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Louisa S. Mccord and the "Feminist" Debate

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LOUISA S. MCCORD AND THE “FEMINIST” DEBATE

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The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.
I dedicate this to
my best friend and understanding husband,
Lee Henderson.
You’ll be in my heart,
forever.
I would like to acknowledge the professors whose influence this work illustrates:
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Thank you for training my mind that I might become a critical thinker.

Sapere Aude!

(Dare to Know!)
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ABSTRACT

Who was Louisa S. McCord as a writer and polemicist on women’s rights in the antebellum South? Why did she, a conservative intellectual, use the term “feminist” in 1852? Historians of the nineteenth century Woman’s Rights Movement have paid McCord little attention because of her geographic location—she lived in South Carolina—and her conservative opinions. Her attitudes, which were conventional for her era, put her outside the interest of women’s studies until recently. This dissertation provides a new analysis of Louisa S. McCord’s work and argues the historical significance of her ideas about the Woman’s Rights Movement of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this dissertation is particularly interested in McCord’s use of the word “feminist.” In the course of critiquing female reformer Elizabeth Oakes Smith, McCord may have been the first person to use the term “feminist” in print. This study adds to the collective knowledge of women’s history by shining a light on the impact of McCord’s ideas.

This study is an interdisciplinary one, utilizing both sociology and women’s history in studying the social system of the antebellum South. This dissertation examines the gendered aspects of the South’s social class structure by analyzing McCord’s published essays on women’s rights. An analysis of non-fiction nineteenth-century periodical literature provided the foundational sources for this work. In addition, letters and legal documents gave insight into the personal life of this intriguing woman.
INRODUCTION

In the mid-1980s, the combined work of historians Steven Hause, Karen Offen and Nancy Cott led to an understanding that the words “feminism” and “feminist” originated in France in the 1880s, spread to England in the 1890s, and arrived in America in the 1900s (France → England → America). However, research into periodicals from the 1890s to 1920s has since revealed the terms in American magazine articles from the 1890s. By researching the word “feminist” in ProQuest’s American Periodicals Series, even earlier mentions of the term were also found. Of particular interest is an 1852 article in DeBow's Review where the word “feminist” was used to directly comment on the American Woman’s Rights Movement of the time, potentially raising questions over the prior historical chronology for the word “feminist.”¹

“Art. V. — Woman and Her Needs” by Louisa S. McCord was published in De Bow’s Review of the Southern and Western States from September 1852. In this article, McCord wrote a scathing response refuting the arguments Elizabeth Oakes Smith made in her book Woman and Her Needs published in late 1851. Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune had originally presented Oakes Smith’s work in serial format from November 1850 to June 1851. After attending the second Woman’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in October 1850, Oakes Smith had been inspired to write. After the publication of her works, McCord had been equally inspired to repudiate ideas in Oakes Smith’s writings.²


Thus it is that McCord’s article supports Cott’s observation that the earliest users of the term “feminist” were detractors who utilized the word in a demeaning manner to refer to woman’s rights activists. Although McCord wrote as a defender of true womanhood, what we would today call an “antifeminist,” this study illustrates various parts of her personal life that were not in agreement with the standards she upheld. Louisa S. McCord’s name is largely unfamiliar because many women’s historians have overlooked her antifeminist works as a conservative intellectual. Part of McCord’s neglect stems from a bias against intellectuals in the South before the Civil War. As historian and McCord biographer Leigh Fought explains, earlier works on intellectuals, which thought that only men held such status in the south, further exacerbated difficulties. In addition, the destruction the Civil War wrought left few early McCord letters or diaries intact.3

During her lifetime, McCord received admiration for the quality of her poetical and literary works as well as her scathing analytical essays. John S. Hart included her for both her essays and poetry in his catalog of The Female Prose Writers of America, published in Philadelphia in 1852. Caroline May gave McCord a small entry in The American Female Poets: With Biographical and Critical Notices out of Philadelphia in 1853. McCord’s poetry earned her further acclaim in a listing by Thomas B. Read in The Female Poets of America of 1855. The Duyckinck brothers, Evert and George, gave her an in-depth biographical entry for The Cyclopaedia of American Literature of 1856 in which they noted several of McCord’s otherwise anonymous works, which was a great boon to later historians. Apparently, McCord’s husband, David J. McCord, personally had a hand in writing the entry just before his death in 1855, which lends it more authority than other such listings. Afterward, writers who sought to include excerpts about McCord drew their information from the Duyckinck brothers’ work. Mary Forrest thought it fitting to include McCord amongst her Women of the South Distinguished in

Literature, published in 1861 after the Civil War had begun. An advertisement for Forrest’s upcoming book appeared in the “Morning Jottings” section of The Daily True Delta published in New Orleans. The Morning Jottings enthused that the work of female prose writers and poets, who either lived in or were born in the South, had a place in this stylish work, naming McCord from South Carolina among the listing of contributors to Forrest’s book. James Wood Davidson included McCord in his 1869 work, Living Writers of the South, which was fitting, given that he had been a private tutor to her children years earlier. In what may be the last publication about McCord during her lifetime, Mary T. Tardy included her in an entry for The Living Female Writers of the South published out of Philadelphia in 1872.⁴

McCord passed away on November 23, 1879, but her work continued to make brief appearances in various anthologies for decades afterward. The first one to mention her after death is Louise Manly in her 1895 publication of Southern Literature from 1579-1895, a Comprehensive Review, with Copious Extracts and Criticisms. Between the years 1909 and 1910, there was a surge in publications that mentioned McCord. The most notable of these is the Library of Southern Literature, Compiled Under the Direct Supervision of Southern Men of Letters which Joel Chandler Harris had a hand in editing, though it was Clelia P. McGowan who actually wrote the entry for “Louisa S. McCord.” McCord’s work also found its way into a general southern history book, The South in the Building of the Nation, published in 1909 by Walter Lynwood Fleming. The last of the resurgence works during this two-year period was seen in The Writers of South Carolina by George Armstrong Wauchope in 1910.⁵

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A decade later, in 1920, McCord made a brief reappearance in the *Bulletin of the University of South Carolina*, which devoted the entire October edition to publishing the 1919 master’s thesis of Jessie Melville Fraser, “Louisa C. McCord.” Unfortunately, Fraser’s work contains several flaws because she utilized Louisa McCord Smythe’s *For Old Lang Syne* as a historical source. Smythe was McCord’s daughter who privately published the work on her family’s history in 1900, complete with the polite fictions common to such productions. These were repeated in later family compilations such as the one written by Smythe’s daughter, Susan Smythe Bennett, “The McCords of McCords’ Ferry, South Carolina” published in 1933 in *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*. The fictions were further perpetuated in Bennett’s 1934 “The Cheves Family of South Carolina,” which appeared in the same instrument. With just this brief overview of McCord’s representation in a variety of books, it is evident that the appearances prior to 1872 were all published in the North, most often in Philadelphia. Conversely, the entries about her works during the later period of 1909 to 1934 all came out of the South, as the last vestiges of the Civil War generation were dying off.6

A new perspective was conferred upon McCord in Margaret Throp’s 1949 book *Female Persuasion: Six Strong-Minded Women*, which feted feminist foremothers Amelia Bloomer, Jane Swisshelm, Sara Lippincott, Lydia Marie Child and Catherine Beecher. Included among this august body a chapter was devoted to McCord as “the opposition” against these women. Although it is questionable as to whether McCord, a staunch foe of both the anti-slavery and woman’s rights movements, would have appreciated her placement among such company. It is remarkable that Throp placed McCord – and only McCord – on par with these feminist luminaries, granting her the distinction and honor of being their worthy anti-feminist foe. Throp also looked at McCord’s work with a new perspective, choosing to focus on her as a social thinker and for the first time examining her works on feminism. In addition to *Female Persuasion*, Throp contributed an entry on McCord for *Notable American Women, A Biographical Dictionary* in 1971. In Throp’s publications one finds for the first time a historian

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who considered McCord’s writings on woman’s rights, which previous scholars often ignored choosing instead to focus on her poetry, prose, or essays on political economy.⁷

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the works of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese brought McCord into the analytical realm of women’s history. In 1987, Fox-Genovese published “The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders’ World View,” which included McCord, in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion. This was followed in 1988 by her book Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South. Chapter five of this book featured “The Imaginative Worlds of Slaveholding Women, Louisa Susanna McCord (sic) and Her Countrywomen.” McCord is again mentioned in Fox-Genovese’s Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism published in 1991. Each of these works portrays McCord as a cunningly clever woman with a sharp mind who proudly touted the most privileged aspects of southern society.⁸

The second edition of The American Intellectual Tradition, published in 1993 and edited by David A. Hollinger, includes McCord’s essay “Enfranchisement of Woman.” Her inclusion in this compilation of noted literary writings places McCord’s work in the same echelon as that of John C. Calhoun, Frederick Douglass, Sarah Grimké, George Fitzhugh, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Hollinger asserts that McCord was the only woman writing on political economy and social issues before the American Civil War, making her the most significant female thinker of the South.⁹

Richard C. Lounsbury is an intellectual historian who engages with McCord’s works at length. He includes her among noted intellectuals of the South prior to the Civil War and can claim some of the responsibility for the recent resurgence of interest in her writings and her life.

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Lounsbury’s compilations of all of McCord’s known works in two volumes: *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays* in 1995 and *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters* in 1996, have proven to be a valuable resource to historians. He took on the project of collecting and organizing all of her known published works from concern that her idea’s – revolutionary for her time and place – had been forgotten, except for excerpts in anthologies. He predicted that future scholars would become aware of her work and would find great historical treasures through examination of McCord’s ideas in her poetry, closet drama, and social essays.\(^{10}\)

Another McCord historian, Manisha Sinha, argued against prevailing notions that in the past, women were either victims or rebels. Instead, she proposed a third class of women who were in the unique position of “‘oppressors’” and placed McCord firmly among its membership. She makes this argument in her chapter “Louisa Susanna McCord: Spokeswoman of the Master Class in Antebellum South Carolina” which joined others in the 1994 anthology *Feminist Nightmares: Women at Odds: Feminism and the Problem of Sisterhood*. This article was her most in-depth analysis of McCord’s work. Sinha published two works in the year 2000: the first was an article in *Civil War History* called “Revolution or Counterrevolution?: The Political Ideology of Secession in Antebellum South Carolina”; and the second was the book *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*. In both of these, Sinha discusses McCord’s essays on political economy and feminism.\(^{11}\) McCord’s work in relation to slavery was also included in Marli F. Weiner’s chapter “Plantation Mistresses’ Attitudes toward Slavery in South Carolina,” of the anthology, *Slavery and Emancipation*, published in 2002.\(^{12}\)

Arguably, the best analysis and most encompassing coverage of McCord’s life and work can be found in Leigh Fought’s *Southern Womanhood and Slavery: a Biography of Louisa S. McCord*, released in 2003. In this book, the author masterfully plays the primary sources against each other; comparing known facts with published fictions while detailing the possible reasons for their appearance and their perpetuation. Furthermore, Fought’s careful examination of all

\(^{10}\) Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*, 8-9; Apparently he was unaware of Thorp’s work at the time; Lounsbury, *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters*.


known aspects of McCord’s private life, and the detailed accounting of the circumstances under which she produced her published works, provides valuable insight into the complexity of this historical woman.\footnote{Fought, Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord.}{13}

Historian Michael O’Brien in 1992 published a veritable catalog of overlooked southern intellectuals called All the Clever Men Who Make Their Way: A Critical Discourse in the Old South. A chapter entitled “Louisa Susanna McCord, ‘Enfranchisement of Woman,’” reprints McCord’s April 1852 article from the Southern Quarterly Review along with a brief analysis of her life and her work. O’Brien also provided the introduction to Southern Writers and Their Worlds in 1996, which contained an essay by Susan A. Eacker called “A ‘Dangerous Inmate’ of the South: Louisa McCord on Gender and Slavery,” which he helped edit for her. His most extensive exploration of McCord and her writings’ contribution to intellectual history can be found in his 2004 two-volume opus Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and The American South, 1810-1860. In fact, the cover jacket on the first volume has a row of faces on it where McCord’s is not only the first in the series, but also precedes that of John C. Calhoun and is the only female image displayed on that particular volume.\footnote{Michael O’Brien, ed., All the Clever Men, Who Make Their Way: Critical Discourse in the Old South, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Eacker, “A ‘Dangerous Inmate’ of the South: Louisa McCord on Gender and Slavery,” 27-40; Michael O’Brien, Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and The American South, 1810-1860, Vols. 1 and 2. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).}{14}

Richard Lounsbury was quite right when he described McCord as only a slight figure in the annals of southern literary academics after her death. Yet since the 1980s, she has become increasingly familiar to both women’s historians and intellectual historians. The results of this study will bring McCord’s work on woman’s rights under new scrutiny by historians. Perhaps now her ideas will insure her permanent placement among the southern luminaries of her era.  

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CHAPTER 1

ASPECTS OF THE EARLY WOMAN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT RELATED TO MCCORD’S LIFE

That only a few, under any circumstances, protest against the injustice of long-established laws and customs, does not disprove the fact of the oppressions, while the satisfaction of the many, if real only proves their apathy and deeper degradation.

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Before we can examine Louisa S. McCord’s works, it is necessary to understand the context of the era in which she wrote them. What spawned the Woman’s Rights Movement of the 1800s? What were female reformers fighting to change? Why? The answers to these questions will aid in understanding how extraordinary a woman McCord was in her personal life compared to the conventional standards she fought to uphold in her writings against the Woman’s Right’s Movement.
Revolutionary Woman’s Rights

The struggle for equality is traceable far back into Women’s history; however, the purpose of this chapter is to focus primarily on one particular era of that history: the Woman’s Rights Movement of the 1800s. Yet, even by focusing predominantly on the nineteenth century, it is still necessary for one to revisit the eighteenth century to identify the first steps in the sequence of subsequent events. The actions taken during the 1700s planted the seeds for the 1800’s whose roots sprouted the Woman’s Rights Movement. Then, in order to fully comprehend the vision feminists and their foremothers sought, the acts of the nineteenth century must be followed through into the early twentieth century. During the 1800s, a period of considerable political and social unrest, the Woman’s Rights Movement grew until it spanned continents. German feminist Dr. Kathë Schirmacher maintained that middle-class women in every country in Europe and North America formed coalitions and organized their own campaigns for woman’s rights.¹

During the late eighteenth century there was a decided change in the propaganda and arguments utilized by woman’s rights proponents to acquire emancipation for women. The late eighteenth century’s Enlightenment philosophy combined with the political revolutions in both America and France effectively created an atmosphere that supported social progress for one and all. Seeing the opportunities inherent in a movement which touted the betterment of all, women included themselves in this expansion and put forth new ideas to attain their political, legal and social rights. This inclusion of women as equally deserving of development and evolution, put male Enlightenment advocates into a contradictory position. Their concept for equal rights was for all men; for these enlightened scholars women were never considered as they were not thought to be in ownership of even the most basic mental facilities required for progress. The male Enlightenment advocates put themselves into a hypocritical position by demanding their natural rights while simultaneously maintaining that women were not entitled to the same

¹ Carl Conrad Eckhardt, Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey (Die moderne Frauenbewegung), trans. Dr. Kathë Schirmacher (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), x.
because of their sex. This new form of discrimination, brought about by men who were demanding their own rights, is linked to the creation of modern feminism.\(^2\)

This situation was too much for thinking middle-class women in France, America and Britain to endure so they rose up to demand their natural rights even as men were demanding theirs. As it turns out, modern feminism did not evolve as a natural result of civilization’s progress, but instead it evolved in response to a new wave of arguments denying them the same rights that were now conferred upon every white man who met suffrage requirements. This was particularly deplorable to women because most white men could vote regardless of their standing in the community, so long as they were a member of the male sex, the white race and met a few standards, but respectable middle-class women found themselves barred from exercising the same privilege. Beyond the Age of Enlightenment, advocates for equality at the time of the Revolutionary War in America (1774-1783) were a handful of educated and politically active women in prominent positions such as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Lee Corbin, all applying pressure to improve the lot of all white women.\(^3\)

Meanwhile, the Woman’s Rights Movement in Europe came about as the handmaiden of the 1789 French Revolution. As Frenchmen reveled in their newfound equality, freedom and brotherhood, they found that keeping women in an inferior position was not nearly as easy as it had been during the monarchy. Women had counted among the most ardent supporters of the French Revolution and the most bloody as they exacted revenge for their suffering under the king’s rule. In direct opposition to the men’s declaration of rights, Olympe de Gouges (the *nom de plume* of Marie Gauze) held forth her own declaration of rights for women. She argued that women were equally as worthy of social and political equality as men since the new government also needed their support to survive. After the executions of many aristocratic women, de Gouges maintained that if a woman could be guillotined for breaking the law, then she should have a hand in the making of the law, since her blood ran as red as that of any man. In 1789, she dedicated her pamphlet *The Declaration of the Rights of Women* (*La declaration des droits des femmes*) to Queen Marie Antoinette. Since the original *Declaration of Rights* (*Declaration des droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*) mentioned only men, she felt forced to enumerate the rights of


women in a separate, yet equally appropriate document. Since de Gouges’ work matched
cwomen’s rights as equal with those of men, she attracted the attention of the common public.
One of the more exceptional demands she made on behalf of her sex was that women should
possess the suffrage. She went even further, saying that women should also become political
leaders. When her head parted from her person, Queen Marie Antoinette’s blood was
indistinguishable from that of her husband, King Louis, who had awashed the cobblestones in
 crimson some months earlier. De Gouges’ argued that women should be indistinguishable from
men in regard to the law, maintaining that if a woman could lose her life on the scaffold the same
as a man, then she should be the same as man in all other respects of life as well. Unfortunately,
Gouges’ words seemed clairvoyant when she drew down the wrath of Robespierre who ordered
her arrest and execution on the guillotine’s scaffold.4

In her writings about France, the German feminist Dr. Kathë Schirmacher observed that it
was during this time that women began demonstrating in protests organized by women’s clubs.
If nothing else, Charlotte Corday’s murder of Marat in 1793 proved that women could at least
kill the same as men. However, in the governmental backlash following Marat’s death, the
Committee of Public Safety thought it prudent to close all women’s clubs that same year,
claiming that their demonstrations were a menace to the public. A later historian noted the irony,
“In short, the regime of liberty, equality, and fraternity regarded woman as unfree, unequal, and
treated her very unfraternally.” The French Revolution itself delivered one of the oddest twists
in history as it proclaimed more freedom for citizens in general, yet in the specific case of
women, it reduced the few rights they did possess.5

Under the French monarchy, an aristocratic woman who owned land enjoyed all the
rights and privileges accorded to a nobleman in the same position. Remarkably, she could raise
troops, levy taxes and act as magistrate. There were even female peers and some who worked in
diplomatic circles occasionally. Abbesses had the same civil powers as those of abbots and
complete dominion over their convents as well. Large landowners of the female persuasion even
played a role in government, meeting with the provincial estates. The most notable of these was

4 Karen Offen, European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University
Press, 2000), xx; Correa Moylan Walsh, Feminism (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1917), 7; Eckhardt,
Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey, 175-176; Rudolph Cronau, Woman Triumphant, The Story of Her
Struggles for Freedom, Education and Political Rights (New York: R. Cronau, 1919), 154; Claire Goldberg Moses,
5 Eckhardt, Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey, 177; Offen, European Feminisms, xx, xxii; Moses,
French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century, 13.
Madame de Sévigné of Brittany, the widow of a Marquess, who performed her husband’s role in the Estates General. In the middling classes, female master craftsmen were voting members of their respective guild. The Revolution whose purpose was to bring more freedom to the French, in fact stripped away the few rights women enjoyed, entrapping them into a system in which they had no rights at all.⁶

While Olympe de Gouges became famous for her defense of women’s rights in France, in England another book was printed that argued for women’s equality in that kingdom as well. In 1792, a great feminist historical work was published, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Mary Wollstonecraft, a British woman born on April 27, 1759, was its creatrix. Due to their father squandering money on farming and other schemes that took them all over Great Britain, she and her sisters followed a course open to respectable women of the time and ran a girl’s school in Newington Green. Later in her life, she became the governess for Lord Kingsborough’s children and spent most of her time in Ireland. Years later, her personal life evolved considerably outside the bounds of propriety for respectable women. She had a relationship with a Mr. Imlay, which she called an “engagement,” refusing to marry him due to his impecunious status and hers as a debtor. Their engagement was not a chaste one, however, as they called themselves husband and wife without the benefit of the civil ceremony and removed to Paris to reside together. She was there in the early years of the French Revolution and personally saw the scarlet on the street left behind from an execution by guillotine. Imlay eventually deserted her after she gave birth to his child. Wollstonecraft returned to England in 1795 and began a relationship with William Godwin in 1796. They lived together for seven months before eventually marrying in early 1797 when she was once again pregnant. Once the true nature of their relationship became known, they drew down thunderous denouncement from respectable society. Mary Wollstonecraft died from an infection due to the improper removal of the placenta after she birthed her second daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, who became the famous author of Frankenstein.⁷

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⁷ Cronau, Woman Triumphant, 156-157; Offen, European Feminisms, xx; Caine, English Feminism, 1780-1980, xiii; William Godwin, Memoirs of the Author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman, (London: J. Johnson,
Eventually Mary Wollstonecraft’s name became synonymous with feminism and the fight for women’s right to vote. In her *Vindication*, she pointedly argued that women should be the equal companions of men, not their personal toys. It is for this work that Wollstonecraft remains famous today as one of the foremothers of the modern feminist movement.

Unfortunately, during her lifetime fame remained elusive. Wollstonecraft’s death in 1797 shortly followed the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Her fellow feminists largely ignored, and sometimes scorned, both the woman and her publications throughout the nineteenth-century. It would be over one-hundred years before the light of her mind would shine for all.\(^8\)

Over time, more and more women went public in print with their demands for equal rights. Their burgeoning numbers were such that by the 1830s, French female writers and scholars coalesced into a vital force under the flag of George Sand and were inspired by the indomitable Madame de Staël. Indeed, Sand’s fashion choices and personal habits affected women in countries outside her native France. She gave other European women the confidence to write as well as enact similar standards of style and attitude, which met with varying degrees of success.\(^9\)

These literary women are celebrated today for overcoming society’s most onerous obstacles rather than keeping their thoughts and actions *sub rosa*. To step out into society’s spotlight by publicly speaking to mixed audiences, or displaying her intellect, was enough to change the public perception of that woman’s sex from female to a being half-male and half-female, with marked social ostracism included. Such ostracism, even from those who otherwise approved of actions but lacked the courage of conviction, stunted the social and political development of women in general. A woman who published her ideas, who sought out a higher education, or spoke her mind in front of others was dubbed a “Bluestocking” (*bas bleu* in French), meaning she was a woman more concerned about self-improvement than fashion and was therefore considered an oddity among her sex. Detractors declared that a Bluestocking was


not a woman, but rather a literary scion of both sexes: a woman-man. George Sand was perfect fodder for such reprobation as an 1842 cartoon of her in men’s dress says:

If this portrait of George Sand
Leaves the mind a bit perplexed
It's because genius is abstract
And as one knows has not a sex.

Although to a modern reader this may seem a mild insult or even a compliment, remember that a woman’s recognition as a woman was tied irrevocably to the definitions prescribed by her gender; identifying her as a woman by virtue of her sex. If she evaded or denied the boundaries prescribed for her, then she became a social outcast among respectable people. Sand’s outrageous behavior and writings spread beyond the borders of France to the rest of Europe and North America. Any woman who willfully stepped outside the accepted norms was thought to have a case of “Georgesandismus,” or female emancipation. Symptoms included wearing men’s clothes (illegal in France without a license), imitating a chimneystack by smoking, or embracing the sexual double standard of men for themselves. Among many, George Sand became synonymous with anarchy and was publicly derided by friend and foe alike. Feminists carefully distanced themselves from her questionable reputation to gain respectability, while antifeminists adopted Sand as a symbol for all that was wrong with outspoken women and what the future held should such women be granted their demands.10

Enemies of woman’s rights advocates, also known as antifeminists (or anti-feminists), employed many methods to nullify feminist demands. Scholar Christine Planté has examined the various forms of abuse heaped upon the femme écrivain (woman writer) by French literary critics in the course of the July Monarchy. Janis Bergman-Carton has done likewise by studying the caricatures and other forms of a “thinking woman” in public displays of debasing mockery. France was not alone in its practice of public invective against intellectual women writers; other countries followed the same path in syncopated lock step. George Sand and Mary Wollstonecraft became famous for their feminist writings and infamous for their personal

behavior that was far outside the societal norms of their eras, not to mention that just by being public figures they were considered abnormal women beyond the bounds of propriety anyway.\textsuperscript{11}

Meanwhile, in France, the 1848 February Revolution brought matters to a head; French women demanding their share of rights and claiming equality were finally heard. Utopian groups like the Fouriests and the Saint Simonians along with standard-bearer George Sand advocated equal rights for all. A new partnership was formed continuing in association of mind, if not fact: French women stood side-by-side with their countrymen in the Socialist party during the 1848 February Revolution. As a result, in many countries socialism and feminism were irrevocably linked in the minds of many members of the public. Unfortunately, this association was not always thought to be for the better, since granting the equality socialists and feminists demanded would have put the poor on par with the rich and made women the equals of men. This was considered by some as “excessive equality” that ran counter to the laws of nature. In the West, the Woman’s Rights Movement continued to gain supporters in various reform groups such as socialism, abolitionism, and temperance.\textsuperscript{12}

Feminists were a brave and committed group of resolute women and their male supporters who insisted upon an end to practices that left women in a lower caste than men. These women made their demands despite the threat of public menacing in a number of countries before the 1848 revolutions. They wanted women to receive the suffrage, own property, have a presence in the courts and more. Their challenges were revolutionary even before the beginning of revolutions that changed the course of history for a continent had begun. They utilized the natural rights arguments of the Enlightenment philosophy, which had been so effective for France in 1789 and thereafter. These eighteenth century logics shaped the demands of woman’s rights advocates throughout the subsequent century.\textsuperscript{13}

Demands by feminists in the nineteenth century were many as they theorized what a society made up of equals would be like, how it would function, and in what manner it would improve upon the flaws of common practices. Among their imaginings of an equal society, for instance, marriage no longer need be a life-long prison if it were an unhappy one, when the wife possesses the key to her freedom through divorce. When a woman can walk away from a

\textsuperscript{13} Offen, \textit{European Feminisms}, 106.
deleterious marriage on her own, it gives her the freedom to choose under which conditions she would find matrimony acceptable. Wives would no longer be subordinate to their husbands in financial, legal, and sexual matters. Women would form their selves in the manner that best suited their wants and needs, not simply in the mold men desired they be made. The new type of women would consist of voting citizens, doctors, intellectuals, business owners, authoresses, teachers, and artists. The contributions women made to society would be valued equally with those of men, granting them the recognition and praise deserved by the success of their endeavors. Once the field of economic battle lay open before them, they would achieve economic independence where a mother-wife could go off to work just as the father-husband of their day did. There would be no scourge cast upon women if they pursued a career beyond marriage or motherhood. These life-changes did not affect the careers of men, and in an equal society they would not hamper women’s professions either. Children would grow up happy and healthy in a home where their mother could follow her own aspirations, rather than foist these unrealized dreams and desires upon her children and live vicariously through them in an unnatural manner. The calls for change by woman’s rights advocates continued unabated, as they demanded an end to the sexual double standard, which exploited poor women and wives – all for the sake of the head of household’s occasional immoral pleasure. There could be no virtue preserved through such a practice. They also demanded equal political representation of women by women and for women who were more familiar with the needs of their own sex in the roles of daughter, spinster, mother, wife, and widow than any man could be. Such an addition of female insight could be nothing but a benefit society and the changes it brought about would lead to the betterment of all its citizens.  

