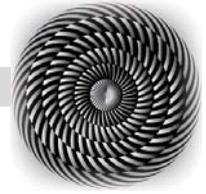


## About This Volume



*Robert C. Evans*

This book, the fourth in the Critical Approaches to Literature series, deals with one of the most important theoretical approaches of modern times: feminism. Covering material from the Renaissance down to the present day, the volume explores works in a variety of genres, including novels, dramas, short stories, poems, and films. For the most part the works examined are by British and American writers, both male and female, who represent a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, social and cultural circumstances, and intellectual points of view.

The book opens with an introductory essay by Robert C. Evans—an essay that explores the Renaissance sonnet tradition in light of feminist ideas. Evans argues that readers too often assume that the sexist males who speak in so many Renaissance sonnets are spokesmen for their mostly male authors. In fact, Evans suggests, just the reverse is often true: the male writers seem to use implied irony to mock and undercut the foolish male speakers. Frequently the writers make their mockery of these obsessed “lovers” very clear. Evans contends that many Renaissance sonnets “can be read as ‘feminist’ poems” written “long before that term was even invented. The women depicted in the sonnets are usually rational, intelligent, self-controlled, and virtuous. The men are often just the opposite.” Evans argues that the oft-repeated claim that these “sonnets are ‘sexist’ results from taking the male speakers as seriously as those speakers take themselves.” Instead, he maintains, the male speakers “are often little more than stalkers—determined to force themselves on women who show little real interest in them.” His essay sets up many of the issues explored more fully and diversely in the rest of the volume.

## Critical Contexts

In a historically grounded essay that opens the volume's Critical Contexts section, Karen E. Rowe focuses on a journal published from June 1792 to May 1793. Called *The Lady's Magazine; and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge*, it was, Rowe says, "America's first periodical devoted to the 'Fair Sex,'" and amounted to a "polyvocal miscellany, in which contributors (largely anonymous) were actively solicited to display their "talents" and "literary labours." It demonstrated "how female 'readers' and 'writers' constituted a new print audience and, in the process, inscribed competing ideals and contingent representations of womanhood. "By analyzing various aspects of the journal, Rowe raises numerous intriguing questions about the ways women were depicted, both in words and visually, in early American culture and how the journal both reflected and contributed to contemporary debates about women and their social and cultural roles.

In the second of the Critical Contexts essays, Brian Yothers examines Margaret Fuller, an early, outspoken American feminist who stood "at the center of mid-nineteenth-century feminist theory and practice. Fuller articulated many of the issues explored by feminist writers both before and after her own era. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*," Yothers notes, "is a major manifesto on the topic of gender equality that provides a framework for reading nineteenth-century fiction and poetry by women, and her life story possessed sufficient interest for nineteenth-century writers that she appears as a character across a range of fictional works dealing with matters of women's agency and women's rights." In this sense, Yothers continues, "Fuller not only embodied a feminist approach to literary texts by others and served as a feminist creator of her own literary texts, but she also functioned as a feminist presence in literary texts that emerged during her adult life and in the years following her death." Yothers's discussion of Fuller surveys various aspects of feminist criticism in general by dealing with one of its earliest champions. His essay introduces readers to many key ideas and terms associated with feminist criticism.

In a critical lens essay, Robert C. Evans returns to explore just *one* way of reading a text that is relevant to the larger issues raised by feminist criticism. Evans focuses on Linda Loman, the wife of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s play *The Death of a Salesman*, examining her by using an approach known as “cognitive criticism.” Evans notes that Linda “often receives much less attention than the many male characters who mostly populate the drama.” But she is, Evans maintains, “clearly a central figure, and she is arguably far more sensible, intelligent, grounded, selfless, and levelheaded than either her husband or her two sons.” To explain why this is so, Evans draws on insights from cognitive psychologists, who “argue that emotional and psychological problems often result from *failures to reason properly*.” According to cognitive psychology, the “ways we think help determine the ways we feel. If we can change our thinking by making it more rational, more logical, and more levelheaded, we are likely to actually feel better.” Linda, Evans contends, is by far the most reasonable character in a play full of irrational thinking. The fact that the most rational character is a woman, he thinks, says much about her as a kind of stoic feminist heroine as well as about the men in the play.

