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# Robert Munford & Mercy Otis Warren : how gender, geography, and goals affected their playwrighting

Kylie A. Horney

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ROBERT MUNFORD & MERCY OTIS WARREN:  
HOW GENDER, GEOGRAPHY, AND GOALS  
AFFECTED THEIR PLAYWRITING

Kylie A. Horney

Thesis for Master of Arts

University of Richmond

2009

Dr. Robert C. Kenzer, Thesis Director

This thesis analyzes the Revolutionary-era plays of Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren. Munford's two comedies, *The Candidates* and *The Patriots*, are compared to Warren's three earliest satires, *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group*, in an effort to explain some of the differences between these two authors. The original printings of these plays from the Early American Imprints series, as well as more recent scholarship on Munford and Warren, are used to investigate the plays and lives of these playwrights. Munford's and Warren's backgrounds are explored to account for variations in their works. While the gender and geographical location of Munford and Warren played a major role in their plays, it was their individual goals and purposes in writing that more fully explain the distinctive nature of their plots, characters, and themes.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Robert C. Kenzer, Thesis Advisor

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Woody Holton

ROBERT MUNFORD & MERCY OTIS WARREN:  
HOW GENDER, GEOGRAPHY, AND GOALS  
AFFECTED THEIR PLAYWRITING

By

KYLIE A. HORNEY

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My greatest thank you goes to my family. My sister, Lindsey Horney, has been there when I needed her most and having her in my life has made me a better person. I am blessed with wonderful parents, Jack and Peggy Horney. They have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and shown the greatest support, love, and an unending belief in me and my abilities. I would not be where I am today without them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren were two of America's earliest playwrights. The works of these Revolutionary-era writers can broadly be categorized as political plays or pamphlets that reflected the feelings of a nation on the verge of war. In Arthur Hobson Quinn's work *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War*, Warren and Munford are both described in the chapter entitled "The Drama of the Revolution."<sup>1</sup> The works of these two colonial figures discuss the political atmosphere of the time and offer present-day historians a unique look at Revolutionary politics. While Munford's and Warren's works cover similar topics, there are several key differences, which can be explained not only by the gender and geographical location of the playwrights, but also by the goals each author had when he or she began writing.

At the time both wrote, American theatre was still in its infant stages. Acting troupes traveled throughout the colonies, except in New England where there were strict laws against playhouses and performances. Most of the plays performed were imported from England, as were a majority of the actors. The first play written by an American was performed in 1766; it was Thomas Godfrey's *The Prince of Parthia*.<sup>2</sup> However, this did not begin a deluge of American plays on the stage. The theatre developed slowly in America and thus Munford and Warren were among the early generations of American playwrights.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., 1946), 33-46, 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution: Painting, Music, Literature, and the Theatre in the Colonies and the United States from the Treaty of Paris to the Inauguration of George Washington, 1763-1789* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 105.

Previous historical work done on Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren can be found on opposite ends of the spectrum. There are few books dedicated solely to Robert Munford; one is Rodney M. Baine's *Robert Munford America's First Comic Dramatist*.<sup>3</sup> Baine provides a well-researched biography of Munford and examines his two plays. At the graduate level, there is only one dissertation about Munford and his works: "A Collection of Plays and Poems, by the Late Col. Robert Munford, of Mecklenburg County, in the State of Virginia: A Critical Edition" by Jon Charles Miller.<sup>4</sup> Miller mainly focuses on how Munford's two plays reflect the changing political scene in colonial Virginia, as well as Munford's personal opinion and views on these changes. Miller also provides a greater context in which to read and place Munford's plays.

Work on Mercy Otis Warren, on the other hand, has multiplied in the last fifty-years. Several biographies have been recently written. One of the current books is Nancy Rubin Stuart's *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation*.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these biographies on Warren, however, do not specifically focus on her early plays. Warren's works are mentioned and she is given due credit for being a female writer in the colonial period, but the analysis of the plays usually stops there. There are a number of graduate theses and dissertations which include Warren. Some are interested in her as an early feminist, while others examine

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<sup>3</sup> Rodney M. Baine, *Robert Munford America's First Comic Dramatist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Jon Charles Miller, "A Collection of Plays and Poems, by the Late Col. Robert Munford, of Mecklenburg County, in the State of Virginia: A Critical Edition" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).



her correspondence and still others offer a glimpse at how Warren and other women affected early American theatre. Marguerite Anne Donnelly analyzes Warren's canon of plays in her dissertation, "Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814): Satirist of the American Revolution;" her main comparison is among Warren's plays and does not incorporate any other authors from the Revolutionary period.<sup>6</sup> This thesis fills a gap in the historical literature by not only analyzing the plays of Munford and Warren, but also explaining how two playwrights writing in the same period produced pieces with differing themes, characters, and messages.

This thesis closely examines Robert Munford's *The Candidates (or The Humours of a Virginia Election)* and *The Patriots* alongside the three earliest pieces by Mercy Otis Warren: *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group*. All five of these works, written either before or during the American Revolution, have often been grouped together in similar categories. This study demonstrates that while these two playwrights appear to fulfill similar roles with their works, there are essential differences between Munford's and Warren's plays. These differences present distinct examples of Revolutionary-era dramatic work and offer historians an opportunity to compare Munford's and Warren's individual points of view, as well as the varying political opinions, historical figures, and theatrical works found in the Northern and Southern colonies.