Thus by 1848, European feminists had well-honed arguments with which to do battle for woman’s rights. However, sharp points were not enough, as it would be years before society would see these women form a political phalanx marching for their emancipation. This was because in France such women were not taken lightly at all. In fact, in 1850 they were recognized as a danger to the stability of the new French government bent upon establishing its power and credibility. Individual and groups of feminists seen as a threat to national security and were officially, and quite often viscously, repressed. In May 1850, the police raided a meeting among organizers of several leagues for female workers. Of the nine women arrested,

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two were charged with treason against the government for their feminist beliefs. Both were sentenced to six months in prison. The following year, one of the two was deemed a person “dangerous to the state” and deported to a prison in Algeria. These government-sanctioned actions stunted the growth of the French feminist movement for decades so that it was not until the late nineteenth century that the movement was able to begin its march on history.  

**Education of Women in America**

In America, the years 1830-1850 are sometimes referred to as the Jacksonian reform period. The name came about because the Age of Jackson was an era of progressive reform in a wide variety of areas intended to improve the lives of many. This reform spirit was one of the reasons that the Woman’s Rights Movement came to the fore in the United States in the early eighteen hundreds. As a result of the optimistic sentiment, more and more women joined the cause of woman’s rights in spite of the open derision they faced. They were determined to expand a woman’s proper place well beyond the confines of the home into any heretofore solely masculine pursuit in which she cared to engage. In the United States, and even in the United Kingdom, a new atmosphere of personal freedom could be felt as it spread amongst the populace of the nation.

During the Jacksonian era, one of the key reform movements targeted the abolition of slavery. Interestingly, the term “anti-slavery” had existed well before the turn of the nineteenth century. Despite previous use of this term, it was not until about 1830 that the American Abolitionist Movement began to coalesce in large numbers and move forward. After the first awkward steps were taken, abolitionism began to make progress towards its ultimate goal of

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freedom for all slaves. The general spirit of progress that marked this time period assisted in advancing the abolitionist cause across all the states of the Union.17

Numerous women supported the abolition of slavery as well as woman’s rights and, because of these dual simultaneous pursuits the two became intertwined. The World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in June 1840 was the spark that lit the tender of the American and English Woman’s Rights Movements. In the United States, various abolitionist societies duly elected and designated women to serve as the delegates to the anti-slavery convention. Among those dispatched to the London convention as honored representatives of their respective groups were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Pease, each accompanied by her husband for the trip. Given that the meeting took place in London, it is not surprising that Englishmen headed the convention, and - considering the place of the Church in England’s social structure - that these men were primarily clergymen. Though they were enlightened enough to seek the abolishment of slavery, they were less progressive when they viewed the females of the American delegation – seeing women as inferior to themselves and other men. These churchmen refused to give their approval for the female delegates to perform their duties. Instead, the convention leaders ordered them on June 12, 1840, to remove themselves from the floor of the convention; allowing them to remain only as observers in the gallery above the floor. The reason for refusing the women delegates their rightful seats on the convention floor, as explained by one male delegate of the organizing committee, was because a woman’s place was to support a man’s effort, not usurp his leadership for herself.18

Throughout the convention, these three women were sequestered from the general view by a curtain that allowed them to only hear the proceedings from which they were banned, but to neither see nor participate in them. Not all men shared the sentiment of the English clergy and in response to this injustice, abolitionist and American editor William Lloyd Garrison chose to pointedly protest the treatment of the ladies by sequestering himself with them in the gallery for

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the duration of the convention. The convention leaders may have thought that by segregating these women, they were snuffing out a problem, but this was not the case.\textsuperscript{19}

Rather than quash the women’s burgeoning aspirations, the snubbing at the London Anti-Slavery Convention fired the determination of these women, which culminated in the first woman’s rights convention in New York in 1848. In fact, when Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton left the convention for their hotel, Stanton told Mott that as soon as they returned to the States, they had to start organizing a convention to free women from their own slavery. Between 1840 and 1848, these women learned how to engage in public concourse through their involvement in the anti-slavery cause. They could empathize with slaves in their powerlessness to determine their own future or rule their own lives. Women needed their natural rights, personal freedom, and political power just as slaves did. It is not surprising then that as a result, some of the most outspoken opponents against the oppression of slavery were women.\textsuperscript{20}

Due to family demands and pregnancies, it took eight years for the idea that began in London to bear fruit in America. On July 19-20, 1848, during a visit by Lucretia Mott to the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, they summoned friends, acquaintances, and strangers through their advertisement of a woman’s rights convention to take place in Seneca Falls, New York. Around three hundred women and men showed up – many more than anticipated. This gathering became America’s first Woman’s Rights Convention. A historian in the early 1900s explained that respectably married American women Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, female abolitionists who charitably took up the flag of freedom for slaves and had travelled across the ocean to the world anti-slavery convention in London, initiated the call for women to realize their own freedom as well. At this first woman’s rights convention and those that followed, women took up a cause of the earlier American Revolution - they should not be called upon to pay for that in which they had no say. These new revolutionists demanded that women be granted access to the same professions as men and to enter those careers on the same footing that

men enjoyed. Wives, too, were to benefit by new laws preserving their individual rights and personal freedom after marriage as well as the control of their prenuptial property.\textsuperscript{21}

The Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights Convention, as it came to be known, put forth a number of measures meant to improve the lot of women; chief among the requirements listed were improved educational opportunities. There was good reason for education to be a primary demand at a convention for women’s rights; when education was mentioned in a general conversation, the default assumption was that the education of boys was under discussion, no thought was given to the education of girls. Furthermore, should the topic of current female education arise, any discussion would be of necessity limited to primary education; when it came to secondary school or college education, there was nothing to discuss as there were no schools that allowed girls to attend. Considering that this was the Jacksonian era of reform, perhaps it is not surprising that the improvement of women’s minds beyond a rudimentary education finally became a topic of conversation.\textsuperscript{22}

This reform era officially began in 1830, prior to that year, female children were mainly educated in their home; there were few opportunities available for education beyond its threshold. The learning they did receive behind the threshold was primarily vocational, teaching them the rudiments of keeping a home as a wife and mother. Included among their lessons was the ability to churn butter, make cheese, card, spin and weave wool and other fibers such as flax or cotton, and numerous other home crafts. While female children were educated at home, their male counterparts attended the local schools, when they were available, to receive their education.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1838, Southern abolitionist and woman’s rights activist Sarah Grimké complained in one of her writings that a woman’s education in the South was limited to merely cooking and other household functions. It was the same type of domestic education given to women in the North, where girls were not granted a fundamental education in primary school until after 1825. Even girls whose parents were able and willing to pay for their education had a limited number


\textsuperscript{22} Price, “The Woman’s Movement in the United States, 1830-1850,” 19;

of options. Since there were no public schools open to the female sex, only private schools remained as an avenue of instruction for subjects ennobling to the mind.²⁴

Many people, even the well meaning, were reluctant in allowing girls access to a formal education. Those belonging to this group often made these two contradictory arguments: (1) that educating women as citizens in the same subjects as men was a bad investment of time and money, since there was nothing they could do with either, and (2) they respectfully, yet insistently maintained that a woman was physically incapable of attaining the same level of understanding as a man, thus the attempt to form her mind the same way was a waste of time. These sentiments were neither the total nor the best of the conflicting arguments against the education of women. Another claim against providing education to girls was that it would cause women to lose their femininity. On one hand, the argument against educating women was based on the notion that such actions were a wasted effort since female graduates would not have any outlets to apply the knowledge. Then again, a second argument nullified the first, to wit: the very attempt to gain that knowledge would be so stressful as to destroy a woman’s health. This argument proposed that women were physically and intellectually inferior to men to such an extent that were they to make the effort to gain an education in the same manner and of the same quality as that of men, the unavoidable consequence would be widespread breakdowns of the physical and mental variety.²⁵

Reformers argued that granting girls a higher education would make them better mothers of future citizens—meaning their sons. When Emma Willard made her funding request for a female school, she assured the New York state legislators that she only intended to enhance her students’ womanly abilities, to enable enhanced function in their roles as wives and mothers, not give them the education of men. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the English feminist Harriet Martineau made a similar claim in that if women were granted better educations, they would be better able to perform their household duties; once again reassuring the male listeners that women had no need of the larger subjects inherent in male education. Martineau further strengthened her position by arguing that the expansion of a woman’s mental faculties would make her more efficient in the running of her home. As a result of these efforts advocates for women’s higher education put forth, the potential opportunities for a girl to acquire an

education became more numerous—including the option of sending daughters to better private
schools and securing personal tutors for them at home.\textsuperscript{26}

Even with these strides and the absence of any catastrophe that might have proven men’s
fears well founded, the debate over women’s physical and mental suitability for the rigors of
higher education continued until well into the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{27} This persistent prejudice
against a women’s right to equal education is seen in the publication of a graduation lecture
given by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, M.D., to students of the Radcliff women’s college in 1896.\textsuperscript{28} The
physician issued a warning to the graduating misses that although they had successfully
completed their college education, it did not necessarily mean that they could handle the daily
mental rigors to which men were accustomed. Granted there might be among them women who
could withstand such a workload; however, for most it was a dangerous undertaking. Only a fool
would forget that she is a woman, with a woman’s weakness, and willfully ignore the limitations
of her sex in pursuit of careers for which men were better suited.\textsuperscript{29}

Even as late as 1919, some were afraid that giving a woman the same education as a man
would make her into a form of hermaphrodite, or at the very least, a social misfit. In an article
published the same year, one English scientist, a Professor Romanes, issued an admonition
against women who habitually ignored the limitations of their sex in their pursuit of masculine
higher education. To try to grant a woman the same education as a man when she did not
possess his physical and mental abilities would make her into a counterfeit man leading to her
failure in such a pursuit. Such a failure would render her a woman with a man’s mind and
therefore unfit for the expectations of her gender.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{26} Price, “The Woman’s Movement in the United States, 1830-1850,” 18; Caine, \textit{English Feminism, 1780-
\textsuperscript{27} Offen, \textit{European Feminisms}, xxiii.
\textsuperscript{28} S. Weir Mitchell, M.D., “When the College is Hurtful to a Girl,” \textit{The Ladies Home Journal} 17:7 (June
1900): 14.
\textsuperscript{29} Mitchell, “When the College is Hurtful to a Girl,” 14.
\textsuperscript{30} Offen, \textit{European Feminisms}, xxiii; S. Weir Mitchell, M.D., “When the College is Hurtful to a Girl,” \textit{The
Ladies Home Journal} 17:7 (June 1900): 14; “Futility of a Man’s Education for a Woman,” \textit{Current Opinion} 66
(June 1919): 379.
In 1918, one male historian reflecting on the Seneca Falls Convention remarked that the current generation was completely unable to conceive of the fortitude early woman’s rights pioneers possessed. He argued that the roles of women had been largely the same since history began to be written; to demand that women be allowed to take on roles unrelated to their traditional ones was for most inconceivable and to those who could conceive of it - it was impossible to implement. Periodicals and newspapers from 1830 to 1850 offer insight on the typical woman envisioned by the general public. Professional writers poured bottles of ink in efforts to support and reinforce the traditional ideal of a woman as divine creation had intended her to be. A True Woman was a shining example of womanhood encompassing comforting qualities that made the lives of those around her pleasant and instilled their beings with ease. Despite the positive perception of these qualities, women were still believed to best remain indoors because – as was the reiterated message found in magazines and newspapers over and over again - the home was a woman’s whole world and thus her proper sphere of influence. A fundamental aspect of female education was to teach a girl that anonymity was her ally, that her frailty was the herald for man’s strength, and that her reliance on a man was the safeguard of her security. These instructional norms make it simple to understand how those who paid a traditional woman compliments of small coin benefitted from her beneficence and willingly fought against any changes to the status quo that disturbed their comfortable existence.  

The pseudo-science of phrenology was quite popular throughout the nineteenth century. It was utilized to support the differences between superior and inferior races as well as those of men and women, because it was thought that a man’s brain was modeled such that his determination and comprehension united into action. Meanwhile, though a woman shared man’s determination, her skull lacked the protrusions necessary for comprehension. The Church also supported the status quo of the superior and inferior sexes because throughout its history it had given men preferential treatment over women. To the ecclesiastical mind, it was unnatural for a

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woman to have independence, a respectable woman’s only calling was to become a wedded wife and mother; sheltered and sustained by her husband and protected by all men. According to the common law of the time, upon marriage a woman ceased to exist legally, though she legally became an adult when she did so. The new wife was absorbed by her husband under the legal concept of coverture; the twain were made into One, and that One was the husband. He now represented her in all legal proceedings – she could not sue someone, only he could. Furthermore, she could not place a lien against another’s property for a debt owed; her husband had to do that for her in her name. A husband owned everything and controlled everything in his wife’s life, including their children - over whom she held no rights. Effectively, her husband owned and controlled everything within his sphere, his children and wife being on the same footing as his dog and horse. He also became sole owner and complete executer of all the property and monies contained in her dowry. In this way he controlled all income earned on the properties and, although he was responsible for all bills she created, he could also regulate and repress her spending habits as he saw fit. Because a wife had no money of her own, her only fiscal access was through limited possibilities. Either she was kept in the degrading position of being put on an allowance and, like a child, would have to ask her husband for money to spend, or she would only be able to charge items to a store account with no small monies for her purse. Given these limited and equally unpalatable choices, it is perhaps understandable that “the fact is, there can be little equality between the sexes as long as the male partner has entire charge of the purse.” Lack of access to the couple’s finances left the wife completely dependent upon her husband’s whim for any monies she received. It also left her very ignorant about the scope and operation of the family’s finances upon her husband’s death.\(^2\)

In 1925, writer Carl Van Doren reflected back on this marital monetary practice in the Victorian ideal of marriage. He noted that the husband was the center of everything in the household and that his wife had no choice but to adapt herself to his wishes, as she could not enforce her own upon him. Van Doren remarked that although this arrangement had been good for men back to the time of Moses, it had not been so for Moses’ wife and those women that

came along after her. Eventually progressives with reform in mind began to question the fairness of the historical arrangement, which led to its dissolution as an ideal by the 1920s.33

After the fiasco at the World Anti-Slavery Conference in 1840, women began to think about their own freedom as well as the freedom of slaves in terms that were more concrete. English feminist Harriet Martineau later wrote that she lamented that the convention to free slaves, shackled the rights of women instead. For years, she had fought for the emancipation of all enslaved Africans and yet after all that time she possessed no more rights than they did. Martineau also commented that she had become a great admirer of William Lloyd Garrison after he gallantly refused his reserved seat on the floor with the other male delegates, choosing instead to remain in the gallery with the rejected women. Other historians have noted that Harriet Martineau shared the sentiments of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, since she came to an understanding of the need for women’s rights through her work in the Abolitionist Movement just as they did.34

And so it was that the American Woman’s Rights Movement received its tone from the movement to abolish slavery. Many abolitionist women began to recognize the similarity between their status and that of the slaves for whom they fought. This was the case in particular among northern women crusading for abolition. These feminine crusaders dared to challenge both Church and society as they battled for the fair rights of their fairer sex. By comparing the enslavement of blacks with that of women, the similarities between abolitionism and feminism were established. The close relation of the two groups enabled woman’s rights advocates to simply recycle and reuse the arguments for slaves’ freedom into those for their own cause. The Enlightenment philosophy that had served the American and French revolutions so well came into service once more to good effect as the call for women’s emancipation propagated throughout the States. Opponents to the movement moaned that there was more usurpation of the olden revolutionary outrages put into use than its ideals. Foes of woman’s rights complained that associating the freedom of women with that of slaves put the new movement on a firm and well-established foundation, a cunning maneuver that rallied many around their flag.35

34 Caine, English Feminism, 1780-1980, 74, 76.
Even with a growing body of support, many writers and critics of the time said that the women who had spoken out publicly demanding their rights had gone about the act in erroneous fashion that did not serve their cause, but made the activists appear to have “preferred conspicuousness to positive influence.” According to others writing during the same period, men had only themselves to blame for the creation of a Woman’s Rights Movement. As German feminist Dr. Kathë Schirmacher argued, “Woman, in her peculiar sphere, is entirely the equal of man in his. The origin of the international Woman's Rights Movement is found in the world-wide disregard of this elementary truth.” Furthermore, Dr. Schirmacher claimed that since the dawn of history the one who was intended as man’s friend and companion had been repeatedly put into a position of subjugation by him instead and man’s greater physical forcefulness granted him victory in these endeavors.  

It was especially difficult for women to make their wishes heard in the public sphere that was an exclusively male domain. In American society of the era, only the Quakers espoused equality between the sexes. Unfortunately, they were in the minority; the majority of the population maintained Puritanical traditions that included woman’s inferiority and servitude to man. These beliefs held such sway that any woman who spoke from a public podium to a mixed audience was considered by many to be a hideous grotesque, an immoral abomination before the eyes of the Almighty and those assembled before her whose ears imbibed the falsehoods from her evil tongue. She was condemned by her enemies as an unnatural and unholy aberration of her sex. Men alone could hold concourse before an audience, only they could operate within the public sphere. A man who worked for the public was accorded acclaim for his involvement in the politics and cares of his community. Comparatively, a prostitute was the only kind of woman who could work for the public in her neighborhood. It was inconceivable that a respectable woman could find good works to do in the politics and public affairs of her hometown.

The perception of a public woman being a prostitute remained fixed in the minds of many as middle-class women set forth to articulate their demands before a general audience. Rousseau upheld this association, in that he deemed any reputable woman who spoke out in any manner, or stepped out of her proper place of decency, had effectively and immediately lowered herself to streetwalker status. Outspoken female trailblazers were reviled as pretentious pretenders who

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36 Schouler, History of the United States of America, 264; Eckhardt, Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey, ix, xiv.
37 Caine, English Feminism, 1780-1980, 6-7; Eckhardt, Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey, 4.
affected public poses to garner attention for themselves. The kinder critics considered them as simply misguided neophytes of the new religion of reform. Others deemed them marionette males playing at the roles of school instructors and public speakers.\textsuperscript{38}

Attention to correct what were defined as incorrect acts of behavior meant that as soon as a woman took upon herself any remotely manly practice, she was notified straight away that she had veered off her due course. Naysayers and churchmen were not alone in their attempts to stop women from demanding their rights, because even members of the civilized classes held onto the misogynist bias of woman as a second-class human being. In addition to receiving the disapproval of male reformers for other causes, even men within the Abolitionist Movement considered the walls of a home sufficient liberty for wives. Protesters against expanding a woman’s activities outside the home, summed up their mindset best in the symbolic expression of man as the head of the public body and woman as its hidden heart.\textsuperscript{39}

One feminist argued that the fault for women’s servitude lay with the male sex because it was man’s opposition to the fair rights of women that brought about the conflict between the sexes; when woman had her equal rights, man would have peace once again. Of course in order to accomplish this, man would have to gain experience by learning that feminine virtues could fit within the masculine realm, just as women could gain wisdom through their practice of manly virtues in the business world, with neither being despicable enough to exercise advantage in their old respective spheres. A stunned public viewed woman’s rights advocates as fanatics when they demanded not only basic education in reading and writing for girls, but in addition civic lessons on the Constitution and other instruments for the governing of their country, state, and community as well.\textsuperscript{40}

It was particularly difficult for women to get their message heard; since women were rarely the heiresses of sizeable family fortunes, they usually lacked the funding necessary to purchase space in periodicals and other media to advertise their ideas. Not only were women restricted from speaking in public, but they were also restrained from writing in publications. In fact, a woman who put her name on the byline of anything in printed material was considered a


public spectacle. This was enough of a threat that female writers in many western countries took up the practice of using male pen names to mask their natural gender. A woman of culture and intellect had to hide her accomplishments, for demonstration of the full range of her capabilities would cast her as a rude, culpable, and licentious female.\footnote{Caine, \textit{English Feminism, 1780-1980}, 6; Offen, \textit{European Feminisms}, 104.}

In short, either women were mentally incapable of attaining an education equal to a man or they were an aberration of nature if they managed to do so. Even the celebrated outrageous writer George Sand was forced to follow the pen name practice. George Sand was a pen name for Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin, the Baroness Dudevant. The standard of adopting a pseudonym that hid one’s true gender made it difficult for either educated women or female writers in general, who wished to sign their real name to their published work to do so. Those who agreed with a few of the demands made by female reformers could still take a stand against some of their actions they were at odds with. This was possible because although these educated women and female writers agreed that women could benefit from amending some laws, they did not think that women were the proper people to bring about such alterations. In fact, women acting on their own behalf were unwomanly and sinful, even in the eyes of these supporters. Still others simply dismissed the actions of a few women protestors, offering generalizations to the effect that it was both ridiculous and repulsive to imagine women regularly leaving the sanctity of their home and divinely appointed office to go forth in business battling with their husbands and spouses of friends in competition for the same admiration, distinction, and fortune.\footnote{Caine, \textit{English Feminism, 1780-1980}, 6-7; Offen, \textit{European Feminisms}, 104; “Sand, George” \textit{The Columbia Encyclopedia}, 6th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), \url{http://www.questia.com/read/117043906?title=Sand%2cGeorge} (accessed December 3, 2010); Moses, \textit{French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century}, 36; Price, “The Woman’s Movement in the United States, 1830-1850,” 13, 64.}

To counter this kind of indifference, feminists in the middle of the nineteenth-century focused on creating and defining the characteristics of a new female ideal. This “woman’s woman” would combine the best of the old with new qualities that were at once fresh and admirable. In the traditional mold, she would retain her ethical, vestal, and supportive characteristics while assimilating novel qualities such as self-determination, erudition, and personal power that would gain her the admiration of all. They sought to emphasize the distinctions between men and women by creating an authoritative sexual persona founded upon the laudatory qualities of universal womanhood. Then they would draw attention to specific
women whose abilities, personal conduct, and integrity made them role models for all women. One contemporary woman in particular who was often considered the consummate ideal of this new womanhood and a favorite example of feminists was Queen Victoria, who ascended to the throne as the monarch of the worldwide British Empire in 1837. 43

Far from being a unified body, there were detractors against woman’s rights advocates even within the ranks of feminists themselves. There was, for example, Harriet Martineau’s acknowledgement that the daily domestic duties of a woman were sacred and all other activities must adapt around these for they formed the inescapable context of a woman’s life. Although Martineau fought for women’s rights and lamented that so few possessed the moral fiber to do so, she was acutely conscious that the cause could only be aided if respectable women took it up. One instance of this duality was the American Woman’s Rights Convention of 1849, when Martineau refused to give the gathered group an essay of hers to read to the audience. When asked why she chose not to share her work, Martineau offered a curious rationale for distancing herself from the group: she did not agree with the attitude taken by some of the most outspoken proponents for woman’s rights. She also did not see eye to eye with them in their utopian vision of a future based on equality between the sexes. As a result, she did not want her name sullied by association with their convention or any act they undertook. 44

Martineau was hardly alone in expressing seemingly contradictory notions. Deidre David has revealed that female intellectuals in the Victorian era tried to reconcile their new ideas about woman’s rights with traditional female roles resulting in an ill-fitting ensemble of notions cobbled together in a haphazard fashion. The proposals of this female intelligentsia were as likely to collide as collude; often disagreeing not only with each other, but also with their own previously stated positions as well. Such confounding conundrum of contending ideas resulted in discordant agreements as well as arguments. An example of these interesting contradictions can be found with Martineau in that she became famous due to her essays on political economy. These works supported the supremacy of businessmen in early nineteenth-century capitalism, seeing its success as the result of their natural abilities. Her writings also had the indirect result

of reinforcing these same patriarchal business establishments that aided in the subjugation of women to which she loudly objected. In essence, she was arguing against herself.\textsuperscript{45}

Another area where woman’s rights advocates found themselves at odds with one another was in their demands for dress reform—to shorten the length and weight of skirts and do away with the confines of the corset. Detractors made fun of their efforts to alter the direction of fashion, noting that by 1852 the attempt by women to defeminize themselves such that both sexes would look alike led to “Bloomerism.” The shorter skirts and puffy pantaloons would not have been so offensive, said the scolds, but that it seemed those most likely to espouse the new garb were women for whom the descriptors young or beautiful did not apply. While the reformist women who adorned the new garb with steely purpose set out to make the more practical garment acceptable, American and English periodicals, such as \textit{Punch}, loosed their artists in contest to make the most deplorable caricature of women wearing such drapery. The amount of interest that male cartoonists and editors took in female dress was unprecedented. They were so successful in degrading the new dress that respectable women refused to wear the Bloomer outfit, even though it was more practical and less cumbersome than their normal garb. Magazines and newspapers still overflowed with commentary, suggestions and reproaches as to sensible alterations in women’s habitual dress. Many recognized the need for dress reform, yet the Bloomer outfit was disregarded out of hand. A dress with a skirt of reduced length that managed to remain modest and yet gave its wearer more freedom of movement was called for. In short, women needed something like the Bloomer outfit that was not the Bloomer outfit.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{The Late Nineteenth-Century Women’s Movement}

The initial Woman’s Rights Movement that began in the early nineteenth century constantly grew and evolved into the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century movements. A

\textsuperscript{45} Caine, \textit{English Feminism, 1780-1980}, 75.
pattern of continuity and change marked the progress of feminism during this era. This included the creation of a new vocabulary for emancipation, featuring the words “suffragette,” “suffragist,” and “feminist.” These short new terms substituted the old cumbersome word combinations that an agitator had to take to identify herself as a member of the Woman’s Rights Movement, an advocate for woman’s emancipation, or a “woman’s rights woman.” Through their responses to intended slights, these advocates were even able to turn a negative into a positive as “the Pankhursts and their followers gloried in the term—first applied to them as one of abuse—‘suffragette’.” Other terms apparently also made their initial appearance in the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century, such as when Sarah Grand created the phrase “New Woman” in 1894, while according to the Oxford English Dictionary “feminist” was granted its first English expression in the Athenaeum on April 27, 1895.47

Although feminist demands for rights had been underway in earnest since the late eighteenth century, no history of the movement, its origins, or its alterations had been penned. By the 1890s, feminists knew little of their own history before the 1850s. As a result, during the late nineteenth century, several volumes were produced for the sake of unifying and validating women’s history and that of the feminist struggle. In writing these first histories, some questions had to be answered—such as in what country did the Woman’s Rights Movement begin? Examining the origin of the woman rights movement was problematic because criteria were needed to determine what constitutes an origin—what thought, what writing, what act? What is the threshold crossed that delineates the beginning of the Woman’s Rights Movement in the nineteenth century? Given that there had been writings about women’s rights for over a century, Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman of the late eighteenth century can be seen as another book of ideas within a long tradition.48

Strong arguments were made for France being the motherland of the Woman’s Rights Movement. Supporters for this stance could be found in other countries, even in England, such as the famous sexologist Havelock Ellis, for example, who adamantly maintained that the roots of the movement were Gallic in origin. There were other English feminists in the early 1900s who agreed with Ellis, including Ethel Snowden.

