

EDUCATING THE WOMEN OF THE NATION:
PRISCILLA WAKEFIELD AND THE CONSTRUCTION
OF NATIONAL IDENTITY, 1798

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the views of the Quaker educationist, Priscilla Wakefield, on the role of women in the construction of British national identity at the end of the eighteenth century. Priscilla Wakefield wrote children's texts in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England, was interested in the question of women and science and published on the education of women. This article analyses the way in which in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement* (1798), she based her arguments for a 'useful' education for women on her views of what constituted the virtues and values of British society. Wakefield was worried by what she perceived to be a growing degeneracy in Britain, which she feared was engendering similarities to society in pre-Revolution France. She saw it as the moral duty of rational mothers to inculcate their children, their servants and their fellow countrywomen into correct modes of being. The article traces the underlying influence of Quaker beliefs on Wakefield's writing and the similarities in her analysis to and differences from that of her contemporary, Hannah More.

KEYWORDS

Priscilla Wakefield, citizenship, women's education, eighteenth century, Quaker, national identity

Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement, published in 1798, provides a gendered analysis of Wakefield's concept of the British nation in the late-eighteenth century and considers the part she envisaged women should play in the construction of the nation. The article contributes to the growing his-

toriography of gender and nation by exploring the underlying influence of Quaker beliefs on Wakefield's text.

According to Linda Colley, the joining of Scotland, England and Wales in 1707 meant that in 1798, when Wakefield published *Reflections*, Britain as a nation was still under construction (Colley 1996: 1-6). Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catharine Hall (2000) argue that the 'long nineteenth century' was a crucial phase in the developmental phase of modern nationalism in which gender and nation played key roles. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus's (1997) historiographical overview of women's lives in this period, particularly their discussion of revisionist approaches to the notion of 'separate spheres' (Kerber 1998; Vickery 1993), lends support to Linda Colley's (1996) portrayal of the active role of women in forging the British nation at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Catherine Hall (1979) points to the role of evangelicalism in the reform of manners and morals in the making of the British nation during the late-eighteenth century and her analysis of the writings of the Anglican Hannah More highlights the centrality of gender, education and religion to notions of nation. The view that women had a part to play in the making of the nation during the 'long nineteenth century' was not limited to those of an Anglican persuasion, however. The Quaker Priscilla Wakefield felt that she and other women had a role of vital importance to play.

A descendent of Robert Barclay, author of *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, and aunt to Elizabeth Fry, Priscilla Wakefield (1751-1832) came from a distinguished Quaker lineage. A member of the Tottenham meeting, she did not adhere to plainness 'in regard either to dress or to abstinence from amusements' (*Dictionary of National Biography* 1973: 455-56). She was an active philanthropist, promoting education, maternity provision and savings banks for the poor in Tottenham, and in addition supported herself and her family by writing educational books for children and young people (Hill 1997). Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections* appeared the year before Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1838[1799]). Like other women of the period, Priscilla Wakefield wrote against the backdrop of fears of social unrest resulting from the French Revolution and the recurrent rumblings of the Napoleonic wars (Kelly 1993). Hannah More spoke of the period as a 'moment of alarm and peril', while the Scottish Episcopalian Elizabeth Hamilton referred to the times as 'an awful and portentous crisis, big with alarm to the rising generation' (Hamilton 1810: 262). Hannah

More called her countrywomen 'with a warning voice...to come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country' (More 1799: 13) and Elizabeth Hamilton called on women to play their part in contributing to the stability of the country. Fearful of 'national decay' confronting British society (Wakefield 1798: 5), Priscilla Wakefield also portrayed the British nation in need of rescue, and argued that the way to achieve this was through the instigation of a rational and moral system of education for women.

In Wakefield's view, the inadequate state of women's education meant that women were not contributing their full potential to the nation:

The intellectual faculties of the female mind have too long been confined by narrow and ill directed modes of education and thus they have been concealed, not only from others, but from themselves the energies of which they are capable (Wakefield 1798: 5).

