for women to be represented in America's "new Code of Laws," it more importantly reveals her ability to tactically cater her choice of words to her husband by understanding that, as a public political figure, he is part of a Stoical and republican masculine audience.<sup>3</sup> Although Adams's "Remember the Ladies" letter to her husband explicitly displays her own revolutionary agenda, her letter to Warren unearths her strategic literary craft, provoking an intricate conversation surrounding republicanism and gender roles as they relate to women's public voice and representation.

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<sup>1</sup> "Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 27 April 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0257> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Adams to Warren, 27 April 1776.

<sup>3</sup> Adams to Warren, 27 April 1776.

In fact, Adams's letter to Warren was not an anomaly, as Adams and Warren began a long-time epistolary correspondence in 1773 and ended up becoming the two Revolutionary-era women with the most abundant surviving record of writings.<sup>4</sup> Through their epistolary correspondence, Adams and Warren engage in a nuanced dialogue and literary performance in which they experiment with ways that women can carve a space for their voices in the public sphere, ultimately reimagining what constitutes the public sphere, and even femininity, altogether. These women capitalized on the circumstances of war and America's transitioning identity as a new republic in order to reimagine the relationship between the classical and the modern, the Stoical and the sentimental, the public and the private, the national and the domestic, and the masculine and the feminine. Adams's and Warren's epistolary correspondence in the late eighteenth century marks their tandem efforts to complicate these binaries and examine their deep-seeded interrelations in an attempt to actualize their historical and literary voices.

During the late eighteenth century, many women's writing took place in unconventional genres, such as "recipe books, medicinal books, botanical books, gardening and landscape records, sketch books with notes," and, most pertinent to this thesis, letters.<sup>5</sup> As a result, I agree with Lisa L. Moore's, Joanna Brooks's, and Caroline Wigginton's argument in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions* that in order to include marginalized voices, such as the voices of women, in our literary historical canon, we must be "unorthodox" and ultimately reassess "what counts as literature."<sup>6</sup> And yet, letter writing, in its own right, stands apart from the privacy of "sketch books" and the publicity of published works. Letter writing occupied a

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<sup>4</sup> Edith B. Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship: The Correspondence of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 108 (1996): 35-71, *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25081114> (Accessed May 2, 2020), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2012), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Moore, Brooks, and Wigginton, *Transatlantic Feminisms*, 32.

unique, intermediate space between the private and public spheres, making it not only important to examine these documents from a macrocosmic historical point of view but also from a microcosmic literary point of view.<sup>7</sup> In the late eighteenth century, letter writing was susceptible to “circulation among a larger group of readers”<sup>8</sup> and letters were often “lent, copied, orated, and shared among family groups and communities,”<sup>9</sup> adding an element of oral performance and socialization to the medium.

In order to examine letter writing’s relationship with the private and public spheres, it is essential to foreground my argument with Michael Warner’s and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s scholarly conversation on the formation of the print public sphere. In *The Letters of the Republic*, Michael Warner argues that public print culture is dictated by “the principle of negativity,” or the idea that print elicits a performance that revolves around the author’s “absorption into generality.”<sup>10</sup> This “abnegation of the personal”<sup>11</sup> was seen as an act of republican virtue, which inextricably tied the culture of print to republicanism and Stoicism, a republican philosophy that requires forsaking one’s self-interest for the good of one’s community, or country.<sup>12</sup> Warner binds public print culture with republicanism and Stoical virtue, as well as exclusively with white masculinity, claiming that only “propertied white males” are able to achieve “the principle of negativity” and use print as a political resource.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Angela Vietto, *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015046341338&view=1up&seq=7> (Accessed March 24, 2021), 109.

<sup>9</sup> Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 212.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic : Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015018894876&view=1up&seq=7> (Accessed April 11, 2021), 77.

<sup>11</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, cited in Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 38.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon complicates Warner's account of "the eighteenth-century republican sphere,"<sup>14</sup> challenging Warner's idea of "generality" by placing "two forms of identification— abstraction and individuation"<sup>15</sup>— in conversation with one another in the public sphere. While Warner describes the republican public sphere of print as rooted in abstraction and generality, creating a collective community rather than particularizing individuals, Dillon argues that this sphere is actually constructed from a relationship with both the general collective *and* the particular individual.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Dillon points out how Warner's image of the "print public sphere" consisting of solely "white male writers and readers"<sup>17</sup> fails to consider how women might also be "central to the workings of the public sphere."<sup>18</sup> Despite Warner's claims that "only white men were de facto granted access to the print public sphere" because they are the ones capable of accessing "abstraction" through print,<sup>19</sup> Dillon argues that the public sphere is actually responsible for producing the notions of masculinity and femininity that Warner is employing.<sup>20</sup> According to Dillon, women were represented in the literary public sphere<sup>21</sup> and their association with "privacy" is not because "they are consigned to the private sphere," but because "powerful *public* images of femininity identify women as private."<sup>22</sup> My thesis uses Dillon's scholarship on gender and its relation to the *print-oriented* public sphere of early, republican America as a launch-pad for my own examination of private, *epistolary literature* during this same time period. By analyzing the archive of letters between Adams and Warren,

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>15</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 39, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, cited in Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 38.

<sup>20</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 5.



with a focus on their correspondence between the years 1775 and 1777, this thesis explores how these women work to redefine the relationship between public and private and reconceptualize spaces for women's historical and literary voices.

In order to understand the ways which Adams and Warren challenge conventional perceptions of the public sphere and femininity, it is important to first identify a major constraint that perpetuated these conventions, the ideology of republican motherhood. Republican motherhood was an eighteenth-century attitude that intended to reinforce the separation between women's domestic sphere and men's public sphere. However, this ideology also conversely brought about an "integration of domestic and political behavior," since it required women to possess a dedication to "the service of civic virtue."<sup>23</sup> Republican motherhood extended a woman's obligations to educating male citizens, such as their sons, in the ways of republican virtue, which consequently prompted a groundbreaking question: if women are able to counsel men on behaviors and virtues that are allegedly "masculine," how different can men and women truly be?<sup>24</sup> Thus, republican motherhood gave women access to "the language of patriotism," which in turn provided women with a means to justify their involvement in the previously deemed "masculine" worlds of public politics and authorship.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to republican motherhood, performativity was also an essential element of women's epistolary authorship as well as letter writing's mobility between the public and private spheres in the late eighteenth century. While, as discussed above, letters were often publicly performed in a social setting, their performative potential was most influential in the private

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<sup>23</sup> Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective." *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1976): 187-205. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2712349> (Accessed May 5, 2020), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Vietto, *Women and Authorship*, 50.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Hicks, "The Roman Matron in Britain: Female Political influence and Republican Response, ca. 1750-1800," *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 1 (2005): 35-69, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/429428> (Accessed May 5, 2020), 7.

creation of a literary pseudo-public sphere.<sup>26</sup> The epistolary experience is unique in that it requires reciprocity and is distinguished by the “desire to incorporate a specific reader response within the world of the narrative.”<sup>27</sup> There is a sense of intimate, collective world building between the correspondents that is further heightened by epistolary language, as such language relies on “absence” and on “make-believe” in order to hold a personal conversation with an addressee who is physically elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> Such literary performativity began to manifest itself in late seventeenth-century England and ultimately eighteenth-century America in the form of Roman allusions and pseudonyms.<sup>29</sup> American leaders assumed these classical cognomens, simultaneously aligning themselves with Warner’s republican “negativity” and initiating a parallel between the fall of the Roman Republic and the American Revolution. For instance, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, the collective authors of *The Federalist*, wrote under the single cognomen “Publius,” the name of a Roman leader who “established the Roman republic after the last king of Rome was expelled in 509 B.C.”<sup>30</sup> By using the cognomen “Publius,” these men created a representational persona of the American public to serve the public good.

However, it was not only men who were capable of employing these Roman pseudonyms, as women possessed the tradition of “female worthies,” which consisted of a “catalog of illustrious women” for contemporary women to pull from to substantiate their

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<sup>26</sup> A “literary *pseudo*-public sphere” is the creation of an alternate public sphere in epistolary letters through private, performative world-building. This sphere only exists intimately between the people that are narrating such a world in their correspondence. A “literary public sphere” is more directly connected to the actual public sphere, denoting works that in circulation among public literary culture.

<sup>27</sup> Altman, *Epistolarity*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Altman, *Epistolarity*, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Eran Shalev, “Ancient Masks, American Fathers: Classical Pseudonyms During the American Revolution and Early Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 2 (2003): 151–72, *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/3125034> (Accessed September 7, 2020), 154.

