

“Brutes, Bridles and Chains”: On the Debatable Domain of Slavery in the Writings of Wollstonecraft, Hays and Hamilton

In her feminist writings, Mary Hays relied amply on Mary Wollstonecraft's dogma of female servitude. Her novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) reiterates the rhetoric of slavery of the *Vindication* in regard to women's confinement to the domestic sphere and absence of power within a patriarchal system: "Why are we bound by the habits of society, as with an adamant chain?" (31). Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, Hays manifests an attitude of diplomacy to the opposite sex, drawing a line between the loyalist attitudes of men and women alike, and the men who "pleaded the cause of freedom and humanity with a bold and manly eloquence" (115).

Since *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* was a work that encompassed several debatable issues, it was given a frosty welcome in certain quarters. So strong was the resentment against the work that it gave rise to much parodying, notably by Elizabeth Hamilton, whose anti-Jacobin *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) is an attack, not only on Hays's fictional creation, but on the author herself. In particular, Hamilton ostracises adherents to the radical philosophies of the day and the stand they took against slavery. By extending her argument to drawing facetious conclusions regarding the Jacobin predilection for primitive African lifestyles, she attempts to reshape Wollstonecraft's trope of irony into a satire which can be said to backfire onto itself.

This paper exemplifies the late 18th century debate of abolitionist and non-abolitionist discourse and the relevance of this distinction to the woman question. The impact of Mary Wollstonecraft's use of a metaphor of slavery to denote female dependency is traced, first through Mary Hays's adaptation in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and, subsequently, in Elizabeth Hamilton's parodying adaptation: *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*.