She argued that change in individuals would bring about change throughout the nation as a whole, stating that correctly educated, the influence of women of the nobility would permeate society:

The gradual and almost imperceptible, though certain influence of forming the opinions and improving the manners of their country women by their conversation and their practice, is the undisputed prerogative of our female nobility...should she avail herself of the weight of her own example to promote a sobriety of conduct and the general usefulness of her sex, the good effects it might produce upon society would extend beyond her warmest expectations: the benefit would indeed be incalculable (Wakefield 1798: 6).

This formed part of Wakefield's wider view that the progress of humanity was to be achieved through the advance of a rational education, and that education for women would advance 'civilization'.

As a Quaker and a woman, Priscilla Wakefield occupied a contradictory location within the British nation. Following the assertions of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, that both men and women had 'that of God' within them, and were equally capable of receiving guidance from the Inner Light, Quakerism formally accorded women a spiritual equality with men (Braithwaite 1919: 210). Outside the Quaker movement, as a woman of her time, Wakefield was not enfranchised, and as a married woman she had no legal identity under common law (Hill 1984: 112). Furthermore, as a Quaker she came from a cultural background wherein even the men did not attend the English universities or enter the legal

profession; that is until the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act in 1828 (Watts 1998: xi). While the middle-classes, of which Quakers were a part, expanded during the late-eighteenth century, leading members of society continued to see respectable wealth coming only from membership of the gentry, and from land ownership (Thackeray 1992). Coming from a Protestant Christian background, Quakers, however, believed firmly in the morality of work and trade. Their biblical reading showed them Christ, Paul, and other prominent figures practising trades which enabled them to support themselves and build up their community (Lk. 19.15; Mk 6.3). Outside the official ruling classes and many of the professions, Quakers became increasingly prominent within commerce, trade and manufacturing in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Walvin 1997). Many company names still found on the High Street today are Quaker in origin: Barclays, Lloyds, Clarks Shoes, Rowntrees, Wilkinson Sword and Cadbury's. In her introduction to *Reflections*, Priscilla Wakefield upheld Quaker attitudes towards trade and the responsibility of each individual to contribute to the good of society as a whole.

For Wakefield, the responsibility of each individual to be a useful citizen pertained to women just as much as men. She quoted the assertion of Adam Smith, economist, philosopher and author of *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), that:

every individual is a burthen upon the society to which he belongs, who does not contribute his share of productive labour for the good of the whole (Wakefield 1798: 1).

and noted that when Adam Smith laid down this principle:

he speaks in general terms of man 'as being capable of forming a social compact for mutual defence, and the advantage of the community at large. He does not absolutely specify, that both sexes in order to render themselves beneficial members of society are equally required to comply with these terms; but since the female sex is included in the idea of the species, and as women possess the same qualities as men though perhaps in a different degree, their sex cannot free them from the claim of the public for their proportion of usefulness (Wakefield 1798: 2).

She concurred with Adam Smith that importance should be given to trade for the growth and development of the nation's economy (Wakefield 1798: 2). In her opinion, women could engage with the idea of the nation's economy by comparing it with their own household economy. In their prudent management of the household women were

contributing to the financial health of the nation and setting a good example for their servants, husbands and children (1798: 81).

More radically for the late-eighteenth century, Priscilla Wakefield demanded that if it was honourable for men to be engaged in trade why should the same not apply to women?

[I]n a country like England where commerce forms one of the principal sinews of national strength, where the character of the merchant is honourable and no obstacle to a favourable reception in the highest circles, that degradation should not attend the female who engages in the concerns of commerce... One of the effects of this ill directed pride, is to deter young men of liberal prospects from demeaning themselves, as it is erroneously termed, by marrying a girl who has been trained upon any profitable employment. How much more reasonable would it be to give them a preference on account of this mark of their superior judgement (Wakefield 1798: 72-73).