<sup>30</sup> Shalev, “Ancient Masks, American Fathers,” 167.

progressive gender agendas.<sup>31</sup> This tradition dates all the way back to Christine de Pisan's 1405 *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, in which Pizan, as a humanist, employed these worthies to defend female education.<sup>32</sup> American women particularly were influenced by George Ballard's books, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) and *Biographium Faemineum* (1766), which held memoirs of women being "celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts, and sciences."<sup>33</sup> Ballard's books used "the catalog of exemplary women as evidence of women's capability" in order to fight for their improved education.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, women specifically favored pulling from a catalogue of Roman matrons over the Spartans or Amazons, because the Roman matron "constituted a relatively safe, unthreatening exemplar, with fewer unwelcome connotations," while, "at the same time, she could promote daring political acts committed in the name of the greater good."<sup>35</sup>

On August 27, 1775, Adams chose to sign her letter to Warren under the Roman matron pseudonym "Portia," employing literary performativity as a means to activate her own epistolary public sphere. Warren subsequently returned the favor, tailoring her response to "the world of the narrative" by signing her following letter under the Roman matron pseudonym "Marcia."

Adams's and Warren's epistolary correspondence under these classical pseudonyms spanned the

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<sup>31</sup> Philip Hicks, "Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2005): 265-94, *JSTOR* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3491602> (Accessed May 2, 2020), 267.

<sup>32</sup> Vietto, *Women and Authorship*, 29. Cicero's writings during the Roman Republic laid the groundwork for humanism, which Machiavelli later built upon during the Italian Renaissance by defining the ideal republican government of Rome as operating under the political ideology of civic humanism. According to Philip Hicks, "classical, humanist, and republican ideals" propagated the notion that "the purpose of history was to educate statesmen and warriors, and so women were not fit to be readers, writers, or even the subjects of history, which was largely the story of war and politics. However, through "a civic humanist use of history, the virtuous examples of the past became a springboard for women's own political deeds in the present." Hicks, "Portia and Marcia," 271, 275.

<sup>33</sup> George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain, Who Have Been Celebrated for Their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages Arts and Sciences* (Oxford: Printed by W, Jackson, for the author, 1752), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=dul1.ark:/13960/t0wq0v38n&view=1up&seq=5> (Accessed November 15, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Vietto, *Women and Authorship*, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Hicks, "The Roman Matron in Britain," 41.

course of around five years, with Warren's last letter under "Marcia" occurring in 1779 and Adams's last letter under "Portia" happening soon after in 1780. This thesis will focus on a selection of these women's earlier Roman pseudonym letters from 1775-1777. I chose this time frame because it also vitally corresponds with the start of the American Revolution, a time in which both Adams and Warren were continually separated from their husbands, causing them to rely more heavily on their epistolary exchange with each other for conversation, political news, and moral support. The American Revolution also was a period in which America's wartime narrative provided easy access to the employment of antiquity by most directly paralleling the fall of the Roman Republic.<sup>36</sup> Not only have I chosen to focus on a section of Adams's and Warren's correspondence that revolves around the presence, or purposeful lack thereof, of Roman matron pen names, but I have also chosen letters that use classical and neoclassical references, which add a multi-dimensional complexity to their engagements with antiquity. Furthermore, while the use of Roman matrons and classical antiquity has primarily appealed to and been studied by historians, my thesis seeks to fill a scholarly gap by using history solely as a means to contextualize a *primarily literary analysis* of Adams's and Warren's letters. Approaching these letters through a literary analysis will allow me to dive deeper into more specific and interlocking conversations surrounding the private and public sphere, femininity, and performativity in order to differentiate, rather than dichotomize, these women's voices.

While Adams and Warren are both concerned with the same end goal of figuring out how to best carve a space for women's historical and literary voices, such as their own, their letters as Portia and Marcia reveal the intricacies of their conversation, as both women choose to

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<sup>36</sup> When thinking about the fall of the Roman Republic (which took place from around 134 BC to 44 BC), this thesis will primarily be concentrated on the historical events and Roman figures involved in Caesar's Civil War (49 BC – 45 BC).

experiment with different approaches. Adams adopts a classical performance of Stoical self-abnegation as a means to subversively legitimize her female patriotism, dismantle the republican binaries of public versus private and male versus female, and achieve self-actualization in the public sphere. Adams also plays with using literary performativity as a means to circumvent Stoical republicanism altogether, creating her own epistolary pseudo-public sphere in which women can occupy public positions of power. Warren, however, highlights the limitations of Adams's classical performance of Stoical republicanism, opting for a new philosophical lexicon altogether, sentimentalism. Warren recuperates the sentimental in order to reframe virtue and patriotism as particularly feminine and to modernize performativity so that she can achieve self-actualization as a playwright and historian through the private epistolary sphere.

### **Abigail Adams: Reconstructing the Relationship between the Public Sphere and Femininity**

Adams's epistolary correspondence with Warren articulates a way in which republican women can carve a space for their voices in the early national period. Her approach centers around playing into traditionally masculine tropes of Stoical, Roman republicanism and its tenets of patriotism, virtue, modesty, and selflessness in order to ultimately complicate republican definitions of private and public as they relate to femininity and masculinity. The framework of classical republicanism, which centered around patriotism and virtue, was inherently gendered, favoring men's existence in the public sphere. In fact, the word "patriot" stems from the Greek root "patrios," which means "of one's father,"<sup>37</sup> and the word "virtue" is actually derived from

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<sup>37</sup> "Patriot Word History," Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-history-patriot> (Accessed March 22, 2021).

the Latin root “vir,” which means “man.”<sup>38</sup> Philip Hicks notes in “Portia and Marcia: Female Political Identity and the Historical Imagination, 1770-1800” that the ideals of republicanism that America desired to emulate, such as the “abnegation of self in service to country” existed directly in tension with the ideals of the female domestic sphere, making it practically impossible for women to achieve this same patriotism.<sup>39</sup> Not only does the ideal of female domesticity promote a strong tie to one’s family, but, as John Adams illustrates in a letter to Adams, women were not given the chance to also “form deep ties to their country,” since they were “barred from holding or voting for political office” and “unable to reap the glory of state service.”<sup>40</sup> Civic humanism, a prominent pillar of republicanism, necessitated active political engagement and demonstration of citizenship through acts of civic virtue, which were best displayed in the form of “military heroism and civic activism.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, classical republican tenets appeared to cater to men’s public role in society, making it seemingly impossible for women to align themselves with these public ideals.

Adams’s correspondence with Warren between the years 1775 and 1777 responds to and defies such allegations, using Portia as a historical link to classical republicanism, patriotism, and Stoical virtue in order to legitimize her own female patriotism and contribution to the public sphere. Adams began assuming the pseudonym “Portia” with Warren in 1775, right after John Adams left her to attend the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Adams chooses to employ the name Portia with Warren for the first time on August 27, 1775 as she reflects on her ability to part with her husband: “I find I am obliged to summons all my patriotism to feel

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<sup>38</sup> Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue,” 43.

<sup>39</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 283.

<sup>40</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 283.

<sup>41</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13, no. 1 (1987): 37–58, *JSTOR* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174026> (Accessed February 15, 2021), 43.

willing to part with him again. You will readily believe me when I say that I make no small sacrifice to the publick.”<sup>42</sup> Adams’s use of the words “patriotism,” “sacrifice,” and the “publick” draws upon Stoical, republican terminology, a vocabulary that is semantically tied to masculinity, yet is also present in the story of the Roman matron Portia. Portia was the wife of Brutus,<sup>43</sup> a Roman senator and one of Caesar’s assassins, as well as the daughter of Cato the Younger, a devout Stoic, and the stepdaughter of Marcia, Warren’s epistolary pseudonym.<sup>44</sup> In Rome, the Stoical, republican emphasis on the “abnegation of self in service to country” could be taken to the patriotic extreme of “literal self-sacrifice by suicide,” which Portia historically exemplifies.<sup>45</sup> Portia is most remembered for her own Stoical act of stabbing herself in the thigh in order to prove to her husband that she was “worthy of his political deliberations” and could be trusted with the plan of tyrannicide.<sup>46</sup> In this August 27, 1775 letter, Adams’s choice to employ a Stoical lexicon and her assumption of the pseudonym Portia complement one another. Working within the republican definitions of “patriotism” and “virtue” allows her to establish her patriotic loyalty to her husband and, more importantly, to his political mission. As a result, Adams can

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<sup>42</sup> “Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 27 August 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0178> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> This interpretation particularly makes sense when taking into consideration that John Adams signed some of his private political discourse under the alias “Brutus.” Shalev. “Ancient Masks, American Fathers,” 160.

<sup>44</sup> While some scholars associate Abigail’s epistolary pseudonym “Portia” with the character from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, most historians associate Adams’s “Portia” with the Roman matron Porcia/Portia. Elaine Forman Crane. “Abigail Adams and Feminism.” In *A Companion to John Adams and John Quincy Adams*, 199–217. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118524381.ch10> (Accessed January 24, 2021), 214–15. Additionally, while this thesis does not investigate the significance behind the relation between Adams’s and Warren’s pseudonyms, Angela Vietto discusses how women writers “presented themselves as part of networks that were both contemporary and historical, showing that women’s participation in the realms of learning and letters was not new.” Under Vietto’s scholarship, it is very interesting to think about how Adams and Warren are connecting with each other (which Vietto would term “a literary sorority”), connecting with female worthies from Roman antiquity, and also using their Roman pseudonyms to position them as part of a familial lineage. Vietto, *Women and Authorship*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 283. A prominent example of this extreme act of Roman Stoicism is Cato the Younger, who is known for his choice to commit suicide rather than be captured by Julius Caesar.