Readers and audiences discover in Munford's plays a general overview of colonial politics, particularly during the election of delegates to the House. Drawing from his own personal experience serving in Virginia's House of Burgesses, Munford

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<sup>6</sup> Marguerite Anne Donnelly, "Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814): Satirist of the American Revolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1988).

illustrated the types of gentlemen participating in politics and the situations they needed to tackle in order to serve as representatives of the colony.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Mercy Otis Warren loosely based her plays on historical events and figures who were prominent in colonial Massachusetts. Her works were meant to make a statement concerning specific gentlemen and provided an outlet for Warren to comment on the political atmosphere, since as a woman she could not publicly participate.

This thesis also explores the backgrounds of Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren in an effort to gain a greater understanding of these five works and the variations which appear amongst them. The education, upbringing, familial relations, and political ties of Munford and Warren are described as each aspect influenced what these playwrights wrote and how they felt about Revolutionary-era politics. The five plays are individually discussed, and plot, character, and theme are investigated. The differences between these works are explored on a variety of levels. This thesis examines the purpose the playwrights had in writing each play and the various sources for their feelings expressed in those works. In addition, the events in the plays are examined either as general events which could have occurred or actual events which were then molded to suit a particular playwright's purpose. The cast of characters are more closely studied, especially in Warren's works, as possible historical figures. The names assigned are of particular note as they clearly define the heroes and villains of each piece. Female roles are given individual consideration in light of the status of women in colonial society and the fact that Mercy Otis Warren herself was female. Lastly, the plays are examined

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<sup>7</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 25.

as enduring pieces of historical study. The reception these works received from audiences and historians of today is considered as well as the ability of the everyday reader to understand the events, characters, plot, and significance of Munford's and Warren's plays.

In examining these various attributes, this thesis expands the well of knowledge on Munford and Warren and offers a comparative and contrasting look at two playwrights who are often labeled together and yet seem to have shared more differences than commonalities. Robert Munford presented generic figures who can be interpreted as any number of men in Virginia politics. He also included females in his plays and used his own personal knowledge and experience with elections to present a political commentary of the times. Mercy Otis Warren, on the other hand, based her characters on specific historical figures, wrote her plays in response to events in Massachusetts, and was politically driven by her family connections. Munford's works can easily be understood and appreciated by today's readers without any additional background knowledge, while Warren's message is only fully explained when one knows the back story of her historical characters and Warren herself. Though Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren were writing around the same time before and during the Revolution, their works reflect the varying experiences of a Virginia gentleman who had spent his life in politics and witnessed first-hand the decisions which led to open conflict with Great Britain and a woman in New England in the midst of the American Revolution unable to participate publicly in the conflict. It is not surprising, considering Munford's and Warren's varying backgrounds, opposite genders, and geographical locations that there

are differences among their plays. The idea that these differences arise not only from gender and geography, but from the initial purpose each playwright had in penning their works is what makes these two authors intriguing and important to study. These five plays may be part of the “Drama of the Revolution,” but they are significant works which should be appreciated individually and explored as unique glimpses into the political conditions of life before and during the American Revolution, as well as insights into the lives of Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 33.

## CHAPTER ONE THE PLAYWRIGHTS

Robert Munford III was born around 1737 in Mecklenburg County, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> He was the grandson of Robert Munford I and the son of Robert Munford II and Anna Bland Munford. Robert Munford, the dramatist, owed his family's prestige and social position to his grandfather, who married Martha Kennon in 1701, which connected the Munford name with a prominent Virginia family. Robert Munford I also acquired a great deal of land in the early eighteenth-century and formed a close relationship with William Byrd II. Byrd assisted Munford I in gaining a position as justice in Prince George County, which he followed with service in the military where he became a major in 1716 and climbed to colonel by 1729.<sup>2</sup> Robert Munford I was also elected to the House of Burgesses for two terms.

Upon his death, his son, Robert Munford II, inherited Munford I's property, political influence, and William Byrd II's support and patronage. Initially, it seemed Robert Munford II would follow in his father's footsteps. He was elected as a member of the House of Burgesses, served as a captain in the militia, and even acted as an envoy to the Catawba and Cherokee Indians.<sup>3</sup> However, Munford II faced financial woes and thus had to mortgage his mansion in order to pay his debts. He continued to have monetary problems and turned to the bottle for comfort. When Robert Munford III was eight-

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<sup>1</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Richard R. Beeman, "Robert Munford and the Political Culture of Frontier Virginia," *Journal of American Studies* 12, no.2 (1978): 169-183, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 4-5.

years-old, his father died leaving his mother, brother, sister, and himself with financial difficulties and debts still to be paid.

William Beverley, the dramatist's uncle, took Robert as his ward and brought his nephew to live at Blandfield, his estate in Essex County. Robert Munford III was lucky, in a way, when his father died and his uncle took over his care. William Beverley was a man of prestige and wealth, who had a son of his own. Robert fit into the family with ease. He had a boyhood of both fun and entertainment coupled with studies and genteel experience. His uncle was able to offer Robert an education from some of the best local teachers. In 1750, William Beverley took his son, Robert Beverley, and Robert Munford abroad to England to further their studies. Beverley's wealth and prestige allowed him to give his son and nephew the best education possible for one of Virginia's gentry.

In England, Robert Munford studied at the Beverley School under Master John Clarke. Clarke was known for his classical scholarship, and when he became Headmaster at Wakefield, Beverley sent his son and Munford there to continue their studies.<sup>4</sup> Wakefield offered Munford an opportunity to study the classics, including Terence and Ovid. It is also possible that Munford had the chance to see plays performed by the Yorkshire dramatic circuit; this may have been Munford's first experience with theatre, both in seeing it and reading it.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps at this early age, Munford already realized his penchant for the dramatic. Robert also had a number of famous classmates, including Richard Henry Lee.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Armour, introduction to *The Plays of Robert Munford: the First Comic Plays Written in America*, by Robert Munford (Tucson, Arizona: American Eagle Publications, 1992), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 7.