Portraying Britain's national identity formed through its trade and commerce, she put forward a system of vocational education for women to enable them to enter this commercial world. Fulfilling their duties as citizens they would 'contribute their share of productive labour for the good of the whole' (Wakefield 1798: 1). This was in contrast to much of the education for women of this period, particularly for those of the middle rank, which was ornamental, designed to attract a husband and which left women with no training to support themselves financially should they be deprived of male family support through either the death of a father or husband (Jones 1990: 102). Quaker history had illustrated the necessity for women to have an education that trained them to be useful members of society. In the seventeenth century, when Quaker men were imprisoned for their beliefs, women kept the Movement running and also took over the management of the family business (Trevett 1995: 69). Furthermore, when George Fox established a Quaker school in 1668 at Shacklewell, his aim was 'to instruct young lasses and maidens in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation' (Brayshaw 1953: 210). Fox's guiding principle of utility was a central tenet underlying Priscilla Wakefield's proposals for women's education.

From a Christian perspective Wakefield also highlighted for her readers the potential moral degradation that awaited a woman should she have no vocational training behind her. She was aware of the changes that had occurred in French society during the Revolution of 1789. She justified a reformed and useful education for women with the suggestion

that French women, with no male financial support and in receipt of an ornamental education, might have resorted to prostitution to survive:

There is scarcely a more helpless object in the wide circle of misery which the vicissitudes of civilised society display, than a woman genteelly educated whether single or married, who is deprived by any unfortunate accident of the protection and support of male relations; unaccustomed to struggle with difficulty, unacquainted with any resource to supply an independent maintenance she is reduced to the depths of wretchedness and not infrequently, if she be young and handsome, is driven to those parts which lead to infamy. Is it not time to find a remedy for such evils, when the contention of nations has produced the most affecting scenes and transferred the affluent and noble to the humiliating extremes of want and security? When our streets teem with multitudes of unhappy women, many of whom might have been rescued from their present degradation, or who would not perhaps have fallen into it, had they been instructed in the exercise of some art or professions, which would have enabled them to procure of themselves a respectable support by their own industry (Wakefield 1798: 67).

To enable women in similar circumstances to avoid prostitution, Wakefield detailed a range of jobs she felt would be suitable, and the education required for each type of employment. She argued that women should be paid at the same rate as men for doing the same job, and that many jobs closed to women should be opened up to them for the sake of decorum and this, in turn, would save many from the vagaries of prostitution:

The serving of retail shops, which deal in articles of female consumption should be exclusively appropriated to women. For were the multitudes of men who are constantly employed in measuring linen, gauze, ribbons and lace, selling perfumes and cosmetics; setting a value on feathers and trinkets and displaying their talents in praising the elegance of bonnets to camps, to withdraw, they might benefit the community by exchanging such frivolous avocations for something more wanting of the masculine character, and by this measure afford an opportunity of saving a creditable livelihood to many destitute women whom a dreadful necessity drives to the business of prostitution (Wakefield 1798: 164).

She revealed in her writings on vocational education that she saw the nation not merely divided between men and women and Christians and non-Christians but also class structured. Like Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer, Clara Reeve, Mrs West and Miss Hatfield, she viewed education in terms of confirming status hierarchies between the female rich and poor (Miller 1972), rather than a classless society as was suggested in

France. Her view that an education should be 'useful' and her view of society shaped by class distinctions were closely related. She noted: 'No system of instruction can properly be denominated good, which is not appropriate to those who receive it' (Wakefield 1798: 77). Furthermore,

In forming a system of instruction for the daughters of persons in the middle rank, a selection should be made of those studies which require the smallest consumption of time, and which are likely to contribute to usefulness, tending to repress, rather than encourage propensities towards dissipation and extravagance, exercising the rational faculties, preparing them to be capable of defining the duties required to them in the various allotments of their future lives (Wakefield 1798: 118).

She divided her proposed education for women into four sections to reflect the four ranks that she perceived to exist. Each rank was to receive an education suited to the employment they would enter at the end of their education.

Wakefield permitted a wide variety of subjects to be studied by those in the first class of society but for her, as a Quaker, each of them was required to have a purpose beyond that of mere amusement. Women could study languages, geography, chemistry, electricity, botany, zoology, all of which provided 'a pleasing antidote to the indolent habit of loitering away time in an unprofitable manner, or what is worse in dissipation' (Wakefield 1798: 91).