<sup>46</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 281.

mirror Portia, expressing her loyalty to the goal of ending tyranny in order to subversively legitimize her own patriotism and establish herself as an active contributor in the public sphere.

Furthermore, while Adams establishes herself as a patriot, a word that is heavily steeped in republican, Stoical, and masculine ideology, in order to activate her presence in the public sphere, she describes her patriotism as particularly feminine, using her female, domestic responsibilities to complicate the classification of the public sphere altogether. In Adams's letter to Warren in January 1776, which is also signed under the Roman matron pseudonym Portia, she complicates the relationship between the private and public spheres by linking female domesticity with female patriotism. The letter opens with the sentence, "Our Country is as it were a Secondary God, and the first and greatest parent," immediately yoking together the image of the country with that of a parental figure.<sup>47</sup> Adams is cleverly manipulating the concept of a familial unit, zooming out to reveal how America is a family in and of itself and challenging the assumption that the domestic must be private. Adams continues merging private and public spaces when updating Warren on her family's health: "Since I wrote you last all my Little ones have had a settled fever. Johnnys was a pleurisy, and he was very dangerous. I have been confined myself for more than a week; but have Recruited again."<sup>48</sup> While the word "Recruited" can be defined as "to return to strength, health," it also carries a military connotation and can mean "to strengthen or augment (a military force) with fresh recruits or troops."<sup>49</sup> Adams is using the word "Recruited" to convey how, like generals in the American Revolution, she is in charge of supporting her own domestic troops. By bringing America down to the private sphere and her domestic household up to the public sphere, Adams is illustrating the interconnectedness

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<sup>47</sup> "Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, (no date) January 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0272> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Adams to Warren, (no date) January 1776.

<sup>49</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2009), "recruit, v." (Accessed December 12, 2020).



and interdependence of the private and public spheres in order to convey how her domestic responsibilities are precisely what establishes her as an active player in the revolutionary war.

Similarly, in Adams's April 13, 1776 letter to Warren, which is also written under the pseudonym Portia, she carefully crafts analogies between her private household responsibilities and the public wartime battles in order to complicate and blur the distinction between the private and public spheres. Adams expresses the fear that "my small Boat will suffer shipwreck," portraying her household situation through nautical, martial imagery.<sup>50</sup> The Continental Navy was formed in 1775 to intercept British merchant ships and combat British warships and one of its biggest patrons was John Adams.<sup>51</sup> In the end, these American frigates all met terrible fates, as each was either scuttled, set afire to, blown up, or captured.<sup>52</sup> By describing her domain of control as a "small Boat" suffering a "shipwreck," Adams is semantically illustrating how she is similarly manning her own metaphorical ship at home. According to Adams, her private, familial responsibilities are precisely what makes her an active contributor and a female patriot of the American Revolution, as her husband would not have been able to leave and attend the Second Continental Congress without her taking up her own figurative helm at home. Adams capitalizes on Stoical self-abnegation as a means for feminine self-actualization, feeding into Stoical ideology in order to subversively establish her role in the public sphere as tied to her femininity.

While Adams identifies with Portia's conventional feminine domesticity to reassess what constitutes the *public sphere*, in her letter to Warren on April 13, 1776, she ventures beyond Portia's classical capabilities, conversely using the traditionally male responsibilities of the

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<sup>50</sup> "Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 13 April 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0246> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> "Continental Navy," Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, March 5, 2021 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental\\_Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Navy) (Accessed December 5, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Amy Chan, "The Rise of the American Navy 1775 – 1914," HistoryNet, last modified November 1, 2019, <https://www.historynet.com/the-rise-of-the-american-navy-1775-1914.htm> (Accessed January 3, 2021).

public sphere to reassess what *femininity* can mean. For instance, Adams continues to capitalize on words with double meanings when she calls her “in door” responsibilities “domestick affairs,” cleverly conflating domesticity with nationalism and private with public.<sup>53</sup> At the time of Adams’s correspondence, the word “domestick” could refer to matters relating to home life or, alternatively, matters relating to one’s country or nation.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the word “affairs” could denote matters relating “to a particular person or group, especially matters of personal or private importance,” or, conversely, matters of “public interest and importance,” such as those “associated with the governance of a country or area.”<sup>55</sup> Adams’s choice to use the words “domestick” and “affairs,” two words that each contain traditionally opposite meanings, as well as her decision to pair these words together, breaks down the commonly perceived divide between the private, domestic sphere and the public, national sphere. Adams’s epistolary craftsmanship allows her to make the domestic national and the national domestic; by placing the domestic and national side by side, Adams is able to overturn the pre-existing tensions between these classifications and argue that domesticity is not limited to a single sphere and that femininity is not limited to domesticity.

While Adams uses Stoical patriotism as a rhetorical strategy to complicate the republican divisions between private and public, domestic and national, and feminine and masculine, she also capitalizes on the narratives of Stoical Roman, male exemplars to authorize her involvement in the public sphere. The republican, Stoical tradition revolves around a modest reluctance to enter the public arena coupled with a call to action that forces one to enter the limelight solely for the sake of the public good. For instance, Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was “a heroic

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<sup>53</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>54</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st ed (1897), “domestic, adj. and n.” (Accessed December 12, 2020).

<sup>55</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2012), “affair, n.” (Accessed December 12, 2020).

representation of the virtuous Roman citizen,”<sup>56</sup> as “his humility was legend, preferring an agrarian life to the pomp and circumstance of the Roman court.”<sup>57</sup> When Cincinnatus was “called to patriotic duty”<sup>58</sup> in 458 B.C.E., he left his farm and “led the Roman army to victory over the invading Aequi.”<sup>59</sup> Adams represents herself as being pulled into the public sphere in Stoical, republican fashion in her April 13, 1776 letter in order to justify being tasked with “the Education of my little flock,”<sup>60</sup> which included having to “pass Greek and Latin on to her children without knowing the languages herself.”<sup>61</sup> Adams never received a formal education, since “Female education, in the best families, went no further than writing and arithmetic; in some few and rare instances, music and dancing.”<sup>62</sup> In the late eighteenth century, women had to straddle a nearly impossible line when it came to entering the classical conversation in a socially acceptable manner and advice books became a popular means to navigate this public terrain. These books stated that while it was permissible for women to learn about ancient history, it was not acceptable for women to learn the classical languages.<sup>63</sup> As a woman, Adams’s public conversations should be “ornamental but not instructive in its own right,” and yet, with John away, she must be the one to assume this typically masculine instructive role.<sup>64</sup> Adams plays into this notion of being dragged into the public sphere when she qualifies that this new role consists

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<sup>56</sup> Donald L. Wasson, “Cincinnatus,” *World History Encyclopedia*, April 4, 2017 <https://www.worldhistory.org/Cincinnatus/> (Accessed April 1, 2021).

<sup>57</sup> Rotan E. Lee, “Bill Miller, a Modern Cincinnatus,” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (1884) 120, no. 50 (2004): 7A, *ProQuest* <http://turing.library.northwestern.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/bill-miller-modern-cincinnatus/docview/337852431/se-2?accountid=12861> (Accessed February 4, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Lee, “Bill Miller, a Modern Cincinnatus.”

<sup>59</sup> Donald L. Wasson, “Cincinnatus,” *World History Encyclopedia*, April 4, 2017 <https://www.worldhistory.org/Cincinnatus/> (Accessed April 1, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>61</sup> Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750-1900*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), <https://www-jstor-org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/stable/10.7591/j.ctv2n7mfc> (Accessed October 20, 2020), 20.

<sup>62</sup> Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 14-15.

<sup>64</sup> Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 14-15.

of “cares to which I know myself uneaquel,” assuming a tone of modesty to emphasize that, just like Cincinnatus, the circumstances of war have called her to carry out this conventionally masculine responsibility.<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, Adams explains to Warren that she has had to step even farther outside of the republican motherhood sphere by now being in charge of “our little farm,” since “the Man upon whom I used to place dependence was taken sick last winter and left us.”<sup>66</sup> Adams has to both teach her children lessons for schooling *and* teach herself the “Lessons” of “Frugality, Industry and economy” in order to properly care for the property.<sup>67</sup> While the circumstances of war have allowed Adams to liberate herself from republican motherhood’s attempts to “restrict women’s civic role by confining it within the domestic realm,” Adams ironically continues to work within the exemplars of republican tradition to justify her new, traditionally masculine, responsibilities.<sup>68</sup> Adams frames the need for her to represent the family in matters of business and finance through the words “therefore am obliged to direct what I fear I do not properly understand.”<sup>69</sup> The word “obliged” gives off the impression that she is being somewhat forced into this position, rather than her choosing these responsibilities voluntarily, a sentiment that aligns with the Stoical ideal of being dragged into public service. Adams’s emphasis on the fact that these are responsibilities that she does “not properly understand” also contributes to the modest tone, allowing her to unassumingly be granted a level of patriotic and virtuous authority that is traditionally associated with masculinity and the public sphere. Adams uses Stoical vocabulary to ultimately subvert these words’ etymologically masculine and public ties in order

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<sup>65</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>66</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>67</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>68</sup> Vietto, *Women and Authorship*, 75-76.