William Beverley died in 1756 and left no provision in his will for his nephew, Robert Munford III. Munford, therefore, returned to his mother in Virginia. Anna Bland Munford had remarried and was living in Prince George County with her new husband, George Currie. Anna, George, and Robert's uncle, Theoderick, suggested Robert should study law in Williamsburg and made arrangements for Peyton Randolph, the King's Attorney, to serve as Robert's mentor.<sup>6</sup> In Williamsburg, Munford had the opportunity to attend the General Court proceedings and study at the law library in the Capitol, as well as in Peyton Randolph's personal collection of law material. Munford probably served as a secretary and assistant, while studying under Randolph's supervision.<sup>7</sup> There was a slight interruption in Munford's law studies when the French and Indian War arrived in Virginia. Under William Byrd III, Munford was an officer in the Second Virginia Regiment; he began as a lieutenant and was later appointed captain. He participated in a few skirmishes, but probably did not see much fighting. Robert Munford returned to Williamsburg to complete his studies and was finished by 1760. At this time, Munford decided to move to Lunenburg County, where his father, Robert Munford II, had left him land and slaves, an inheritance which was probably saved by his mother's timely marriage to George Currie.<sup>8</sup>

A year later, Robert Munford married his cousin, Anna Beverley, the daughter of William Beverley, and began building his life as a planter and politician. Munford's

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<sup>6</sup> Armour, *Plays of Robert Munford*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Beeman, "Robert Munford and the Political Culture," 173.

chief crop was tobacco, as was customary at the time in Virginia, but he also grew corn and kept cows, sheep, cattle, and hogs to supplement his family's needs.<sup>9</sup> Land was a precious commodity and Munford began enlarging his holdings, probably using the dowry from his marriage to Anna. He acquired "1500 acres on the branches of Blue Stone Creek...and additional property there from his neighbor Matthew Marrable" and also added to his group of slaves.<sup>10</sup> Within the first few years of marriage, Munford and Anna had two daughters, Elizabeth Beverley and Ursula Anna. He began building a home, named Richland, in 1765. Within these walls, Munford constructed a library which housed his collection of law books, alongside history, poetry, dramatic, and fictional works, some of which he probably brought with him from his studies in England.<sup>11</sup>

Munford continued to practice law, but over time his interests were pulled in different directions. His stepfather, George Currie, secured the post of clerk in Halifax County for Robert. Munford was also a vestryman at St. John's Parish and a member of the Lunenburg County Court, which later separated and became Mecklenburg County. In addition, he was a Justice of the Peace. Upon the formation of this new county, Munford took the lead in governmental affairs. He was first the Senior Magistrate, and then had himself appointed County Lieutenant.<sup>12</sup> Munford III followed in the steps of his father and grandfather when he served in the Mecklenburg County Militia. In five years time,

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<sup>9</sup> Armour, *Plays of Robert Munford*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 23.



Munford had climbed the social ladder and took his place in the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg. From 1765 to 1780, Munford would serve as a Mecklenburg County burgess for twelve of those fifteen years.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Munford spent a great deal of time in Williamsburg during his tenure as a burgess. During his first session, the Stamp Act was being hotly debated. Munford sided with the young (and soon to be famous) Patrick Henry. Henry stood against the Stamp Act and called for resolutions protesting it. This position against the Stamp Act may have caused troubles for Robert Munford. Both his uncle, Richard Bland, and his mentor, Peyton Randolph, spoke against Henry's proposed resolutions. In the end, four of Henry's resolutions were passed, and Munford returned home to insure they would be instituted in Mecklenburg County. The Stamp Act was eventually repealed, and when Munford returned to Williamsburg for his second session there was not nearly as much tension among the burgesses. Munford was appointed to several committees during this session, including the Committee of Propositions and Grievances and another committee which was considering where to move the seat of government to, since Williamsburg had been deemed inconvenient for those who lived in the western parts of the colony.<sup>14</sup>

Financial difficulties, unfortunately, found their way into Munford's life just as they had for his father. In 1767, Munford was sued on two separate occasions and forced to admit liability. He also gave up some of his property in Mecklenburg County in a scheme he hoped would make him a fair amount of cash. Yet despite his personal

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<sup>13</sup> Beeman, "Robert Munford and the Political Culture," 174.

<sup>14</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 26-27.

problems, Munford continued to serve in the House and was probably in Williamsburg for his third session in 1767.

Relations with Great Britain had been relatively calm since the repeal of the Stamp Act and in 1769 the new governor of Virginia, Norborne Berkeley, Baron de Botetourt arrived in Williamsburg. On the day of the Governor's arrival, Munford was appointed to another post serving on the Committee of Privileges and Elections. During this meeting of the House, several important resolutions were passed including "the right of the American colonists to levy their own taxes...the right of the colonists to trial in Virginia rather than overseas, no matter what the charge might be, and...the right of Virginians to petition the Throne directly."<sup>15</sup> Governor Botetourt dissolved the House upon the passing of these resolutions, and Munford attended a meeting at the Raleigh Tavern, alongside other Burgesses, to sign the Articles of the Williamsburg Association, which promised none would buy English merchandise until the tax on tea was rescinded.