She acknowledged that finding employment for women of the first and second ranks of society was difficult, but not, she thought, impossible. They could write literature, although she was aware that generally writing did not provide a main income. Rather it could be used to augment a 'narrow circumstance, and beguile many hours, which might otherwise be passed in solitude or unavailing regret' (1798: 126). Women could become professional painters, they could colour prints, which was according to Wakefield 'a lucrative employment' (1798: 131). Women of this rank had been turning to the stage as a career. While accepting that women were capable of acting professionally, she, however, did not recommend it:

[T]he profession of an actress is indeed most unsuitable to the sex in every point of view, whether it be considered with the courage requisite to face an audience, or the variety of situations incident to it, which expose moral virtue to the most severe trials (Wakefield 1798: 136).

Landscape gardening, agriculture and running a seminary for female education were 'likewise a suitable employment for those whose ideas have been enlarged by liberal cultivation' (1798: 138).

Wakefield's third rank included 'several gradations, involving the daughters of every species of tradesmen below the merchant and above the mean mechanic' (1798: 140). Their education was to be directed by their parents according to the employment they wished for their daughters but was to include reading, spelling, knowledge of the English language, and 'A complete acquaintance with the practical parts of scripture is essentially necessary and should be taught them daily as lessons for the conduct to life' (1798: 142).

Plays and novels were to be avoided:

[W]ith every work tending to inflame the passions and implant sentiments of the omnipotence of love and beauty, would be most carefully excluded from their sight, as CONTAINING A BANEFUL POSITION, DESTRUCTIVE OF EVERY PRINCIPLE THAT IS ADAPTED TO DEFEND THEM FROM THE ALLUREMENTS OF VICE (Wakefield 1798: 143; her emphasis).

Her curriculum for this rank of society also included geography, history and needlework, and she placed a strong emphasis on the importance of arithmetic. 'The want of a thorough acquaintance with figures and methodical system of bookkeeping, have conduced to the ruin of many small tradesmen' (1798: 145).

Priscilla Wakefield admitted that the last class of women, the 'labouring poor', had few choices in life other than 'incessant toil' (1798: 176). Attendance at either a charity school or a Sunday School was to provide these women with a basic education in reading, sewing and 'domestic oeconomy'. This would enable them to obtain work either as domestic servants or in the manufacturing industries (1798: 188). While acknowledging that women of all classes should receive an education and be able to support themselves financially, advocating careers for women was not her primary aim. Rather she wished to prevent women entering into prostitution and so adding to 'national decay' (1798: 70).

Wakefield saw the central role of women of all classes as the producers and educators of the nation's next generation. To enable women to carry out this role efficiently, she offered detailed advice which began with pre-pregnancy healthcare and carried through until their offspring were themselves leaving home. Illustrating a knowledge of the Classics and the ancient civilisation of Sparta, she suggested

Britons should emulate the model provided by the Spartans in order to build up the British nation and produce the next generation of healthy citizens. Her advice to mothers began with a reminder of the example set by the Spartans and how they achieved their 'healthy race of citizens':

The Spartans, whose pious institutions are still celebrated, for being admirably adapted to produce a healthy race of citizens, were particularly attentive to observe the most probable means of rendering their women robust in order to obtain for the children they should bring forth, the inheritance of a good constitution (Wakefield 1798: 14).

Priscilla Wakefield contrasted this with the condition of the women of fashion in the 1790s, whom she expected to produce the next governing class. Highly disparaging of them, she felt that they had much to learn from the Spartans:

The manners of our women of fashion, are but ill calculated to prevent the degeneracy of the species; an object of great importance to the public welfare, crowded rooms, late hours, luxurious tables, and slothful inactivity must contribute to the production of a puny offspring, inadequate to the noble energies of patriotism and virtue (Wakefield 1798: 16).

She reiterated that this situation arose through a lack of a rational education for women and as a result of bringing up children according to superstition rather than according to a system based on rationality. Because women produced and reared the nation's future citizens, this situation had to be remedied. Echoing Locke's view that a healthy mind could be fostered only in a healthy body (Curtis and Boulton 1953: 236), she extolled the advantages to women of the great benefits to their children of an upbringing similar to that experienced by children in Sparta. Unless prevented from so doing, mothers should suckle their own children, educate their children themselves, should promote rational dress, fresh air and play as well as regulating children's sleep and food (Wakefield 1798: 13-14, 23-28, 113). She reassured parents: 'It is only intended to recommend a system of greater energy as preparatory to a more vigorous cultivation of the mental faculties' (1798: 28).