Finally, in the last of the Critical Contexts essays—this one designed to illustrate methods of comparison and contrast—Julia Lisella examines the works of two American women poets of the twentieth century, Margaret Walker and Muriel Rukeyser. Lisella juxtaposes these two writers, she says, “for two crucial reasons. First, the pairing allows me to focus on the significance of their earliest work, Walker’s *For My People* (1942), and Rukeyser’s *Theory of Flight* (1935), as first collections. And secondly, bringing these two writers together suggests the coalition-building that permeated US culture and politics on the left during that time period.” Conceding that “it is not clear whether Rukeyser or Walker identified as feminists at this time,” Lisella notes that their “later work suggests a growing feminist consciousness in both writers” and suggests that even their early “work demonstrates what could be called a feminist poetic strategy.”

## Critical Readings: From the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries

The entire Critical Readings section, which is designed to look at numerous works by using a variety of feminist perspectives, is organized chronologically. The first essay, by Fran Teague and Nathan Gilmour, examines William Shakespeare's narrative poem "The Rape of Lucrece." According to Teague and Gilmour, "Lucrece herself, next to the defective Tarquin, stands as doubly interesting: here is a woman who overcomes defects inherent (in Renaissance eyes) to women and becomes, in her integrity and in her act of political will, someone who transcends the limitations (in Renaissance eyes)" of her sex. "Lucrece's resistance," they continue, "operates within sixteenth-century ideological parameters; nonetheless, writing a woman as exhibiting . . . 'manly' virtue destabilizes Elizabethan assumptions that men necessarily exhibit such discipline and that the defects of Tarquin are necessarily womanish vices." They conclude that "a feminist historicist analysis" of the poem "suggests that real Elizabethan women could meet the threats of patriarchal hostility and overcome them."

Also discussing a work by Shakespeare, Robert C. Evans examines six different ways in which the murder of Desdemona in *Othello* has been represented in filmed productions of the play. Evans calls this episode "one of the most interesting in the drama from a feminist perspective." For one thing, he contends, "it shockingly presents murderous violence by a man against a woman—the kind of thing that happens all too often in real life, not just in literature." The scene therefore "provides a perfect opportunity to show different possible reactions to such violence. The more passive a woman is in this episode, the less ideally 'feminist' she is likely to seem. The more resistance and even violence she offers in response to the male violence she endures, the closer she comes to a feminist ideal of self-respect and self-assertion." According to Evans, the six different filmed productions he examines (ranging from the early 1920s to the mid-1990s) "give us a chance to see how different Desdemonas were allowed (by a series of male directors) to respond to the horrible taking of their lives." As the twentieth century proceeded, Desdemonas on film

became more and more likely to fight back—with growing force—against murderous Othellos.

Examining Samuel Richardson’s famous eighteenth-century novel *Pamela*, which deals with a man’s efforts to dominate and possess a young woman, Joyce Kelley argues that modern feminist critics “would admire the way Pamela turns this situation to her own advantage. By empowering Pamela” as he does, Richardson (according to Kelley) “adds a new twist to the traditional pairing of text and body, and to voyeurism as well.” Kelley sets the novel within the context of the tradition of epistolary fiction, and she also juxtaposes *Pamela* with an intriguing painting from the period—a painting also relevant to relations between men and women during Richardson’s era.

In an essay on Jane Austen, Sarah Fredericks suggests that Austen was troubled “by the numerous families around her that were growing beyond their means.” Fredericks argues that “Austen addresses the population control issue in her novels” by using rhetoric influenced by Thomas Malthus. Such rhetoric advocated for “delayed marriages to forestall additional, unsustainable births. By recasting population control as a social status issue,” Fredericks continues, “Austen and Malthus alike exploited the growing desire for upward mobility that dominated the consciousness of the British population in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.” Fredericks maintains that given Austen’s “personal comments in her letters to her closest friends about the burden of excessive children, it is clear that she was engaged in the ongoing discourse of population control and would have been open to more definitive methods of birth control and family planning.”