Over the next two years, Munford was busy with his committee duties. He was appointed to another position on a commission which investigated the conduct of a burgess from Halifax, Nathaniel Terry. Personal tragedy struck in February of 1771 when Robert's mother, Anna Bland Munford Currie, died.<sup>16</sup> Later that year, John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, arrived to fill the role of Governor, as Botetourt had died the previous October. Robert Munford also continued to have personal problems. He faced property damage, falling tobacco prices, the loss of his position as Halifax County clerk,

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<sup>15</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 30.

and a continuing mountain of debt. Munford attempted to use his social and political ties to alleviate his troubles, but difficulties continued to plague him. Tragedy struck once more when Robert was informed of his only brother's death in October of 1773.<sup>17</sup> Robert seemed to recover from his financial troubles and was again buying land later that year as well as continuing to attend sessions of the House of Burgesses.

Upon hearing about a day of fasting and prayer in support of Boston in May, 1774, Governor Dunmore forced action from the Burgesses when he dissolved the session. The Burgesses once again met at Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg and signed an Association which called for a boycott of tea, cried out against the treatment of Boston, and proposed a Continental Congress.<sup>18</sup> A few months later, Munford was back in Mecklenburg discussing the issue with his constituents who supported the resolutions of the Association. In August 1774, the First Virginia Convention met and voted to send delegates to the Continental Congress which was to be held in Philadelphia. While the delegates agreed to discontinue importing British goods, there was some disagreement over the idea of stopping all exportation to Britain. Munford, who was a plantation owner and relied on his tobacco crop for money, probably sided with those who opposed the resolution. Considering the financial troubles he had already encountered, Munford would be loath to lose profit from an entire crop of tobacco. It seemed Munford was in a tight spot. On the one hand, he believed in the cause and thought Virginians should be treated the same as Englishmen. On the other hand, he was reluctant to enter into open

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<sup>17</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 32.

defiance and provoke Great Britain into a larger battle. While Munford was struggling inwardly to choose a side, the colonists of Virginia split along the line of those who supported a Revolution and those who supported the mother country. The definitive blow occurred in April of 1775 when Governor Dunmore made the fatal error of secretly removing gunpowder from the magazine in Williamsburg. Virginians reacted immediately, as Patrick Henry gathered a company of volunteers to march to Williamsburg, and Governor Dunmore, sensing danger, removed his family to a ship anchored in the harbor.

The next session of the House of Burgesses opened under a cloud of suspicion and uncertainty. Robert Munford served on nine committees in the House's disputes with the Governor.<sup>19</sup> Munford was in charge of drafting resolutions and meeting with other council members. He even had the opportunity of working alongside Thomas Jefferson on the draft of an address justifying the closing of courts and protesting other actions of Parliament. In addition, Munford interacted with Governor Dunmore on several issues, including the whereabouts of the powder the governor had taken and securing a key in order to check the inventory of the magazine. Relations between the Governor and the House quickly broke down as Dunmore refused to meet with the Burgesses and the House grew impatient with Dunmore's inaction concerning the magazine and their other various concerns. The House of Burgesses was finally adjourned and a Revolutionary convention was called in Richmond in July of 1775.

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<sup>19</sup> Armour, *Plays of Robert Munford*, 6.

During the American Revolution, Munford spent his time in a number of capacities. In his role as county lieutenant, he was responsible for enlisting men to the regular army and training and equipping the militia and minutemen. When the military system was changed by the convention of May 1776, Munford had more time to devote to his plantation and home life. While there were occasional threats of war for several years, Munford seemed to be content living the life of a farmer tending to his crops. He was also called to travel the county and administer the oath of loyalty. In 1779, Munford was elected to the House of Delegates. While serving the people, he was once again elected to several committees, including one to establish a land office where he served alongside Thomas Jefferson and George Mason. Other committees included the Committee for Establishing a Board of Trade and another which considered establishing an armory at Westham, west of Richmond.<sup>20</sup> Munford also continued his work with the militia, trying to establish more organization and discipline. During the session of 1779, Munford served on the Ways and Means committee, one of seven members elected to that position. Despite his best efforts to prepare the military, however, Virginians were ill-prepared when the Revolution arrived in their backyard. The session of 1780 saw Munford serving in a diminished capacity. It seems some of the delegates blamed him for the defeats at Camden and Charleston, South Carolina, and for the capture of a number of Virginia Continentals.<sup>21</sup> Munford had been chairman of the committee for military preparedness, which had focused far more on the economy than on gathering

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<sup>20</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 38-39.

<sup>21</sup> Armour, *Plays of Robert Munford*, 6.

enough troops. Thus when the Revolution did reach Virginia, they were not ready to face the opposing troops. Meanwhile, in his personal life, Munford's eldest daughter had been married to Robert Kennon and the wedding had perhaps distracted him from some of his duties in the House of Delegates.

Robert Munford left the House in late 1780 and returned home to Mecklenburg to help with the Southern Virginia militia and fulfill his duties as county lieutenant and quartermaster. When Jefferson called for the troops to prepare for a possible invasion in early 1781, Robert Munford was promoted to Colonel, and he led the men from Mecklenburg, Lunenburg, and Brunswick Counties. He was present and leading the Mecklenburg militia when on March 15, 1781 they clashed with the British at Guildford Court House.<sup>22</sup> Following the engagement, Munford, who had been suffering from gout, requested permission to return home to Richland and was granted it.

Robert Munford did not see any other military action during the Revolution, though he did continue his post as quartermaster gathering supplies and food for the troops. He also gave his second daughter, Ursula, in marriage to Francis Otway Byrd, the son of William Byrd III. Alas, Robert Munford took to the bottle during his final years, just as his father had done, and his health further deteriorated. Due to his poor behavior and to avoid a public scandal, Munford gave up his Mecklenburg seat as a gentleman justice, but that could not save him from several suits concerning his debts to various men. Munford would not be able to reclaim his position as a Virginia gentleman of strong reputation as he died at the end of the year 1783. He was buried at his home,

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<sup>22</sup> Armour, *Plays of Robert Munford*, 7.