Also following Locke (Curtis and Boulton 1953: 236), Priscilla Wakefield accepted the idea that children learn by association (Wakefield 1798: 39).¹ She argued that it was vital for children to be

1. Association theory built on Locke's theory. Associationism is 'psychological theory which postulates that all mental phenomena arise from the association of

given correct associations to become virtuous and moral citizens in the future. She thought women had the potential to induce positive associations in all with whom they came into contact, noting that women could see for themselves through their visits to the poor, and in witnessing the ignorance of untrained servants, the effects of a poor education and incorrect associations learnt in childhood.

[I]gnorance rather than ill intention, is the frequent cause of their faults; they are careless, wasteful and irresolute, and imperfect in almost everything they do, from want of information and habits of order in their childhood. Upon which count there are few services, that can be rendered to the public by a private individual of our sex, more beneficial than that of taking a poor child into their family, and forming her into a useful servant, at the age when they are commonly discharged from charity schools and exposed to all the evils of bad example at home or the unvariable impressions of a low place (Wakefield 1798: 113).

Her stress on moral standards for women was influenced by British antipathy towards the French, exacerbated by wars with France over international trade routes, the acquisition of colonies and religious superiority (Emsley 1979: 4). The French Revolution of 1789 added another dimension to the issue of republicanism, and the perception of a growing atheism within French society. Some in Britain thought this as great a threat to the stability of British society as Catholicism. The behaviour of women during the French Revolution and immediately after was held to be immoral and was highlighted in Britain as indicative of what would happen to Britain should a similar course of action be pursued (Colley 1996: 252-53). Priscilla Wakefield felt that had a rational, rather than an ornamental, system of education for female citizens been developed in France, prior to the Revolution, then such a situation would not have arisen. In Wakefield's eyes, France provided a salutary lesson for Britain and made imperative a change in the education provided for British women if national decay was not to occur.

Although France had not made a military invasion into Britain, Priscilla Wakefield was fearful that a covert invasion was being made by French women of unknown character escaping from France and taking up positions in British schools. While recognizing that as native speakers these women were better qualified to teach French, she felt it her duty

ideas. These ideas are originally formed from sensations caused by the impression of external objects on the sense' (Watts 1998: xi).

to advise parents and heads of schools to investigate their backgrounds fully before employing them.

The misfortunes of individuals, occasioned by the revolution of France, has probably furnished a supply of these subordinate instructors better qualified for their office; but antecedent to the period above mentioned, many natives of that country, who had lost their characters at home, came here and found employment as teachers in our boarding schools. Those who preside over institutions for the education of children, whether male or female, can never be too conscientiously scrupulous in selecting such assistants only, whose moral characters will bear the strictest investigation (Wakefield 1798: 47).

Her view that children learn by association meant that she was torn between her Christian duty of sympathy to the plight of French refugees and worry about the potentially immoral effect French women might have on developing children.

Both Priscilla Wakefield and Mary Wollstonecraft (1992[1792]) urged that education should enable women to be financially self supporting. Priscilla Wakefield differed from Mary Wollstonecraft in her antipathy towards the French but maintained that women and men should be paid the same wages for the same work, and that prostitution had an economic basis. By 1798, Mary Wollstonecraft's suggestions for improvements in women's lives and their education had been rejected by society because of revelations about her private life. These had included Republican sympathies with those perpetrating the revolution in France, taking a lover and bearing an illegitimate child. After her death *The Historical Magazine* of 1799 stated that Wollstonecraft's life and works should be read

with disgust by every female who has any pretensions to delicacy; with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality, and with indignation by anyone who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman, whose frailties should have been buried in oblivion (quoted in Brody 1992: 2).