Crystie Deuter, discussing the nineteenth-century English poet Christina Rossetti, notes that although Rossetti is not usually discussed from feminist perspectives, many of her “poems feature women characters or women speakers who are interesting partly or even primarily *as* women.” In many of these works, Deuter argues, “the women adopt or display stances that might be called typically ‘feminist’: they are self-respecting and self-assertive and act as people who deserve—and sometimes demand—the respect of

men.” Deuter maintains that “perhaps the most impressive feature of Rossetti’s ‘feminism’ is the way she presents women characters and speakers in the full range of their human complexity. Taken as a whole, the women in her poetry fit no simple stereotypes and cannot be reduced to predictable stick figures designed to illustrate ‘feminist’ ideas.” Deuter examines various poems by Rossetti to support this claim.

A similar argument is offered by Caitlin Celka in an essay on the nineteenth-century American author Kate Chopin. According to Celka, it is “Chopin’s tendency to present *complex* women” that helps make her “an important feminist writer, as well as an important writer in general.” Celka asserts that if Chopin “had made her women always and everywhere the victims of male oppression; if she had made them uniformly sympathetic or predictably condemned them; in short, if she had treated them as mere stick figures—either to be constantly praised or constantly criticized—she would not be the important feminist writer she is.” Instead, according to Celka, “Chopin typically treats her women as complex human beings who cannot be easily judged in any simple terms. She depicts women as complicated persons who have both virtues and flaws, both good points and failings.”

### **Critical Readings: From the Twentieth to the Twenty-First Century**

In an essay on the twentieth-century poet Genevieve Taggard, Julia Lisella argues that for Taggard, “political change had to include women’s issues. And the modernist lyric had to include rather than turn away from . . . women’s real, historical, material bodies.” Lisella believes, however, that “Taggard struggled with her convictions, internalizing many of the patriarchal arguments against both notions. In her poems she often connects women’s traditional roles of mother and wife with conservative politics, fearing maternity will bring out the conservative and bourgeois impulses in herself and worrying for her readers as well.” According to Lisella, for “Taggard, the political conversion of women was both an ongoing personal journey through poetry, and a poetic and political crusade,” although her “feminism was never explicit.”

Christina M. Garner's essay on the twentieth-century African American writer Zora Neale Hurston contends that Hurston's story "The Gilded Six-Bits" is "an excellent case study for understanding Hurston's views on feminism and her depiction of women characters." According to Garner, Hurston's "works, like her characters, are complex, ambiguous, and often contradictory. She includes a mix of strong, virtuous women characters and weak, imperfect women characters, and for Hurston, the two are not mutually exclusive." Garner maintains that sometimes Hurston's "strongest and most seemingly virtuous women are the ones who fall from grace, and her weakest and most pathetic characters are the ones who experience redemption." Missie May, a central character in "The Gilded Six-Bits," paradoxically "exemplifies both of these categories. If Missie May is any indication, transgressions do not fully break women, nor does good behavior make them incapable of wrongdoing. Even the best are fallible, and even the worst can be redeemed."

Comparing and contrasting works by Ernest Hemingway and Katherine Anne Porter, Michael Kaufmann suggests that "Porter would likely have bridled at labeling her fiction as feminist. In fact, she even said, late in her life, that she considered 'feminism . . . a dirty word.'" However, as Kaufmann correctly notes, "a writer doesn't have to declare herself feminist to have a feminist perspective—nor to be interpreted from such a perspective. Even if Porter disliked the feminist label, she did consider that her particular perspective was both unique and uniquely a woman's." According to Kaufmann, her "feminine and ultimately feminist perspective is especially evident in her treatment of World War I," particularly in her novella *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, which Kaufmann examines alongside Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

In an essay on *The Golden Notebook*, by the British author Doris Lessing, Nicolas Tredell suggests that this novel "to some extent anticipated, and fed significantly into, the discourses of second-wave feminism but did not partake of them directly. It explores and dramatizes the position of women but does not, in any sustained way, use the vocabulary, concepts, and imagery later evident in the

varieties of feminist discourse, fictional and nonfictional, which would emerge in the later 1960s and the 1970s.” In this sense, Tredell argues, “it is a protofeminist text.”