Richland, where his widow continued to live until her death in 1803. His son, William, sold the estate in 1809.

During his lifetime, Robert Munford probably had the opportunity to experience theatrical productions in both England and Virginia. His studies at Wakefield may have allowed him to attend nearby productions, as previously mentioned. The southern colonies welcomed traveling companies and even allowed theatres to be built in some of their main cities. Williamsburg was the location of one theatre which was probably built around 1716 between the Governor's Palace and the Capitol.<sup>23</sup> In addition to traveling groups, students from the College of William & Mary often put on performances of classical works. In 1767, while Robert Munford was serving in the House of Delegates, the Virginia Company of Players was performing in Williamsburg, and he may have taken some time away from his duties to see one of their productions.<sup>24</sup> Though there were opportunities, Munford probably did not have a vast amount of theatrical interaction and knowledge. Theatre in the American colonies was one of the arts which developed more slowly. According to Kenneth Silverman, prior to 1765, "no American had ever acted, danced, or sung professionally on the stage" and with the Revolution looming in the near future, Congress resolved in 1774 that "we will in our several stations...discountenance and discourage...exhibitions of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments."<sup>25</sup> Despite these feelings against the theatre,

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<sup>23</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Silverman, *Cultural History of the American Revolution*, 59; Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 32.

Robert Munford still wrote two of the first full-length plays in American history and thought the theatre would be the best medium to convey his thoughts and feelings concerning the political climate of Virginia.

Nearly ten years prior to the birth of Robert Munford, in the year 1728, Mercy Otis was born to James Otis and Mary Allyne Otis, in the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts. Mercy's family history in America dated all the way back to her great-great-grandfather, Edward Dotey, who was a passenger on the *Mayflower*.<sup>26</sup> James Otis, a lawyer and a farmer with no formal education, was nonetheless quite successful. Before Mercy, Otis and Mary Allyne had two sons, James, Jr., and Joseph, and after her there would be ten more children, four of whom survived into adulthood.

Following the tradition of young women in colonial society, Mercy was expected to help around the house, learn how to sew and knit, to do needlework and embroidery, as well as cook, bake, clean clothes, and watch younger siblings when her mother was busy with other chores.<sup>27</sup> Unlike other young girls in colonial America, however, Mercy was allowed to study alongside her brothers. When James, Jr., and Joseph were tutored by the Reverend Jonathan Russell, Mercy accompanied them and read both Shakespeare and Milton, learned to write, and was able to study translations of some of the classical works.<sup>28</sup> It is not known why Warren's father allowed her to be educated in this way. Perhaps it is because she was the eldest and her father had a special fondness for her.

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey H. Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Twayne Publishers & London: Prentice Hall International, 1995), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Rosemarie Zagari, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1995), 9-10.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 13.



Another possibility is that since her father had not been educated, he realized the value of knowledge and wanted as many of his children to have the opportunity he was unable to have. Though her education may not have been as thorough as Robert Munford's in England, Mercy Otis received something few other females would have had the opportunity to experience and this instilled in her a love of history and an interest in writing.

James Otis Jr., also known as Jemmy, played an important role in Mercy's education and her life. In 1739, James, Jr., was admitted to Harvard where he studied Latin and Greek, rhetoric, divinity, and logic, among other subjects. Whenever James, Jr., returned home to Barnstable, he shared his books and knowledge with Mercy. He encouraged his younger sister to expand her knowledge and continue her education on her own. Jemmy was known for his "intellectual prowess," and he served as Mercy's tutor. The brother and sister became "inseparable companions."<sup>29</sup> Though Jemmy was said to be brilliant, he also had an "odd streak" and would sometimes act irrationally without cause or explanation. At these times, it seemed Mercy was the only one who could talk to him and bring him back to his senses.<sup>30</sup> James Otis, Jr. was also important in Mercy's life because it was probably at his graduation from Harvard in 1743 that Mercy first met James Warren, a younger student from Harvard and her future husband.

It was over ten years before Mercy and James Warren married. During this time, James, Jr., returned home and read literature for his Master's degree. Mercy's father,

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<sup>29</sup> Katharine Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution: The Life of Mercy Otis Warren* (Port Washington, NY & London: Kennikat Press, 1972), 31.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 14.

James Otis, Sr. was a selectman in Barnstable and in 1745 he became a delegate to the Massachusetts House of Representatives.<sup>31</sup> Mercy spent most of her time tending to the house, continuing her studies, and probably getting to know James Warren on a more personal level. November 14, 1754 was the day Mercy Otis married James Warren and became Mercy Otis Warren. The couple moved into the Warren family home in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and in 1757 they purchased General John Winslow's old home in town, where they would spend the majority of their life together.

Mercy was lucky in her marriage, for her husband was just as supportive of her education and literary abilities as her father and brother had been during her adolescence. James Warren found outlets for Mercy's works and shared her writings with his close friends, including men like John Adams. James Warren, states Jeffrey Richards, "promoted her [Mercy's] self-esteem as a person of accomplishment...and reassure[d] her of his belief in all the aspects of herself she held dear."<sup>32</sup> When James's father died in 1757, he inherited the estate and all the responsibilities that went along with it. He also held the position of Plymouth County sheriff and was thus very busy and often away from home. The year 1757 was also the year which marked Mercy's first pregnancy. Mercy gave birth to five sons over a period of nine years: James, Winslow, Charles, Henry, and George.