Such attitudes made it difficult for women writers who came after Wollstonecraft to agree publicly with her views (Campbell Orr 1996: x). After reading Godwin's *Memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Priscilla Wakefield noted in her literary journal that Mary Wollstonecraft's

genius was not curbed by any regular cultivation...but whilst this neglect procured her so great an advantage...it deprived her of the benefit of early impressions of religious principles. Void of fixed sentiments on this essential subject she deviated from those wholesome and necessary

restraints wh[ich] the doctrines of revelation impose upon natural inclination, when it leads beyond those limits wh[ich] the good order of society and happiness require...unguarded by a sense of religious duty she wandered from the standard of female excellence (Shteir 1995: xvi).

In contrast, religion was a central influence for Wakefield and her Quakerism ran as a thread through *Reflections*. Although promulgating a rational education for women, Wakefield also stressed the principle of 'cultivating the heart' and noted that 'cultivating the heart' was a much more difficult task than 'cultivating the head' (Wakefield 1798: 38, 54). A key aim of education for Quakers was to ensure openness to the leading of the Inner Light, which led Quakers to see the education of the heart as important in fostering receptivity to the Inner Light. An awareness of 'true' feelings was central to Quakers' reliance on feelings to sense both the feeling, or unity, of the Meeting and the leading of the Holy Spirit in dictating the course of their lives. The necessity of adhering to the Truth in all situations extended for many Quakers to a rejection of the arts on the grounds that emotions engendered by music, a play, or the reading of a novel were second-hand emotions, created by the imagination and hence not 'true' feelings. This was reflected in Priscilla Wakefield's antipathy to novel-reading, and her caution in respect of both the stage and music, which she termed one of 'the seductive arts'. Wakefield stressed that for 'correct' associations to be formed, children's experiences had to be closely regulated, a practice that was in line with Quaker precepts for a 'guarded education'. Her views on a useful education for women and her claims that education 'disproportionate to rank' was misplaced and wasted (1798: 58) fitted Quaker views of utility, as did her vocational outlook in respect of women's education. Her view of women working alongside husbands in their businesses also fitted the ethos of Quakerism, where, as Sheila Wright observes:

Quaker men were socialised and educated to expect women to take up a position within the Society that allowed them to function with the approbation and encouragement of their fellow members, fathers, husbands and brothers and sisters in a sphere far removed from the domestic (Wright 1995: 49).

Despite her stress on an education for women geared to economic support, and the similarities of some of her views to those of Mary Wollstonecraft, Priscilla Wakefield did not see her plan of a reformed

education removing women from a 'seemly' female role. For Wakefield, the wife was still to be

the participator of her husband's cares, the consoler of his sorrows, his stimulator to every praise-worthy undertaking, his partner in the labours and vicissitudes of life, the faithful and oeconomical manager of his affairs, the judicious superintendant of his family, the wife and affectionate mother of his children, the preserver of his honour, his chief counsellor, and to sum, up all, the chosen friend of his bosom (Wakefield 1798: 31-32).

Indeed, she was at pains to stress that the more rational an education a woman received, the more she would

be better acquainted with her relative situation...so far from puffing them up, and making them self-willed or presumptuous, an increase of real knowledge will conduce them a just estimate of what they owe to themselves and what is due to their husbands (Wakefield 1798: 109).

Nevertheless, this did not mean that women lacked influence. While she was aware that women could not take part in the official government of the country, she stated:

Women are prohibited from the public service of their country by reason and decorum, but they are not excluded from promoting its welfare by other means better adapted to their powers and attainments (Wakefield 1798: 96).

Despite proscribing female economic roles, Priscilla Wakefield held to a relational view of women. This, along with her antipathy to the French, her fear of national decay and of the insidious effects of imported French teachers and her stress on the importance of women and their reformed education in reconstituting national life, echoed much of Hannah More. Both Wakefield and More were in agreement that as a result of defective female education it was not possible to state what women might become (Wakefield 1798: 4; More 1838: iii) and both viewed the question of women's rights as misplaced (More 1838: 199). However, Wakefield saw a distinction between women and men based on strength, but not intellect (Wakefield 1798: 73), while More viewed women's minds as inferior to those of men's (More 1838: 202) and in contrast portrayed science as threatening for women (More 1838: 200, 207, 217). Hannah More's view of a 'useful' education for women was constituted through the notion of 'industry' (More 1838: 72), rather than the economic usefulness propounded by Priscilla Wakefield, and More equated woman and the 'ends' of female education as domestic and, as a result,