<sup>69</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

to assert her public presence as particularly feminine and complicate the demarcation of the public sphere. Under this Stoical and republican rhetorical strategy, Adams exploits the Stoical notion of modesty and the narrative of being selflessly dragged into public service as a lens in which to view and authorize her newfound, public position of influence.

Adams also demonstrates a similar use of republican Stoicism as a rhetorical strategy in her January 1776 letter. At the beginning of the letter, Adams relays to Warren how, when deciding whether or not John Adams should take up another public position or resign, she “found his honour and reputation much dearer to me, than my own present pleasure and happiness.”<sup>70</sup> This sentence substantiates the two discoveries made above. First, Adams is showing that she is willing to make her own sacrifices in order for John to perform his public duties, displaying her female patriotism. Second, her sentiment possesses a tone of Stoical modesty, since she suggests that her husband’s “honour and reputation” in the public sphere is most important to prioritize. However, Adams then delves into discussing the influence that the public holds, noting that “The Eyes of every one are more particularly upon that assembly, and every motion of every member is inspected, so that he can neither be dropped nor resign without creating a thousand Jealousies in the minds of the people.”<sup>71</sup> This description places John, as a member of the assembly, in the center of the public spotlight. Then, near the end of the letter, Adams expresses, “I am afraid to write any thing which ought not to come to the publick Eye. I have many reason[s] to be careful of what I write as the fates if I may so express myself seem to delight in bringing into publick view private correspondencies, and making malicious use of very trifling circumstances.”<sup>72</sup> On one hand, the “publick Eye” can be dangerous in terms of the extent of power it has over the

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<sup>70</sup> Adams to Warren, (no date) January 1776.

<sup>71</sup> Adams to Warren, (no date) January 1776.

<sup>72</sup> Adams to Warren, (no date) January 1776.

reputations and livelihoods of public individuals, such as John Adams. On the other hand, Adams is astutely using this same “publick Eye” to imagine herself as the public subject. She adheres to the exemplar story of Cincinnatus, using the public as a buffer so that the possibility of her letters and her voice entering the literary public sphere is not from her actively seeking glory but from the public dragging these letters into the spotlight. Adams’s words have the potential to seep into the public sphere because, “even when intended for a single addressee, the letter is always subject to circulation among a larger group of readers,” passing “freely from the private to the public domain and even back again.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, Adams’s fear of writing something that “ought not to come to the publick Eye” suggests that everything she does choose to put in her letters might even be partly intended for a public audience, since there is always the possibility that they will end up in those hands.

Adams uses the masculine exemplar of republican Stoicism to benefit from the power the public has to bring her letters into the honorable *public sphere*, while allowing her to remain modest in the process. Nonetheless, Adams also uses this emphasis on Stoical modesty to simultaneously reiterate the honorable nature of the *private sphere*. In her January 1776 letter, Adams taps into the spirit of Cato, who, like Cincinnatus, was a Roman exemplar of republican Stoicism, quoting one of Cato’s lines in Joseph Addison’s play, *Cato, A Tragedy* (1712) in order to highlight the importance of the private sphere. *Cato* was widely digested as a republican tribute, illustrating a Stoical “liberty and love of country” that supersedes one’s priority to family as well as one’s own life.<sup>74</sup> In the play, Cato leads the resistance efforts against the dictatorship of Caesar, fleeing with other members of the Roman senate to plan their next retaliation. In Act IV Scene IV, he is informed that Caesar’s army is on their way to attack and Cato decides to stab

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<sup>73</sup> Altman, *Epistolarity*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> Hicks, “The Roman Matron in Britain,” 10-11.

himself, refusing to submit to tyranny.<sup>75</sup> Cato performs the ultimate Stoical sacrifice, and in one of his final speeches, he says, “When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway,/ The post of honour is a private station.”<sup>76</sup> Adams integrates “the post of honour is a private station” into her letter to Warren in order to convey that sometimes the real post of honor is the one that goes unnoticed. Therefore, while Adams plays into republican ideals in order to find a way for her voice to enter both the historical and literary public sphere in a manner that upholds, yet subverts, republican standards, she also uses republican ideals to extend the republican notions of honor and virtue to the private sphere. Importantly, Adams does not valorize the private in a manner that deprecates the public or fails to grant women access to the public sphere as well. She follows up this Cato quote with the qualifier, “yet in these days of peril whilst the vessel is in a storm, it would be guilt in an able passenger not to lend his assistance,” reinstating the idea that being dragged in the public sphere under selfless circumstances is deemed honorable under the tenets of republican Stoicism.<sup>77</sup> Adams manipulates Stoicism and republicanism as rhetorical strategies, challenging mutually exclusive institutional dichotomies by showing how republican Stoicism does not solely denote the public sphere, but rather also extends to the private sphere, and how women’s roles can extend to the public sphere and yet still be compliant with republican ideology.

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<sup>75</sup> Jorge Bastos da Silva, “Cato’s Ghosts: Pope, Addison, and Opposition Cultural Politics,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 38, no. 1 (2005): 95, *Gale Literature Resource Center* <https://go-gale-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=northwestern&id=GALE%7CA143216120&v=2.1&it=r&asid=8723f255> (Accessed April 3, 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Joseph Addison, *Cato, A Tragedy and Selected Essays*, eds. Mark E. Yellin and Christine Dunn Henderson (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2014), <https://aaron-zimmerman.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Cato-A-Tragedy.pdf>, (Accessed March 25, 2021), 87, 4.4.141-42.

<sup>77</sup> Silva, “Cato’s Ghosts.”

### **Abigail Adams: Creating a Literary, Pseudo-Public Sphere**

Above, I have shown how Adams employs the pseudonym Portia in a personalized manner in order to establish and legitimize her own female patriotism. However, in Adams's same April 13, 1776 letter, she also employs Portia in a depersonalized manner, using the pseudonym as a vehicle for literary performativity that grants her the permission to role-play under masculine positions of public power. Adams employs literary performativity not only to envision herself as occupying roles that have traditionally corresponded with republicanism, masculinity, and the public sphere, but she does so in a way that allows her to circumvent the Stoical narrative of a modest and selfless entrance into public service. By creating her own literary, pseudo-public sphere, Adams can bypass the tenets of Stoical republicanism and thus more directly and unabashedly insert her voice into the public canon. Engaging in a performance of any kind requires the process of world building, which includes establishing the rules of the world by setting up the *permissions*. In Adams's epistolary correspondence with Warren, she uses the pen name Portia to establish that she is employing literary performativity and to communicate a sense of theatrical and *literary permission*. Adams uses her Roman matron signature to signal that, in her epistolary world, she is capable of linguistically moving between classical and contemporary roles, an action that I will term "body hopping." By comparing Adams's April 10, 1776 letter to John Adams with her April 13, 1776 letter to Warren, two letters in which Adams quotes the same passage in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, I will illuminate exactly what makes Adams's and Warren's female-female correspondence invaluable. While Adams acts as more of a commentator in her letter to her husband, drawing out parallels between Caesar's Civil War and the American Revolution, with Warren, Adams is freer



to “body hop,” engaging in a performance and experimenting with what it would be like to occupy a masculine position of power in the public sphere.

Adams pens letters to her husband on April 7 and April 10, 1776 that chronicle the funeral of General Warren, or Dr. Joseph Warren, an esteemed patriot who died in the Battle of Bunker Hill and became known as the first martyr of the American Revolution.<sup>78</sup> She also notes that there was “an oration by Mr. Morton” in which Warren’s death was used to incite a recommitment to the patriot cause, as the “heroic virtues of the diseased” and “the noble cause to which he fell a Martir” was very fresh in “the minds of the Audience.”<sup>79</sup> Adams uses a simile, remarking “the Dead Body like that of Caesars before their Eyes,” and then transcribes an abridged version of Mark Antony’s soliloquy from Act III Scene I of Shakespeare’s play, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, in order to depict General Warren’s wounds:

Like dumb mouths did ope their ruby lips,  
And beg the voice and utterance of a Tongue.  
Woe to the Hands that shed this costly blood;  
A curse shall light upon their line;  
Domestick fury, and firce civil Strife  
Shall cumber all the parts of Britton (emphasis mine).<sup>80</sup>

By explicitly mentioning Caesar in her letter to John Adams, Adams contextualizes the quote within Shakespeare’s play. In *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, Brutus and Cassius are worried by Caesar’s love of power and his ambition to “turn the republic into a dictatorship.”<sup>81</sup> As a result, they, along with some other conspirators, assassinate Caesar by stabbing him to death in order to

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<sup>78</sup> Note: Dr. Joseph Warren is of no relation to Mercy Otis Warren. Harry Schenawolf, “Doctor Joseph Warren. Forgotten Patriot Leader of the American Revolution Who Was Killed in Battle,” *Revolutionary War Journal*, October 1, 2016 <http://www.revolutionarywarjournal.com/warren/> (Accessed November 21, 2020).