James Otis, Jr. and his father, James Otis, Sr., had both been climbing the political ladder during Mercy's early years of marriage. Jemmy, who married Ruth Cunningham

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<sup>31</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 5.

six months after Mercy was married, established a law practice in Boston, was appointed justice of the peace for Suffolk County, and soon after became a deputy advocate-general of the Vice-Admiralty Court.<sup>33</sup> James Otis, Sr. resigned his seat in the House of Representatives, for he hoped to be appointed to a position on the Governor's Council. However, that appointment never came and Otis later learned a whispering campaign had been perpetrated against him by Thomas Hutchinson. Hutchinson was a main player in the political scene in Massachusetts. He was a known Loyalist and quickly rose through the ranks, stepping on men such as Otis along the way. Thus began a personal feeling of loathing between the Otis and Warren families and Hutchinson. To add insult to injury, in 1760, Hutchinson was appointed successor of the recently deceased Chief-Justice Stephen Sewall, a position which was previously promised to James Otis, Sr. This slight outraged James Otis, Jr. and fed the already burning fire of hatred toward Hutchinson.<sup>34</sup> When merchants asked James, Jr., to represent them in court against the writs of assistance enforcing the Molasses Act of 1733, James stood up in front of Hutchinson and five other justices for over four hours speaking against the writs and claiming "taxation without representation is tyranny."<sup>35</sup> Among those sitting in the audience was John Adams, who was awed with Otis's performance and wrote that "Otis was a flame of fire."<sup>36</sup> The case was not over for months and in the end, the justices ruled against Otis, Jr. However, his reputation had grown and he was elected to the Massachusetts House of

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<sup>33</sup> Zagari, *Woman's Dilemma*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 25; Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 54.

Representatives. Meanwhile, Mercy was living at home, raising her children, and running her household.

When the Stamp Act was passed in March, 1765, there was an uproar in Boston. Jemmy had already spoken out against the behavior of the British government towards its subjects in the colonies and was allied with Samuel Adams, a second cousin to John Adams. During the following months, the colonists in Boston called for a boycott of British goods and in August a mob made their way to Hutchinson's home and ransacked it. Hutchinson barely escaped with his family. Mercy heard of the attack and would later use it in her first play. A few months later, the Stamp Act was repealed and the boycott ended. By this time, Warren had given birth to her fifth child, George, and was still busy at home looking after her five children all under the age of ten. Meanwhile, James Warren was elected to the General Court and was required to spend a great deal of his time in Boston away from Mercy and his family. In October, 1768, British troops arrived in Boston. Jemmy and Sam Adams had continued to speak out against the British invasion and had written a letter which was circulated to the other colonial legislatures calling for a resumption of the boycott and reiterated the idea of taxation without representation.<sup>37</sup> However, Jemmy's erratic behavior had escalated and several articles had been published about him in the Boston newspapers. One was a letter printed in the *Boston Gazette* in 1769, which accused Jemmy of "obstructing 'the rights of the crown and [being] disaffected to his Majesty.'"<sup>38</sup> Not one to stand by and let others sully his

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<sup>37</sup> Zagarri, *Woman's Dilemma*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 39.

name, James Otis, Jr. sought retribution. He published his own response in the *Boston Gazette* and claimed the customs commissioner, John Robinson, should answer for the accusations made in the printed letter. On September 5, 1769, Jemmy entered the British Coffee House to confront his enemy; the lights went out and Jemmy was “assailed by a band of Robinson’s adherents, [and] was seriously wounded in the head.”<sup>39</sup> Mercy was extremely concerned when she heard of the attack on her favorite brother. The effect the attack had on Jemmy was not immediately realized, but over time it was clear he was not mentally stable and would no longer be able to participate in American politics. The young man, whom Mercy had deemed “The Patriot” and who had been the leader of the cause and instrumental in beginning the movement against Great Britain, would miss out on the Revolution and retired to the countryside in an effort to recuperate.<sup>40</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren watched her brother’s rise and fall, and when he could no longer carry the torch, Mercy took up his cause in the best way she knew how by writing anonymous plays, pamphlets, and poems, and by supporting her husband and other men as they fought for the American cause. The fireside in Mercy’s Plymouth home was a gathering place for men such as Samuel and John Adams, who visited to discuss political affairs with James Warren and Mercy. Through the surviving letters between Mercy and James Warren and Mercy and John Adams, it is clear these men asked for and respected Mercy’s opinions and advice.

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<sup>39</sup> Alice Brown, *Women of Colonial and Revolutionary Times: Mercy Warren* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896), 46.

<sup>40</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 10.

Meanwhile, Thomas Hutchinson continued to fall in the public's opinion even though he had been appointed governor in 1771. In December 1773, the residents of Boston displayed their displeasure by throwing tons of tea into the harbor in the now infamous Boston Tea Party. Mercy, by the request of John Adams, wrote a poem pertaining to this event.<sup>41</sup> James Warren during the pre-Revolutionary years served as chairman of the Plymouth County Convention and was subsequently elected to the Massachusetts' Provincial Congress. These duties continued to keep him away from Mercy and his boys.

During this time and for most of her life, Mercy wrote to several female friends, including Abigail Adams, Hannah Winthrop and Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay.<sup>42</sup> These women offered Mercy support when her husband was away and an outlet for her thoughts and feelings as she struggled to keep her household running and raise her five sons. On trips to visit her husband, Mercy would stop at Braintree to visit with Abigail Adams. The women probably discussed their feelings of loneliness and worried about the possibility of war reaching their doorsteps. Rumors spread throughout Massachusetts that British soldiers behaved as savages and showed little or no respect for women left at home with their children. Mercy also discussed plays and history with Adams and Macaulay. In an exchange of letters between Abigail and Mercy, the women talked about Molière, a French playwright, and the use of satire in his plays.<sup>43</sup> Catharine Macaulay

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<sup>41</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Zagari, *Woman's Dilemma*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 96.

was a noted female writer in England for her work on the Stuart kings and she and Mercy exchanged opinions on the role of women in society and political history. Macaulay even visited Warren when she came to America after the war.<sup>44</sup> These women were also called upon to live as economically as possible while their men were off fighting. They spun their own wool and made their own clothes. They had to sacrifice just as the men on the battlefield did.