proposed a narrower role for women (More 1838: 69). But both women decried novels and works that stimulated the imagination (More 1838: 116) and saw dissipation (Wakefield 1798: 94; More 1838: 253) and a heightened sensibility for women as threatening to national stability (Wakefield 1798: 33-34; More 1838: 247). Both viewed a 'correct' form of philanthropy (Wakefield 1798: 82; More 1838: 270) and the mothers' role in educating their children as an important aspect of national regeneration (More 1838: 44, 69). Indeed, Priscilla Wakefield praised Hannah More's *Cheap Repository* for its 'civilising' potential for the poor (Wakefield 1798: 114).

In contrast to Priscilla Wakefield, however, Hannah More's analysis of nation and of the place of women and their education in the reconstruction of the British nation was rooted in a belief in Original Sin:

Is it not a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may perhaps want some corrections, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify?

The foundation of Christian religion...appears to be the doctrine of the fall of man from his original state of righteousness and the corruption and helplessness of human nature, which are the consequences of this fall, and which is the natural state of every one born into the world (More 1838: 47, 329)

For Hannah More, religion was sustained by morality. Illustrating this view, she was concerned that young people turned away from the doctrine of Original Sin 'as a morose, unaimable and gloomy idea' because their lack of moral training had closed them to the leading of religion:

This error in youth has a still deeper foundation which is their not having a right standing of moral good and evil themselves in consequence of their already partaking of the very corruption which is spoken of and which, in perverting the will, darkens the understanding also; they are therefore apt to have no strict sense of duty, or of the necessity of a right and religious meaning to every act (More 1799: 330)

In Hannah More's view, morality supported religion, which, in turn, supported the state. As a result, 'all human learning' had to be taught 'not as an end but a means' (More 1838: 127).

As Robert Hole argues, Hannah More believed that overthrowing the state involved destroying the religion that sustained it; and that to overthrow religion, the morality that supported it had to be undermined. She saw both the excesses of female sensibility and of female assertiveness as

dangerous to morality; both were conducive to degenerate (female) sexuality, which powerfully undermined morality and hence the state itself (Hole 1996: xxx, xxxiii). Education in the accomplishments, novel reading and dissipation were just as inimical to the morality that sustained religion, and so national life, as the disputations of 'female dialecticians'.

Gina Luria sees Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections* as a curious marriage of the innovative content of Mary Wollstonecraft's polemic with the high moral seriousness of Hannah More (Luria 1974: 6). Wakefield's Quaker beliefs are central to understanding this position. Her literary diary illustrates that she saw her Quaker beliefs leading to her difference from Mary Wollstonecraft. At the same time, her view of the place of religion in the construction of the nation was in contrast with that of Hannah More. While both More and Wakefield agreed that religion was central to the life of the nation, for the Anglican Hannah More morality underlay religion, which in turn underlay the state and religion was undermined by attacking morality. In contrast, as a Quaker, Priscilla Wakefield located religion as the basis of morality and hence of national regeneration.

Supported by her Quaker beliefs, Priscilla Wakefield held very clear ideas about nation, women as citizens and the part that women and their education played in the construction of the nation. The fact that most women of this period did not have a legal or political identity was not seen by her to lessen the contribution that women were able to make. Britain as a governing nation with a growing empire could not function without those who made Britain a commercial and trading nation. In order to expand the nation the government needed ships, clothing and food for the sailors. Neither could the government function as a defender of the nation against the threat of invasion from its war with France without practical and financial support from trade. In Priscilla Wakefield's view, women might not have been able to enter political government but they were able to enter respectably into manufacturing and trade without compromising their feminine virtues; and this was of an equal value to playing a part in political government. Furthermore, in contrast to their French counterparts, British women could act as Christians, protecting the nation's moral standards; and primarily, they could contribute through their role as mothers, producing and educating the nation's future generations of Christians, who would, as a result, prove to be moral and virtuous citizens.

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