47 Caine, English Feminism, 1780-1980, 134, xv.
48 Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman, eds., Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: From the Middle Ages to the Present (London: Routledge, 1998), 8; Offen, European Feminisms, 186, xix-xx.
In her 1911 book *The Feminist Movement*, Snowden declared that France birthed the feminist movement, which eventually spread from there to all European nations becoming a Continental movement in the process. She paid homage to the brave women who had come before her, nobly forfeiting their own reputations, taking unpopular actions for the right reasons, and absolutely refusing to be seen and not heard any longer. Unfortunately, their numbers and agitation grew to such an extent that the very government of France viewed them as a threat to national security and stability. The Committee of Public Safety savagely suppressed French feminists in order to keep the peace and protect the government from its female citizens. Snowden even accurately traced the genesis of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to the actions of France’s revolutionary daughters.\(^49\)

German feminist Dr. Kathë Schirmacher concurred with Snowden that the ideas forming the basis of Wollstonecraft’s magnum opus were ferried over from France to the English isle. This argument has a valid corollary, given that Wollstonecraft had closely followed the developments of the French Revolution and even wrote a book on the subject *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, and the Effects it has Produced in Europe*, published in 1790. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was its immediate successor with its publication beginning in 1792.\(^50\)

Yet another scholar, Frenchman Léopold Lacour, in 1900 published *Trois femmes de la Révolution: Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe* (*Three Women of the Revolution: Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe*), which included the subtitle *The Origins of Contemporary Feminism*. His research identified the cornerstone of the Woman’s Rights Movement as being laid in France. Lacour’s sentiments were echoed by Madame Avril de Sainte-Croix, who penned a French women’s history book, *Le Féminisme (Feminism)*, in 1907 declaring in it that over one hundred years of effort were finally on the verge of bearing the fruit of success. Mere platitudes and promises would not stop French feminists in their march toward a better future for all of womankind. According to her, the feminist army was now a force to be reckoned with in mankind’s counting.\(^51\)

In *fin-de-siècle* France, Maria Deraismes was the woman after whom many French feminists modeled themselves. Deraismes claimed the origin of feminism traced back to the

\(^{49}\) Offen, *European Feminisms*, 186.  
\(^{50}\) Eckhardt, *Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey*, 176; Cronau, *Woman Triumphant*, 157  
\(^{51}\) Offen, *European Feminisms*, 186, 188.
heady days of the 1789 French Revolution, giving the movement a glorious heritage. Now, although women had participated in the French Revolution, the Terror that followed caused the various French governments of the early nineteenth century to strongly repress any criticism, making it perilous to be a champion of feminist ideas. This repressive reaction left the country without a viable Woman’s Rights Movement for much of the nineteenth century. Hubertine Auclert took up the torch leading the French feminist movement in 1878. Yet even with a proponent to show the way forward, it was not until the 1880s that feminism could be publicly discussed without repercussion in France. When feminism first reappeared, its advocates faced adversaries who charged that the feminist movement was really not French at all. They declared that the movement was actually an import imposed upon the French people by either Jewish, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon (meaning English), Freemason, or American conspirators seeking to undermine their country. The derisive terms employed by the French antifeminists gives credence to the possibility that the Woman’s Rights Movement in France had originated in another country.  


The German feminist Dr. Käthë Schirmacher, journeyed far and wide across both the European and North American continents, initially as a student in France, then sailing on to Chicago for the World Congress of Women in 1893. Having made an extensive and careful study of the feminist movement, she steadfastly maintained that the United States was its font, the wellspring from which the movements in other countries sprang forth. She even provided the strange argument that countries with Germanic backgrounds (Germany, England, America, etc.) had well thought-out woman’s rights movements with solid structures to their credit. However, feminist movements in the Romance countries, including France, were more disorganized and transient.  

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So where then is the origin of the nineteenth-century Woman’s Rights Movement? In France, it was suppressed for most of the century. In England, there was little political or social mobilization of a recognizable woman’s rights movement before 1850. But in the United States, the Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights Convention of 1848 can be clearly identified as the creation of a movement that continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. Although its strength abated during the Civil War, its genetrixes—Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—kept the fire of reform alive and reignited the movement after the war ended.

Radicals Get the Vote

One of the most controversial demands made by feminists was the right to vote. As a result, those who fought for the suffrage in their country were considered the “radicals” of that nation’s woman’s rights movement. Their own reformist sphere even excluded them from the main group. At the first woman’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, it was the last item on the list of demands voted on by the delegates; the vote was unanimously against the measure. In response to the consensus, Frederick Douglass stood up and made an appeal. He published an article in his *North Star* newspaper, “The Rights of Women,” on July 28, 1848, eight days after the convention ended. In this article, he recounted some of the same arguments he made that day at the convention. As Douglass explained,

While it is impossible for us to go into this subject at length, and dispose of the various objections which are often urged against such a doctrine as that of female equality, we are free to say that in respect to political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man. We go farther, and express our conviction that all political rights which it is expedient for man to exercise, it is equally so for woman. All that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being, is equally true of woman, and if that government only is just which governs by the free consent of the governed, there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and
administering the laws of the land. Our doctrine is that “right is of no sex.” We therefore bid the women engaged in this movement our humble Godspeed.

After Douglass’ speech, the suffrage measure was voted on a second time and, on that second occasion, the measure passed. Even those who advocated for a variety of rights for women had trouble accepting the notion of women voting.55

The woman’s suffrage movement gained steam throughout the nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, the burgeoning movement still had its share of detractors. One such antagonist was His Eminence, Cardinal J. Gibbons, who wrote in 1902, “I regard woman’s rights women and the leaders in the new school of female progress as the worst enemies of the female sex.” Another writer who shrouded himself in the protective identity of “‘Pater’” penned an interesting disclosure, saying that he would not lend his ear to the cries of “Votes for Women” made by his fellow countrywomen. He knew several leading New York suffragists personally and there were no scales on his eyes in regard to them. Pater had partaken of their tables’ wares and enjoyed the smoke of good tobacco with the husbands of these same women. He maintained that if their fellow suffragists knew the stylish leaders of their movement as well as he - such as the details of their domestic situations and the ghosts in their pasts - it might give them pause to ponder whether or not they really wanted to be led by ladies such as they.56

In 1914, Current Opinion reprinted some arguments against feminism made by William T. Sedgwick, a professor of Biology and Public Health at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Sedgwick claimed that feminism and its related agitation were merely the mania of the moment. However, the potential for repercussions could become dangerous to the dissidents of the movement if they refused to cease their bothersome blather for equality of the sexes in the domestic and public spheres. Sedgewick argued that to make such demands was ridiculous for men would soon have an uprising of their own, using physical force to put women back in their proper place. Charlotte Perkins Gilman offered a terse and succinct response to Professor Sedgwick’s threat of men becoming brutes with women: if men dared try such a thing,

women would arm themselves en masse and men would find themselves the targets of their practice. After all, Mr. Colt had made all men equal, while Annie Oakley showed that women could shoot even better than that.⁵⁷

The violence between the sexes that Sedgwick predicted did not occur, however the Great War brought about a new level of conflict with which women and men had to contend. In the post-war period, Britain gave women the right to vote in the year 1918. America followed suit, granting women the federal suffrage with the passing of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. It would take the escalated violence of World War II before France presented women with the suffrage in 1944.⁵⁸

Chapter 1 Summary

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an interest emerged in researching the origin of the Woman’s Rights Movement of the era. Feminist history traced its immediate roots back to the eighteenth century in Enlightenment philosophy, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. Researchers learned that it was during the nineteenth century that feminism made some of its most impressive improvements in the conditions for women. Among these were the opening of female seminaries for higher education, the admission of women to some medical schools and married women gained more control regarding their property and earnings.⁵⁹

Through the course of the nineteenth century, there were several areas in which woman’s rights advocates attained new privileges for women. During the early part of the century, girls received very little formal education; a highly educated woman was a rarity and subsequently

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viewed as an oddity by many. Over the course of that century, feminists increased educational opportunities for girls and even gained access to higher educational institutions for them. Feminists did not always agree among themselves how to best approach reform for woman’s rights. This led to conflicting ideas within the movement, sometimes contradictions could be found even within the works of a single feminist. Harriet Martineau, an English feminist and published writer on political economy, is an excellent example of this conundrum. She was famous as a political economist and supporter of English business that in turn reinforced the patriarchal system. Martineau was also a well-known feminist writer for woman’s rights. Yet, she refused to attend the 1849 Woman’s Rights Convention in the United States because she did not approve of some of the feminist advocates there and did not want her name associated with them. Another example of conflicting ideas is the creation of the practical Bloomer costume, its support by radical feminists, and its resulting abandonment due to public derision. Although calls for making women’s dress reform continued, most feminists rejected Bloomers out of hand.

Despite learning more about the growth and influence of the feminist movement, the question remained among historians as to which country started the movement. As of the turn of the twentieth century, feminist historians had established camps regarding in which country the movement originated: France, England, or the United States. In the early twentieth century, the feminist movement became so strong that feminists soon won their most controversial demand: women received the suffrage in all three countries.
CHAPTER 2

DERIVATION OF THE WORD “FEMINIST”

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute.

- Rebecca West, 1913

Early Feminist History

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, advancements in communication increased the ease and speed with which intellectuals in America and Europe discussed new concepts and philosophies. Because of this, France and the United States were linked in an exchange of numerous ideas in the areas of politics, economics, and new doctrines of ideology that circulated in each country via the medium of print. The dispersal of information in each country was accomplished through publications that were translated either from French into English or from English into French.¹

By the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century, those involved in the Woman’s Rights Movement reflected upon the history of their enterprise and wanted to learn more about it.

Several histories relating to the history of the women’s movement achieved publication during this era. Notable among these historical works are those by Léopold Lacour, *Trois femmes de la Révolution: Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe* (Three Women of the Revolution: Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe, subtitled *The Origins of Contemporary Feminism*), which was published 1900; Dr. Käthe Schirmacher, whose *Die moderne Frauenbewegung. Ein geschichtlicher Überblick* (*The Modern Women’s Movement. A Historical Overview*), came out in 1905 (English translation by Carl Conrad Eckhardt: *Woman’s Rights Movement, a Historical Survey*, was first printed in America in 1912); Madame Avril de Sainte-Croix’s, *Le Féminisme* (*Feminism*), publication of which occurred in 1907; and the Ethel Snowden work, *The Feminist Movement*, came off the presses in 1911.²

Scholars searched for the origin of specific ideas, one particular quest involved determining the genesis of the words “feminism” and “feminist,” reconciling the history of these words and ascertaining the particular concepts responsible for their creation. For many years, the origin of these words and their subsequent use in connection to women’s emancipation was credited to French philosopher and utopian socialist Charles Fourier in his *Theory of the Four Movements* (*Theoriés des quatre movements et des destinées generals*) originally published in 1808 anonymously. The researchers’ final determination then linked Fourier, France and the start of the nineteenth century as the origin of the words “feminist” and “feminism.”³

Among those who made this link was Virginia Crawford, as is seen in her 1897 article, “Feminism in France,” when she explained, “Thus Feminism—a word, by the way, first introduced into the language by Fourier.” Crawford’s article had influence given that it was first published in England’s *The Fortnightly Review* and then a few weeks later was reprinted in the American periodical *The Living Age*. In 1922, writer Winifred Stephens recognized that “the word feminism [sic] was not coined until after the [French] Revolution,” noting that Charles Fourier created it in 1808. The word “feminism” first appeared in *The New International Encyclopædia*, published in the United States in 1915. According to the entry, “Feminism is a term which originated in France about 1890” and it is derived from the French word

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“féminisme.” Although the definition does not mention Fourier and the date mentioned conflicts with others, France is still considered the country of origin. Conversely, while the word “feminist” is used in the entry for the word “feminism” as an enhancement of the definition, there is no separate listing for it. As illustrated by the publication dates of the works listed above, there was a great deal of confusion about when and by whom the words “feminism” and “feminist” were created, although it was generally accepted that France was the country of origin. As for the other aspects of antecedence, Fourier was a favored candidate, although the year he coined them was unclear.4

The definition of “feminism” found in John Ogilvie’s 1850 Imperial Dictionary demonstrates that the word existed prior to its association with women’s rights. Within the Imperial Dictionary the term is defined as the “state of being feminine.” An example of this particular definition is seen in an article in the Medical and Surgical Reporter published in Philadelphia. In the subsection “Feminism and Infantilism” of the 1875 article, “The Woman Physician Question,” a Parisian physician, Dr. Lorrain, described the characteristics of the feminism affliction:

The condition of the hair and skin, the length of the eyelashes, the delicacy of the form, the habitual slenderness of the limbs, and the disappearance of the muscular masses amidst the surrounding cellular tissue—all these give the appearance of a woman to a young man who is the subject of this diathesis (condition).

In other words, feminism was deemed a disease state in which a man had the physical characteristics usually attributed to women, thus rendering him unmasculine.5

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The New Migration of “Feminist”

The feminist movement in the 1960s once again aroused curiosity about the foundation of the women’s rights movement. As a result of this interest, a number of historians began to once again research the origin of the terms “feminism” and “feminist.” It was not that the new generation doubted the capabilities of their predecessors but that as communication became easier and advances were made in technology, the potential to research and comprehend historical data was greatly improved. The quest for more detailed and definitive information about the words “feminist” and “feminism” was especially important because “[l]anguage has become a central focus of the history of ideas.”

Several important works in women’s history were published in 1987. Among them were Steven Hause’s biography of Hubertine Auclert, The French Suffragette, Karen Offen’s article “Sur l’origine des mots ‘Féminisme’ et ‘Féministe’ (On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist),” and Nancy Cott’s history The Grounding of Modern Feminism. As Offen explained in a later work,

The words “feminism” and “feminist” are used today throughout the Western world and beyond to connote the ideas that advocate the emancipation of women, the movements that have attempted to realize it, and the individuals who support this goal. Few people in the English-speaking world realize, however, that the origin of these terms can be traced to late nineteenth-century French political discourse.

For decades, Fourier had been credited as the creator of the term “feminism” thus leading to the emergence of the word “feminist” as a rather pejorative byproduct. Steven Hause focused his research in France, noting, “Fourier is considered to have coined feminism in the 1830s, although this remains unverified.” However, the research of historian Claire Moses in the 1970s and 80s

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called into question whether Fourier, although considered a feminist thinker, had in fact been responsible for the creation of the words “feminist” and “feminism.” In Karen Offen’s 1987 work “On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist,” she established by means of careful examination of all his works that Fourier did not coin the term “feminism” in relation to women’s rights. This revelation meant he could not have created the term “feminist” either. Offen concluded,

French dictionaries (and many earlier historians) have erroneously attributed the invention of the word féminisme to Charles Fourier in the 1830s, but in fact its origins remain uncertain. No traces of the word have yet been identified prior to the 1870s.

Originally, Hause determined that the French suffragette Hubertine Auclert was the first to use the term “feminist” in 1882, according to her own admission. Its initial appearance in print was on September 4, 1882, in La Citoyenne (The Woman Citizen), when the newspaper published a letter from Auclert. However, Hause concluded that due to the association of Auclert’s confrontational public persona with “feminist,” the word was not accepted in the Woman’s Rights Movement of France until many women’s organizations, newspapers and magazines implemented it in the 1890s.

Offen also began her research in France; however, she found the date for the first use of the word “feminist” a decade earlier than Hause’s one of 1882. She cited Paul Robert’s 1960 edition of Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française (Alphabetical and Analogical Dictionary of the French Language), in which the word féministe is described as having first been used in print in 1872 by Alexandre Dumas fils as a derisive designation in his work L’Homme-femme. With the fundamentals for chronology and origin firmly in place, Offen

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then determined that the word féministe made the journey to England during the 1890s, where it was translated as “feminist,” per the Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED) citation for that term.9

According to Offen, the expressions “feminist” and “feminism” sailed across the Channel from France to England sometime between the years 1894 and 1895. Offen further determined that the phrases traversed the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas at the end of the 1890s. In comparison, Nancy Cott followed the terms across the Atlantic and put the initial appearance of the words “feminist” and “feminism” in the United States a little later, in the 1900s. This course follows an established tradition of the period that assumed ideas migrated from the European continent into England, and then out of England to the United States.10

The Problem of Using the Oxford English Dictionary as a Historical Source

Offen and Cott agree on citing the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as the source for the earliest dates of usage for the term “feminist” in English. This attribution is understandable, given that in the OED, not only is the definition of a word given, but also the date when it entered the English language and historical references illustrating changes in the meaning of the word over time. Dr. James Murray, one of the main editors of the venerable tome, observed to a friend that no previous dictionary had even attempted to search out the history of words in English, much less the changes in their meanings throughout time. The OED began publication in 1884 as A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Founded Mainly on Materials Collected by the Philological Society, but because it was printed at Oxford University and associated with that institution so strongly, it developed a nickname as the Oxford English Dictionary (also referred to as the OED) by 1895. Its first volume in 1884 covered “A-Ant” with

9 Offen, “On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist,” 46-47; Hause, Hubertine Auclert: The French Suffragette, n. xix, 90, n. 91; This fact was confirmed in this study through an examination of Dumas’ L’Homme-Femme, Réponse a M. Henri D’Idleville (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1872), 91; Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 14; Offen, European Feminisms, 183.

the dictionary’s final installment printed in 1928, making it primarily a “nineteenth-century artifact.”

Part of its fame resulted from the fact that the OED was entirely original in the definitions it provided. This was because all OED authors were required to do their own historical research for the entry of each and every single word. Furthermore, they were particularly tasked to ensure that their definitions were done without the plagiarization of material from previous dictionaries; which was the disgraceful standard reproduction tradition in such works of the time. Thus, for the OED, its uniqueness was in the assembly of new information for word definitions and its inclusion of references that gave the exact date of the first known usage of a term and in what work this earliest instance could be found. In any given entry, citation dates illustrate the different meanings of a word and provide past usages of the word, thus ably demonstrating the evolution of each word.

Production of a word for the dictionary was systematic because of the time it took to process each word and because of the sheer volume of information involved. The standard practice was to start by placing the then current spelling of a word on a piece of paper of set size. Next, the earlier spellings and definitions for the word were arranged on the same slip of paper in ascending order – that is oldest to youngest, where the youngest in use was the modern usage. Each of the historical definitions were placed on their own line and received a citation quoting the earliest known source for that particular meaning or usage of the word. These references were then organized by the grammatical category as noun, adjective, verb, and so on, for each variation of the term.

There was also a method in the choosing, defining, and citing of references for the OED. Picking suitable hand-written or published sources from which to extract information worthy of addition was the first step. The second was selecting from among these works which definitions

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and citations to add for the entry of a particular word. Originally, editors of the OED stated, “We admit as authorities all English books” with some basic limitations. This research into the origin of a word was simultaneously simple and complex, because for words of potential entry, only a half-sized sheet of notepaper was the set size for the paper slips. In this smallish area, a volunteer reader reproduced a citation utilizing the word that was going to be entered into the dictionary. Included in the citation were the publisher’s copyright and edition number of the source work and the exact place in it where the word was found.\footnote{Brewer, “OED Sources,” 41; Willinsky, Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED, 4.}

This process resulted in a slew of over five million slips of paper with 1.8 million citations used in the first edition of the dictionary. The OED was applauded for its thoroughness, the careful research of its volunteer readers in finding at least one suitable quote for every individual word, redefined the basic definition of what a dictionary was itself. The editors and volunteer contributors did more than merely apply historic references to basic wordage; their work became the authority which defined the English language throughout the British Empire. Eventually it became apparent that the true value of the OED was more than just the word definitions; it was the citations that were the real jewels. For anyone looking up a word in the OED, a greater depth of understanding was readily available simply by referring to the specific denoted page within the literary work cited as the definition’s source. This made the dictionary vulnerable to criticism and ridicule if too many errors were found in its volumes.\footnote{Willinsky, Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED, 4, 7, 11, 193, 194.}

The method of applying references to each source and including specific details of the word’s location in the cited material was developed as a means of averting potential disaster. The forthright manner in which the citations were included for verification graced the work with nobility. That only a miniscule number of errors were located among the tens of thousands of citations effectively quieted the detractors and made the OED an institutional authority on the English language. Invariably, the references employed were historical in two senses: 1) citations drawn from works throughout the history of the English language reflect the historic era in which they were originally quilled, and 2) their selection for inclusion in the OED also reflected the tastes and sensibilities of the Victorian era in England.\footnote{Willinsky, Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED, 7, 206.}

While most of the volunteer contributors were located in Great Britain and its colonies, there were also a sizeable number of people researching words in America. Despite the
publication’s goals, and its veritable army of volunteers, there were - as with any human enterprise - the inevitable oversights and errors made largely by new researchers and editors who joined the staff ranks along the way. These unintentional mistakes resulted in some late-stage production problems, given that all too often an earlier or more succinct citation for a word magically appeared just at the point of printing a volume. Such instances led editors to rant that they sent the best citations they had available up to the point of printing. They further informed the more junior contributing editors that changes would not be accepted past a specified point unless there was an occurrence of a newly discovered citation so much more distinguished that it made the original an embarrassment to the book.¹⁷

Indeed, in Empire of Words, The Reign of the OED, John Willinsky observed that while conducting research for his work, he discovered that references given for a word were quite often inaccurate. During the period of initial research and development, the OED relied heavily on literary books and contemporary periodical literature published after 1879 to provide sources and citations. Thus, each definition provided the readers with a list of particular sources referencing a word’s usage for each specific time period. When these parameters are considered, the chance of overlooking a word in a periodical prior to 1879 becomes not only plausible, but also highly possible. Murray noted this possibility himself, as he proclaimed that accurately locating the exact first instance of a word’s use was nigh impossible. He predicted that over the course of time, researchers would discover earlier citations for the vast majority of words in the OED. Furthermore, Murray argued that the initial usage of a word was really a rough estimate. He maintained a word would have to have been in conversational language for a decade or two before it would ever appear in a printed context. According to his argument, the first use of a word in literature was not the advent of its acceptance into the language; its meaning had to be in the common knowledge of readers long before the word appeared in the works cited by the OED. Indeed, Murray acknowledged that scores of words were already well established as a part of the language earlier than the citations for them claimed.¹⁸

When it came to citations, the editor’s guiding directive was to select the finest quotes for an example from those that were immediately available. On numerous occasions over the years,

¹⁷ Knowles, “Making the OED,” 27, 30, 32.
¹⁸ Willinsky, Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED, 4; Brewer, “OED Sources,” 42-44, 51; Mugglestone, Lexicography and the OED: Pioneers in the Untrodden Forest, 8; Bailey, “‘This Unique and Peerless Specimen’,” 213.
the editors of the *OED* have been disparaged for using prejudicial elitism to choose which literary works were suitable as citation sources. The editorial prerogative in the selection of sources worthy for the retrieval of citations for use in the *OED* remained strong well into the twentieth century. Given the common prejudices of the Victorian era in which it was compiled, the dictionary does not provide sufficient treatment of some subjects. One case in point is found in the citations related to women; they are either defined with scarce terms and few references or are conspicuously absent. This selective coverage is not surprising given that the editing of any written work invariably reflects the historical era in which it occurs; the *OED* is no exception to that rule.\(^{19}\)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* has long been considered a national project, the work of just one nation, that nation, of course, being England. One historian claimed that this dictionary focused on the English language as the core of the country’s civilization and the basis of her historical saga. Great Britain’s own writers composed the vast majority of books used in the *OED* citations, as though the true purpose of great wordsmiths, such as Sir Thomas More, William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, was just to create and enhance the language of the British Empire. The preference to associate English writers with an ostensibly English work is not surprising; it did however lead to additional discrepancies within the language as a whole. In the nineteenth century, the main dictionary in the United States was *Webster’s*, while in England the *Oxford English Dictionary* filled that role. Although technically both books defined the same language, the variations in slang, spelling and standard usage differed enough between the two countries to require that each have its own dictionary. Thus, according to linguistical experts in the early twentieth century, the English in America was not “true” English, and so,

With the first signs of the crumbling of the empire and the shifting of power in the English-speaking world to the United States, the Society of Pure English was formed in 1915 with a mission to protect the language from “the obnoxious condition” of British colonials engaged in “habitual intercourse” with “other-speaking races.”

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\(^{19}\) Bailey, “‘This Unique and Peerless Specimen’,” 216; Mugglestone, *Lexicography and the OED: Pioneers in the Untrodden Forest*, 13-14; Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED*, 7, 11.
However, the modern version of the *OED* has altered its original coverage of the English language, expanding outside the borders of Great Britain to allow entries from across the globe so that it can encompass all the words in all the varieties of English. Despite the efforts made by the Society of Pure English during the course of the twentieth century, the emphasis in word choice shifted from the dialect used in the country of England to the English language spoken around the world in all of Britain’s former colonies. Now the *OED* is the guardian of a language more expansive than the country in which it originated.\textsuperscript{20}

It is impossible to overstate the continuing influence of the *OED* on words and ideas today as it grows and evolves. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the standard by which all other dictionaries are measured. Its contents change year-to-year, current entries are adjusted for idiomatic changes, new words are added and obsolete ones removed from its pages. Indeed, the *OED* is much more than a mere dictionary; it is both the scribe and the historian of the English language. As the passage of time alters speech patterns, the *OED* bears witness to its growth and guards its past. A dictionary, as Murray put it, is a bottomless chasm that can never be completely filled. According to one historian, over the years it has become increasingly obvious that the archaic nature of the *OED*’s original Victorian citations require further research to confirm and validate each of their claims for the earliest occurrence of a word. Still, despite its irregularities and omissions, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is rightly called the most respected and thorough English dictionary in the modern world.\textsuperscript{21}

**Earlier American Citations for Woman’s Rights Words**

The word “feminist” first appeared in the *OED* in its *Fee-Field* volume published in September 1895. Under the title word, the adjectives of “feminist” were listed as “feministic, femininistic.” Continuing in the usual format, the *OED* next defined the first use of the word.

\begin{thebibliography}{21}
\bibitem{20} Bailey, “‘This Unique and Peerless Specimen’,” 209, 216, 224-225; Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED*, 6, 8, 12, 197, 203, 205.
\bibitem{21} Bailey, “‘This Unique and Peerless Specimen’,” 209, 216, 224-225; Mugglestone, *Lexicography and the OED: Pioneers in the Untrodden Forest*, 18; Brewer, “OED Sources,” 55; Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED*, 3, 6-9, 12-13, 193, 203, 205, 207.
\end{thebibliography}
According to that citation, the word “feminist” first appears in English on October 12, 1894, in an article published in the Daily News, which used the word in the line, “What our Paris Correspondent describes as a ‘Feminist’ group is being formed in the French Chamber of Deputies.” However, there is an earlier article called “Religious Notes” in the August 30, 1894, edition of the American magazine The Independent, in which the word “feminist” appears in a review of fringe religions in France at the time. According to the article, the Essenes were a group in Paris who claimed that Jesus was an Essene in his youth, as was Joan of Arc, who was also considered by many to be the female messiah. By the same token, “[o]n the other hand, the Essenes look with horror upon St. Paul, because he was neither a ‘Spiritist,’ nor a ‘Feminist’.” This citation means that the term “feminist” appeared in an American magazine two weeks earlier than the date of the source cited in the OED. This disconnect is in keeping with Murray’s declaration that three-fourths of the words in the OED had earlier citations than the ones originally used in the highly acclaimed publication.  

According to the OED, the year 1908 was when the adjective “feministic” was first used in English. It was promulgated via the September issue of Westminster Gazette, with the line, “Some thinkers in Hungary anticipate feminist developments even in Turkey.” In the estimable North American Review published in the United States, writers and their articles provided the reading public with a sound measure of the best in Victorian era living. In the 1896 article of The North American Review, “Some Later Aspects of Woman Suffrage,” the Right Rev. William Croswell Doane, Bishop of Albany translates an article from French into English. The French periodical Revue des Deux Mondes, had an article called “La Feminisme,” which Doane translated into English as “Womanness.” Although it was an article in a French magazine, the subject focuses on feminism in Australia and New Zealand. In it the Bishop writes, “There are curious contradictions among the promoters of this Feministic movement.” Clearly, Bishop Doane’s article of 1896 in The North American Review with its use of the term “feministic,” predates the 1908 article cited in the OED by a dozen years.

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In addition, the OED reports that the variant of “feminist” was first used in English in an 1895 issue of Critic in the sentence, “The writer depicts Ford as the deepest ‘feminist’ in the Shakespearian constellation.” Yet the American George Vanderhoff translated Alexandre Dumas’ L’Homme-Femme into English in 1873, at which time he interpreted “féministes” into the word “feminists”: “We will take leave to reply to the feminists that what they say has no sense in it.” This historical citation means that the word “femininst(s)” appeared in use in the United States more than twenty years earlier than is indicated in the OED.  

In the United States, the word “feminism” may have also made its stateside appearance in Bishop Doane’s 1896 article “Some Later Aspects of Woman Suffrage.” The first sentence of the article about the feminist movement down under is noteworthy, “They have taken up Feminism with the same ardor as Socialism.” This essay provides a date for the first American usage of the word “feminism,” which is later than the 1895 citation given in the OED. Even so, it is earlier than the 1906 article, “Feminism in Some European Countries,” found in the Review of Reviews from England, reprinted and circulated in the United States, previously considered the first instance of the word in America. However, its usage did not proliferate for some time, as is demonstrated in The New International Encyclopædia. Although the Encyclopædia began publication in New York in 1903, it did not provide an entry for “feminism” until the 1915 edition. This delay in recognition is in line with Kathy Peiss’s examination of The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature for America. Peiss’ research found that the term “feminist” did not have an entry in that index until after its 1910-1914 edition.