<sup>79</sup> “Abigail Adams to John Adams, 10 April 1776,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0244> (Accessed November 20, 2020).

<sup>80</sup> Adams to John Adams, 10 April 1776. This quotation is from *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, 3.1.275-79.

<sup>81</sup> Amanda Mabillard, “The Tragedy of Julius Caesar: Plot Summary,” *Shakespeare Online*, August 20, 2000 <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/juliuscaesar/juliuscaesarps.html> (Accessed December 6, 2020).

“save Rome from tyranny.”<sup>82</sup> While Dr. Joseph Warren and Caesar represent opposite agendas, the former for liberation and the latter for despotism, in death, both become significant catalysts that garner public support for their respective causes. In order to illustrate this parallel, Adams talks about Morton’s eulogy directly prior to this quote in order to assign Mark Antony’s speech to Morton, consequently adapting Mark Antony’s statement, “Shall cumber all parts of Italy” to “Shall cumber all parts of *Britton*.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, Morton’s eulogy contains several parallels in both vocabulary and imagery to this quote. For instance, similar to how Mark Antony’s quote uses a simile to transform Caesar’s wounds into lips for his dead body to speak, Morton revitalizes the voice of the deceased General Warren when he proclaims, “Ought we not to listen to the Voice of our slaughtered Brethren, who are now proclaiming aloud to their Country.”<sup>84</sup> Additionally, Mark Antony exclaims, “Woe to the *Hands that shed this costly blood*,” and Morton also uses hands as a synecdoche for the enemy when he says “the Hand of British Tyranny!”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, Adams’s letters to her husband contextualize both Warren’s funeral and the quote from *Julius Caesar*, overlapping the former onto the latter in order to place Morton, the orator, as the deliverer of Mark Antony’s lines and highlight the similarities between Caesar’s Civil War and the American Revolution.

Alternatively, in Adams’s letter to Warren on April 13, 1776, she decontextualizes Dr. Joseph Warren’s funeral as well as the Mark Antony quote in order to place herself in the public, masculine roles of a modern orator and a classical oracle. After Adams discusses her new household responsibilities, she begins a new paragraph in which she briefly mentions the passing

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<sup>82</sup> Mabillard, “The Tragedy of Julius Caesar.”

<sup>83</sup> Adams to John Adams, 10 April 1776.

<sup>84</sup> “Addressing Both Understanding and Passions — From the One He Forced Conviction from the Other He Stole Assent,” Doctor Joseph Warren RSS, <http://www.drjosephwarren.com/2016/07/addressing-both-understanding-and-passions-from-the-one-he-forced-conviction-from-the-other-he-stole-assent/> (April 5, 2021).

<sup>85</sup> “Addressing Both Understanding and Passions — From the One He Forced Conviction from the Other He Stole Assent.”

of a mutual, unnamed friend (which her letters to John Adams identify as Warren) with the line “I have been much gratified with the respect shewn to the remains of our worthy Friend. I hope and believe that the orator exerted himself upon the occasion—he had a fine field to display himself in.”<sup>86</sup> While Adams mentions the presence of an orator at the funeral, she does not name the orator like she does in her letter to John Adams, before quoting Mark Antony’s soliloquy. Adams transcribes a longer excerpt from Mark Antony’s soliloquy in Act III Scene I of *Julius Caesar*, starting right from the moment when Mark Antony sees Caesar’s dead body:

O pardon me, thou bleeding peice of Earth!  
 That I am meek and gentle with these Butchers  
 Thou art the Ruins of as brave a Man  
 As ever live'd in the tide of times;  
 Woe to the hand that shed this costly Blood  
 Over thy Wounds now do I prophesy,  
 (Which like dumb mouths, do ope their Ruby lips  
 To beg the voice and utterance of a Tongue  
 A curse shall light upon that line of Men  
 Domestick fury and fircce civil Strife  
 Shall cumber all the parts of Brittain.  
 Shakspear<sup>87</sup>

Adams’s letter to Warren distances the passage from its Shakespearean origins, as she does not put quotes around the passage, whereas in her letter to John Adams, she does use quotation marks. Furthermore, the additional lines from Mark Antony’s soliloquy that she chooses to include in her letter to Warren add the first-person pronouns “me” and “I,” which make the language appear to fall under *her* penmanship and represent *her* perspective. Through claiming Shakespeare’s language as her own, Adams is able to carry out a literary performance as the orator at Warren’s funeral, a role that women did not have access to in the eighteenth century. Not only does Adams transform into an orator, but her audience correspondingly shifts from her

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<sup>86</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>87</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776. This quotation is from *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, 3.1.269-79.

correspondent, Warren, to the American people. By assuming this role, Adams is rewriting history, transporting herself into the public sphere to publicly eulogize and memorialize one of the most prominent male martyrs of the American Revolution. Unlike the Shakespearean context of Mark Antony speaking these lines to Caesar with no one else on stage, in this new context of Adams as the orator of this quote, she is speaking to the public about how “brave a Man” Dr. Joseph Warren was, asserting her loyalty to the General, and ultimately, to the patriotic cause.

However, Adams does not stop there. She uses the Roman roots of the quote to body hop into the classical role of an orator, granting herself another position of masculine, public power. Adams explicitly takes on a prophetic tone with the lines “Woe to [the] hand that shed this costly Blood/Over thy Wounds now do I prophesy,” but the following parenthetical crucially reveals the source of Adams’s oracular power. The simile of “dumb mouths” with “Ruby lips” refers to Warren’s bleeding wounds, portraying these wounds as wanting to speak, but unable to do so. Warren’s wounded body does “beg the voice and utterance of a Tongue,” or a spokesperson to speak on his behalf. Thus, by Adams framing this quote as her own speech, she is subsequently positioning herself as the metaphorical “mouth” of Dr. Joseph Warren, engaging in a clever form of literary ventriloquism that gives her the utmost level of contemporary and classical authority in her epistolary public sphere. As a modern orator and a classical oracle figure that is authorized by Warren, Adams places a curse of “Domestick fury and fierce civil Strife” on Britain on his behalf. Adams merges and blurs the private and public spheres while simultaneously blurring temporality by body hopping between contemporary and classical roles. Through such temporal dualism, Adams can imagine herself as occupying traditionally masculine, public positions of power in both the past and the present; this literary performance ultimately allows Adams to

envision a world in which women, just like men, have a historical pool of canonized female public leaders to emulate.

Adams uses her newfound ability to speak in the public sphere under these contemporary and classical roles to begin rewriting and reframing republicanism's conception of women, highlighting how domestic women are occupying an active role in the American Revolution. Although, within the context of Shakespeare's play, the word "domestick" denotes a civil war, under Adams's pen, the word, which is now encircled by Adams's epistolary writing, can take on a more political and gendered meaning. Through Adams's voice, the lines, "Domestick fury and firce civil Strife/ Shall cumber all the parts of Brittain," can alternatively paint an image of women, who are traditionally restricted to the private, domestic sphere as engendering public, civil unrest in America against Britain. The word "fury" also supports this reading, as "fury" can denote "one who is likened to an infernal spirit or minister of vengeance," such as the female Furies of Greek mythology, or more colloquially, "a ferociously angry or malignant woman."<sup>88</sup> Adams is not merely assuming the roles of powerful men in history, but she is also using their words to promote her own agenda. Adams's voice uses this Shakespearean reference to Roman antiquity as a means to restructure the historical canon and portray women as active, patriotic contributors to the war effort by placing them at the helm of the America's vengeful retaliation against Dr. Joseph Warren's death.

Nevertheless, while this alternative tactic of literary performativity and body hopping may allow Adams to circumvent the rules of republican Stoicism, she ultimately qualifies and aligns this performance with those very tenets. After Adams's insertion of Mark Antony's quote from *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, she immediately pivots with the brief phrase, "But where do

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<sup>88</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st ed (1898), "fury, n." (Accessed December 12, 2020).

I ramble.”<sup>89</sup> This five-word sentence stands as a stark contrast to the lengthy lines of enjambment in the Mark Antony soliloquy. The clipped feeling of this sentence mirrors its intent, which appears to be a withdrawal from her role as a public orator. The word choice of “where” implies that Adams has gotten so caught up in her own imaginary performance that she has forgotten her place as a woman in an American republic. With the word choice of “ramble,” Adams trivializes the ambitious literary pursuits she sought after with the Shakespearean reference, re-assuming the modest facade of the Roman Stoics. For Adams, epistolary correspondence offers a means of escape and performative re-invention; however, this letter also reveals the limitations of epistolary writing, as this medium proves to be insufficient in letting Adams fully escape and erase the paradigms of republican Stoicism that impede women from having an active public voice in the historical canon.