At times, Mercy fell ill or became so anxious she found it hard to function; “Mercy’s anxieties knew no bounds, spilling over into her letters” which caused her husband, sons, and friends to worry about her.<sup>45</sup> Mercy’s anxious feelings and nervous spells concerned James Warren, especially when he was away from her for long stretches of time. Though James had taken over as president of the Provincial Congress when Joseph Warren fell at the Battle of Bunker Hill and later assumed the role of paymaster general for the army and was a member of the Navy Board, he turned down a number of posts, including a seat as delegate to the Continental Congress, a position as Major General of the Rhode Island regiments, and a nomination to the Superior Court because Mercy did not want him to travel further from her nor did she want him fighting. She relied on James for strength, love, and support and she could not imagine a life without him. If he had chosen to go she would have “march[ed with him]...and take[n her]

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<sup>44</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 10, 44-45.

<sup>45</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 64.

lodgment in the neighborhood of the camp.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, James Warren stayed as close to Mercy as he could while still fulfilling a role in the Revolutionary efforts.

Not everyone from the Warren family escaped the Revolution unscathed, however. Mercy’s eldest son, James, Jr., was serving aboard the ship *Alliance* when it engaged in battle with two British sloops of war in 1781. James, Jr., had a shattered right knee and would never fully recover.<sup>47</sup> He returned home to recuperate, then moved to a nearby town to teach. James, Jr., returned home later in life, looked after his mother, and helped her in her efforts to write as her eyesight deteriorated with age. Charles and Henry studied at Harvard, while George went to Rhode Island to continue his education. Over the years, most of Mercy’s children moved away from her. Charles contracted tuberculosis while at Harvard and returned home to recuperate. He never overcame the illness which attacked his body. Despite travels to Haiti, where physicians hoped the weather would improve his condition, Charles died in San Lucar, Spain in 1785 on his way to see his brother, Winslow, in Lisbon. George moved to Maine where he worked the land and served as a politician. Mercy’s youngest son, however, also became sick and died on the frontier without any of his family present in 1800. Winslow, Mercy’s favorite son, never achieved the success his mother had hoped for him. Winslow traveled between Boston, Philadelphia, London, and Lisbon. He attempted several business ventures and found himself deep in debt. He was jailed for a time in New Haven before escaping to Massachusetts. In order to fulfill his debts, Winslow enlisted in the army in

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<sup>46</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Zagari, *Woman’s Dilemma*, 108-109.



1791 and marched to the frontier under General Arthur Saint Clair. Winslow was killed when St. Clair's forces were annihilated at the Wabash River.<sup>48</sup> Henry Warren was the only son who married and raised a family. Tragedy had struck Mercy in 1783, as well, when her brother, Jemmy, the man who was so important to the cause, was killed by a lightning bolt.

Though the American Revolution was over, Mercy and James continued to champion the Republican cause. Neither was pleased with the Constitution drawn up by the convention that gathered in Philadelphia in 1787. They felt America was too close to creating a monarchy and nobility in the newly-formed United States and thus found themselves alienated from some of their closest friends. However, Mercy did not back down from her opinions. She feared, according to Richards, "America would be defeated internally before it lost on the battlefield and [had a] sincere belief in her own role as guardian of the nation's virtue."<sup>49</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren's later years following the Revolution were filled by her husband, her sons, and her greatest work, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*. Her eyesight had deteriorated since her younger years of writing letters, poems, and plays, so James, Jr., moved home and helped her write her *History*. He also continued to keep her correspondence for her. The work was printed between 1805 and 1806 in three volumes. James Warren, Mercy's greatest supporter and love, died in 1808. Mercy lived another six years, during which time she and John

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<sup>48</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, xvi.

<sup>49</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 61.

Adams argued over her representation of Adams in her *History*. However, before Mercy's passing, she was reconciled with John Adams and continued to write to Abigail. A week before her death, Mercy was still entertaining guests at her fireside, but that night she grew violently ill.<sup>50</sup> Mercy Otis Warren died on October 19, 1814.

Theatre in New England was practically non-existent during Mercy Otis Warren's lifetime. The Puritan beliefs of the colonists "saw plays as scandalous and immoral" and so public performances were prohibited.<sup>51</sup> Though students at the College of William & Mary in Virginia were allowed to perform, students at Harvard were prohibited from performing plays by the College's code.<sup>52</sup> Mercy probably never saw a play performed. Her education of theatre came through reading plays, including Shakespeare and Molière. Thus, theatre was more of a literary genre rather than a theatrical art for her. She saw plays as vehicles which could be used to convey political messages and images to the masses of people. Plays were also works to be read, rather than seen, and thus Warren did not have to worry about the normal theatrical rules which might inhibit other playwrights.

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<sup>50</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 267.

<sup>51</sup> Zagarri, *Woman's Dilemma*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 85.

## CHAPTER TWO THE PLAYS

The plays Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren wrote during the 1770s offer a rare glimpse into the life of politics. Robert Munford wrote from his own experience serving in the House. His plays focus on the political atmosphere in Virginia. *The Candidates* is set during an election and in *The Patriots*, Munford addresses the titles of Tory and Patriot and what truly defines someone loyal to the Revolutionary cause. Neither of his plays was published during his lifetime. In 1798, his son, William Munford, had his father's works printed in a volume titled *A Collection of Plays and Poems, by the late Colonel Robert Munford, of Mecklenburg, in the State of Virginia*.