Further on, the phrase “feminist movement” appears in Bishop Doane’s 1896 article in unflattering fashion: “At the bottom, this whole feminist movement is nothing but a great humbug [sic], devised by politicians who are always in pursuit of new agitations, by those who have lost their positions, and by hot-headed people.” Unfortunately, while the OED does have a definition for the term “feminist,” it does not provide an additional entry for the phrase “feminist movement.” However, Doane’s use of the expression takes place at an earlier time.

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than the February 1913 article published in *McClure’s* by Inez Milholland, “On the Liberation of a Sex.” On the first page of the article, Milholland wrote, “From the rapidity with which the suffragist movement and its deeper parent, the feminist movement, are moving. . . .” Although Milholland’s article has been cited by other historians as what may be the earliest use of the word “feminist” in America, Bishop Doane’s November 1896 translation predates it by seventeen years.26 (In Chapter 4, I will further examine what is now perhaps the earliest known use of the word feminist in the world to date.)

As illustrated above, it would appear that the *OED* is not alone in needing to reexamine and correct its citations. The discovery of new research sources and the technological advances of the last few decades that have simplified researching a wide range of historical works and collections will likely result in the discovery of even earlier examples than those referenced above.27

In all instances of the words “feminist,” “feministic,” and “femininistic,” it seems that their earliest appearance in the English language occurred in America, not in Great Britain, as cited in the *OED*. There is a problem of nuance in using the *OED* as a resource: in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *OED* referred to the language of England proper, whereas in the decades thereafter, it referred to the language of English around the world. Therefore, the citations for feminist and its variations are accurate for England when the entry was originally written. Given the vast quantity of definitions recorded by the *OED*, there are many words which have not yet received an update. Thus, it is understandable that those entries related to the word “feminist” have not yet been revised to include the earlier American instances of the words. However, it must be noted that the works in which these words do appear are either translations to English from French or are articles discussing some aspect of France, so the French connection with feminist terminology still exists. Rather recently, research into the history of words and the circumstances that brought about their creation have given added


significance to the history of the strategic usage of language in political and philosophical ideas; becoming more important to our understanding of historic trends.  

Chapter 2 Summary

The earliest books on the history of the Woman’s Rights Movement came out at the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century. Research on the origins for the terms “feminism” and “feminist” was problematic. Even into the early decades of the twentieth century, there was still some uncertainty among writers as to who conceived the terms and when they were born. The most popular choices were Fourier as their creator and France as the country in which they were coined. Technically, the word “feminism” had already existed for some time, but not in association with woman’s rights, instead its definition was “the quality of being feminine.”

Feminists in the 1970s became curious about their past just as their predecessors had done. By 1987, Claire Moses and Karen Offen had proven that Fourier did not invent the words “feminism” or “feminist.” Yet, both still looked to France as the country where they originated. Eventually, Offen determined that Alexandre Dumas fils first used the word “feminist” in print in 1872. Calling upon the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as a reference, Offen speculated that, based on the dictionary’s citations, the term “feminist” migrated from France to England in the 1890s. Nancy Cott continued to follow the word’s migration, maintaining that “feminist” was first used in the United States in the 1900s.

However, as has been pointed out in the previous pages, there are several considerable problems in utilizing the OED as a reference. Dr. James Murray, one of the venerable editors of the first edition declared that he was certain that over seventy-five percent of the words contained in the dictionary had earlier examples of the first use of the word than those cited. He further maintained that not only would earlier citations be found, but also that a word had to have

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28 Willinsky, Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED, 203; Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism, 14; Kelley, “What is Happening to the History of Ideas?” 15.
29 “Feminism,” The Imperial Dictionary, vol. 2, 1850, e-mail message to author from Catherine Essinger, Women’s Sexuality and Gender Studies Librarian, University of Houston, May 19, 2010.
been in common conversational usage ten to twenty years before it ever graced a printed page. Furthermore, for many decades the *OED* only listed citations from British sources, ignoring those in their former colonies – including America. Over the years, the shortcomings of citations in the *OED* have become increasingly obvious. Not only are there several instances of words first used in print at an earlier date than is noted in their entry’s citation, but the appearances were in America, not England. It is notable that these shortcomings appear in all the expressions specifically related to the subject of women.

Chronology is vital when attempting to put the events of history into sequence. The chronologically inaccurate dates of the terms created during the first Woman’s Rights Movement sorely needs updating if the *OED* is to be considered a scholarly reference for this topic. The first column in Table 1 lists three terms – Feminist, Feministic, Femininist – created during the first movement for woman’s right’s. The next column contains the *OED* citation dates for the earliest example in print for each of these words. Then the third column identifies dates from periodicals confirming the earliest known appearance of each term in America. The fourth and final column provides a numerical figure to showing the difference between the date of the first American usage of each term and the date provided in citation by the *OED* as its first appearance in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminist</th>
<th>Oct. 1894</th>
<th>Aug. 1894</th>
<th>2 weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feministic</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininist</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *OED* is not alone in the need for updating, this study revealed that books on the American Woman’s Rights Movement also need editing. The phrase “feminist movement” first appeared in an American magazine article in 1896, seventeen years earlier than the date given by Cott for the earliest known example of 1913. That same 1896 article also included the term “feminism,” in this case ten years earlier than a 1906 essay Cott previously considered its initial use in the United States. These findings change the chronology of feminist history in U.S.
history since these words entered American print in the 1890s a decade or more before previously thought.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Previous Examples & Earlier Examples & Difference \\
\hline
Feminist Movement & 1913 & 1896 & 17 years \\
Feminism & 1906 & 1896 & 10 years \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Earlier Use of Terms in America}
\end{table}

Scholars throughout history have shared and shaped ideas through communication with their peers, in turn bringing about the migration of ideas from one country to another and enabling their spread between continents.\textsuperscript{31} The earlier American dates for the words “feminist,” “feministic,” and “femininist” indicate that it is possible the migration of these terms travelled a route entirely different from the previously recognized paths. Indeed, it is possible to speculate that the terms migrated along alternate routes by way of America $\rightarrow$ England $\rightarrow$ France or perhaps France $\rightarrow$ America $\rightarrow$ England.

\textsuperscript{30} Cott, \textit{The Grounding of Modern Feminism}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{31} Roberto Scasziere and Raffaella Simili, eds., \textit{The Migration of Ideas} (Sagamore Beach, MA: Watson Publishing International LLC, 2008), vii, viii.
CHAPTER 3

DUMAS & THE DUBOURG AFFAIR

The chain of wedlock is so heavy that it takes two to carry it—and sometimes three.

—Alexandre Dumas, fils

Prior to this study, Alexandre Dumas, fils was considered to have been perhaps the first to use the word “feminist” in print in 1872. The history behind his use of the term is found in an interesting case in French legal history. Dumas was considered quite negative in his opinions which were revealed in his published perspective on the case. As the son of novelist Alexandre Dumas, père, the family history of Dumas fils provides unique insight into the individualistic and creative heritage that influenced his works.
A Literary and Colorful Lineage

Famous French playwright and author Alexandre Dumas fils (son), was the illegitimate son of the celebrated novelist and “Romancist [sic]” Alexandre Dumas père (father), author of the Count of Monte Cristo (Comte de Monte Cristo), The Three Musketeers (Trois Mousquetaires), The Man in the Iron Mask (L’Homme au Masque de Fer), and other famous works. *The grandfather of Dumas père was the Marquis Antoine-Alexandre-Davy de la Pailleterie who emigrated to the French colony of Haiti to found a plantation and married a “half-cast” black woman by the name of Louise (Marie) Cessette Dumas. Together, they had a mulatto son they named Thomas-Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie, a Creole. Louise Cessette Dumas died in 1772; so, in 1780 at the age of eighteen, her son moved to France with his father. Thomas-Alexandre was a master swordsman and once killed a man in a duel by the sword. He later had a falling-out with his father and, rejecting his paternal name, enlisted in the French army in 1786 under the name of Alexandre Dumas, taking his mother’s maiden name for his own. He entered the military at the rank of private in a dragoon regiment. His father’s death just thirteen days after he enlisted cut the son off from ever claiming his rightful rank in the French aristocracy.1

Thomas Alexandre Dumas was a handsome man who had “a deeply bronzed complexion, powerful frame, and delicate wrists” with an aristocratic air about him. He rose through the ranks, eventually becoming a lieutenant-colonel in 1792. That same year he married Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Labouret, who was either a “Haytian Negress” or the daughter of a former butler of the Duke of Orléans. By then her father was the “host of the ‘Crown’ at Villers-Côterêts,” a hotel located in a small town north of Paris that was “upon the great north-eastern road” Laon Soissons in France. Just a year after achieving the impressive rank of lieutenant-colonel, he was promoted to the rank of “a general of brigade (division).” His exploits included single-handedly holding off an entire Austrian army on a bridge in Clausen in 1797, earning him the nickname “the black devil” among the Austrians. Not one to mince words, he had a falling-out with the leader of the French army, Napoleon, attributed to the young man’s “plain speaking” in Egypt, which caused Dumas to quit the army and return to France.²

The General’s son, novelist Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie Dumas père, was born on July 24, 1802, in Villers-Côterêts (Aisne), France; he was a quadroon (one-fourth African). It was said that he had “a strong infusion of the rich, hot blood of the tropics in his veins,” which was thought to contribute to his quick temper. He was very tall for his time at six foot six inches, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a strong constitution. One contemporary described him as having a “swarthy countenance” with Negro hair, while another referred to him as a “half-African Frenchman.” Dumas père was a rival of the writer Balzac, who referred to him as le negre (The Negro); otherwise, his racial mixture never hampered his success nor caused him any phrase meaning illegitimate son (“French Novelists—Alexandre Dumas, fils,” 614; Gallaher, General Alexandre Dumas, 1.); *There are numerous variations in the biographical information of the three Dumas; for example, accounts give different reports as to the Marquis’ name (see Ainsworth, “Autobiography of Alexandre Dumas,” 72; Bidwell, “Alexandre Dumas,” 411; Alexandre Dumas, The Critic, 379) and as to whether he married Louise (see Bidwell, “Alexandre Dumas,” 410; Dumas, Alexandre, [Alexandre Davy De La Pailleterie],” 654; J. Brander Matthews, “M. Alexandre Dumas, fils, The International Review (June 1881): 531, Maurois and Hopkins, The Titans: A Three-Generation Biography of the Dumas, 19; Gallaher, General Alexandre Dumas, 1). In addition, Dumas père was known to embellish accounts of his life as well as that of his father (see Maurois and Hopkins, The Titans: A Three-Generation Biography of the Dumas, 29; Bidwell, “Alexandre Dumas,” 409, 410; Albert Rhodes, “Alexandre Dumas,” The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading, 20:1 (July 1875), 31, 32; “Alexandre Dumas,” The Critic, 379; Ainsworth, “Autobiography of Alexandre Dumas,” 70), and Dumas fils records in one place that his parents married and recounts in another how he tried to get them to marry when they were in their sixties, but his mother refused to wed his father (Matthews, “M. Alexandre Dumas, fils,” 538; Cynthia Grenier, “Dumas, the Prodigious,” 284). Given these difficulties, I have chosen to give as much detail as possible from all sources and note discrepancies.

difficulty worth his mentioning. Accepted by society’s highest circles, he even knew the King of France personally and interacted with royalty from other countries. He was only four when his father died at age 40 in 1806. Later in life, Dumas pére told a story of how the night his father died, his father’s spirit came and knocked on his bedroom door to bid him goodbye. After Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, Dumas pére had the opportunity to reclaim his aristocratic rank by birthright. He refused, saying, “I have known my father, I never knew my grandfather; and what would my father, who came to bid me goodbye at the moment of his death, think of me, if I denied him, to call myself by the name of my grandfather.” An insightful characterization of him claims, “he resisted no temptation which came to him.”

Dumas pére’s famous son, Dumas fils, was born illegitimate in Paris on July 29, 1824, to a young dressmaker/washerwoman named Marie (Catherine) Labay, a “Frenchwoman of low social degree,” and he grew up in the City of Light. She had been Dumas pére’s neighbor in a small apartment building. At the time of the child’s birth, Dumas pére was twenty-one and worked as a minor secretary for the man who later became King Louis-Philippe, then the Duke of Orleans, since he had not yet made his “grand coup” as a literary success yet. Dumas fils was an octoroon (one-eighth African) with slightly kinky hair and a broad noble brow. Contemporaries did not always agree on the appearance of Dumas fils. One described his appearance as “‘brawny, curly-headed and dark; full of that peculiar personality for which the mixture of French and negro [sic] blood is responsible.’” In comparison, another spoke with more genteel phrasing: “[t]here was nothing of the Ethiopian in his complexion, being of the kind which usually accompanies blue eyes (which he had).”

Dumas fils’ mixed blood was not deemed a disadvantage because “the French are without prejudice in the matter of race, and the eighth part of African blood which runs through his veins..."
did not prevent him from enjoying any of the social privileges belonging to a pure-blooded Gaul.” As a small boy, Dumas fils was sent to visit with “Monsieur Dumas” every two weeks. He was thirteen when Dumas père achieved literary success. At that time, Dumas père claimed paternity of the younger Dumas and bestowed upon him the paternal cognomen (legal surname) of “Dumas.” Dumas père paid for his son’s education, including college, and took the boy with him on trips to other countries such as Africa and Spain. The elder Dumas, though not required by law to make a legal claim on his bastard son, chose to do so. As the younger Dumas later recounted, “[A]s soon as his first successes as a dramatist’ enabled him to do so ‘(he) recognized me and gave me his name.’” However, because the boy was thirteen when this event occurred, he had already endured the taunts of schoolmates during his youngest years for having been born an illegitimate child. The colloquialism “natural son” refers to a male of illegitimate birth. Historical accounts do not agree as to whether his parents ever married; it is said that his mother did not want to marry his father, though his father was willing.

Dumas’ childhood experiences led him in 1858 to invent the first “social problem” play, “Le Fils Naturel,” (The Natural Son) in which he showed

that a man who brings a child voluntarily into the world without assuring to him the material, moral, and social means of livelihood, and without recognizing himself as responsible, in fine, for all consecutive damages, is a malefactor who ought to be classed among thieves and assassins.

At the time it was first staged, it was called the “‘useful’ drama—the drama which should expose vices, remedy evils, and be in general an instrument of public and private good.” In it, Dumas fils celebrated natural sons by “making heroic juvenile illegitimates exclaim jubilantly, ‘We are the sons of angels, whilst the rest are but offspring of properly married grocers.’” Drawing upon his own personal experience, Dumas makes the focus of the play the right of a child to his or her father’s name.

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6 “French Novelists - Alexandre Dumas, fils,” 619, 622; Matthews, “M. Alexandre Dumas, fils,” 538; “Alexandre Dumas,” The Critic, 381; “Dumas, Alexandre, the younger,” 464; “Dumas, Alexandre, [‘Dumas fils’]
Dumas Fils Takes up the Pen

Very early in his writing career, starting at the age of eighteen, Dumas fils tried to imitate his father’s writing style and was embarrassed in his first two published works as a failure for attempting to do so. Although “To a son of Dumas the use of the pen came naturally,” originality in his writing took longer to develop. He wrote his first original novel, *La Dame aux Camélias* [sic] (*Lady of the Camellias*), in 1848 at the age of twenty-four, finally demonstrating his own style. The author quilled his most well known work in the course of eleven days at an inn near Saint-Germain-en-Laye near his father’s chateau, named Monte-Cristo, situated about an hour by train outside of Paris. It was a sentimental tale of the life of a courtesan who dies of consumption (tuberculosis), a popular romantic disease during the nineteenth century. It earned Dumas a notorious reputation as one who “made an especial study of the unclean;” one contemporary bestowed him with the title “apostle of vice and prostitution.” Marguerite Gautier, the dame of the novel, had been known in life as Marie Duplessis, her real name being Alphonsine Plessis. She was a young French girl from the country who became a famous high-class courtesan before she met Dumas fils. When Dumas was twenty-one, he had a brief but intense love affair with her that ended six months before she died at the age of 23. He wrote *La Dame aux Camélias* after she had been dead for about a year. This was the work that made the younger Dumas famous overnight, “found an immense number of readers,” and whose royalties freed him “from the slavery of debt.” It was a story of “unwholesome” and “dangerous morality” that quickly became popular in France and the rest of Europe. Published in 1848, just before revolution broke out in France, it speedily sold out three editions. Due to subject matter, the readership of novels in France was far different from that of English-speaking nations:

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French novelists warn mothers of families, for the sake of their little girls who are eating bread and butter or just leaving school, that their books are for men; so the novel in France is not the domestic institution [sic] it is in England. It is read mainly by men; to married ladies who are not particularly pious, it is known a little; to maidens not at all.

However, not all of the men and boys in France were allowed to read such novels; a contemporary observed that one would not like to see “‘La Dame aux Camélia,’ in the hands of a boy at school.” Moreover, it was remarked that the novels by Dumas “occupy their proper place between heaven and hell,” a rather polite piece of damning with faint praise. It should be noted that La Dame aux Camélia is the only work by Dumas fils which is not a comedy of manners. Instead, the work “renewed modern French comedy by pointing out the path back to Nature and the existing conditions of society, and by showing that life should be studied as it was, and not as it had been or as it might be.” No wonder Dumas warned parents not to take their daughters to the theater.7

In 1849, Dumas translated La Dame aux Camélia from a novel to a play in just eight days. When the attempt was first made to present the play on the Parisian stage that same year, its showing was denied by a rigorous French censor, M. Léon Faucher, who tried to suppress it. It took the “intervention of Napoleon’s all-powerful minister, Moray,” to have the play put on. La Dame aux Camélia was finally first shown at the Vaudeville Theatre in Paris on February 2, 1852. Deemed an “instant success,” it created “a perfect fureur [sic]” and continued at the theater for more than 100 days. Still, despite its considerable acceptance by the viewing public,

based on its impressive run, some critics thought it no more than “a vulgar melodrama.” One admirer noted that

[quote]
[the examples are not numerous where the talent descends from father to son, especially of a literary kind, one equal to the other in the branch to which he devotes himself; for the son here is equal as a playwright to his father as a novelist.
[/quote]

Another agreed, writing, “There are few more striking instances of hereditary genius than that presented in the case of the elder and younger Dumas.” As ever the case, pundits viewed the relationship somewhat differently, commenting that Dumas père’s worst crime was in giving his son the fine literary training that produced such works. According to this perspective, Trois Mousquetaires was the responsible party in siring La Dame aux Camelias.⁸

An 1895 edition of The Critic described Dumas fils as the stylish scholar and expert in societal difficulties of his day. His talent for exacting detail in his research and his profound intellectual faculties endowed his writing with a smooth style and cleverness of phrase with which he described the dregs of society. These characteristics of his personality and talent were, in turn bestowed upon his plays, gracing the stage with the nuances and realism of everyday life. Another admired Dumas, saying that he was emphatic in his self-expression and his individualism was of a vigorous cast. It has also been said that Dumas was a complicated and intriguing man of his time, fascinating others in the reflections he showed society of itself. In his plays, Dumas jousted at the grave failures of society, in particular those that centered on gender relations. One contemporary referred to him as the chief historian of vice in all its loathsome detail. Nevertheless, his works were considered genuine examples taken from everyday life, and the masterpieces he produced possessed the high intellectualism that is the force of wit, sorrow, and comedy within the theater.⁹


The Dubourg Affair

Since 1987, Alexandre Dumas fils has held the title as the first to use the word “feminist” in printed publication. In his work *L’Homme-Femme, Réponse a M. Henri D’Idleville* (*The Man-Woman, Response to Mr. Henri D’Ideville*), Dumas wrote, “‘Les féministes, passez-moi ce néologisme, disent, à très-bonne intention d’ailleurs . . . ’ (The feminists, if I may borrow this neologism, say, with very good intentions moreover . . . ).” He continued with a denouncement of “féministes” saying, “We will take leave to reply to the feminists that what they say has no sense in it.”

This sociological brochure by Dumas responded to a July 6, 1872, newspaper article by journalist Henry D’Ideville on the “affaire-Dubourg.” D’Ideville was covering the trial of M. Dubourg, a man accused of murdering his unfaithful wife, Denise MacLeod [Dubourg], for the French newspaper *Le Soir* (*The Evening*). Yet, the facts were not nearly so simple as a common crime of passion over an extramarital affair and D’Ideville found himself sympathizing with the wife. In the article, he called French law “barbarous” because it was considered “‘excuseable’” for a husband to kill his adulterous wife if she was caught in the act. He also reprinted letters from MacLeod to Dubourg and to one of her friends, offering a sympathetic perspective on the course of her life before she was killed. D’Ideville remarked that “it would perhaps have been as well if M. Dubourg had abstained from murdering his wife.” Dumas took exception to D’Ideville’s commentary, which “brought M. Dumas into the field,” and he “rushed to du Bourg’s defence [sic]” publishing the *L’Homme-Femme* brochure as a response.

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The Dubourg drama began on Sunday April 21, 1872, and involved a jealous husband, Arthur Le Roy Dubourg, “a young man of good family, . . . dark, thick-set, and fairly handsome with heavy moustaches.” Dubourg stabbed his young wife, Denise MacLeod (Dubourg), fifteen times with a “sword-stick,” after catching her with her lover “in flagrante delicto.” The lover managed to escape his wrath, so Dubourg satisfied his revenge by murdering his wife, receiving a five-year prison sentence for his actions. The specifics of the case were problematic from a legal perspective because the couple had lived apart for quite some time and both the husband and wife had taken lovers. The wife had her own attic apartment, Number 14, in the Latin quarter of Paris in the Rue des Écoles. It was in this setting where her husband stabbed her repeatedly. When the attack commenced, her paramour - wearing only his shirt – escaped “through the window jumping and thence over an adjoining roof,” and without a thought for MacLeod, escaped the furious husband, “saving his own life by a precipitate flight on to the roof.”

What followed is both vexing and interesting, as Dubourg ran downstairs and told the bellhop about his crime, and then took off in a taxi straight to the nearest police station where he turned himself in. Yet prior to his departure for the district jail, he announced that he was ravenous and directed his police escort to a nearby bistro where he enjoyed a five-course meal with a fine wine followed by a good cigar. After the murder, Dubourg became calm quickly and was angered by the long wait he had to endure before a judge could assess his bail. This was not too unexpected, given that Parisians were amazed and rather outraged that the proceeding took so long. The French Code gave sanction to a husband killing his wife for adultery as a crime passionel (crime of passion). Eventually, Dubourg was released on bail, while Count de Précorbin the young lover, who only had his title to fill his pockets and worked for the Prefecture of the Seine, was taken into custody and held for a long time in solitary confinement. MacLeod


died on April 26, 1872, five days after the attack, in the La Pitié infirmary in Paris due to the injuries meted out by her enraged spouse.\textsuperscript{13}

An American correspondent in Paris observed at the time that Parisians so were overwrought with emotion over the news that MacLeod had died of her injuries that it took some time for them to calm down about it. Meanwhile, others were making jokes about Dubourg’s murder of MacLeod:

“My child,” said M. Scribe, “permit me to give you a hint. Here is the scene. Suppose that you are in your own room: a young man is at your feet, making a passionate declaration of love to you: your husband suddenly enters. Now, what would you do?”

“I would tell him to go away again,” replied the artless maiden.\textsuperscript{14}

The trial of Arthur Le Roy Dubourg began in June 1872, at the Paris Assizes and was covered in the \textit{New York Times} under the heading, “The ‘Affaire-Dubourg’.” The coverage by the \textit{New York Times} correspondent in Paris was delayed by the technological limitations of the day such that, although the trial took place on the morning of Friday June 14, 1872, it was not reported in the paper until June 29, 1872, some fifteen days later. The correspondent described the husband as the murderer Dubourg who executed his spouse – calling him an insignificant example of a small middle-class man. The extraordinarily scandalous trial was so exciting that even women from the aristocracy wrote to the President of the Court asking for tickets to the seats in the courtroom during M. Dubourg’s trial. The President “promptly and indignantly refused” such requests. Nonetheless, during the eleven-hour trial women packed the courtroom from well-dressed nobility to harlots off the street. In the course of the trial, the facts of the Dubourgs’ arranged marriage came to light.\textsuperscript{15}

MacLeod’s family was Scottish, and at the time of her marriage her parents were dead, and her sisters were already married. The Countess de Toussaint had introduced the MacLeod


\textsuperscript{14} “Foreign Notes,” \textit{Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading} 1:23 (June 8, 1872), 643.

family to the Dubourg family for the purpose of matchmaking for nineteen-year-old Denise MacLeod. Because Dubourg was a rich landowner the relatives agreed to the arrangements and, two weeks later, he and MacLeod were married. It was a typical French marriage of convenience for both parties. Unfortunately, MacLeod had already fallen in love with Count de Précorbin, a younger man, and as is typical in such cases, the marriage became a yoke around the necks of the spouses; linking them thoroughly and inexorably. To put a finer point on the matter, it was not long after the wedding that the new wife developed a strong aversion for her new spouse, leading to such antagonism between them that eventually they would only agree to be in the same room at mealtime. After six months, MacLeod wrote a letter begging her husband to agree to a judicial separation, avowing that she had already committed adultery so there was no longer a point to remaining together. Dubourg refused, choosing instead to remove her to Switzerland imprisoning her in a hospital for the insane. While there, she delivered a child whose physical characteristics made it highly likely that her husband was indeed its father.\footnote{Vizetelly, Republican France, 1870-1912, 121; Meyer, How the Russians Read the French, 164; Vizetelly records the name as “M’Leod” (see Vizetelly, Republican France, 1870-1912, 121), but I have chosen to use the spelling in Meyer “MacLeod” (see Meyer, How the Russians Read the French, 164); Barry, “Hermance Lesguillon,” 409; Crawford, “Feminism in France,” 530, 532; Vizetelly’s description conflicts with Meyer’s account that MacLeod’s parents were dead when the marriage with Dubourg was arranged (see Vizetelly Republican France, 1870-1912, 121; Meyer, How the Russians Read the French, 164).}

The Franco-Prussian War followed and Dubourg joined the French military becoming a Captain of the Mobiles. During the war, a friendly correspondence of letters took place between MacLeod and Dubourg. It was later suspected that MacLeod might have pretended to be fond of her husband as a way of escaping the lunatic asylum. She was with Dubourg when he returned to Paris and they began to live together again. Eventually, Dubourg became suspicious of MacLeod, who was now twenty-two, and he chose an extraordinary tactic for finding out. He rented her a room in a boardinghouse owned by one of his past lovers. He paid his former mistress to gain the trust of his unsuspecting wife and ferret out all the details of her love affair with young Count Précorbin. After getting MacLeod established in the apartment, Dubourg left her to live in its rundown furnished rooms. Meanwhile he hired private investigators to follow her and report on any assignation she had with her young love.\footnote{Meyer, How the Russians Read the French, 164; Vizetelly, Republican France, 1870-1912, 122.}

During Dubourg’s trial, the public prosecutor, M. Benoit, presented his case arguing,
that when a husband, suspecting his wife, encourages her to lodge at an [sic] hotel alone, and then personally, aided by paid detectives, tracks her to a rendezvous, carrying with him changes [sic] of arms, and kills her ruthlessly with repeated blows, her offense cannot give impunity to the deed.