Anne McGee, exploring two stories by the recent Hispanic American writer Sandra Cisneros, suggests that both “‘Woman Hollering Creek’ and ‘Never Marry a Mexican’ are complex narratives” that “attempt to rewrite and revise potent symbols of Mexicana and Chicana female identity, specifically *la Llorona* and *la Malinche*.” Although the protagonists ultimately fail “to wholly rewrite or supplant their particular figure of Mexicana and Chicana femininity, each does succeed in revealing the multiplicity of alternative meanings that can be attributed to each, thus opening a space for possible redefinition.” Perhaps, Magee concludes, “the power of symbols such as *la Llorona* and *la Malinche* lies in their fluidity of meaning, especially in the space of the border. It is up to the Mexicana and Chicana women who inhabit this border zone to negotiate this multiplicity of meanings in order to form their own identities.”

Finally, in the last of the Critical Readings, Nicolas Tredell explores a novel titled *NW*, by the contemporary British ethnic minority novelist Zadie Smith. According to Tredell, “the paucity of explicit feminist discourse and imagery . . . signals that *NW* is set in a postfeminist era.” But Tredell adds that “this does not, of course, mean that the range of issues that concerned the second-wave feminism that emerged in the later 1960s have all been resolved, or that feminism, in its many varieties, has wholly disappeared.” It only means that “the concentrated and explicit discourses of that era have become fragmented, subdued, redirected, partly absorbed into other and sometimes older issues, particularly around marriage and children.”

## Resources

The Resources section of the book opens with an essay on “Feminist Pluralism,” which complements similar essays in previous volumes in this series.<sup>1</sup> By examining one short poem from a wide variety of possible perspectives, this essay seeks to remind readers that

“feminism,” as an interpretive tool, can be used in many different ways. A chronology then outlines some important figures, works, and episodes in the development of feminist thinking, and then two different listings of books point readers in the direction of even more discussions and examples of feminism than the ones the present book has already provided. Finally, the volume closes with a glossary of important terms, notes about the editor and the contributors, and a comprehensive index.

## A War Story of One's Own: Katherine Anne Porter's Re-Envisioning of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*



Michael E. Kaufmann

The Great War, as Sandra M. Gilbert asserts, profoundly turned the world “topsy-turvy,” especially gender role definitions. Katherine Anne Porter’s short novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939) and Hemingway’s full-length novel *A Farewell to Arms* both demonstrate and explore how World War I could challenge and destabilize conventional gender definitions in America and abroad. Although these two works are sometimes mentioned together since both focus on the same historical period and general events, the many ways in which they complement each other and each other’s explorations of gender during wartime have not been thoroughly detailed. In fact, the gendered way these authors and their works have often been read has sometimes obscured the manner in which they perform their similar explorations of the Great War.

Hemingway’s novel, set in Europe either at the front or not too far from it, describes how an American volunteer named Frederic Henry, who serves the Italian army as an ambulance driver, is wounded by a mortar shell. While hospitalized in Milan, he falls in love with a beautiful English nurse named Catherine Barkley, who becomes pregnant with his child. Eventually, both Frederic and Catherine escape by rowboat to neutral Switzerland, where Catherine is hospitalized during her labor. Their baby is stillborn, and then Catherine herself also dies, leaving Frederic feeling lost and lonely.

Porter’s novella resembles Hemingway’s novel in various ways. Set in the United States during the final year of the war, it also involves a pair of doomed lovers. Porter’s central character is a young woman journalist named Miranda who falls in love with a young American soldier named Adam Barclay. Perhaps the fact that Adam’s last name (Barclay) resembles the last name of Hemingway’s heroine (Barkley) is merely a coincidence. Or perhaps it is one

small indication (among many) that Porter may have been thinking about Hemingway's famous novel while composing her own. In any case, the fate of Porter's lovers resembles the fate of Hemingway's, although the gender roles are obviously reversed. In Hemingway's book, the woman dies at the end, leaving the man alone and bereft; in Porter's book, the opposite happens: both Miranda and Adam come down with devastating cases of the flu, but only Adam dies—probably after catching the disease while nursing Miranda. In each case, the main character loses a lover not to a battlefield death but rather to death in a hospital.