### **Mercy Otis Warren: Becoming a Sentimental, Epistolary Playwright and Historian**

While Adams’s Stoical approach adheres to the republican, and subsequently masculine, definitions of patriotism and virtue, Warren’s approach hinges on sentimentalism, uprooting “patriotism” and “virtue” from their public, masculine origins and re-framing them as particularly private, domestic, and feminine. Eighteenth-century sentimentalism redefined virtue as “above all a feminine quality,” by conveying women as moral cultivators for men.<sup>90</sup> Women were supposed to use their roles as “social companions, wives, and mothers” to instruct “men to be virtuous,”<sup>91</sup> which would ultimately promote “patriotism in men.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore, sentimentalism engendered a novel understanding of virtue that, unlike its Stoical, republican

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<sup>89</sup> Adams to Warren, 13 April 1776.

<sup>90</sup> Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue,” 51.

<sup>91</sup> Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue,” 55.

<sup>92</sup> Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue,” 46.

predecessor, was rooted in *women* and the *private sphere*. Since sentimentalism pinpointed women's feminine domesticity as the source of their morality, Warren's letters "wrote of a privacy, founded on retirement, sentimental exchange, and familial attachment, as the source of patriotic, republic virtue."<sup>93</sup> Additionally, Warren's sentimental approach allowed letter writing to act as a literary vehicle that brought the public sphere to her, letting her observe public life and remain historically and politically engaged while remaining in the private, domestic sphere. In the eighteenth century, even if a letter was addressed to one person, they were often read out loud to a group, turning the space of the home into an embodied public sphere, or Warren's own personal sentimental coterie. Thus, not only did sentimentalism muddle private and public spaces by re-defining the traditionally masculine and public ideologies of patriotism and virtue as particularly feminine, domestic, and private, but it also merged these spheres by framing epistolary culture as a social forum for discussion, reflection, and self-discovery.

In her letters to Adams, Warren shifts the epistolary tone from Stoical to sentimental in order to address limitations within Adams's classical approach and instigate a new method for contemporary women to redefine their relationship with the public and private spheres and reconfigure space for their historical and literary voices. Warren first assumes the name "Marcia" with Adams in a letter on September 21, 1775, which is directly after Adams's first "Portia" letter to Warren. Intellectual historians generally believe that Warren's epistolary pseudonym "Marcia" refers to "the wife of the Roman statesman Cato the Younger, who, like Brutus, was an implacable foe of Caesar and during the eighteenth century lionized as a martyr to the republican cause."<sup>94</sup> Marcia was "a self-sacrificing enemy of Caesar" and a domestic figure that was completely subservient to Cato. While Warren similarly adopts the name of a Stoical and

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<sup>93</sup> Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren*, 187.

<sup>94</sup> Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity*, 50.

domestic Roman matron, unlike Adams, Warren calls attention to her own change of signature, ending the letter with “from one who will Indulge so far in the Romantic stile as to subscribe once more by the Name of Your affectionate Marcia.”<sup>95</sup> Warren decides to explicitly acknowledge Adams’s change in signature and is willing to copy her in this “Romantic stile,” a word choice that allows her to draw on the etymological root “Roman.”<sup>96</sup> However, the word “Romantic” also refers to “an idealized, fantastic, or sentimental view of life or reality,” emphasizing a modern, un-Roman sensibility.<sup>97</sup> Warren cleverly capitalizes on the double meaning of the word “Romantic” in order to acknowledge Adams’s tactic of Stoical, Roman performativity and, more importantly, to re-route these efforts to support her own sentimental philosophy. Additionally, the word “indulge” suggests a secret satisfaction or joy that accompanies literary performativity, while the addition of the words “so far” suggests that Warren senses limitations to Adams’s epistolary approach of enacting Roman Stoicism as a means to carve out a space for women’s historical and literary voices.

These limitations are better specified in a later letter to Adams on October 15, 1776. This letter was written after Warren’s husband, James, was elected to be a member of the Provincial Congress. Thus, not only does Warren have to handle her own separation from her husband, but, as evident in this letter, she has to support Adams in her long-time separation from John Adams, since John had congressional responsibilities to tend to in Philadelphia. Warren assures Adams that while it is “A Great *tryal of patience and philosophy* to be so Long separated” from John, “the High Enthusiasm of a *truly patriotic Lady* will Cary Her through Every Difficulty, and Lead

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<sup>95</sup> “Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 21 September 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0182> (Accessed October 14, 2020). While Marcia was a “self-sacrificing enemy of Caesar,” she never aspired to the “life-and-death heroics” of other Roman matrons, such as Arria and Portia. Hicks. “Portia and Marcia,” 285.

<sup>96</sup> “The History of ‘Romance’,” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/ah-romance-a-word-borne-to-english-on-the-breastplates-of-chivalry> (Accessed February 16, 2021).

<sup>97</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2010), “romantic, adj. and n.” (Accessed February 27, 2021)



Her to Every Exertion. *Patience, Fortitude, Public Spirit, Magnanimity and self Denial* are the *Virtues she Boasts*" (emphasis mine).<sup>98</sup> Warren's language is steeped in allusions to Stoicism, listing a plethora of Stoical virtues to highlight how Adams has made the notion of a "patriotic Lady" synonymous with the Roman ideology of republican Stoicism. Warren identifies Adams's decision to sign her letters of correspondence under the Roman matron pseudonym Portia as a tactic for Adams to align herself with ancient, Stoical virtues. Nonetheless, Warren's choice of the words "High" and "Boasts" taints the tone from offering friendly advice to having an underlying bite of critique and doubt. The word "High" can signify "showing pride or self-importance," attributes that directly contrast with the republican and Stoical prioritization of public virtue over private self-interest.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, after listing the various Stoical virtues of a "truly patriotic Lady," Warren concludes the sentence by saying that these are virtues that "she Boasts," implying an attitude of vanity that also starkly contrasts the selflessness required of republican Stoicism. As a result, Warren's decision to implant anti-Stoical words within an extremely Stoical description creates a philosophical tension that renders Adams's "truly patriotic Lady" unachievable. Once again, while, on the surface, Warren appears to acknowledge and accept Adams's approach of classical literary performativity, she tactfully generates an undercurrent of doubt in her epistolary responses. Warren questions whether there is any benefit to women attempting to perform under the ideology of republican Stoicism and striving to embody such rigidly selfless and sacrificial roles.

Warren's tone of critique becomes even more apparent when she reflects on applying her advice for Adams to herself, confessing:

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<sup>98</sup> "Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 15 October 1776," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-02-02-0098> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>99</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2014), "high, adj. and n.2" (Accessed February 27, 2021).

I wish I Could put in my Claim to those *sublime* qualities. But oh! the Dread of Loosing all that this World Can Bestow by one *Costly sacrifice* keeps my Mind in Continual Alarm. I own my weakness and stand Corrected yet Cannot Rise superior to Those *Attachments* which sweeten Life and Without which the Dregs of this *Terestial Existence* Would not be Worth preserving (emphasis mine).<sup>100</sup>

Warren cleverly takes a page out of Adams's *Stoical* book yet twists it to ironically dismantle its own republican philosophy. Warren enacts a performance of humility, similar to how Adams threads a tone of Stoical modesty throughout her letters. However, Warren conversely employs this humility to admit that she is not strong enough to live up to the Stoic ideal and to shift from Adams's epistolary tone of ancient Stoicism to her own tone of modern sentimentalism.

Warren's ability to use Stoicism as a rhetorical tool to advance sentimentalism already begins to depict how she is working to complicate the traditional binary between these genres. While, as mentioned earlier, the word "Romantic" yokes sentimentalism with idealism and fantasy, Warren reframes this affiliation, attaching this idealism to the artificiality and impossibility of Stoical pursuits. Although Warren confesses that she wishes she could embody Stoical traits, she recognizes that these attributes are "sublime," or occupying "the highest sphere of thought," and consequently present an unachievable goal for human beings to strive for.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, Warren blurs the dichotomy between Stoicism and sentimentalism by elucidating how the limitations of republican Stoicism stem from its idealistic and unrealistic virtues, drawing upon a realm of fantasy that is typically associated with sentimentalism. Warren then equates her pragmatic humanity, which is typically more associated with Stoicism, with sentimentalism, citing it as the reason why it is impossible for her to embody the "sublime." Warren describes the sacrifice involved in Adams's Stoical patriotism as "costly" and ultimately not worth it, as she would rather preserve earthly "Attachments," such as her friendships and her family, than strive for an

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<sup>100</sup> Warren to Adams, 15 October 1776.