One journalist observed that during the presentation of evidence it was revealed that Dubourg had orchestrated his own cuckolding by entrapping his wife in such appalling circumstances that they became conducive to bringing about his dishonor. For his part, Dubourg, as the prisoner standing in the box, made the trial more theatrical by often adding anguished eruptions of tears.¹⁸

Dubourg’s defense attorney, M. Corraday, spent two and a half hours countering the prosecutor’s case. However, the jury sided with M. Benoit and found M. Dubourg guilty. When the President of the Court announced his unfavorable summary of the case to those present, the criminal gave a loud cry and threw himself to the floor – shattering a glass of water and ether as he did so. He fainted and the gendarmes (constables) had to carry him out. Following a short recess, he returned to court this time carried in by the guards. Earlier in the trial, Dubourg had displayed insolent behavior during the proceedings, but now that had left him entirely.¹⁹

While Dubourg was recovering outside the courtroom, the unemotional jury returned a verdict of guilty for murder with the additional conditions that it was an unplanned murder and that there were justifications in this situation. The result was that M. Dubourg received a five-year “reclusion” sentence (solitary confinement) in jail. This was a very unusual outcome since the customary bias in French juries was usually favorable to the husband, regardless of the cause that incited his action. Sometime later his defense counsel was able to get the sentence commuted to five years in the prison’s general population. As the New York Times Paris correspondent explained the difference, a sentence of reclusion meant much more than a type of confinement. It was considered a form of cruel and unusual punishment - the harshest way for a prisoner to endure his sentence. Reclusion also changed legal status by stripping away many rights a citizen normally enjoyed; among these was the loss of any parental rights. Because Dubourg had a young child, a sentence of reclusion would have caused him to lose legal custody of the child, making it a ward of the state. Under the new sentence, Dubourg was able to retain

¹⁹ Ashby, “The Affaire Dubourg”; Vizetelly (1913) differed from Ashby (1872), reporting that “towards the close, while the judge was summing up, Dubourg suddenly drank off some ether, which had been handed to him to inhale, and fell fainting on the floor” (Vizetelly, Republican France, 1870-1912, 122).
parental custody of his child. In addition, in regular prison circumstances, a wealthy prisoner could purchase some comforts to make his stay more endurable. Dubourg could also regain his freedom six months to a year earlier than with his original sentence.20

While the Parisian press exchanged opinions about Dubourg’s guilt or innocence, Dumas quickly joined in the disputes by publishing the work *L’Homme-Femme*. In *L’Homme-Femme*, Dumas’ rather extreme solution to the problem of outraged spouses chained to wandering wives who committed adultery was simple, “*Tue-la!*—‘kill her!’” The sarcastic pamphlet about women with which Dumas *fils* will always be linked for his “*Tue-la!* theory,” was the sort of social commentary which made him famous. It is possible that the pamphlet was written reactively, a reply to more than just the trial at hand but to his experience with the institution of marriage. Dumas *fils* was no stranger to the extramarital affair, one of which he enjoyed as the lover of the married Countess Lydia Nesselrode. She had met him with the full intention of having a fling with the author of *La Dame aux Camélias*. After the affair ended, Dumas was left lovesick and hardened his heart against married women who enjoy dallying with the feelings of young men.21

A writer at the time commented that anyone who perused the pamphlet pages of *L’Homme-Femme* would have them emblazoned in her or his memory: should your spouse play you false; when you have done everything in your power and she adamantly refuses to change her ways; when her presence in your life is corrupting your chances for a blessed hereafter; and the police refuse to assist you, then you must take the law into your own hands, adjudicate her guilty and put her to death accordingly. This sentiment later caused one journalist to playfully envision Dumas’ rest being disturbed each night by the demands of desperate husbands hounding

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him at his bedroom window with evidence proving they have been cuckolded, passionately pleading *faut-il la tue* (must she be killed)?

*L’Homme-Femme* has been called Dumas’ most perplexing work. One journalist noted that it became wildly popular and sold out quickly; in just two weeks, it went through six editions. In a little over a fortnight, 50,000 of the books were purchased and eventually it would be reprinted thirty-nine times. In 1873, it was reported that common sense had prevailed and Dumas’ solution apparently did not catch on because although it was a sensation, it did not really change the behavior of people. The number of avenging husbands murdering their wives did not cause an increase in the crime statistics of Paris.

Yet by 1913, a French historian noted that, questioning of the traditional “unwritten law” began with the debates brought on by Dubourg’s murder trial. The unwritten law to which this particular French historian was referring was that if a husband accidentally happened upon his wife with her lover *in flagrante delicto*, then his outrage was understandable and justified killing the two of them on the spot. The Dubourg Affair stretched this convention to its limits of credulity. No one had ever imagined that it would enable a husband to plan to kill his wife by arranging circumstances that encouraged her adultery just so he could catch her at in the act; thereby bringing about the murder of his wife with the excuse of revenge. Today we might call Dubourg’s actions entrapment, which is why his jury took the extraordinary step of finding him guilty of murder in spite of the circumstance in which it took place that would normally be in his favor.

The outcome of the Dubourg trial did not have lasting results. All over France, the practice of the unwritten law continued as wives and husbands meted out their own justice against unfaithful spouses using guns, knives, swords, iron bars and vitriol (sulfuric acid) with

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impunity since juries invariably sided with the offended party of either sex by finding him or her not guilty of murder.\textsuperscript{25}

At first applauded for the work, Dumas became known as a sexist and misogynist for \textit{L’Homme-Femme}. One contemporary described the work as an advice manual on how to choose a good wife and the intricacies of relationship in marriage. All the same, it was apparently written tongue-in-cheek, the writer explained, since the foolish could see it as inspirational while the wise would know enough to recognize it as garbage; a person could be classified according to his or her opinion on the matter. Another individual expressed his approval of Dumas’ work by observing that Dumas \textit{fils} had written a guide to marriage and the nature of the female sex. As a worldly man and keen observer of society, Dumas’ opinions on these topics would make worthwhile reading.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{The Aftermath of \textit{L’Homme-Femme}}

\textit{L’Homme-Femme} struck a nerve as a variety of books were published after its release, all with titles related to adultery or some form of the phrase \textit{l’homme-femme}. As of August 1872, seven books had appeared in response to Dumas \textit{L’Homme-Femme}, including one by newspaper owner M. Émile de Girardin, “\textit{L’Homme et la femme; l’homme suzerain; letter à M. Alexandre Dumas fils}” (\textit{The Man and the Woman; The Equal One of the Man; Letter to Mr. Alexandre Dumas}). Another by Mademoiselle Maria Deraismes, her first feminist book, “\textit{Éve contre M. Dumas}” (\textit{Eve Against Mr. Dumas}), advised women to “disregard the ignorant denunciations of Dumas.” It was considered “one of the ablest of her pamphlets which we may assume to have been not without effect.” An anonymous writer penned \textit{L’Femme-Homme} (\textit{The Woman-Man}). The last feminist tract Hermance Lesguillon wrote before her death was \textit{L’Homme—Réponse}


[sic] à M. Dumas fils (The Man—Response to Mr. Dumas) for the purpose of confounding Dumas’ bigotry. In her response, she advised cuckolded husbands that when their wives committed adultery, the best course of action was simple: “Leave her.” In France “‘Kill her,’” and ‘Don’t kill her,’” became the stock phrases of the time.27

In 1873, an American, George Vanderhoof, translated L’Homme-Femme into English for both American and British readers. He contended that Dumas did not intend his work as an argument that cuckolded husbands had the right to murder their adulterous wives, because such a stance would enable betrayed wives to rightfully kill their adulterous husbands in kind. This idea was seconded by another contemporary with the tongue-in-cheek comment,

By the by, we believe he has omitted one little thing: the course to be adopted by the wife in the event of the husband’s infidelity. But probably such a high-minded, virtuous man as M. Dumas never contemplated the possibility of such a contingency arising.

Although Dumas’ L’Homme-Femme has been interpreted by scholars as an antifeminist work, Vanderhoof maintained that rather it was really intended to lampoon the conventions of French conduct and principles. One journalist noted the subtlety of Dumas’ argument in that although the dramatist did support the killing of wives, he added the caveat that the husband himself must be blameless of the same sin in order to carry out such an action. The implication was clear: there were more adulterous husbands than wives and the wronged among the female sex might decide to come to terms with the situation in the same manner as M. Dubourg. American critics were not as understanding; one complained that it was a futile quest to find a plausible reason for the improprieties in conjugal relations contained between the covers of L’Homme-Femme. A later French historian said it was no more than a second-rate rant against the fairer sex. The Paris correspondent of the New York Times noted with delight that it was a running joke in the city that since Dumas had put himself forward as an expert in marital matters cuckolded

husbands sought him out for his advice as to whether or not they should kill their wives, besieging him in consequence of this.  

The play “La Femme de Claude,” written in 1873, was the dramatization of the pamphlet’s arguments. Dumas created it after Girardin’s pamphlet responding to L’Homme-Femme was made into a play, “Les Trois Amants [sic]” (The Three Lovers). It was observed that L’Homme-Femme was merely the opening act to the play “La Femme de Claude,” so that a viewer would understand the peculiar circumstances associated with its production. The drama was first enacted on the night of January 16, 1873, at the Gymnase in Paris with such success that the Paris correspondent of the London Daily Times expected it to run for 100 nights, the mark of an outstandingly successful run for a play. Because Parisians did not take his “Tue –la!” solution seriously, Dumas created his play La Femme de Claude to support his argument that every so often the justified, appropriate and apt circumstances arose where a husband was obligated to murder his wife. Thus it happened that for a theatergoer unfamiliar with the details of the Dubourg murder and L’Homme-Femme, confusion and misunderstanding would result if she or he saw the play La Femme de Claude without the necessary points provided in Dumas’ book.

Penned in 1867, Dumas’ novel L’Affaire Clémenceau also argued the right of a husband to administer his own justice and kill an adulterous wife. Adultery and death became the topic for several of Dumas plays, as a simple accounting will illustrate. In Diane de Lys and Princesse Georges the lover dies at the hands of the vengeful husband. For the Affaire Clémenceau and Femme de Claude, the wife dies by the hand of her wronged husband. Lastly, in Étrangère there is a reversal as the husband dies instead. Despite the similarities among these various works, not all had the same outcome; the different plays experimented with the death of each participant in a love triangle. Dumas explained that he focused on ridiculing and detailing the portrayal of

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infidelity in order to stimulate theatergoers into debating and talking about marital problems and to galvanize politicians into making needed changes to the existing laws. He considered it his responsibility as a playwright to bring about the discussion of social problems and correct the circumstances that brought them about.\textsuperscript{30}

Dumas’ examinations of the subject of adultery led one reporter to assign to him the dubious title of “the adultery doctor of France.” This attribution was made because he frequently presented French theater patrons with his vivisections of infidelity. French historian Ernest Vizetelly claimed that Dumas was a social gadfly on the subject of adultery as it appeared in a variety of his works: books, plays, booklets, and even the prefaces he penned for the books of other writers. Sometime later an English feminist writer observed that it was clearly apparent from his earliest work \textit{Dame aux Camelias} to his play \textit{Femme de Claude}, that Dumas was antifeminist in the intent and tenor of his productions. Dumas maintained this antifeminist attitude for over two decades as a dramatist.\textsuperscript{31}

Denise MacLeod and Le Roy Dubourg were forced to live apart, yet remain married, because divorce was illegal in France at the time. In 1881, in a 417-page text, “\textit{Question du Divorce},” Dumas argued that if divorce became legalized in France, the act would revolutionize French drama - as infidelity was at the core of most theater productions. With the escape valve of divorce available, it would no longer be necessary to commit adultery thereby rendering the subject stale and removing it from the imitation of life preferred by the French populace. If it was no longer a realistic portrayal of society in all its inconsistent glory, the subject would not be worth seeing on the stage, so plays would have to find other fodder to feed their audiences. It certainly would have changed Dumas’ work because he would not have been able to produce as many plays on the subject of adultery, the treatment of which had made him a famous dramatist. Yet in the end, on the consuming question of legalizing divorce, Dumas favored legislative reform that would make divorce legal.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32}Matthews, “M. Alexandre Dumas, \textit{fils},” 547.
An About-Face

Eventually French feminists celebrated their conversion of the antifeminist Alexandre Dumas into a feminist among their number. It was evident when he wrote *Les Femmes qui Tuent et les Femmes qui Votent* (*Women Who Kill and Women Who Vote*) in 1880 that his perspective on the subject was no longer as it had been. Dumas completely changed his opinion about women and began to support them in their quest for rights. Surprising all who knew him and his fans alike, he announced that he had become a firm supporter for the political rights of women. Dumas argued that if women could be ruling monarchs, despite their sex, then there was no rational reason why their sex should keep them from being voters. As Theodore Stanton, son of feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, noted from Dumas’ pamphlet *Women Who Kill and Women Who Vote*, there was no impediment preventing women from enjoying the suffrage just as men did. By this time, Stanton had resided in Europe for some years and married a French Protestant woman, Marguerite Berry. By 1884, Stanton had written a substantial tome, *The Woman Question in Europe: A Series of Original Essays* – perhaps this is why he in particular responded to Dumas’ pamphlet. In his book, Stanton wrote a long article about women in France while writers from other countries contributed essays on the conditions for women in their homelands. Stanton’s work started a trend in historical writing. Following the publication of *The Woman Question in Europe* in 1884, every history book and article produced about the Woman’s Rights Movement thereafter copied his practice of including an introduction highlighting the details and major events of the earliest years of the movement. Yet the idea put forth within Dumas’ pamphlet was just a step in his development; for although he thought women should vote; he also believed that they should not hold political office or be on juries.33

In the 1880s, after an incident where a wife threw vitriol on her husband, Dumas recommended that women would not be so likely to mete out justice by committing acts of violence if they had a voice in the lawmaking of their country. According to Dumas, giving women a political voice would have the additional benefit of allowing men to rest easy in their

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beds at night. He went further using his authority gained through experience to declare his belief that French morals benefitted men and harmed women. Dumas advocated that women join as one in combating the ethical customs of their land, which were more powerfully against them than any law on the books.  

By the end of his life, Dumas had also changed his mind about killing an adulterous wife. Of course, his altered views brought about contradictions. One writer complained that Dumas asserted in one book that there was no such thing as an immoral play, only poorly produced ones. Then in another work, Dumas declared that theaters were immoral by showing plays that justified murdering an adulterous wife. The writer continued that in yet a third work, Dumas maintained that a husband must forgive his wife if she commits such a dishonor.  

France finally made divorce legal in 1884. One social commentator reflected in the second decade of the twentieth century, that even with the more liberal divorce law, sometimes people still took revenge against an adulterous mate. French juries often forgave such wronged spouses for their crimes of passion. Yet a change had taken place, now most of these cases were not between a husband and wife, but rather against a mistress or lover. The number of such cases between married couples dropped considerably after the new divorce law. Furthermore, it is notable that in Dumas’ final letter on social subjects before his death, he staunchly defended his belief that the sexes should be socially equal. Understandably, his last missive was a great aid to the Woman’s Rights Movement. Some referred to the change in his views on women as “the conversion of Dumas fils (sic).”  

After his death in Paris at Marly-le-Roy on November 28, 1895, one critic noted that it was well for the world indeed that Dumas decided to forego his career as an unsuccessful novelist to turn his attention to the stage, becoming a very accomplished playwright. Plays provided the medium necessary for him to display both the realistic nuances and the buffoonery of society’s foolishness, immorality, and transgressions. Furthermore, his approach exceeded the finest standard in France’s cultural heritage.  

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34 Crawford, “Feminism in France,” 530-531.
35 Matthews, “M. Alexandre Dumas, fils,” 530.
37 The World’s Great Masterpieces, 4011; “Dumas, Alexandre, the younger,” 464; Clark, European Theories of the Drama, 382; The date of his death has also been reported as November 27 (see “Dumas, Alexandre, [‘Dumas fils’] [sic],” 657); “Dumas, Alexandre, [‘Dumas fils’] [sic],” 657.
Chapter 3 Summary

The ancestry of Alexandre Dumas fils is a complex and colorful one. He became a famous dramatist known for producing the first “social problem” play. Adultery turned into his favorite topic with which to entertain theatergoers. The wit and realism he brought to his works classed them as art rather than ribaldry.

In 1872, the Dubourg Affair rocked Paris. A vengeful husband had entrapped his wife in the crime of adultery so that he could catch her in the act and kill her. He succeeded in his quest, and then calmly turned himself in to the police. Historically, crimes of passion where a husband discovered his wife with her lover and subsequently murdered one or both of the parties were habitually forgiven in the French courts. However, this case presented a new twist on the old tradition – the husband had driven his wife to the act. He had manipulated circumstances to create the scene of his dishonor with the sole intent of killing his wife for the crime. For the first time, a French jury found the husband guilty of murder and sentenced him to five years of solitary confinement.

Journalist Henry D’Ideville wrote a newspaper article condemning Dubourg’s actions and sympathetic to MacLeod’s plight as his wife, saying that she should never have been killed. Alexander Dumas fils took exception to D’Ideville’s opinion, writing L’Homme-Femme in 1872 in response. In it he argued that if an adulterous wife refused to change her ways, then a husband had the right to Tue-la!—kill her! In the course of this work, Dumas used the word “feminist” in its earliest known appearance in print, up to the present study.

A spate of books was published in response to Dumas’ L’Homme-Femme and his infamous solution to female adultery. Dumas became a famous antifeminist as a result of this work and the myriad plays displaying the indelicacy and deficiencies of such love triangles. However, in the final years of his life he converted into a staunch feminist supporter.

For over twenty years, – since Karen Offen made the assertion in her 1987 publication of the article “Sur l'origine des mots ‘féminisme’ et ‘feministe’” (“On the French Origin of the
Words Feminism and Feminist”) – Alexandre Dumas fils has held the title as the first to use the word “feminist” in his L’Homme-Femme of 1872.
CHAPTER 4

“FEMINIST” FROM AN ANTI-FEMINIST

Myriads upon myriads of men,
before the time of Isaac Newton,
must have sat under apple trees;
and vast numbers of them too, undoubtedly,
had apples to drop upon their heads;
while not a few, it is likely,
puzzled themselves to know why
the apple should fall plumb down,
(thereby entailing upon them the evils of a headache,) . . .
Many a one of these myriads might, perchance,
just as well as the great philosopher,
have guessed out the wonderful law of gravitation;
only—not one of them did it . . .
No doubt there were many men before,
as well as since Sir Isaac Newton,
quite his equals in mental power.
But they did not solve the riddle,
and he did.

—Louisa Susanna McCord, Sept. 1852

A Southern virago given the name Louisa Susanna Cheves (McCord) was born in the Palmetto State at Charleston, South Carolina, on December 3, 1810, with far more than a whimper. Her father was Langdon Cheves, a pillar of the community in his various careers as successful rice planter, a lawyer, Attorney General and Congressman of South Carolina, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and President of the Second Bank of the United States. Her mother, Mary, bore fourteen children in twenty-four years of marriage of which McCord was the fourth born, so “growing up, Louisa witnessed her mother’s pregnancies and declining health.” This trajectory was a common experience for women in the early 1800s, and amply illustrates why women of that era “were associated almost exclusively with pregnancy, breastfeeding, and child-rearing,” duties which confined them to the home. Being so limited in their movements, it is not particularly surprising that women could make only modest alterations in their social and economic positions. Since they held no voice of power within the government, women were also politically impotent; as a result, they necessarily had to depend upon the men who continued to keep women in their roles as second-class citizens. Throughout her life, the extent of Louisa’s enormous intellect would allow her to fashion a far more independent existence than that of her peers.2

As the daughter of Langdon Cheves, a famous and respected figure of the day, she inherited the power and energy of his intellect. Her loving father was especially proud of his daughter’s demonstrated intelligence and, unlike his less progressive contemporaries, made it possible for the young girl to receive the kind of education usually reserved for boys. Mr.  

2 Fought, Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 2, 14-15, 30-32, 34; Lounsbury, Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays, 12-13; Fraser, “Louisa C. McCord,” 5, 15, Incorrectly states that “[o]f this union Louisa was the first born,” Fought, accurately describes McCord’s position in her family as the fourth-born, after two brothers and a sister (p. 30), which is supported by Throp (p.183); Hart, The Female Prose Writers of America, 187; Tardy, The Living Female Writers of the South, 518; James W. Davidson, The Living Writers of the South (New York: Carleton, 1869), 351; Fleming, The South in the Building of the Nation, 132; Wauchope, The Writers of South Carolina, 269; Read, The Female Poets of America, 207; May, The American Female Poets, 420; James W. Miles and J. H. Easterby, “Letters of James W. Miles and David J. McCord,” The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 43:3 (July 1942): 185; Forrest, Women of the South, Distinguished in Literature, 480; McGowan, “Louisa S. McCord,” 3505; Manly, Southern Literature from 1579-1895, 291; O’Brien, Conjectures of Order, 267; Sinha, “Louisa Susanna McCord: Spokeswoman of the Master Class in Antebellum South Carolina,” 63.
Cheves declared that his brilliant daughter would be educated in any topic her heart desired because she had exhibited a facility for mental labor in the areas of arithmetic, philosophy and economics. Cheves’ other daughters did not receive the same level of education that McCord did. She also studied such advanced subjects as Greek, Latin, and the classics; receiving a vast education usually deemed unnecessary for a female. It was because of her father’s open-mindedness and her own extraordinary capabilities that Louisa acquired the finest instruction in all subjects available to a person of her class and era. As one of her contemporaries later observed, the high social status of her family and her father’s indulgent tendencies caused her to develop natural talents of an intellectual cast and fostered her maturity to pursue knowledge with a passion. The depth and breadth of her education put Louisa in a rarified and distinguished bracket; being more highly educated than most women was a given, but she possessed a finer knowledge in lofty subjects than most men as well.³

From a young age, Louisa was able to speak conversational French; further education enhanced her capabilities within that language and allowed her to maintain fluency in French throughout her life. Her experience with the romance language began during her early education. For several years, she studied with a French refugee named M. Picot and another teacher named Mr. Grimshaw at the best girl’s school in Philadelphia. She achieved fluency and in turn taught her younger siblings the language. Competency in French served as a stepping-stone: because of her early fluency in one language, Louisa gained an uncanny facility for other European languages as well. Her father’s professional careers as a dedicated public servant and successful businessman often brought other planters and high-ranking politicians to the family dinner table. Young Louisa listened attentively while they discussed the great topics of the time. Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John C. Calhoun, and other great men of the era graced the family with discourses on pivotal subjects concerning their state and nation. This unorthodox

upbringing of formal instruction in non-domestic skills and informal lectures from the family’s expansive social connections made Louisa an immensely learned woman.⁴

Louisa’s intellect and interest in political topics set her outside the norm of most women of her age. She grew up in an era during which there was a sort of secret society of upper class, educated and intellectual women who had to conceal their mental abilities to remain members of respectable society that considered women largely inconsequential. Her life was unique in that she did not follow the path of domesticity firmly established for her sex. Due perhaps to witnessing her mother’s fate of an early union and seemingly countless pregnancies, Louisa remained single until she was twenty-nine. This was entirely unlike many of her compatriots, who married in their teens and early twenties. Unlike the plight of many spinsters, her years of single status were by her own choice. She also refused to pretend to be a typical southern belle, as she wrote at the time,

‘I am again released from playing belle, which,. . . seems some how or other to be my destiny when I go into company. Next time I go to matronise Miss Anna in the gay world, I vow it will be in a cap, or some such distinguishing mark of old age . . . I’ll pin a piece of paper with ‘aged twenty-nine,’[sic] on my shoulder, and if that don’t scare off the young seventeen-year-olders who come to flirt with me, the dear knows what will…’.

Louisa was adamant about remaining single. Apparently, she fought the traditional roles of wife and mother by choosing to maintain her unmarried status for over a decade beyond that of her peers, into a stage of life where it was doubtful that a woman of her age would ever marry. Spinsterhood allowed her to enjoy scholarly pursuits while leaving her unshackled to the drudgery that wifehood and motherhood brought about. The blatant disregard of social convention was a hallmark of Louisa’s life; her contemporaries were often confused and concerned by these behaviors that were so highly unusual for a woman of her time and place. Her prolonged singlehood, when she was supposed to be welcoming the responsibilities of

having her own home and family to care for, rebelled against the expectations of the society to which she belonged. At a minimum, her choices cast her as an irresponsible girl unwilling to bear the burdens required of womankind that maintained civilized southern culture.⁵

Eventually Louisa decided to marry, although it was not without a degree of skepticism on her part. Always realistic and logical, Louisa recognized that though she possessed desirable qualities as a partner with property and financial security, she was still an old spinster without the bloom of youth or beauty to recommend her. She could have rebelled completely and remained unmarried, but instead she chose a path as unusual and unorthodox as her life up until that point. She finally settled upon a marriage to David J. McCord, a forty-three year old attorney, politician and widower, whose wife had died in early August 1839. On May 20, 1840, the two were married in a quiet wedding that was a very small affair with only their closest blood relatives attending. The size and understatement of the event was most unusual, as the wedding of a daughter of a wealthy and famous politician it should have been a grand event with a large compliment of society’s finest in attendance. Instead, the wedding was a hushed happening. Rightly so, given that the event took place a mere nine months after the death of David J. McCord’s first wife. The standard practice of the period was for a widower to remarry a year after his wife’s death for decency. Less than half of all widowers did so, many more remarried two to three years after their wives’ death. This quick marriage caused their descendents to gloss over the short mourning period by claiming that by the time Mr. McCord remarried, “his first wife [had] been dead something over a year.”⁶

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Thus, Louisa Susanna Cheves became Louisa Susanna McCord (hereafter referred to as McCord). The marriage doubly blessed David J. McCord, who needed a woman to help raise the five living children from his first wife and, because he had little money to do so himself, wealthy Louisa made a good match for him. Yet even though, by all accounts, she had knowingly entered into marriage to a man encumbered with children, it seems that McCord was unwilling to bear the burden of helping to raise David’s children. Interestingly, although all of David’s children were under the age of eleven, none of them wound up living with their father and new stepmother.\footnote{Fought, \textit{Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord}, 92-94.}

Some people could preach one way of life while living another and McCord certainly had a number of contradictions in her life. For instance, she owned a large cotton plantation, Lang Syne, “near Fort Motte on the Congaree” in St. Matthew’s Parish that she had been given many years before her marriage. Lang Syne was around 1,500 acres and had over one-hundred slaves on it, while McCord already owned forty she had inherited. She ran it very well by herself; in fact, she was an extremely capable manager of her plantation bringing in great profits from it on a regular basis. Despite her having entered the marriage with this property and having demonstrated capability to manage its affairs, it was the standard practice of the day that a woman no longer held legal title to her property upon marriage, it became her husband’s property to control and sell as he saw fit. This meant that the Lang Syne plantation would become David McCord’s property once Louisa married him. Although the transfer of property upon marriage was a common practice, not just in the United States but also in most civilized countries, a different tradition arose with it in the South. The South was generally conservative when it came to women’s rights, with the exception of property. It was legal in the South for a married woman to maintain ownership in her own name of any property she brought into a marriage. The rationale behind this alternative practice was entirely practical; it was formed as a precaution to keep a family’s lands and possessions from the reach of creditors should a husband prove to be an irresponsible and dissolute man. As a result of these precautions, it had become a normal practice among southern elites for a woman to maintain ownership of property in her own name after marriage.\footnote{Fought, \textit{Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord}, 6, 64, 70, 88, Fought says the plantation Langdon Cheves gave Louisa was in Abbeville, S.C., but the modern location for that town is over two hours away from Lang Syne. This combined with missing and vague records combining its acres with other}
Not one to adhere with common practice when his family could benefit from doing otherwise, McCord’s father, an attorney, statesman and successful businessman intimately familiar with the law, took this practice one step further. He drew up a prenuptial agreement that not only kept Louisa as the owner in title of Lang Syne, but also insured that she maintained complete control of the plantation. Langston Cheves further stepped outside the boundaries of tradition by stipulating that even if her husband preceded her in death, the plantation would remain in his daughter’s legal control and not – as was standard practice – be passed on to another relative as an entitlement. In regular southern practice of the day, the legal arrangement of the property being in the wife’s name meant that she was the owner in title only, her husband really had complete control. After marriage, the husband took on the sole responsibility for managing a plantation, overseeing its daily operations, and running its business affairs as he saw fit. Behaving true to form and contrary to norms, McCord took full advantage of her father’s legal protections on her behalf. Unlike most married women in the South, not only did she maintain legal ownership of property she owned before her marriage, but also full and complete control of it after marriage. After all, she had run it quite capably before becoming married; managing the plantation wisely with pronounced business acumen and therefore had far more experience in such matters than the majority of married women. The executive ability necessary for directing the administration of Lang Syne made McCord an atypical wife in South Carolina since she was that rare creature of the time, a businesswoman.


home by childbirth and childrearing, but also by the inability to attain money without the prior approval of her husband (as discussed in chapter 1). Women of the time were kept financially dependent on their husbands through a preset allowance or store specific spending account, either of which could be altered or completely removed upon the whim of the man. The situation within the McCord family was substantially different from the standard practice of the era. Lang Syne plantation gave McCord a sizeable income that allowed her financial independence from her husband. Yet there was another circumstance created by her control of Lang Syne that was especially odd for this era in the South: McCord not only generated a large portion of the family’s income, she also “held the purse strings” over her husband. In his will, David McCord acknowledged that Lang Syne plantation had provided their full income since their wedding day. By keeping ownership and control of her plantation, McCord lived a contradiction. She deeply respected the social hierarchy, seeing it as but natural and necessary for maintaining order. She even sacrificed her own independence in order to fulfill her duty by marrying. But in that marriage, she was the superior spouse because she controlled the household wealth.