By the time Porter wrote her novella, Hemingway's novel was already one of the most famous American books to have dealt with World War I. Did Porter deliberately intend her text as, in part, a response to Hemingway's? Did she shape her plot and characters and themes, to some degree, to create a dialogue with his earlier work? How, in any case, do the two texts both resemble and differ from one another in the ways they depict the war and, especially, in the ways they deal with issues of gender? These are some of the questions this chapter will explore.

### **Gender Roles during the War**

In earlier, more conventionally gendered readings, Hemingway's work is often framed as the ultimate commentary on the waste and futility of World War I as reflected in his characters' tragic romance. In contrast, Porter's narrative tends to be viewed inversely—as a tragic romance that merely happens to take place in wartime.<sup>1</sup> In other words, in criticism on Hemingway, the war is often foregrounded rather than the romance, but in criticism on Porter the characters' romance tends to be highlighted while the war is less strongly emphasized. But *A Farewell to Arms* is, in fact, much more the sort of story that *Pale Horse* is often framed to be: Hemingway wrote a love story that takes place as the war transpires, more or less, offstage. In *Farewell*, the romance eventually subsumes the historical events, while *Pale Horse* offers a much more detailed portrait of the history and social atmosphere of the time, despite

the fact that its main characters are not in direct proximity to the battle.

In *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, Claire M. Tylee notes how critical discussions of World War I (such as Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*) tend to focus on the "personal histories" and experiences of young male soldiers and typically "exclude women's memories." Such writings, Tylee says, have "given support to the idea that war is a men's affair" (188). Tylee insists that to understand the period properly we must redefine war not so much as a matter of men killing men but rather as a "state of hostility between human beings, and the whole way of life where such a state of hostility exists and is taken for granted, even actively promoted" (13). In her view, accounts of the Great War should have a wider focus and should "incorporate the story of the noncombatant part of the nation, including both women and . . . disabled soldiers" (203). Such a reorientation of our view of the Great War and of war in general toward the home front is precisely what Katherine Anne Porter offers in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

Porter would likely have bridled at labeling her fiction as feminist. In fact, she even said, late in her life, that she considered "feminism . . . a dirty word" (*Letters* 298). However, a writer doesn't have to declare herself feminist to have a feminist perspective—nor to be interpreted from such a perspective. Even if Porter disliked the feminist label, she did consider that her particular perspective was both unique and uniquely a woman's. She once wrote that the "whole trouble with me as artist and as human being is that I have always been too much a woman" (*Letters* 121). This feminine and ultimately feminist perspective is especially evident in her treatment of World War I.

One reason Hemingway's account of the war in *Farewell* may be perceived as foregrounded over the characters' romance is his own well-known experience as a reporter before and after the war. As Margaret R. Higonnet points out, to speak about war authoritatively and authentically, writers must usually be seen as having the proper credentials—they must have "been there"—a requirement that effectively disqualifies most women (205). Hemingway's war

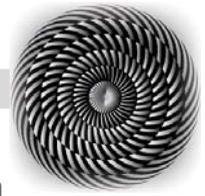
wounds and his experience as a foreign correspondent provided him such credentials (although he had never actually served in the trenches).<sup>2</sup> Though Frederic Henry (like Hemingway) is not a combatant but an ambulance driver, he, like Hemingway, is directly involved in war and suffers from it.<sup>3</sup> Both the character and his creator could thus speak with some authority about warfare. After all, Hemingway not only served during or after battles but also wrote about war as a journalist.

Porter was also a journalist, but unlike Hemingway she (like Miranda) held the less glamorous position of writing theater reviews and society gossip columns. Since such assignments were less esteemed than war reporting and were usually relegated to women writers, the connection between Porter's fiction writing and her reporting has seemed less significant than Hemingway's. Even Miranda, whose journalistic assignments largely mirror Porter's, derides her typical duties. She recounts that she and her coworker, Towney, had been "real reporters" once but had recently been "degraded publicly to routine female jobs, one to the theaters, the other to society" (*Collected Stories* 274-75; hereafter CS). Miranda, then, as a female journalist, is kept distant from witnessing any actual combat. *Pale Horse*, however, shows that "[t]he battlefield is not the only theater of war" (Tylee 188). Porter chronicles the various battles taking place on the home front rather than simply telling a tragic romantic tale.