<sup>101</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed (2012), "sublime, adj. and n." (Accessed February 27, 2021).

unachievable ideal. Warren is adeptly recuperating the sentimental, which typically denotes the primacy of emotions at the expense of reason, in order to illustrate how her own emotions and terrestrial “Attachments” can be viewed as realistic and logical sentiments. Hence, in her letters to Adams, Warren offers a systematic reconfiguration and critique of Stoicism, revealing that she does not want to perform under Adams’s Stoical definition of a “patriotic Lady” because she is not as willing as Marcia or the other Roman matrons to sacrifice private life with her husband so that he can serve the public good. Warren illuminates the limitations of Adams’s approach of centering her letter writing around Roman matron embodiment and literary performativity, as both tactics are rooted in the past rather than the present, Stoicism rather than sentimentalism, and idealism rather than reality. This tension between Warren’s and Adams’s epistolary strategies is reflected in Warren’s choice to not sign this letter as Marcia, as well as her general inconsistency with employing this pseudonym. In fact, Warren fully stops writing to Adams under the cognomen Marcia in 1779 and then later requests for her granddaughter to be named Marcia, transforming the name from acting as a link to ancient Rome and republican Stoicism to acting as a contemporary, sentimental link to her actual familial lineage.<sup>102</sup>

Warren’s letter to Adams on March 1, 1777 ultimately encapsulates the tension between their rhetorical strategies by framing their conversations about Stoicism and sentimentalism, as well as the past and the present, more explicitly under the context of the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. The quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was an important debate in early eighteenth-century letters as to whether writers should aspire to imitate the literary excellence of

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<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: G.W. Jacobs, 1900), <http://gerritsen.chadwyck.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/?jsessionid=AB1C6CA1D37D3D41EBC37EC3110814B0fulltext/fulltext.do?area=documents&id=GerritsenG785.1&pagenum=99&backto=FULLREC&fromPage=fullRec> (Accessed February 28, 2021), 92-93.

classical literature or should challenge the supremacy of the ancients with modern scholarship.<sup>103</sup> In this letter, Warren once again must deal with Adams's sorrow over her husband's "distance and absence."<sup>104</sup> While Warren initially expresses understanding, she then states, "But why should not the same Heroic Virtue, the same Fortitude, patience and Resolution, that Crowns the memory of the *ancient* Matron, Adorn the Character of Each *modern* Fair who Adopts the signature of *Portia*" (emphasis mine).<sup>105</sup> By semantically placing "the *ancient* Matron" and the "*modern* Fair" together in one sentence, she is intentionally invoking the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, putting these two ideologies in tension with one another. Warren poses this rhetorical question to point out a disconnect between the classical "Portia" and modern women (such as Adams) who adopt her name as a literary pseudonym. Notably, Warren frames this epistolary thought experiment from the perspective of a playwright, delineating Portia as a "character" whom literary performers, such as Adams, play, and listing Stoical virtues as a quasi-script for women to stick to in order to embody this classical role. This list of Stoical virtues harkens back to the list of "sublime qualities" in Warren's October 15, 1776 letter in order for her to once again portray Adams's perspective of Portia as steeped in traditional republicanism, which tied Stoicism, patriotism, and virtue to the public sphere, and thus to men. Warren's conversation with Adams prompts the philosophical question: if Portia could be a pillar of Roman matron Stoicism, virtue, and patriotism during the tyranny of the Roman Republic, why should Adams *not* be able to do the same now? Nevertheless, the dubious and biting tone of Warren's words draws attention to the futility of such a comparison by questioning the

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<sup>103</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Ancients and Moderns." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 29, 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Ancients-and-Moderns> (Accessed March 8, 2021).

<sup>104</sup> "Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, 1 March 1777," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-02-02-0122> (Accessed October 14, 2020).

<sup>105</sup> Warren to Adams, 1 March 1777.

possibility for a woman in contemporary society to achieve this ancient ideal. Warren views the expectations of Stoical virtues as unnatural and unrealistic, suggesting that this Stoical resolve should not actually be considered a virtue for contemporary women to imitate.

Warren then trades her playwright perspective for her historian perspective to further question the interrelation of Rome and America. Right after she poses the above rhetorical question, Warren remarks, “Surely Rome had not severer tryals than America, nor was Cesar in the senate with his Flatterers, and his Legions about him, more to be Dreaded than George the 3d with his parasites in parliment, and his murdering Mercenaries in the Field.”<sup>106</sup> Warren draws upon the exemplar theory of history, another integral classical idea that stemmed from Renaissance humanism. According to the exemplar theory of history, “history presented examples of virtue that readers were meant to imitate and examples of vice they must avoid.”<sup>107</sup> During the American Revolution, American leaders began to resurrect ancient republican figures, creating a parallel narrative between the tyrannical institutions of Britain and Caesar’s Rome, and the republican pursuits of America and the Roman Republic. For instance, Washington, Jefferson, and John Adams assumed classically coded aliases in their private discourses, identifying as “Scavola,” “Scipio,” and “Brutus” respectively to internalize the republican spirit of the public good and position themselves against British tyranny.<sup>108</sup> Warren alludes to this historical parallel that male public figures have been constantly employing to justify the American Revolution and the establishment of a new republic; yet, in doing so, she also incites a tension within this parallel between the ancient and modern, implying that modern society is capable of taking political action against tyranny and does not need to imitate the

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<sup>106</sup> Warren to Adams, 1 March 1777.

<sup>107</sup> Hicks, “Portia and Marcia,” 6.

<sup>108</sup> Shaley, “Ancient Masks, American Fathers,” 160.

Romans to do so. Rather than imitate the past, Warren overturns exemplar theory and opts to detach virtue from its classical, Stoical roots.

On one hand, it might appear that Warren does not use her epistolary correspondence to craft an alternate persona for herself, but to rather reaffirm her already existing public authorship, using letters as “the testing ground for different models of historical explanation, narrative technique, and character sketches.”<sup>109</sup> Warren’s correspondents thoroughly admired her skill in “mental portraiture”<sup>110</sup> and John Adams described her responsibility to “delineate Characters” as one belonging to a “faithfull Historian,” since “the public is so interested in public Characters” that “it becomes the Duty of every good Citizen who happens to be acquainted with them to communicate his Knowledge.”<sup>111</sup> However, on the other hand, Warren’s choice to identify under her public roles as a playwright and historian in her private, epistolary correspondence to Adams accentuates that *there is something different that letter-writing* under these personas supplies her with. When viewed from such a lens, Warren uses letter writing to better actualize her roles as a playwright and historian because she is free to carry out her own sentimental philosophy and create portraits of real, contemporary, female characters. Warren’s most prominent public plays, *The Adulateur* (1772), *The Defeat* (1773), and *The Group* (1775), as well as her book, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), reflect on and recount the American Revolution through numerous allusions to Roman antiquity.<sup>112</sup> For instance, in *The Adulateur*, Warren names the revolutionary leaders and patriots Brutus, Cassius, Junius, Portius,

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<sup>109</sup> Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren*, 214-15.

<sup>110</sup> Alice Brown, *Mercy Warren* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1896), <https://go-gale-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/ps/i.do?p=NCCO&u=northwestern&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CASPUI439716781> (Accessed February 28, 2021), 159.

<sup>111</sup> Brown, *Mercy Warren*, 161-62.

<sup>112</sup> While Warren’s *History* was published after the letters in this thesis, she began writing this book from the start of the American Revolution. Also, the large span of time between *The Adulateur* (1772) and her *History* (1805) serves to highlight the recurrent public pattern of having public writing be centered around republicanism, Roman allusions, and above all, men.

and Marcus, “well-known and adored heroes of the Roman Republic,” in order to promote the revolutionary message of expelling tyranny and restoring liberty.<sup>113</sup> This apparent dichotomy between the classical Stoicism of Warren’s published works and the modern sentimentalism of her epistolary correspondence with Adams becomes more decipherable when thinking about the demographic that is represented in her public works: men. In all three of these plays, every single character is a man, as Warren is using “a cluster of Roman republican heroes,” who are all men, to embody public leaders in the American Revolution, who are also all men.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, in Warren’s *History*, she only creates literary portraits of public male figures, such as her sections on the “character of Mr. Hutchinson” and the “characters of Samuel Adams and John Hancock.”<sup>115</sup> In the public sphere, unlike in the epistolary sphere, Warren cannot renounce the traditionally male-dominated use of exemplar theory. Her public roles as a playwright and historian are constrained by the public sphere’s perpetuation of its inextricable link to republican Stoicism, patriotism, virtue, and masculinity.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, Warren’s public works adhere to this same classical, Stoical language of the masculine public sphere. Nevertheless, Warren’s private epistolary correspondence with Adams enables her to modernize virtue in the form of sentimentalism and ironically actualize her public roles by playwriting and history chronicling *about* contemporary females, *for* a female companion.

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<sup>113</sup> Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), <https://muse-jhu.edu.turing.library.northwestern.edu/book/5265> (Accessed January 16, 2021), 135.

<sup>114</sup> Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores*, 133.

<sup>115</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution: Interspersed with Biographical, Political and Moral Observations* Vol. 1 (Boston: Printed by Manning and Loring, for E. Larkin, No. 47, Cornhill, 1805), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CY0103461615/SABN?u=northwestern&sid=SABN&xid=3c1fd5a3&pg=1> (Accessed February 28, 2021).