This reversal of traditional gender roles may have caused her marriage to be one that was not of a happy complexion. The situation must have been galling to a man thirteen years senior to his wife as well as a successful lawyer and statesman in his own right. Indeed, the public and private faces of McCord’s marriage were a study in contrasts and pretense. To the public eye, McCord appeared to be a doting mother and dutiful wife properly guided by her husband. From this viewpoint, the southern practice of female ownership had been observed, meaning that David McCord appeared to be an ingenious businessman in full control of all aspects of his family’s economic livelihood. However, closer examination reveals the lie behind the social façade. In reality Louisa S. McCord was not merely a name on the deed of Lang Syne; even as a wife she was the plantation manager for its daily operations, making business decisions independently without consulting her husband, and the creator and dispenser of the family income.\textsuperscript{10}

Between the ages of thirty and thirty-four, McCord had three children. Amazingly, and quite out of keeping with the religious practices of the time, she never had any of her children baptized. This was quite an accomplishment, given that McCord’s childhood took place during the Second Great Awakening. By 1848, eight years into her marriage, McCord’s youngest child weaned off its mother’s breast. As each child was weaned, McCord put it in the care of a slave nursemaid who acted as a surrogate mother. The children spent most of their time with their slave nurse and she, not McCord, was the one to whom they ran for emotional comfort. As a mother, McCord was a distant authority figure in charge of administering their punishments such as locking one in a closet or giving a slap across the face. She did, however, make the decisions regarding their upbringing by determining the details of their education and religious instruction. As a result, McCord as a mother was a person her children both respected and feared, but not the comforting presence that a normal mother was supposed to be in her children’s lives.11

Although she might not have taken much interest in making an emotional connection with her children, McCord did take a more involved role in their education. Echoing her own educational experience, she actively taught them both French and English, starting when they were quite small, so that they would become fluently bilingual. When they were old enough, McCord took another page from her own upbringing, sending them thrice a week to the residence of a native French woman so that they would perfect their conversational French. In further efforts to encourage their language skills, McCord also read her children books in both French and English. She was a regular customer of the Philadelphia bookseller John Pennington, receiving new books for her children on a recurring schedule, including texts in German and French as well as English. McCord was a recognized expert in the French language, reading and speaking it as fluently as any native Gaul up to the day she died. She maintained her abilities by corresponding with Alexander Herbemont’s family. They were also fully conversant in French since Alexander’s father Nicholas Herbermont had been a French professor at South Carolina College.12

McCord’s plantation provided her with more than just money, having slave servants to take care of most domestic tasks gave her otherwise unoccupied hours that she spent enjoying

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her intellectual pursuits, reading and writing. However, the labor system that freed her of many basic responsibilities – child rearing, cleaning and cooking - pinned her down as much as it freed her. Slavery entailed a hierarchy, a racial one certainly, but in the South, it also became a gender hierarchy as well. Despite her education, her successful plantation and her distinctly independent actions, McCord’s sex assigned her firmly and irrevocably to the inferior class, forcing her to accept this status.  

The southern social hierarchy could only come about through racial hierarchy, which was tied to the class hierarchy, both of which interconnected with the submission of women. Indeed, given her position as a plantation owner, McCord resolutely supported the race hierarchy that profited her as divinely decreed and natural. She staunchly believed in a class hierarchy as well since she was a member of the highest class in that ranking. Despite her education and abilities, McCord’s knowledge that she was the intellectual equal, if not superior, to most men was irrelevant – she was in an inferior position to men, which she accepted. Technically, McCord did not resent the society of the South, only her placement in a secondary status within it. She was an ardent supporter of the many layers of the southern hierarchical system as a bulwark against the mayhem socialism represented. This disparity was demonstrated in her everyday married life, because as a conservative, she believed that the paternal relationships social hierarchies engendered were the normal relations of superiors with inferiors, yet this was not the way of things within her own marriage.  

Although McCord was not averse to rocking the boat when it suited her intellectual and self-supportive objectives, she knew that southern society existed through a set arrangement, one not based on equality. The rulership of superiors over inferiors was proper and good. She benefited from certain forms of inequality – racial, economic, and social – in each, she enjoyed superior status. McCord’s only real disadvantage was the one accorded to the sexes – hers was inferior to men, though she knew that she was more than equal, and often superior in fact, to most of the men with whom she was acquainted. In spite of her gender making her subordinate to men, she enjoyed her superior status as a member of the white race, a wealthy person, and a member of high society, all of which combined to place her firmly in a privileged class. McCord was a proud daughter of the South and strong supporter of slavery, yet in giving support to the

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one institution, she also had to give her sanction to women’s placement in the lower status rank. Ironically, she became a famous woman for vigorously defending the hierarchical conceptions of the South.  

McCord managed in her marriage to have an intellectual life of her own in addition to a respectable position in the local social life. It has been said that McCord was fortunate in that her choice of husband allowed her to realize her dreams of becoming a scholarly writer. However, given that she held the position of economic power, it is doubtful that her husband could have stopped her intellectual pursuits or her publishing even if he had wanted to do so. McCord’s control of the purse strings might have contributed to marital discord, yet various sources paint the picture of a marriage that was a comfort to both parties. There were indications that David McCord was comfortable with his wife’s interests, given that they shared a study in Lang Syne where her walnut writing table was placed on one side of the fireplace facing that of her husband’s on the other side. It is easy to envision the two seated opposite one another in this companionable study aiding each other’s ideas and writing in agreeable fashion even as they worked on their separate interests during their annual winter stay at Lang Syne.

After her marriage, McCord made her summer home in Columbia, South Carolina, on property situated at the perimeter of the South Carolina College campus. Her husband was a trustee there and their new home was located only a short distance from the state capital and the South Carolina State House. We must keep this in consideration since intellectuals are obliged to do their thinking within the restrictions of their society and its influence on their ideas. This is especially true in light of the fact that scholars are frequently associated with academic environments, though this is not necessarily always the case. Before the Civil War, colleges in America were minor affairs, unknown by most of society. The scholars associated with these small institutions affected the ideas of the public on certain specific subjects, but otherwise considered unremarkable for the most part. The college libraries were barely adequate and scarcely held enough books to be worthy of the name, their instructors provided a minimal education, and the atmosphere for artistic and literary endeavors was conducive primarily to the


accepted conventions of society. An American scholar or intellectual was not recognized as such in Europe unless they schooled themselves within the continental university system. An American intellectual was an oxymoron to European thinkers. Some American academics did manage to connect with scholars in Europe and elsewhere, exchanging ideas, thoughts and philosophies with their continental peers via written correspondence (as described in chapter 2). Ironically, quite often the most inventive intellectuals were not those associated with universities and other institutions, but rather were on the periphery of such places in a more independent context.  

Proximity to the seat of political power and an institution of higher education made it easy for McCord to maintain connections with intellectuals. Professors and visiting scholars at the South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina), gave her a mentally stimulating atmosphere in which she penned and published her articles. These scholarly associations were particularly convenient for her to maintain, given that her home in Columbia was just across the lane from the college campus. Since the college president was an old family friend and her husband was a trustee, the lives of the McCords intertwined with the college’s society and intellectual climate. This proximity to esteemed scholars, academic leaders as well as state and national politicians put McCord in an enviable position relative to other intellectuals of the era. Most scholars during this period, especially those in the South, interacted with each other primarily through correspondence. It was unusual for them to meet one another in person except in extraordinary circumstances. Conversely, McCord lived in the midst of great political and intellectual persons. She interacted with them frequently in social settings as well as in private ones when they visited her home or she, theirs. In fact, many southern writers were among her personal friends. Although she might have a certain degree of access and status in her own right due to her education and intellect, her father and husband gained her admission into the highest reaches of southern social, political, and intellectual society.

By 1848, McCord had arrived at a unique place in her life: she had fulfilled her feminine duty by marrying, but it did not stilt her life. If anything, being a married woman enabled her to

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18 Fought, Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 2, 103; Lounsbury, Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays, 18; Tardy, The Living Female Writers of the South, 518; Bennett, “The Cheves Family of South Carolina,” 90; Read, The Female Poets of America, 207.
have more individual freedom than she had ever experienced as a spinster. By marrying, she upheld and became an elite member of the southern social hierarchy, enjoying all the benefits of an affluent lifestyle. After eight years of marriage, she was finally finished with her necessary contribution to child rearing - being a wet nurse. Casting off most of her motherly duties to the children’s slave nursemaid, she finally had the time and energy to indulge in her intellectual pursuits by becoming a published author of French translation, book reviews, and magazine articles. Her married status and position as a mother provided proof that she was a true woman and insulated her from accusations of impropriety she might have received for publishing her work – something respectable southern ladies simply were not supposed to do. Even with slaves to absolve her of the most time consuming aspects of child rearing and domestic chores, she waited until she was a thirty-seven year old married matron with three children before she published anything. It was no accident that McCord did not publish until this period of her life; she understood that

[...]ociety leaned against the literary woman; so she tended to need affidavits of respectability or the confidence of social standing conferred to hazard her opinions. Hence many female intellectuals were the wives or daughters of notable men, usually of means, . . . most too, had children of their own.

Achieving commercial recognition through publication added to McCord’s sense of self and confirmed her status as an intellectual. Married life, typically an impediment to creativity, gave her more freedom than she had enjoyed while single and was not the restrictive institution experienced by so many other women.19

McCord’s Publications

In 1848, after being married for eight years, McCord formally launched her writing career and began publishing her works from then until 1856. Her known writings were published only during these years. During this time, her mind ranged through a wide variety of literary forms as she published a play, a book of poetry, conservative essays on social subjects, and even biographical material. It was her choice to write because raised as a wealthy woman in high society, she “never had that sharpest of all spurs—necessity—‘to prick the sides of her intent’ and urge her on to constant literary effort—almost a sine qua non to great literary success.” Southern society was such that only a well-born woman had a decent chance at becoming a writer. Through the medium of her writing, McCord presents herself as a true believer in the ways of life during the antebellum South.

Her first showing in the publishing rosters was as “Mrs. D.J. McCord,” a literary translator. McCord was a strong scholar of the French language, as her “admirable” translation of Frédéric Bastiat’s *Sophisms Économiques* (*Sophisms of the Protective Policy*) from French to English in 1848 illustrates. Published by George Putnam in New York with an introduction written by a family friend, Dr. Francis Lieber, a famous economist who was a Prussian professor of political science at the South Carolina College, the book sold well. Advertisements appeared in papers such as the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, which both promoted and praised the book, noting that it was one of the finest books detailing the problems the federal economic protective policy had brought on the South. Written clearly and concisely, it presented a fresh perspective on the southern view of the matter with sound reasoning to support the points of its arguments.

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Another review in the *Boston Evening Transcript* claimed that it was a sound work, succinct, moralistic, and rational. Although McCord merely put Bastiat’s arguments into English and added no supplementation to the work, as she might have done, still her translation of his *Principles of Political Economy* was so polished that it won her public acclaim. The South used her translation as slaveholder sophistry in their proactive argument for slavery. The dinnertime discussions of politics and economy to which she had been privy as a young girl schooled her well as a political economist. Her translation of Bastiat was so readable and accurate that the editor of the *Southern Quarterly Review* asked her to write essays on economic topics.  

In what might be considered an unexpected nod to the traditional and genteel South, McCord’s second literary work, published before May 1848, followed the conventional fashion for women of her day: she produced a volume of poetry entitled *My Dreams*. Although published after she was married, the verses comprising the little book were penned during her lengthy spinsterhood. They articulated her dream of spending her time engaging in scholarly pursuits. Although her poetry was in keeping with expectations of southern women’s writing, nevertheless her close friends were shocked when she published her stanzas. The story of how the volume came to be published became a McCord family legend. The story goes that after the Bastiat translation was released, David McCord sought to support his companion in her writing by secretly gathering pages of her poems; unbeknownst to his wife, the proud husband then sent the pages to Philadelphia to be published by Cary and Hart as a volume of verse. According to the same myth, the intended surprise backfired on David McCord, his actions inspiring anger rather than gratitude, because his wife was all too well aware that those stanzas were not polished enough for publication. To save herself public embarrassment, she sought to purchase all the copies printed and destroy them. As a result of her efforts, editions of *My Dreams* are difficult to find. However, her best poem, “The Voice of Years,” has been repeatedly reproduced in a number of anthologies on literature of the South.  

As is the case with many family legends, this one is inaccurate; the reality is that McCord published the poetry volume herself, not her husband as a surprise for her. Later, in a letter to William Porcher Miles, a former mayor of Charleston and fellow supporter of slavery, McCord referred to the slender book *My Dreams* as the work she was audacious enough to present to the public. However, McCord would rue the day she had done so because she was purportedly ashamed of her published poetry— the grammatical errors made during the typesetting were considerable. McCord’s attempts to buy up all copies of *My Dreams* were quite successful; her daughter and namesake later wrote about the episode, “You will notice that ‘My Dreams’ is very much marked and torn. I have two or three copies but all are so and Mamma often told me that she never liked it to be seen on account of the mistakes made in the printing.” The mistakes made by the printers in spelling and grammar reflected poorly upon McCord’s poetic ability and caused her no small amount of public embarrassment. At the time, a fellow literary woman publicly commented that the poems in *My Dreams* were immature works lacking in tastefulness and common sense. In the years following its publication and suppression, McCord wrote that she had “‘suffered enough from the impish fraternity of the printing-office to learn a most sympathizing fellow-feeling towards our co-sufferers in that line’.”

In contrast to her mortification over the failure of *My Dreams* in 1848, the acclaim from McCord’s translation of Bastiat’s book gave her the courage to present another creative work to the public just a few years later in 1851; the piece was called *Caius Gracchus: A Tragedy in Five Acts*. Technically a play, it was really a “closet drama” meant to be read not enacted; these were quite popular in the early nineteenth century. Amazingly, *Caius Gracchus* was advertised for sale in the “New Books” section of northern newspapers such as *The Boston Evening Transcript*. In 1852, shortly after *Caius Gracchus* was published, a contemporary called it McCord’s most complex and significant work; in light of what she had published before it that was not a difficult compliment to make. The status she had achieved as translator of Bastiat was surpassed when she became known as the playwright of *Caius Gracchus*. Friends enjoyed the work and called McCord a brilliant writer for penning the splendid verses of *Caius Gracchus*. As one
acquaintance wrote to McCord’s husband, “The ‘Courier’ of this morning, leads me to anticipate a high intellectual treat from Mrs. McCord’s ‘Caius Gracchus’.” Indeed, the work was very well received by the reading public, and its popularity was heralded as late as 1853 in an advertisement for it which read,

The Knickerbocker, which is good authority, speaks in high terms of the new tragedy of “Caius Gracchus,” by Mrs. McCord of South Carolina and says:

‘The choice of this subject, the severe classic simplicity of the play, in plot and incident, and the author’s distain of the accompaniments which have opened the way of others to a brief popularity, will prevent its acquiring a sudden reputation; yet it envices powers of a very high and uncommon order, and deserves special attention as a brilliant anomaly in our literature, significant, perhaps, of a change that will greatly elevate its character’.

Biographical dictionaries and anthologies prepared after 1852 that mentioned McCord almost invariably included Caius Gracchus as the most popular among all her works. Admiration for it continued even after McCord’s death, as is seen in the 1909 Library of Southern Literature, which states that William Porcher Miles, identified as a prior president of South Carolina College and former member of the Confederate Congress, greatly admired Caius Gracchus. Miles thought it expressed gallant and splendid ideas through a fine writing style. He further described it as a play possessing robust theatrical force with superior expression in verse and emotion. Some modern historians have been less enthusiastic. They do not like the work as much as those who reviewed it in its early years, as can be inferred from comments made by one critic who denounced it as a poor imitation of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar wholly lacking in creativity.25

Despite the mixed success of her attempts at literature, the reception with which her Bastiat translation was received caused others to consider her a successful and erudite woman of

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literature. However, she was unlike other female writers who primarily produced verses and fiction, which the mid-nineteenth century South accepted in stride. As one contemporary reviewer specified, though McCord was a literary woman, it was not in light fiction that she made her mark, but rather in the challenging intellectual subjects of economy and political policy. Her excellent language skills and unusual upbringing, surrounded as she was by the great minds of the day, enabled her to complete the Bastiat translation with such skill and quality that editors of periodicals asked her to write essays on political and economic topics. Beginning in 1849, she responded to these invitations by becoming a contributor of articles to periodicals such as the *Southern Literary Messenger, Southern Quarterly Review*, and *De Bow’s Review*. The essays McCord published in these journals swiftly earned her a high status as an author because forcefulness, detailed reasoning and clever diatribes marked her writing. She produced two to three substantial articles per year during her writing career. Unlike her initial forays into poetry or drama, most of McCord’s writings for these publications were on intellectual subjects occupying the public’s attention such as economic, social, and political problems.  

McCord was a literary anomaly; she did not write about household hints, give marital advice, write romantic fiction, or publish guides for child rearing. Instead, her works focused on subjects with political importance, which was an odd occupation for any woman, but unheard of in the South especially. One writer noticed her uniqueness and, in 1852, said McCord was a rare woman who had engaged with the complicated topic of political economy. Historian Michael O’Brien thinks that McCord is likely the sole woman in the South to ever do so. Reviewers and would-be critics alike praised her work; one wrote that the essays on political economy she published in the *Southern Quarterly Review* demonstrated that McCord had the force of a masculine mind, was well educated on the subject, and possessed a thorough understanding of its complexities. Later in her life, another writer who was apparently unaware of McCord’s dabblings in poetry and drama, commented that her works were primarily magazine articles and

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book reviews, but noted especially that she had also published concerning the challenging topic of political economy.27

McCord was pleased to have a reputation for being literary and intelligent, especially when it came to tackling topics considered difficult even for men. Unlike most representatives of her gender in that era, she was a gifted and forceful debater whose arguments showed the genius and persuasion that enabled her to succeed in these forums. McCord’s writing covered controversial subjects including free trade, political economy, slavery, racial history, and secession. Years later, her articles remained memorable, as one of her old friends maintained, anyone who had been a regular reader of the Southern Quarterly Review in the past could readily recall the forceful and caustic essays she wrote on a variety of economic and political topics. In this regard, she outstripped her northern sisters’ accomplishments; after all, it was unheard of for a woman to publish serious political commentary in the South, but it was still very rare for a woman to publish such articles, even in the northern states. McCord was remarkable precisely because

that a female should attempt to set forth such views in learned articles was a phenomenon, and not only in the South. New England and the Middle States had their female journalists who dashed off pungent paragraphs on questions of the day but their number was small and they seldom extended their thinking beyond the limits of a newspaper column. Louisa McCord’s elaborate reasoned presentations of social and political ideas were certainly as strong-minded productions as the century had seen, though their content was thoroughly conservative.28

Her published works of political and economic essays centered on slavery. McCord was a renowned proslavery ideologue, who utilized doctrines about political economy to contest the emancipation of slaves. She maintained that to free them in large numbers would result in anarchy such as socialism produced. The strength and intelligence of her arguments won her laurels making her the most prominent southern woman writing in support of slavery. The verve with which she argued was particularly robust when McCord wrote furiously against the twin

27 James, Notable American Women, vol. 2, 451; O’Brien, Conjectures of Order, 267; Hart, The Female Prose Writers of America, 187; Tardy, The Living Female Writers of the South, 518.
threats of abolition and woman’s rights, all too aware of that the movements were linked in origin and intent. Against these, she poured ink onto pages holding forth in tirades marked by wit and intelligence against this damnable duo more frequently than on any other topic. When it came to the defense of her beloved South and its practice of slavery, McCord unleashed the boundless might of her mind in scathing invectives against its foes. Her works illustrated a clever and cunning intellect guided by reason that was almost masculine in its vigor.

One area that McCord drew upon for evidentiary argumentation to validate her views of slavery was the Christian religion. Although her work was not as overrun with religious references as that of some of her contemporaries, she was a plantation owner and believed that the hierarchy of superior and inferior races that made up southern society followed the natural order of things sanctioned by God. As for the works of other writers, their arguments in favor of slavery were grounded in religious homilies that heavily referenced the Bible as a means of supporting that peculiar institution of the South. Southern writers endeavored to use Christianity to justify slavery making southern society one that abided by God’s will.

Southern intellectuals approved of slavery partly because the majority of their social, political and economic ideas were based on the belief in a society founded upon inequality that resulted in a distinct hierarchy that favored them. Essays couched slavery in terms of economics and politics, an important distinction given that the southern economy rested on the backs of slaves. One of McCord’s biographers observed that McCord wrote concise and masterful essays on economic and socio-political topics. She and other southerners were all too aware of what had occurred in Haiti, where plantation owners had experienced a fearsome and violent slave rebellion. This unrest was felt especially in South Carolina which had been first colonized by planters from Barbados and whose Black/White population ratios closely mirrored those of Haiti. McCord’s position as a plantation owner and manager offered unique insights which she called upon when producing her essays for the *Southern Quarterly Review* and *De Bow’s Review*. Her steadfast stance, her frequent contributions to respected publications, and the quality of her

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writing are among the reasons she became known as a well-educated female writer with vast mental capabilities.\textsuperscript{31}

Therein lay her problem: despite her obvious literary competency and intellectual capacity, McCord’s works still placed her upon uncertain ground because she was a woman operating in an exclusively masculine field. By venturing into territory that was so distinctly designated as inherently male, she had stepped outside both gender and class expectations. Even the rare wife of a plantation owner who was knowledgeable in politics kept such insight limited to advice quietly administered to her husband in private. Rather than being viewed as an oddity, McCord took a position that was both socially rebellious and bold, the two characteristics that were the trademarks of her personal history. She positioned herself publicly as the female champion of slavery and the southern way of life. Her marriage, her children, her complete fulfillment of the matronly role, these were the building blocks to her respectability and ultimately to her literary acceptance. Although her essays were in support of the South, her method of presenting them as a female writer known for her intelligence, education, and sharp wit put her solidly in the dominion of men, that realm where no belle dare tread. It is a sign of her remarkable personality and abilities that she won acclaim for doing so.\textsuperscript{32}

McCord was well aware of her unique position, so she carefully made self-deprecating comments about her writing skill, camouflaging her abilities by presenting the femininity expected of her sex. These actions further protected her from allegations that she was an abnormal masculine woman. It is also probable that this was a deliberate act sought to de-emphasize her prowess relative to that of her husband, whose works were also regularly published in the Southern Quarterly Review. Because they were contributors to the same publications, there were occasions when both had essays published in the same edition. Critics of the day considered McCord’s published essays to be more interesting and of better quality than those of her husband. In the expert opinion of Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of Godey’s Lady’s Book, McCord’s writing rivaled that of any other published in the finest magazines. Hale was well acquainted with a variety of extraordinary women and noted that McCord was a rare


\textsuperscript{32} Throp, Female Persuasion, 194; Sinha, “Louisa Susanna McCord: Spokeswoman of the Master Class in Antebellum South Carolina,” 64.
woman who had become famous for her political writing, a field in which few women had the
courage to venture.  

McCord, the Anti-Feminist Feminist

Given McCord’s glaringly anti-feminist stance, it may seem bizarre to propose that she
shared common traits with the northern feminists advocating for woman’s rights. That McCord
wrote so vociferously against woman’s rights is ironic, given that many of her attributes were
considered “unwomanly,” resembling those of the very “feminist reformers” she scorned.
However, an attentive examination of McCord’s work in fact exposes astounding parallels in
both personal history and ideological inclinations with woman’s rights activists. In McCord’s
youth, even her grandmother observed that she was an unusual child. Historian Michael O’Brien
noted that she was depicted as tall for a woman, yet neither soft spoken nor quiet in her
deportment. According to comments made by others of her social strata, her physique was
masculine beyond height, earning her the descriptor “queenly,” which was not a desirable one for
a young southern woman. McCord was usually characterized as being manly, strong, or
dogmatic; lacking in physical beauty, these traits did not make her more attractive either. What
good looks she had were not considered feminine, but rather classic, as she possessed dark eyes
and hair with pale skin of delicate coloration.

About McCord, her contemporaries and later reviewers wrote of characteristics more
commonly attributable to a man than a woman, some of which were both damning and laudatory;
describing her as being vigorous, powerful, with a masculine intellect of high order combined
with the cleverness of a resourceful woman. It is easy to find many clever remarks in any one of

33 Fought, Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 90; “Sketch of Mrs.
David J. McCord,” in Lounsbury, Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays, 486; James, Notable American
34 Eacker, “A ‘Dangerous Inmate’ of the South: Louisa McCord on Gender and Slavery,” 27; McCord,
“Woman and Her Needs,” 269; Lounsbury, Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays, 14; O’Brien, All the
Clever Men, 338; Throp, Female Persuasion, 186; Fraser, “Louisa C. McCord,” 40; Fought, Southern Womanhood
McCord’s writings, though they are more reminiscent of Horatio’s satire rather than lively French quips, which is surprising given her strong French background. McCord presented a classic, timeless appearance in her physique, demeanor and intelligence. Her intellectual interests caused her contemporaries to associate her with the term masculine. McCord’s unusualness is noted even in the compliments she is paid, such as one in *De Bow’s Review*, which called her a “brilliant anomaly.” In her own time, she was reputed to be a dominant female personality with forceful abilities and tremendous capacity. In 1869, James W. Davidson published *Living Writers of the South*, who in describing McCord wrote, “Her mind is Roman in its cast and heroic in its mould. - She was Roman, always Roman, and not even Corinthian, always Doric.” The interpretation of this comment is a somewhat surprising damning with faint praise since the terms Roman and Doric were bywords for strong-minded in the South. Given the choice between being referred to by these various terms, it was her preference to be called stoic, which in turn lent itself to others calling her manly. One contemporary noted, “Mrs. M’Cord paid us a visit this afternoon . . . —she is a masculine clever person, with the most mannish attitudes and gestures, but interesting and very entertaining.” Words can connote meaning and imply sentiments, during this era the range of associations with the term clever was wide and varied, covering definitions from an ignorant wiseacre to that of a scintillating wit. In all of McCord’s writings, her intelligence shines, though it is of a more classical mold common to men. Ironically for this southern belle, the most common term used to describe her during her lifetime was “masculine.”