### **Comparisons and Contrasts**

Oddly, though Hemingway's and Porter's narratives have sometimes been mentioned together, no one has discussed the possibility that Porter was responding to what she likely perceived as Hemingway's more typically masculine account of the war. Perhaps because her account comes nearly a decade after Hemingway's and after the general outpouring of war memoirs at the end of the Twenties, or perhaps because Porter's characters never leave the country, much less get near the front, no one has suggested that Porter's story may be a re-envisioning of Hemingway's tale. The broad similarities between her work and his—which both center on a wartime

## Feminist Pluralism: A Variety of Possible Feminist Approaches to Literature and Film

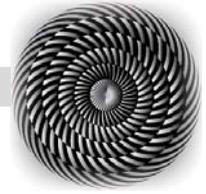


Feminist criticism, at least in explicit and fully articulated forms, is relatively new. Unlike other approaches (such as moral criticism), fully developed feminist approaches date from the 1960s and '70s. In the decades since then, however, feminist approaches have been developed in an impressive number of ways. There is, then, no such thing as a generic *feminist critic*. Instead, there are feminist *critics* and *theorists* of many different kinds. Most share certain basic assumptions, but sometimes they disagree significantly. The purpose of this essay, then, is to outline, very briefly, a variety of ways to think about feminist approaches to literature.

To try to suggest how variously a single work can be studied from numerous feminist perspectives, I have chosen on “On My First Daughter,” by the seventeenth-century poet Ben Jonson (1572-1637). This text, which is widely taught, both resembles and differs from Jonson’s poem “On My First Son,” which is the focus of previous, similar essays in preceding volumes of the *Critical Approaches* series. (Those volumes deal with psychological, moral, and multicultural criticism.) Both poems lament the deaths of Jonson’s children. The poem on the death of his first son is famously tender; the boy, to whom Jonson was very close, died at the age of seven. The poem on the death of his first daughter laments the death of an infant who died at the age of six months.

Here lies, to each her parents’ ruth,  
Mary, the daughter of their youth;  
Yet all heaven’s gifts being heaven’s due,  
It makes the father less to rue.  
At six months’ end she parted hence  
With safety of her innocence;

# Chronology



## The 1400s to the 1990s<sup>1</sup>

c. 1405	<i>The Book of the City of Ladies</i> , Christine de Pisan
ca 1405	<i>The Treasure of the City of Ladies</i> , Christine de Pisan
1429	<i>The Tale of Joan of Arc</i> , Christine de Pisan
1529	<i>The Superior Excellence of Women Over Men</i> , Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa
1545	<i>The Defense of Good Women</i> , Thomas Elyot
1589	<i>Her Protection for Women</i> , Jane Anger
1600s	<i>Poem 92, called Philosophical Satire</i> , Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz
1617	<i>A Muzzle for Melastomus</i> , Rachel Speght
1617	<i>Ester Hath Hang'd Haman</i> , Ester Sowernam
1617	<i>The Worming of a Mad Dog</i> , Constantia Munda
1620	<i>Swetnam the Woman-Hater</i> , Anonymous
1632	“The Memorandum of Martha Moulsworth, Widow”
1640	<i>The Women's Sharp Revenge</i> , Mary Tattle-well and Joan Hit-him-home
1667	<i>Women's Speaking Justified, Proved, and Allowed</i> , Margaret Fell
1673	<i>An Essay to Revive the Antient [sic] Education of Gentlewomen</i> , Bathsua Makin
1678	<i>La Princesse de Clèves</i> , Madame de La Fayette
1686	<i>Female Advocate</i> , Sarah Fyge Egerton
1694	<i>A Serious Proposal to the Ladies</i> , Mary Astell
1697	<i>An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex</i> , Judith Drake
1697	<i>A Serious Proposal</i> , Part II, Mary Astell
1700	<i>Some Reflections Upon Marriage</i> , Mary Astell
1701	<i>The Ladies' Defence</i> , Lady Mary Chudleigh
1719	<i>The Education of Women</i> , Daniel Defoe
1739	<i>The Woman's Labour</i> , Mary Collier
1763	<i>An Essay on Woman in Three Epistles</i> , Mary Leapor
1776	<i>Letters on Women's Rights</i> , Abigail and John Adams
1784	<i>Desultory Thoughts</i> , Judith Sargent Murray