<sup>116</sup> In some ways, Warren actually instantiates Adams’s vision of a woman in the public sphere, as Warren has already inserted her voice in this sphere by being a published playwright (and soon to be published historian). However, while she technically has a public voice, it is a censored and restricted voice. Ironically, for Warren, the private, epistolary sphere allows her to rebuild and actualize her public roles as a playwright and historian in a modern, sentimental, and feminine way.

In her letters with Adams, Warren first uses her new sentimental, epistolary perspective as a playwright and historian in order to bring to the forefront the possibility that history's classical models may not be appropriate paragons for the present. Warren explicitly narrates an epistolary tonal shift that mirrors the philosophical transition from Stoicism to sentimentalism when she says, "I must speedily descend from the Altitudes of Heroism, and talk in the simple stile of the Manufacturer and the Humbler Language of the Domestic Dame: who seeketh Wool and Flax and Worketh Willingly with her hands."<sup>117</sup> Warren associates the "Altitudes of Heroism" with Adams's rhetorical strategy of using her letters as a mode of classical, republican, and Stoical performativity. Notably, Warren refrains from creating a character portrait, but rather uses the description of the "Altitudes of Heroism" to represent Stoicism as an intangible, lofty, and glorified public ideal that she wants to leave in the past.

Warren then alternatively uses her new *epistolary role* as a playwright and historian to give voice to modern, female characters, such as the private, "Domestic Dame," treating the real world as her metaphorical stage. Warren uses language that evokes vertical movement with the words "descend" and "Altitudes," building off of the spatial dichotomy she establishes in her October 1776 letter between "sublime qualities" and "Terestial" bonds, in order to position the character of the "Domestic Dame" as a foil to republican Stoicism and antiquity. Warren highlights how this persona requires a "descent" away from past Roman fantasies and towards a pragmatic contemporaneity grounded in private domesticity and sentimentalism. Furthermore, Warren updates this modern, female classification of the "Domestic Dame" to reflect the present revolutionary circumstances, as these women's roles in the late eighteenth century changed in response to men's shifting roles. Warren reveals that this domestic classification is no longer

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<sup>117</sup> Warren to Adams, 1 March 1777.



distinct from the role of “the Manufacturer,” since a housewife “seeketh Wool and Flax” and also “Worketh Willingly with her hands.” Since men were now “Wading in the Field of Blood,” women needed to enter the public sphere as manufacturers in order to secure necessary materials for their families.<sup>118</sup> Warren states that the manufacturers from Braintree, which is where Adams lives, are led by “one of the Amphyctionic Ladies, to whom the Females of the unites states, must *in the Future Look up for the Example* of Industry and oeconimy” (emphasis mine).<sup>119</sup> The word “Amphyctionic” refers to the Amphictyonic League, a system of governance in ancient Greece in which “an association of town-states linked together to form a cultural and political union.”<sup>120</sup> While Warren is using classical vocabulary, which might initially appear to contradict her shift from classical Stoicism to contemporary sentimentalism, she substitutes the word “League” with “Ladies,” modernizing the language to create a new contemporary portrait of a group of female leaders rather than an ancient council of men. Instead of fixating on the past, Warren updates this classical term to reflect a present classification of women, showing how female manufacturers are in an influential position to spur on a new, modern lineage of female exemplars.

Thus, not only is Warren able to use her *epistolary roles* as a playwright and historian to overturn exemplar history, but, just like with patriotism and virtue, Warren detaches this methodology from its republican, Stoical, and masculine roots, repurposing it to highlight a female historical canon. Warren even explicitly uses the word “Example,” not to focus on imitating virtues from the past and observing masculine historical paradigms, but rather to pose a new virtuous example that is grounded both in the present and in women. Finally, instead of

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<sup>118</sup> Warren to Adams, 1 March 1777.

<sup>119</sup> Warren to Adams, 1 March 1777.

<sup>120</sup> “The Great Amphictyonic League of Ancient Delphi in Greece: Greeka,” Greekacom, <https://www.greeka.com/sterea/delphi/history/amphictyonic-league/> (March 10, 2021).

using the words “Look up” to continue the vertical, spatial visualization of Stoical, Roman matrons as an antiquated ideal to which women should aspire for, she replaces this ideal with the future-oriented exemplar of the modern, female manufacturer. Therefore, while Adams’s letters strategically employ epistolary performativity, Warren’s letters acknowledge Adams’s literary world-building but do not rhetorically position Warren as occupying the role of a performer. Warren complicates the idea of literary *performativity* by assuming the persona of a playwright and historian, two roles that are consistent with her actual roles in the public sphere, rather than embodying a character that is located outside of her own sense of self. By situating the roles of a playwright and historian, two occupations that are inherently tied to the public sphere, within the private epistolary sphere, Warren creates a space for herself to criticize self-abnegation and classical allusions. The epistolary sphere ironically allows Warren to fully actualize her identity as a playwright and historian, opening her eyes to these public roles’ potential to capture the nuanced and constantly evolving classifications of modern-day women. Through her epistolary correspondence with Adams, Warren taps into her new historical and literary voices, paving the way for a modernized use of the exemplar theory of history that originates with the female paragons of the present rather than the Roman matrons of the past. Warren’s repositioning of the traditionally public genres of plays and histories as private, domestic, and epistolary genres suggests that Warren might be starting to create a new role of authorship for herself entirely, that of the modern biographer.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> While this thesis does not expand upon what it would be like to think about Warren potentially striving to become a public biographer, it originally delved into scholarship about Warren’s public role as a historian. According to Kate Davies, Warren believed that being “conventionally domestic, private, and sentimental” is what gave her the proper qualifications to be a public historian. Warren’s “feminine privacy” enabled rather than detracted from her efforts to legitimize the public use of her voice, because it fostered “that independence so necessary to the character of a historian.” allowing her to be impartial and dissociate from public parties and political factions. It is possible that Davies’s work provides a foundation for thinking about Warren as a biographer. Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren*, 218.

## Conclusion

As I argued in my introduction, just because scholars have remembered the “Remember the Ladies” letter, does not mean we have properly remembered and understood the literary legacies of historical women like Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren. Examining Adams’s and Warren’s eighteenth-century epistolary correspondence as “Portia” and “Marcia” through a literary perspective has served to complicate historical scholarship by challenging the binary correlations between women and the private sphere and men and the public sphere. This thesis showcases how, not only are “abstraction and individuation” both present in the public sphere as Dillon argues, but *women* imagined ways to use *both* of these qualities to revise the relation between public and private.<sup>122</sup> Adams exhibits a version of Warner’s “abstraction” through her use of literary performativity, fluidly hopping between the private and public sphere, traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity, and classical and contemporary roles of authority. Such abstraction actually works to sharpen, rather than obscure, Adams’s individual voice in the public sphere. Through this same method of performativity, Adams capitalizes on the public sphere’s perpetuation of traditionally Stoical, republican, and masculine narratives, manipulating these traditions in order to subversively insert her own voice into the historical and literary canons. Furthermore, through her creation of a literary, pseudo-public sphere, Adams is able to transition away from historical parallels between antiquity and contemporaneity; instead, Adams constructs her own alternate reality as a means for her to envision a world that is parallel to the one she lives in, in which she, as a woman, has access to public positions of political power.

While Warner and Dillon both situate abstraction in the public sphere, Warren’s “abstraction” manifests itself in the private sphere, as this sphere, according to Warren’s

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<sup>122</sup> Dillon, *Gender of Freedom*, 42.

recuperation of the sentimental, is the center of female, domestic virtue. Warren's private epistolary correspondence with Adams provides her with a new forum in which to explore her individual identity as a playwright and historian, liberating herself from the republican, Stoical constraints these two roles possess when situated in the public sphere. As a result, Warren's use of abstraction more importantly actualizes her individual, sentimental voice, allowing her to use epistolary writing to re-envision a public sphere in which she can use her identity as a playwright and historian to create literary characterizations of contemporary women.

Rather than pinning these women against one another, my thesis illuminates how, through their female-female epistolary correspondence, these women create a unique space of their own in which to engage in a more open, experimental, and nuanced conversation about their current and desired roles in the public sphere. Adams and Warren differ on exactly *how* to carve out spaces for their historical and literary voices, as Adams employs republican Stoicism and classical literary performativity, while Warren employs sentimentalism and a novel, modern adaptation of literary performativity. Nevertheless, both women are ultimately rewriting the classical models of republican Stoicism and the exemplar theory of history. Warren's letters to Adams create an alternate, female-oriented literary lens to interpolate into the historical documentation of the American Revolution. Adams's letters to Warren radically push the limits of epistolary writing by envisioning an alternate version of the public sphere, reimagining the history of the American Revolution entirely in order to grant women access to the public sphere as well as public positions of authority. I personally find hope in how these two women, who lived within a restrictive, republican society, were able to use epistolary writing as a tool to bridge the literal spatial gap between them, and to figure out imaginative ways to bridge the public-propagated gap between the private and public spheres. Through complicating the

relationship between private and public spheres of influence, Adams and Warren explore the interconnected relationship between what it *means* and *should mean* to have a public voice as a woman in late eighteenth-century America.

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