Even the famous diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut recognized and admired McCord’s differences, commenting, “Mrs. Preston and I speak in whispers. Mrs. McCord scorns whispers, and speaks out.” Not only did McCord eschew communicating in quiet and dulcet tones, but she also refused to vacillate, apologize or give ground; she stood strong and held forth on her opinions, commanding others to listen. Chesnut also described McCord as being one of “the many larger brained women a kind of Providence has thrown my way” because “[s]he has the intellect of a man and the perseverance and endurance of a woman.” Chesnut’s diary gives several colorful instances of McCord’s dominant personality and character describing her as an

extremely complex person. Included among Chesnut’s observations was her opinion that McCord “has the brains and energy of a man.” In fact, she admired McCord’s granite personality, as she seemed to possess attributes that Chesnut wished for her own self.36

McCord was also famous for her mount—a legendary bronco mustang named Pixie, a willful, energetic animal much like McCord in personality. McCord’s expertise in the equestrian arts made her an accomplished and fearless rider capable of commanding a horse that no one else could ride. Yet she kept it under complete control, riding it everywhere she went at all hours of the day and night without arousing commentary among her neighbors or suffering a single mishap. As a matter of habit, she chose Pixie as her preferred mount for riding around her plantation in overseeing its daily work.37

McCord’s descendants considered her a unique woman whose laurels merited a closer examination of her life’s work. An advanced woman for her era, she gained fame through her scholarly writing, becoming one of the most distinguished women in the antebellum South. Those who knew her remembered her as a most remarkable woman, in whom her father took pride, and whose ideas influenced not only her native South Carolina, but other southern states as well. During her lifetime, she was known as an extraordinary person, even though her conservative ideas were conventional for the time. In fact, no one ever questioned that she was a female force who had created a singular place for herself, forging a path untrodden by others before her through the power of her mind and personality. Richard Lounsbury correctly observed that McCord was never a “straw woman” that others could carelessly overlook or ignore.38

36 Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary, eds., A Diary from Dixie, as Written by Mary Boykin Chesnut, Wife of James Chesnut, Jr., United States Senator From South Carolina, 1859-1861, and Afterward an Aide to Jefferson Davis and a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 139, 174-175, 335, hereafter referred to as Martin and Avary, Mary Boykin Chesnut’s Diary; Throp, Female Persuasion, 197; O’Brien, All the Clever Men, n. 339; Lounsbury, Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays, 1, 11; Fought, Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1; James, Notable American Women, vol. 2, 452; Eaton, The Mind of the Old South, 235.
McCord’s Anti-Feminist Essays

McCord’s publishing career spanned the period from 1848 to 1856, yet the years 1852 and 1853 were the only ones during which she focused on “the woman question.” There were only three of her works that addressed the matter of women and their roles; two of those were essays, “Enfranchisement of Women” and “Woman and Her Needs,” published in 1852, and the third was a poem “Woman’s Progress,” published in 1853. In her articles, she wrote blazing lines supporting the inferiority of women by the patriarchal arrangement of relations between the genders. Like her articles on slavery and social hierarchy, McCord’s essays against woman’s rights examine the traditional roles of women, their place in society, and their unique responsibilities. McCord never encountered any suffragettes in person during her lifetime, yet she wrote prodigiously on the topic of the budding Woman’s Rights Movement, taking on the entire breed of dissenters from a distance. Even without firsthand knowledge of or acquaintanceship with any suffragists, she engaged her northern counterparts in battles of dogma. The changes that Yankee women worked to bring about, she thought made as much sense as keeping an open umbrella indoors. McCord wrote analytically about feminist ideas, discussing the tenents of their movement with her sharp wit and logic. She could do this because

[s]afely ensconced in marriage, Louisa could venture into the public world through her essays. As a single woman, publication would have called her femininity into question and, again, threatened the hierarchy that dictated that a woman’s position remain private and within the home. Even as a married woman, the charge could be leveled against her that she was neglecting her husband and children in order to pursue her own ambitions. Thus, she framed publication as another sacrifice. Because attacks by abolitionists and the women’s movement were being taken seriously by the press, Louisa, as an American and as a woman, would have to sacrifice her own femininity and step outside of her domestic sphere in order to defend both the institution of slavery and women’s subordinate position in society.

That these women were demanding entry into the political arena infuriated McCord because it threatened the ideal for “true” women of the South. She was doubly against the Woman’s Rights
Movement because she knew that its wellspring was in the Abolitionist Movement. In her heart, she firmly believed that the role of reformer was not one that God had created for women.\textsuperscript{39}

It has been suggested that McCord was against the woman right’s movement precisely because in her own life she had not experienced restrictions on exercising her abilities, legal difficulties, or the discrimination most women suffered due to the unique advantages of her life. As a well-heeled lady of the elite class, to McCord it seemed ridiculous that an intelligent woman would be unable to find any outlet for her talents. Yet there is evidence in her writings that suggest she, too, struggled within the confines of her gender’s expectations. In “Enfranchisement of Women,” “Woman and Her Needs,” and “Woman’s Progress,” so much emotion is evident in the way all three essays are written that it is easily imagined that McCord used many of the same arguments on herself early in her life to reign in her desire for an intellectual existence.\textsuperscript{40}

In the second of her articles against the Woman’s Rights Movement, McCord penned a review of Elizabeth Oakes Smith’s book, \textit{Woman and Her Needs}. Oakes Smith was a reformist author and lecturer in New York. Born a precocious child in Maine, she began reading at the age of two. She received her education at a private school run by the mother of literary star John Neal. As a girl, Oakes Smith taught a Sunday school for African American children and wanted to become a teacher. Her mother would not give permission for her to do so, considering marriage to be the only occupation available to respectable women. Oakes Smith’s life followed along the general lines for women of her era: at sixteen, she married a newspaper editor twice her age and bore six sons over the years. Bankrupted by the panic of 1837, Oakes Smith eked out as much of a meager living as she could from her pen. By 1851, she had authored several children’s books, a few novels, two volumes of poetry, and essays for periodicals such as \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book}, \textit{Snowden’s Ladies’ Companion}, and the \textit{Southern Literary Messenger}. One admirer commented that Oakes Smith was an accomplished woman of quick wit and penetrating understanding. She even wrote a play, \textit{The Roman Tribute}, produced on Broadway in 1853. Her writing won her the attention and friendship of contemporary luminaries such as


\textsuperscript{40} Throp, \textit{Female Persuasion}, 188, 197; James, \textit{Notable American Women}, vol. 2, 451.
Edgar Allen Poe, Lucretia Mott, Margaret Fuller, Thomas Cole, William Cullen Bryant, and Horace Greeley. Speaker of the House Henry Clay thought highly of her, commenting, “Seldom has a woman in any age acquired such ascendency by the mere force of a powerful intellect.”

A comparison of the lives of Louisa S. McCord and Elizabeth Oakes Smith provides an interesting study in contrasts. Oakes Smith was quite feminine and comely in appearance, possessing brown eyes and hair, pale skin, and a round face with full lips. Yet she was distinctly independent in thought and action. The intellect and strength of will coupled with the pretty face often surprised those who met her; reporters who attended her lectures found her beautiful, well mannered, pious, dignified, intelligent and a distinctly womanly woman. This was surprising to them as well as to members of the general audience in attendance who anticipated, from the vigorous tone of her writings, a manly woman completely devoid of the gentler aspects of her sex. Instead, Oakes Smith was a true woman of the highest ideal, lady-like in her every movement and utterance.

She attended the Second National Woman’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850 and afterward did a series on woman’s rights for Greeley’s New-York Tribune (sic). These articles were eventually published in the form of a “little twenty-five cent pamphlet” in 1851 as Woman and Her Needs, which demanded the vote and political rights for women. One of the primary assertions raised was that women should be unfettered to allow them to develop their minds and abilities to their fullest extent. Oakes Smith further argued that women were perfectly capable of being intelligent and should not be forced to conceal their abilities from society for fear of being viewed as abnormal. In fact, she maintained that women were right to develop themselves as people and that gainful employment should be based on


ability, not the proper sphere for one’s sex. Oakes Smith commented many years later on the
clear reception of Woman and Her Needs, saying that the book had been very well received and
had served its purpose in educating people about the need for women’s suffrage. The book made
her famous as letters poured in and visitors traveled from faraway lands to meet her in person.
Oakes Smith received letters of congratulation from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Phillips,
William Lloyd Garrison, and Robert Owens.43

Also in 1851, Oakes Smith became a popular lecturer of the Lyceum Circuit on the
subjects of woman’s rights and dress reform by way of Bloomers. Emerson called the Lyceum
Circuit “the new pulpit.” However, it took more than popularity to compel Oakes Smith onto
the lecture circuit since, unlike McCord, she was driven to the work by financial necessity.
Fortunately, she possessed a glib and graceful tongue when it came to public speaking. A
Philadelphia newspaper advertised for one of her lectures in the spring of 1852 claiming that she
held an esteemed position among American writers primarily for her work on women’s rights.
Unfortunately or fortunately, Oakes Smith’s lecture was a bit like a sideshow freak show - for it
was a considerable oddity to see a female public speaker before the Civil War. As a result, she
was the first woman to address the lyceum in Concord, Massachusetts, in December 1851. She
delivered her speech on “Womanhood,” to an audience including Amos Bronson Alcott, Henry
David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.44

Oakes Smith later received credit for her pioneering effort in making it possible for
women to lecture in lyceums. This was a monumental accomplishment because in the early
1850s, there were ingrained cultural injunctions against a respectable woman presenting her
person before a mixed audience, not to mention holding forth in a lecture. Even people who
supported the notion of women publishing their writing, held the opinion that no woman

43 James, Notable American Women, vol. 3, 310, Actually Smith attended the 1850 convention, given that
her first article in the Tribune is published in November 1850; Scherman, “Elizabeth Oakes Smith—Chronology”;
Elizabeth Oakes Smith, Woman and Her Needs (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1851); Hart, The Female Prose
Writers of America, 179; The New International Encyclopaedia, 447; Wyman, Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith
and Elizabeth Oakes Smith, 148, 190-192; There is one dissenting historian who claims that Oakes Smith began
writing “Woman and Her Needs” in 1849 (see Wyman, Selections From The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes
Smith, n. 126, 151); Apparently Horace Greeley never paid Oakes Smith for her Tribune series (Wyman, Selections
From The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith, 151) ; Ray, “Performing Womanhood: The Lyceum Lectures of

44 James, Notable American Women, vol. 3, 310; Scherman, “Elizabeth Oakes Smith—Chronology and
Gallery: 1851 cartoon satire of Oakes Smith’s lecture on ‘Dress and Beauty’, ”; Ray, “Performing Womanhood: The
Lyceum Lectures of Elizabeth Oakes Smith,” 1, 3, 5; Kuklick, A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000, 81;
Wyman, Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith, 193; Wyman, Selections From The
Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith, 156.
belonged behind a lectern in front of a crowd. Oakes Smith turned this potential pitfall into an advantage when she used her sex to convey her message, by purposefully presenting herself as a conventional womanly woman. This tactic ran counter to public expectations such that she was able to perform her speech, a heretofore solely masculine occupation, with the rapt attention of her audience precisely because she was not an unfeminine female or a manly woman. By speaking as a seemingly traditional sort of woman, she was demonstrating that regular women had something to say worth hearing despite misogynist belief which held that women did not possess the mental capacity for such work. If anything, Oakes Smith was a fashionable female of the white middle classes whose living embodiment of womanhood directly contradicted popular caricatures of woman’s rights advocates of the time. Oakes Smith remained an ardent supporter of woman’s rights for the rest of her life. She went on to become one of the founding mothers of Sorosis, the first woman’s club in New York, and continued fighting for women’s rights until her last day.45

There are remarkable similarities and differences between McCord and Oakes Smith. Most notably, McCord purposefully postponed marriage until relatively late in life, while Oakes Smith married at an age popular for the time: sixteen. McCord and Oakes Smith both received a vastly superior education than the kind usually afforded to women of their era. Both women were mothers before they became published writers, although Oakes Smith had six children to McCord’s three. Each published a Roman-themed play; however, Oakes Smith’s actually appeared on Broadway while McCord’s was a closet drama, never intended for the stage. Both knew Speaker of the House Henry Clay, though only Oakes Smith received his open admiration. Each woman was blessed in her intimate acquaintance with many noted intellectuals of the day.

Despite these parallels, their life paths diverged in that without the income-generating plantation inherited by McCord, Oakes Smith felt the spur of economic necessity keenly and as a result produced a far larger number of works than did McCord. This difference was even more remarkable given the fact that Oakes Smith produced a wide variety of works with the polish of a professional in every field she undertook. Another ironic difference is that it was Oakes Smith, the advocate of woman’s rights, who was considered feminine, while “manly” was the adjective most often used to describe the anti-feminist McCord. Conservative McCord shunned the

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logical, and admittedly useful, bloomers Oakes Smith favored. As McCord explained, she did this because Oakes Smith’s *Woman and Her Needs* was a book length rant filled with bitterness, foolishness, utopian nonsense and half-truths that were half lies in their presentation. McCord was more so disappointed in Oakes Smith because she was supposedly a moderate in the Woman’s Rights Movement. Therefore, if Oakes Smith went about sporting the Bloomer costume, then McCord was willing to “wager our newest gold pen that she ‘wears it with a difference’” just like any other woman’s rights radical. Elsewhere, McCord wrote that lady reformers had best prepare themselves to wear clothes that were even more mannish than their “satin and muslin Bloomer equipments.”

In contrast to her avowed aversion of the fashion stance adopted by Oakes Smith, McCord went to some pains to explain her rejection of Bloomers in a footnote:

* One word *en passant* of ‘the Bloomer.’ We really mean nothing disrespectful of the dress, which, as far as we know anything about it, is not only entirely unobjectionable, but we decidedly think, from description, (we have never ourselves been so happy as to encounter a real live Bloomer,) a great improvement upon the dirty length of skirt, wherewith our fashionable sweep the pavements and clear off the ejected tobacco of our rail-road cars. The *dress* is not only convenient, but entirely modest; and could the same be said of its *wearers*, we would decidedly be of the number of its advocates. We object to it, not as intrinsically wrong in itself, but only in so far as it is used for the wrong purposes. The Bloomer dress has been adopted as a kind of flag of rebellion against established usage, and when some good-tempered peace-makers, endeavoring to excuse it on the score of health and neatness, ventured to advance the plea that it was nothing new, inasmuch as a similar garb had been worn for centuries by eastern womanhood, forthwith a meeting of the Bloomers inform these ignorant meddlers, that they do not know what they are talking about; that the Bloomer is no eastern dress, but the chosen garb of such ladies, who consider themselves as having a full right to consult their own sense of propriety, and to indulge the freedom of their nature in the pursuit of health, happiness, and humbug! It is the rallying standard of woman’s rights advocates, and as such unfit for a modest female. Had it been but the invention of some Parisian *modiste*, or some country, field-tripping milk-maid, or of any other womanish thing, imagined womanishly and worn womanishly, we would not have hesitated to recommend it to our daughters. But indifferent things become vicious entirely by their use; and the uses to which the Bloomer dress has been applied condemn it *in toto*.

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McCord went on to clarify that in fact she really liked the Bloomer outfit as a practical option, but felt obligated to decry it due to the type of women associated with wearing it. The same could be said of her view of woman’s rights in general—she liked some of their ideas, but was required to deplore the entire movement because of the type of women in it, much like Martineau had done (see chapter 1). McCord agreed that Oakes Smith had the right to write of her ideas, as do other women:

There is nothing unwomanish in the fullest exercise by woman of the thought and mind, which, if God has given, he has given for use. There is nothing unwomanish in the writing of such thoughts; nothing unwomanish even, we think, in the publishing of them. Society has accordingly permitted, and does permit, unblamed and unchecked, woman’s fullest liberty in the exercise of her literary powers in every line; and she has, equally with the man, as far as she is able to use it, this theatre of effort open to her.47

McCord took a kind tact concerning women who published, stating that they were within their womanly bounds in doing so; a blind reference to herself, given that she was doing just that by publishing this article and her other works. One historian has observed that McCord may have realized she was being hypocritical in warning women to not do the very things that she was doing herself. She approved of this endeavor by women, even though publishing put them in the public eye and subjected them to scrutiny with the possibility of bringing them degrading notoriety. McCord even went so far as to declare that women were on equal footing with men in the writing realm, which logically meant that a woman could have success in a writing career just like a man. Having made this testimony, she later denounced such attempts by women attempting to gain notoriety and equality with men, remarking

Many women (we have already said we will even grant an unfortunately large proportion of women) are degraded, not because they have submitted themselves to the position which nature assigns them, but because, like Mrs. Smith, they cannot be content with the exercise of the duties and virtues called forth by that, and in that position. They forget the woman’s duty-fulfilling ambition, to covet man’s fame-grasping ambition. Woman was made for duty [sic], not for fame;

and so soon as she forgets this great law of her being, which consigns her to a life of heroism if she will—but quiet, unobtrusive heroism—she throws herself from her position, and thus, of necessity, degrades herself. This mistaken hungering for the forbidden fruit; this grasping at notoriety belonging (if indeed it properly belongs to any) by nature to man, is at the root of all debasement.  

Those who knew of her household’s operations might wonder at the irony of McCord’s denunciation of such writing by women who were mothers when she begged an answer to the question: “Why does the literary lady leave too often her infant to the hireling; her sick and her poor to chance charity?” After all, in 1848, when she began her writing career, she left her infant and two small children in the care of a slave. In this case, McCord is to be counted as guilty as the women she censured. She turned tack once again, backtracking her earlier criticism of writing women, “Nevertheless many women, with great and true woman-minds, have written, have published, and have done good, by so expanding the brighter developments of woman-thought.” Again she spared herself from the sharp point of her own wit. McCord chided Oakes Smith’s grammar and writing, yet recognized that it may not be her fault,  

We will say little of the last—simply remarking, that if the lady is not a very careless writer, she has to complain of a very careless printer. Her thoughts (or vacancies of thought, we cannot quite determine which) being not unfrequently given in a form which fairly puzzles our grammar as well as our logic. How many of these discrepancies belong to the printer, we will not undertake to say, having ourselves suffered enough from the impish fraternity of the printing-office, to learn a most sympathizing fellow-feeling towards our co-sufferers in that line.”

Her sympathy might be attributed to her own experiences with the debacle of publishing *My Dreams* and the numerous errors made by its printers, which caused McCord great personal chagrin and one female literary critic to comment that the poems therein were poor quality works.  

Mid-nineteenth century feminists liked to cite Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria as examples of women successful in a male profession. Yet according to McCord

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A single Queen Elizabeth might be tolerated, and, if suited to the taste of the nation over which she ruled, even admired; but a race of such monster-women could only exist as a race of Amazons. Men must disappear from a world where men-women should gain the ascendancy.

For she maintained, the primary occupation of a woman was to perfect herself, not to become a “counterfeit man.” To this end in McCord’s way of thinking, the highest sort of woman was one with genius, intellect and logic who did not deny her womanly qualities, but embraced them. Such a woman fought to fulfill her duties and responsibilities, not wrestle with men. The woman who tried to take on the work of a man actually degraded herself by being unnatural and acting counter to her true nature. For a woman to attempt to enter an arena normally filled by men, she sought to make herself a hybrid man by her own volition and thus degraded herself by her own hand. It was an unwomanly pursuit in coveting a sphere that was not accorded to her. Oakes Smith’s opinion was the polar opposite of McCord’s in this matter, “‘If more largely endowed, I see no reason why she should not be received cordially into the school of Arts, or Science, or Politics, or Theology, in the same manner as the individual capacities of the other sex are recognized’.” Furthermore, she declared, that she wanted “‘to see my own sex side by side with men in every great work’.” McCord’s strongest argument against this was the old axiom of might makes right, since man had the physical might, he could forcefully make his way the right way. She had a sharp rebuke for women agreeable to Oakes Smith’s way of thinking, “Man has then the corporeal, physical right to rule the woman, and she combats God’s eternal law of order when she opposes it; combats it to her own undoing; for who can strive against God?”

According to McCord, a man could physically intimidate any woman who stepped out of the confines of womanly action since her actions were counter to God’s holy law.50

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“Feminist” from an Anti-Feminist

It is ironic that such an anti-feminist as Louisa McCord should be the foremother for “feminist” in the earliest known use of the word. She first used the term “feminist” as she examined the arguments of the “reforming ladies,” paying particular notice to Oakes Smith: “Following this course, our attention has happened to fall upon Mrs. E. O. Smith, who is, we are informed, among the most moderate of the feminist reformers!” However, in saying “we are informed,” McCord opens the possibility that she did not coin the term, but rather learned of it from another. In considering where she may have happened upon the term, it is confusing that in “Woman and Her Needs,” McCord refers to the French philosopher Charles Fourier (see chapter 2) saying, “the communist, the socialist, the Fourierist; and such finally of this new sect, as yet but limitedly known, which is, we learn, springing up in the interior of the State of New York.” Yet the extensive research of Moses and Offen has proven that he did not create the term “feminist.” Furthermore, Offen maintains that the word “feminism” had not entered the vocabulary of any country before 1800; it was strictly a nineteenth century creation.  

Of further interest is the fact that McCord had published “Enfranchisement of Woman” in The Southern Quarterly Review just five months earlier in April 1852. However, the term “feminist” does not appear in that article. Perhaps this narrows the window of time in which McCord may have created or happened upon the term “feminist” to the five months between April and September 1852. Yet, bear in mind that McCord’s “Woman and Her Needs” article is one-third longer than her earlier “Enfranchisement of Woman” one. In fact, a content analysis comparing McCord’s vocabulary usage in the two articles reveals that in “Enfranchisement,” her favorite descriptors were “conventionists,” the most popular with four instances; “female-man,” “petticoated,” and “would-be(s),” had two uses for each. Her word choice broadened considerably in “Woman and Her Needs,” as variations of “reform(er, s, ing)” were seen five times, not including “lady-reformers” and “reforming ladies,” with two instances each.

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“Conventionist(s)” is once again seen four times, while “sister(s, hood)” appears three times, with “manish” rounding out the multiple applications with two occurrences. “Counterfeit men,” “counterfeit of man,” “feministic,” and “feminist” each made a single appearance. McCord seemed to be trying to vary her vocabulary to strengthen the quality of her writing. However, there may be more to the expansion in word choice than just variety in vocabulary. Adding up the derogatory terms used for women in “Enfranchisement,” there are ten instances counted; for “Woman and Her Needs” that number is twenty-two. Therefore, although “Woman and Her Needs” is only a third again longer than “Enfranchisement,” McCord more than doubles her verbal barrage. Given this, it becomes possible that McCord already knew the word “feminist” in April 1852 when she wrote “Enfranchisement of Woman,” but that her ire had not been stirred enough to warrant its use. After all, “conventionist” is the only disparaging term both articles share, with four instances in each. The three other insulting terms that appear in “Enfranchisement” are not included in “Woman and Her Needs” and it is highly doubtful that McCord forgot them in the intervening five months between the two. It is arguable that “female-man” and “would-be(s)” found in “Enfranchisement of Woman” along with “manish,” “counterfeit men,” and “counterfeit of man” in “Woman and Her Needs” are all variations of the same idea – that of a woman with characteristics normally associated with a man. Following this line of reasoning, it also becomes possible that McCord did know the word “feminist” before April 1852, but chose not to use it when she wrote “Enfranchisement of Woman.” Regardless whether McCord created the term or learned it from another before September 1852, at that time she did use “feminist” in her article “Woman and Her Needs” in DeBow’s Review, which is the earliest known use of the word in print to date.52

Interestingly, “feministic,” which the Oxford English Dictionary cites as an adjective of “feminist,” appears before “feminist” in “Woman and Her Needs.” In the due course of her article, McCord recognized the reformist movements of her era:

“Today, in this great age of “new lights,” we have solutions numberless offered to this our world-wide problem. Every “ism” [sic] upon earth has got its explanation of, and its remedy for, this monster Evil, which the poor, ignorant world has so long imagined inexplicable and incurable. What is this bugbear of the world?”

This sin—this pain—this suffering? Nothing, forsooth, it would now appear—nothing but a nightmare dream; a kind of world dyspepsia; at worst a species of toothache, which, by some socialistic, communistic, feministic, Mormonistic, or any other such application of chloroform to the suffering patient, may be made to pass away in a sweet dream of perfection.

Conservative McCord was prone to criticizing the new “isms” appearing in the northern states, especially those that distracted women from their divine duties in the home. Rather, she wanted to illustrate the dogmatic irrationality of movements such as communism, Fourierism, Bloomers and woman’s rights. Given the creation of so many progressive movements during this time and the repeated association of “feminism” with “feminist” in Women’s history, it is remarkable that McCord also noted that “[t]he reforming ladies have not yet got an “ism” [sic] for their move.” If they had an “ism,” it would have been open to equal use by its proponents and opponents, enabling McCord to implement it in her political polemics. Even so, the word “feminism” was in existence at the time of the first edition of *The Imperial Dictionary*, published in 1850. It defines “feminism” as “the qualities of females,” however there are no entries for “feminist,” “feministic,” or “feminist movement.” Anticipating what would later be called the “feminist movement,” McCord explained that her argument was “solely against the female move [italics added], our effort has been to show its false assumptions and ludicrous inefficacy.”

It is ironic that McCord actually mentions Dumas in “Woman and Her Needs,” the essay which takes the title of first to use “feminist” away from him:

> the blushing mother, who watches that her innocent child shall not lay its hand upon the foul productions wherein France’s brilliant novelist often competes in obscenity with the nauseous filth spewed forth, as though in devilish scorn, by her compatriots, a Sue and a Dumas, upon a community sufficiently degraded to admire them.

Alexandre Dumas fils, published his novel *La Dame aux Camélias (sic)* (Lady of the Camellias) in 1848, considered at the time as an immoral tale that romanticized the life of a courtesan. Then in February 1852, a play based on the novel opened in Paris, running for over one-hundred days

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53 McCord, “Woman and Her Needs,” 268-268, 290; Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, 235; This is particularly noteworthy since “In the twentieth century, historians have been particularly interested in the development and deployment of ‘ism’ words and concepts,” Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” n. 121, 128; Throp, *Female Persuasion*, 180; “Feminism,” *The Imperial Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1850.
and the subject of many news articles in France and the United States, some rave reviews while others were simply raving. Since McCord was fluent in French, tried to keep current on events in France, and had French friends, it is likely that she knew about the scandalous nature of these Dumas works. Perhaps this explains her use of the phrase “foul productions” for plays and the rest when she writes, “wherein France’s brilliant novelist often competes in obscenity with nauseous filth spewed forth” then she uses Dumas name in association with this and states that it takes only an immoral country could find anything attractive in them.54

McCord also put forth the idea that the women’s suffrage movement started in America, “We regret to believe that this move for woman’s (so called) enfranchisement is, hitherto, entirely (at least in its modern rejuvenescence) of American growth.” She further pointed to a migration of ideas about women’s suffrage from America to England:

We have said that this move is entirely of American growth. Our reviewer tells us, exultingly, that “there are indications” of the example being followed in England, and that “a petition of women, agreed to by a large public meeting at Sheffield, and claiming the elective franchise, was presented to the House of Lords by the Earl of Carlisle.”

It is interesting that Elizabeth Oakes Smith shared McCord’s notion of an American idea transmitting to England. As Oakes Smith claimed, “I am glad this peculiar stirring of womanly thought upon womanly requirements originated in our own country.” Many years later in her autobiography, Oakes Smith put the period in perspective by explaining that the Woman’s Rights Movement began as a barely noticed movement in the mid-nineteenth century. That two women from diametrically opposed stands on the same issue can agree on this subject brings up the possibility that ideas about woman’s rights communicated from America to England and thence to France (America → England → France). Instead of the Old World leading the new country in

its sensibilities and ideas, it rather seems that the young country brought vigorous new ideas to stimulate the old countries.\textsuperscript{55}

Clearly, above all, McCord believed that women should be educated and that it was entirely proper for them to publish their writing. She severely disagreed with the notion of women entering the traditional male activities of politics and other areas, finding the idea ludicrous. She maintained that a separate sphere for women was necessary for society to function.

In 1852, Louisa would write that even a ‘high-minded, intellectual woman’ should not ‘put aside God’s and Nature’s law, to her pleasure.’ Instead, she should be ‘an earnest woman, striving, as all earnest minds can strive, to do and to work,’ because ‘While man writes, she does.’

McCord ordered her life to do what was expected of her as a woman and still pursue her publishing ambitions. In her eyes, other talented women who refused to engage in their home duties were fools lost to the ways of folly.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1853, McCord published the last of her works on the woman’s movement: “Woman’s Progress,” a blank verse poem published in the \textit{Southern Literary Messenger}. The piece spoke out against woman’s rights supporters,

\begin{quote}
These reverend Misses, doctors in mob caps,
And petticoated lecturers, are things
Which make us loathe, like strange unnatural births,
Nature’s disordered works. Yon chirping thing
That with cracked voice and mincing manners prates
Of rights and duties, lecturing to the crowd,
And in strange nondescript of dress arrays
Unfettered limbs that modesty should hide…
Sweet sisters, call not that unsexed thing
\end{quote}


By the pure name of woman.

A Pulitzer Prize winner in the history of periodicals, Frank Luther Mott categorized “Woman’s Progress” as “conventional,” noting that the Woman’s Rights Movement faced its greatest opposition in the southern states.  

The Remainder of McCord’s Writing Career

Crafting a critique was something McCord was accustomed to doing, albeit in the context of social and political problems. McCord became so well known for the strength of her essays that William Gilmore Simms, the editor of the *Southern Quarterly Review*, asked her to write a review essay on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. His thinking was that since Harriet Beecher Stowe was a female author, then having a female southern writer critique her book was more appropriate than having a man denounce her volume. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published as a book in March 1852 and McCord shows in a personal letter that she read it prior to October 9, 1852. Her review essay was not sentimental or overly religious in its tone, rather it was a nineteenth-century version of a “hatchet job” on Stowe’s novel. McCord’s outrage against *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was partly due to the fact that it supported her long-held belief that the Abolitionist Movement and the Woman’s Rights Movement were twin heads on the same serpent.

Not all considered McCord a notable literary woman, even after several successes in the publishing world. In 1853, Harpers published *Woman’s Record, or Sketches of all Distinguished Women from “The Beginning” till A.D. 1850* by Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey’s*

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Ladies’ Book. Hale included herself among the listing of famous women covering “from the
time that mother Eve listened to the serpent’s wiles to that which saw Mrs. Bloomer sport so
gracefully the unmentionables.” De Bow’s Review took her to task, however, for failing to
include McCord in the list,

a lady who, for vigor and grasp of thought, and chaste and eloquent composition,
is not excelled by any of her sex in America. If she had written nothing besides
Caius Gracchus, or her reply to Mrs. Oakes Smith on “Woman and Her Needs,”
which we published last year in the Review, her reputation would have been
established upon a proud and high basis. In fact, her protest, in the name of the
women of America, against the Amazonian [sic] movement, is enough in itself to
confer immortality.

However, by 1861 McCord’s reputation as a writer was so well established that she was included
in Mary Forrest’s Women of the South Distinguished in Literature. Advertisements of the
collection appeared in newspapers such as The Daily True Delta in New Orleans. Its “Morning
Jottings” column noted that the Home Journal had given a list of writers in Forrest’s new book,
all southern women who had published poetry or prose, including Louisa S. McCord from South
Carolina in its roll. This time, McCord was not left out of the counting of major women
writers.59

Though her writing career spanned the eight years from 1848 to 1856, apparently
McCord planned to continue publishing even as late as 1858, when her name appeared on the
roster of well-known writers whose work would grace the pages of a new periodical, “The ‘Great
Republic’ Monthly.” The magazine was intended to be national, rather than sectional, as Oakes
Smith’s husband explained, “It is to have a nationality broad enough to cover the whole
Republic, patriotism deep enough not to be swerved from duty by party strifes (sic) and is to be
tolerant, wide awake, discreet, conscientious, and pure.” This is further demonstrated by
advertisements for it appearing in northern newspapers such as The New York Herald, The New
York Tribune, The New Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette, as well southern standards such as
The Charleston Mercury and The Daily Confederation in Alabama. Even the advertisement

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vol. 14, New Series vol. 1 (Washington City, 1853), 194; Forrest, Women of the South Distinguished in Literature,
480-482; “Morning Jottings,” 2.
itself claimed that *The ‘Great Republic’ Monthly* would give all authors and intellectuals in the United States a level playing field where they could publish the best in contemporary literature. Ironically, Elizabeth Oakes Smith and her family published just two volumes of this periodical in the year 1859 before the enterprise was shuttered. Unfortunately, it was rare for an article to have its author listed, therefore it cannot be determined if McCord contributed one.\(^6\)

It must be borne in mind that McCord had to agree to write for the magazine and would have known that Oakes Smith was in charge of it. In essence, this would have made McCord an employee of Oakes Smith and McCord willingly agreed to this relationship. In addition, Oakes Smith listed McCord’s name below her own in the magazine’s advertisements. This had happened to McCord before when in *The Female Prose Writers of America*, published in 1852, McCord’s entry immediately follows that of Elizabeth Oakes Smith, authoress of *Woman and Her Needs*. Now, McCord had previously demonstrated the ability to separate a person from their political views, as seen in a letter she penned to Henry Charles Carey, author of *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign: Why It Exists, and How It May Be Extinguished*, on January 18, 1854. In it she writes,

Dear Sir

I was pained to see from your kind letter to Mr. McCord, that you considered my article of the ‘Southern Quarterly’ as having been written consequent upon the reception of the copy of the ‘Slave Trade’ etc., which you were so polite as to send me last summer. The truth is, that having purchased a copy of the work some time before receiving the one sent by you, my article was written before the arrival of the latter, - upon seeing which, for fear of apparent dis-courtesy, I was much inclined to suppress what I had written; but in sober earnest, your book is, in my opinion, (I am sure not intentionally on your part) of so mis-chievious a tendency upon a subject of vital importance to us of the South, that I felt it even a duty to dispute its accuracy…

Believe me, Dear Sir, in spite of these widely differing opinions

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Very respectfully etc. etc.

Louisa S. McCord

Although McCord was from firebrand South Carolina, and her father and husband leading advocates for secession and states’ rights, she herself took great pains to remain courteous to people whose political opinions ranged widely from her own, even when it was not incumbent upon her to do so. The possibility also arises that the relationship between Oakes Smith and McCord was one an amiable one rather than merely professional, given that, “literary friends of the Smiths wrote them of their interest in this project (The ‘Great Republic’ Monthly).” Bear in mind, too, that McCord was not a poor woman and therefore did not have to swallow her pride to work for her living, as did Oakes Smith. As a wealthy woman, McCord agreed to work for a lady reformist whose book she had denounced publicly and received acclaim for doing so. It also means that despite the fact that it was McCord who published some of the most damning invectives against the Woman’s Rights Movement and enjoyed her role as an antifeminist crusader, Oakes Smith thought McCord’s writing was of a caliber suitable for a national magazine. It seems that neither of them held personal grudges against the other and that they each thought well enough of the other that they were willing to work together. This is even more striking considering that by 1858, the sectional differences between North and South had become very pronounced and the possibility of civil war loomed. Oakes Smith, the woman right’s advocate from the North, and McCord, the fiery anti-feminist from the South, were polar opposites in many ways. Despite the turbulent history between them, they were able to put aside their differences and get along for the sake of a publication. Too bad the rest of the country was not able to follow their example.61

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Chapter 4 Summary

Louisa Susanna (Cheves) McCord was born in South Carolina in 1810, the daughter of Langdon Cheves, a powerful politician and wealthy plantation owner of the era. Since she was amazingly gifted intellectually, her father ordered that she receive the same education as her brothers – it was rare for a southern woman to be given such a fine education. McCord became fluent in French, conversing in it daily for the remainder of her life. She refused to play the role of a typical southern belle, opting instead for a spinsterhood spanning over a decade. During this time, McCord freely engaged in the intellectual pursuits she loved – reading, thinking and writing.

McCord finally married at the age of twenty-nine to widower David McCord who was also an attorney and politician with five children under the age of eleven. Yet after their marriage, all of his children were sent off to relatives who raised them. McCord was a wealthy plantation owner in her own right before marriage. Her father drew up a prenuptial agreement that enabled her to remain in control of her land and her business after marriage, not just have it in her name, as was the common practice of the era. She oversaw the daily operation of her plantation and handled all of its business affairs. Since McCord and her husband received the majority of their income from her plantation, she controlled the purse strings in the family – a rare arrangement for the time. McCord bore three children in four years and never had any of them baptized. As each child was weaned from her breast, she handed it over to a slave nurse who took care of the children’s daily needs. She became an emotionally distant authority figure in her children’s lives.

After marriage, McCord’s family made their home in Columbia, the state capital of South Carolina, at the edge of the South Carolina College campus. Here the McCords socialized with state and national politicians as well as scholars and writers. This gave McCord a rarified circle of intellectual friends. After eight years of marriage and three children, she was in a secure position to begin publishing her writing. In 1848, she translated the French economist Bastiat’s *Sophisms Économiques (Sophisms of the Protective Policy)* into English. McCord’s translation
was so clear and accurate that she received requests from periodicals to publish essays on political economy. Next, she published a book of poetry called *My Dreams* whose printing errors caused her no end of embarrassment. McCord also put forth a closet drama, *Gaius Gracchus*, a play set in the Roman era that never made it to the stage. Eventually she became a famous writer known for using the sharp point of her pen and the strength of her intellect to joust in defense of slavery and against women’s rights. Part of her fame was due to the fact that she published on subjects that were normally accorded to men. No other southern female writer tackled such difficult subjects. McCord received praise as the female champion protecting the way of life in the South. Despite her intellect and renown abilities as a writer in masculine subjects, McCord managed to maintain her public persona as a womanly woman. This was quite the accomplishment within itself given that McCord was tall with a “masculine” physique and not considered a beautiful woman by the standards of the time.\(^\text{62}\) Neither quiet in demeanor nor about her opinions, she was regularly described as being “manly.”

McCord wrote at length against the newly borne Woman’s Rights Movement. One of her articles was against the book *Woman and Her Needs* by Elizabeth Oakes Smith in 1852. Oakes Smith was as well educated as McCord, but as a poor girl, she was forced into marrying at the age of sixteen. Her husband was an editor and together they had six sons over the years. Oakes Smith turned to writing for an income after they were bankrupted in the Panic of 1837. By 1851, she had authored several children’s books, a few novels, two volumes of poetry, and essays for periodicals such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, *Snowden’s Ladies’ Companion*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. She also produced a play, *The Roman Tribute*, which appeared on Broadway. Her writings and intellect won her the friendship of many famous writers and politicians. Oakes Smith was beautiful in face and body, an altogether fine feminine figure of a woman. In 1851, she also became a lecturer on the Lyceum circuit speaking to mixed audiences about woman’s rights and the appropriateness of the Bloomer outfit. In *Woman and Her Needs*, Oakes Smith argued for women’s suffrage, that girls should receive the same education as boys and that women with ability should have access to compete in the professions just as men did.

There are striking similarities and differences between McCord and Oakes Smith. Both were professional authors highly regarded for the intellectual quality of their writing, though economic necessity forced Oakes Smith to produce a greater volume and variety of works. The

feminist Oakes Smith was considered “womanly,” while the antifeminist McCord was called “manly,” which according to stereotypes should have been the reverse. Oakes Smith advocated the use of Bloomers, while McCord, though she liked the outfit, shunned it because it was the favored costume of outspoken woman’s rights reformers. McCord and Oakes Smith agreed that girls should receive an equal education with boys and that women should be able to publish their writing the same as men. Yet McCord contradicted herself by saying that women should not strive with men for the same career opportunities and that a woman who did so degraded herself. Oakes Smith and McCord agreed that the Woman’s Rights Movement began in America and its influence later spread to England.

McCord’s first use of the word “feminist” was to describe Oakes Smith as a moderate feminist reformer in the article “Woman and Her Needs” in September 1852. It is notable that although modern historians regularly pair “feminist” with “feminism,” McCord observed that the feminists “have not yet got an “ism” [sic] for their move.” The word “feminism” did exist at the time, meaning “the quality of being feminine,” but not in association with woman’s rights. She mentions Alexandre Dumas in the essay, most likely referring to Dumas, fils, who had published his novel La Dame aux Camélias in 1848 which was produced as a play in early 1852. This is ironic since from 1987 up to the present study, Dumas fils was considered the first to use the word “feminist.”

Although McCord’s published writing career covers 1848 to 1856, evidence provided by newspaper advertisements shows that she planned to continue publishing until 1858. Her name was listed among the contributors for the new periodical “The ‘Great Republic’ Monthly”. It was intended to be a national magazine at a time when regionalism was increasingly dividing the country. Elizabeth Oakes Smith published the periodical, which would have made McCord answerable to her as the editor. McCord was a wealthy woman with no need to debase herself to a former enemy to earn her livelihood. However, in the course of her life she worked to maintain friendly relations even with those whose ideas clashed violently with her own. This makes it possible that McCord and Oakes Smith had a friendly relationship despite their diametrically opposed views on many elements of woman’s rights and McCord’s searing review of Woman and Her Needs. Unfortunately, the magazine only published two volumes before closing and writers were often uncredited on the articles, so it is not known if McCord actually contributed
anything to the periodical. That McCord planned to continue her writing career as late as 1858, has been missed by previous McCord historians.
CONCLUSION

The discovery of Louisa McCord’s use of the word “feminist” in a September 1852 American magazine article specifically about the Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States changes many elements of feminist history. Since feminist historians began actively searching for the roots of their movement, certain assumptions have been held as true. The first, that a man conceived the word “feminist,” originally attributed to Charles Fourier at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then, with a new generation of women’s historians in the 1980s, new evidence was brought to light which proved that not Fourier, but Alexandre Dumas fils bore the phrase at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite the change in its creator, the nationality remained the same; for over one hundred years of feminist history, France was considered the place where the word “feminist” originated (see chapters 1 and 3).

Perhaps it is fitting that after spending so many years as a masculine accomplishment, the birth of the word “feminist” is attributed to a woman at last. In addition, the parent country now must change from France to the United States. The entire historical chronology for the development and spread of the word “feminist” between countries and continents requires reconsideration in light of these new discoveries.

It is not hard to believe that a woman could create the word “feminist,” however, it may be harder to accept the reason for its creation. Under Fourier, the epithet “feminist” was a plauditory development, under Dumas it was a note of derision. Perchance it was McCord – plantation owner, scholar, pro-slavery activist, and antifeminist woman from South Carolina – who begat the concept in castigation of the American Woman’s Right Movement. This illustrates how historians need to reconsider examining the work of conservative intellectuals who have been overlooked in favor of their more progressive counterparts. McCord’s use of the term in “Woman and Her Needs” may also explain the word’s early associations as an insult by
feminist detractors rather than with woman’s rights advocates espousing the term as an identifier (see chapter 4).  

Further changes beyond the sex and location of the person who minted the term “feminist” must also take place in women’s history. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), a resource for the chronological development of words and phrases, has failed to amend many citations within its pages over the years. Moreover, the chronologically inaccurate data has been wrong since the initial printing, due in part to the prejudices of the editors favoring published works originating in Great Britain. By ignoring articles from the colonies, the OED has enabled the dispersal of erroneous information through researchers who look to its pages as a reputable authority and reference guide. Historians and editors have a common responsibility to ensure that the OED continues to be updated and developed. Their failure in this responsibility is now easily apparent (see chapter 2).

### Table 3: Earlier American Citations

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>OED</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Earlier by</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>Oct. 1894</td>
<td>Aug. 1894</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feministic</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininist</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>19 years</td>
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From the data provided in Table 1, and repeated here as Table 3, it becomes likely that the journey of feminist words passed to England from America, and not from England to America as the OED suggests; yet the changes of migration go further. As Virginia Crawford observed in 1897, the French feminist “movement could not have sprung into life so quickly had not the seed been sown at a far earlier date.” Given McCord’s French connections, the possibility arises that the term “feminist” may have migrated from America to France by means of written correspondence or personal conversation. This possibility would mean that the term féministe was a translation into French from the word “feminist” in English, not the other way around as has long been assumed. When examining this possibility it is important to keep in mind that it is equally probable that a French friend introduced the term to McCord via

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conversation or correspondence. A search for McCord correspondence on both sides of the
Atlantic is necessary to learn which of these scenarios may have occurred.²

Louisa S. McCord has been heralded as the finest female scholar of South Carolina
before the Civil War. However, her writing demonstrates that she was all too aware of the
contradictory nature of her work as a female published writer. By her own standards, putting
herself into the masculine public sphere meant she was competing with men and therefore
degrading herself. Indeed, to publish at all she had to embrace conservative viewpoints and sign
her work with the androgynous “L.S.M.” or as an anonymous author, claim no relation to it at
all. Remember that during the era McCord was active, if a southern woman wrote in favor of
liberal views, then she had no hope of being published in the South or of having her work read.³

Throughout her life, McCord found herself caught between her personal longing to
pursue scholarly interests and the requirements of women by the South’s social hierarchy for
community order. Like Virgil’s Aeneid, McCord’s work must be read with an awareness of
possible subtexts. It may be necessary to read her writings multiple times because, depending
upon the perspective of the reader, her writings could have several meanings. The subtleties in
her word choices and phrasing make the existence of alternate interpretations and deeper
meanings apparent. These nuances sometimes led to contradictory statements in McCord’s
essays and even on occasion put her in agreement with northern feminists. The choices she
made concerning her personal life illustrate the need for closer scrutiny because her love of
higher education, long spinsterhood, management of her plantation, and control of the family
finances, all conflict with the True Woman ideal she heralded in many of her writings. She was
not a domesticated wife and devoted mother, her focus was often on the world outside the sphere
of the home, and she was not submissive to her husband or society’s expectations for women.
When she did publish, it was not in the realm of light fiction, romance or children’s stories, all
acceptable areas of publication for women writers, but in the masculine tradition of letters as she
wrote her essays on subjects considered advanced even for men to engage. As was seen with the
publication of My Dreams (chapter 4), she actively sought to become a professional published
writer, despite her disparaging comments against women who sought public notoriety and fame.
A comparison of McCord’s private life and public intellectual persona make the contradictions

² Crawford, “Feminism in France,” 526.
between the two evident. She found herself in a quandary as the public defender of women and their traditional roles, while she herself stepped beyond those boundaries to be a professional writer on these subjects. As evidenced in McCord’s life, the line between private behavior and public ideology is not always a straight one.⁴

Given that so many of her characteristics were considered “masculine,” it is understandable that McCord reined in her ambition to publish until she was married. For a single woman, especially an aging spinster, to engage in a public profession as a writer, even as a conservative one, would likely have led to accusations that she was not a womanly woman but rather an unnatural woman. In being a female writer, her actions could be construed as both an insult and a threat to the southern social hierarchy. As a woman, marriage offered McCord various protections since she wed a man who was also a member of the elite class; she was now able to enjoy legal adult status. Even through her twenties and as an independent and successful plantation owner, she was not considered an adult and full member of society. Marriage enabled her to publish without threatening the society of which she was a part. Furthermore, it also protected her from accusations that she was an abnormal female. In addition to the adult status afforded by marriage, it also made her socially unchallengeable. In this way, she did not have to worry about rumors impinging upon her reputation, or attacks calling her a man-woman, that publishing could bring about. It may be said that her status as a member of the highest social class and her antifeminist writings shielded her from any scandal occurring as she stepped outside the boundary of women’s home sphere to enter into the public sphere of men.⁵

Due to her unique position, McCord became South Carolina’s finest female polemicist of plantation society, proving herself to be an extraordinary woman in the process. This was especially true given that, intellectualism in the South was an arena dominated by men. And so

[s]he consciously participated in the public debates of the antebellum era, . . . as an intellectual and, more important, as a woman whose instincts might have led

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her to challenge the social order to pursue her intellectual ambitions, but whose commitment to that social order caused her to rein in those ambitions.

It can be said that McCord was a strong-minded woman in the South at a time when such a personality was not considered attractive. Her sharp wit, personal power and willful nature made her more akin to Yankee feminist reformers than southern belles. Yet while woman’s rights advocates fought the status quo to improve the position of all women, McCord fought against them to maintain it.

That the political career she did have was quite as revolutionary as that of the most virulent Northern suffragist seems not to have been apparent to Louisa McCord. She was really a strong-minded woman though she did not shatter woman’s sphere; she simply stretched it, into a new shape to be sure…

For feminist historians, the hunt for a “usable feminist past” has led to an improbable collection of women – white female slave owners in the South. Such women show that women’s history is not constantly progressive and that women can be easily found fighting among themselves about various topics. Some may say that McCord is an antihero because a conservative antifeminist who was also a slave owner is not someone that women today would admire. Yet, we must consider that,

Although it is tempting to look for feminist heritages and influence only in radical and progressive quarters and amongst those overtly protesting or rebelling against the oppression of women, it is impossible to do so. For such an approach ignores the importance to feminists of conservative women and of some conservative stereotypes of femininity which they used so effectively in making their arguments, demands, and claims.

Arguably, even though she may be the only woman writer and intellectual in the antebellum South, and regardless of the social status and respectable reputation she enjoyed during her lifetime, McCord’s ideas barely received notice in the hundred years after her death. Yet as a writer, she was a forceful woman who tried her hand at many forms of literature and whose opinions on southern society and politics influenced others. She was one of the leading
conservative intellectuals in the United States before the Civil War. McCord was a remarkable woman for her era precisely because

[t]he issues central to the nineteenth century—. . . the ‘woman question,’ individualism, social order—were also central to the life of Louisa McCord. Well-placed socially and economically as a member of the upper class, . . . she had opportunities for education and leisure not available to most people, let alone women, of her time. So rooted in privilege, she was also aware of its limits, particularly in regard to gender.⁶

Recently, McCord’s ideas have begun to receive notice from scholars in several fields. Her placement among southern intellectuals has attained a high plane, as is demonstrated by the use of her image on the jacket of the first volume of a recent collection by Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order, Intellectual Life and The American South, 1810-1860*.⁷

It is the job of the historian to organize the disorder of the past into recognizable patterns of change and continuity and explain their significance to the present. The discovery of an American woman, Louisa S. McCord, and her first use of the word “feminist” in 1852 in writing about the Woman’s Rights Movement of the United States accomplishes this task. McCord’s article changes the country of origin for the word “feminist” from France to America. With this, the paradigm of feminist history shifts its research focus from France to the United States as the land of its origin.⁸

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Future Research

The timeline of when the word “feminist” came into use has now changed, opening up several areas for future research; two specifically involve McCord and the origin of the word “feminist.” Offen previously established that Fourier had not invented the term “feminist,” and he died in 1837. Robert’s Dictionary attributed the word’s earliest usage to Alexandre Dumas fils in 1872. McCord published “Woman and Her Needs” in 1852, twenty years earlier than Dumas’ work. Yet Murray’s declaration that a word is in use ten to twenty years before it appears in print opens up the timeframe of 1832 to 1852 for the first instance of the use of the word “feminist” in personal correspondence. Then again, if McCord did create or learn of it between writing “Enfranchisement of Woman” and “Woman and Her Needs,” then her personal letters between April and September of 1852 require careful research. This process of elimination narrows the period of time to be researched in order to discover a personal journal or a letter to or from McCord that shows she is the foremother of the word “feminist.”

The printed material of France, England, and the United States during 1832 to 1852 also requires examination to see if it was another published work wherein she happened upon with the term.9

Unfortunately, the destruction of most of McCord’s papers in South Carolina during the American Civil War makes delving into her antebellum personal life more problematic. In yet another instance of her contradictory history, late in her life, McCord wrote that, “[p]amphlets, manuscripts, and every thing of the kind, formerly owned by me, were for the most part destroyed by our brutal invaders at the close of our Southern Struggle for Liberty.” However, the Yankees did not destroy everything; as McCord’s daughter later recounted, “the morning after the burning of Columbia the family set about destroying the personal papers still in their possession.” McCord burned her own papers in February 1865 at her Columbia, South Carolina home to keep them from falling into Yankee hands. Meanwhile, back on her Lang Syne plantation, slaves celebrating their newfound freedom burned all of the plantation records, including McCord’s personal writings. Due to the calamity of war, sometimes documents

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pertaining to McCord’s antebellum life simply no longer exist; this lack of information has created large holes in her personal history.\textsuperscript{10}

Only through surviving letters in the hands of other family members and friends, have historians been able to piece together sufficient fragments to learn about McCord’s early life. Letters to those who were not as physically involved in the destructive forces of the American Civil War may hold the key to solving the mystery of when McCord first became familiar with the word “feminist.” Thus far, each of the letters collected “was written and signed by LSM and is the recipient’s copy.” However, these are widespread throughout America and France, and possibly England as well. As Fought observed, McCord’s private papers are not in any one specific repository or collection. This state of dispersion means that there may be more McCord letters awaiting discovery. When writing about McCord, the history of her early life is a thorny obstruction for a historian to overcome since private papers written by her are scarce. This dearth of firsthand accounts means that scholars have to work around the lack of primary sources, which often leads to speculation about her antebellum years.\textsuperscript{11}

The destruction of McCord’s personal papers further exacerbates the plight of the historian because the lack of references to her writing career makes identifying anonymous and pseudonymed submissions she made to magazines extremely difficult. Without these private documents, a historian is limited to McCord’s identified published works as the foundation of any accounts written of her. Since she had to conceal her identity as a female writer, McCord did not sign everything she wrote with “L.S.M.” Taken in conjunction with the inclination of many women writers for publishing under a pseudonym and the tendency of magazines to not publish authors’ names, no historian can be certain that all of McCord’s printed works have been discovered, or even hazard a guess as to how many may still await being identified. Given the burning of her personal papers, we may never know how or when exactly McCord came upon the word “feminist.” “Woman and Her Needs” may very well be its earliest artifact and yet, a


search for her correspondence would be a worthwhile one. As the famous historian Lucien Febvre has argued, “‘It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word’.”

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Cindy Ann McLeod was born on Saturday October 9, 1971 in Jacksonville, Florida; the elder child of an eldest daughter of five. She graduated from Nathan Bedford Forrest Senior High in May 1989. After receiving an Academic Achievement scholarship, McLeod began her college education at Florida Community College of Jacksonville in August 1989. Professor Joe Sasser of the History and Anthropology department hired her as a student assistant, a position she maintained throughout her attendance. McLeod earned her A.A. degree in two semesters due to Advanced Placement test scores, dual enrollment classes in high school, and CLEP test credits, graduating in May 1990. She transferred to the University of North Florida in January 1991. McLeod interned for a year between 1992 and 1993 with the Maple Leaf Project, preserving and researching Civil War artifacts discovered on a troop transport ship at the bottom of the St. Johns River.

She received her B.A. in History from the University of North Florida in May 1993 and entered their master’s program in August 1994. McLeod worked as an Assistant Librarian for the St. Augustine Historical Society’s research library under Page Edwards for the summer of 1994. She presented “The Africans’ Involvement in the Slave Trade” at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s Graduate History Conference in 1996. During the course of her graduate studies, she received four Leadership Scholarships for her work with the Sawmill Slough conservation club. Between October 1994 and August 1997, McLeod worked as a SUS
Representative for Enrollment Services recruiting students from community colleges in the North and Central Florida regions. From August 1997 to June 1999, she worked in Financial Aid counseling students on the financial aid process. In January 2000, McLeod entered the Humanities program at Florida State University to pursue her Ph.D. She graduated from the University of North Florida with her Master’s in American History in May 2000. McLeod’s thesis was “The Evolution of Ideals in Gender & Marriage from the Victorian to the Modern Era, 1900-1929,” a statistical content analysis of early twentieth century American periodical literature.

Starting in the fall of 2003 McLeod began as a Teaching Assistant teaching Multicultural Film and Homer to Gothic for the Humanities program. She held this position through to the spring of 2005 having taught in all the class formats: face-to-face, hybrid, and online. In addition, in the spring of 2005, McLeod began teaching for Tallahassee Community College as an adjunct instructor for both the humanities and history departments, eventually becoming an adjunct professor. The courses she taught included Humanities of the World I, Western Civilization I & II, U.S. History I & II, American Experience I – Foreign Policy, and American Experience II – Social History.

In the spring of 2007 McLeod’s book review of Brian Baker’s *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000* was published in the Rocky Mountain MLA Review. She was also a Reader in American History for the 2008 and 2009 AP Conventions in Louisville, Kentucky.

At the 61st Annual Rocky Mountains MLA Convention in Tucson, Arizona during the fall of 2006, McLeod became the session chair for “Practical Approaches to Teaching Film” when the original chair had to cancel her attendance. McLeod presented her paper “Malena as Mulvey: Deconstructing the Male Gaze,” later published as a chapter in the book *Practical Approaches to Teaching Film* by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2009.