The first play in the collection, *The Candidates*, was probably written in late 1770 or early 1771, after Governor Botetourt's death. William Munford added a prologue to this work, to be delivered "By a Friend;" it is a brief speech, written in rhyming couplets, which introduces the audience to the basic plot of the play:

In merry scenes his biting tale unfold,  
And high to Folly's eye the mirror hold:  
Here eager candidates shall call for votes,  
And bawling voters louder stretch their throats;  
Here you may view, in groups diverting, join'd  
The poor and wealthy rabble of mankind;  
All who deserve the lash, the lash will find.<sup>1</sup>

The main eager candidate, which William alludes to, is a character by the name of Mr. Wou'dbe. Wou'dbe and Mr. Worthy have been colleagues, running and serving together in the House of Burgesses. However, Worthy has decided not to run in this election and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Munford, *A Collection of Plays and Poems by the Late Col. Robert Munford, of Mecklenburg County, in the State of Virginia; Now First Published Together* (Petersburg, VA: William Prentiss, 1798), xi. Early American Imprints no. 34158.

Wou'dbe is left in a difficult position. He no longer has the support and name-power of his older and more distinguished colleague, and there are three other men running against him to fill the two open seats. These other men are named Sir John Toddy, Mr. Strutabout, and Mr. Smallhopes. All three have objectionable qualities about them which are revealed throughout the action of the play. Still, despite Wou'dbe's previous service and the fact that he is clearly a more qualified and respectable man, Wou'dbe is concerned that he may lose the election and men of lesser character will be elected.

During the course of the play, Toddy, Strutabout, and Smallhopes attempt to win voters to their side by starting whispering campaigns, pretending to know their voters personally when really they have no clue who these freeholders are, supplying alcohol to various supporters, and by making promises they may not be able to keep. For example, Guzzle, a drunk who is working for Sir John Toddy, asks Mr. Wou'dbe if he would lower the price of rum. When Mr. Wou'dbe replies he could not, Guzzle cries "Huzza for Sir John! he has promised to do it, huzza for Sir John!"<sup>2</sup> Guzzle serves an additional purpose in the play, besides being Sir John Toddy's henchman. He and his wife, Mrs. Guzzle, offer comic relief in several scenes as they are often found drunk and playing tricks on one another. There are also scenes which feature the freeholders discussing the possible candidates and changing their minds regarding their votes depending on whose promises and reputation they support at the moment. The action resolves itself when Wou'dbe refuses to enter into a dishonorable alliance with one of his competitors and thus fears his hopes of serving another term in the House of Burgesses are over. Worthy, hearing of

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<sup>2</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 31.

Wou'dbe's actions and upset by the tactics of the other candidates, decides to re-enter the election and run for his seat, "My sole motive in declaring myself was to serve you [Wou'dbe], and if I am the means of your gaining your election with honour, I shall be satisfied."<sup>3</sup> In the end, Worthy and Wou'dbe are re-elected to the House and Munford closes the play with two rhyming couplets, stating:

Henceforth, let those who pray for wholesome laws,  
And all well-wishers to their country's cause,  
Like us refuse a coxcomb—choose a man—  
Then let our senate blunder if it can.<sup>4</sup>

Munford ends his first work with advice to his readers: those who wish for a strong and wise group of representatives should choose the men best suited for the job, rather than those who would manipulate the system and make false promises to their freeholders that they cannot keep. In his second play, Munford continues to advise the people on how to judge other men, but in this case he turns to the great debate during the Revolution: how do you tell a true patriot from a pretender?

*The Patriots* is a five-act comedy with a well-developed story and multiple plots interweaving throughout the action. It is a more polished and complete work than *The Candidates*. However, its main focus is not electioneering politics, but rather the issue of loyalty during the Revolution. Robert Munford may have started working on this play as early as May of 1777; however, historians believe it is more likely he completed the work sometime in 1779, after his re-election to the House of Delegates.<sup>5</sup> The main love story

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<sup>3</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 73.

focuses on Trueman, a man accused of Toryism, who is in love with Mira. Brazen, Mira's father, had originally approved of Trueman as a suitor, but when Trueman's loyalty is questioned, Brazen changes his mind. He declares he does not want Mira to marry Trueman and states "I don't care who you take, so he's no tory; d—m all tory's, say I."<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, a captain by the name of Flash tries to court Mira, but she will have none of it.

Meanwell, a friend of Trueman's, is also accused of Toryism. Pickle, Meanwell's servant, and his attempts to trick the innocent Melinda into a physical relationship by staging a false marriage, constitute the first romantic subplot. Pickle woos Melinda by lying to her about his name and station in life; he claims to be his master, Mr. Meanwell. When Melinda questions his motives, Pickle swears "upon my soul, my intentions are honourable."<sup>7</sup> Then Pickle promises to meet Melinda the next day, at which time Pickle tells Melinda to meet him that evening for the marriage. At the fake marriage, Pickle has Meanwell's butler pose as a minister. Luckily, Meanwell is notified of the plot and shows up in time to stop the wedding. The entire plot is revealed to Melinda and her parents and the audience discovers that Pickle is really an aristocrat of an honorable heritage named George Worthy. When he reveals this to Meanwell, Melinda, and Melinda's parents, Pickle decides he will still marry Melinda. Pickle recaps his entire relationship with Melinda stating:

I confess, with shame, that when I first saw this beauteous maid, I was tempted to entertain dishonourable designs upon her, but I found her pure as spotless snows, and firm as adamant against all improper proposals,

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<sup>6</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Munford, *Collections of Plays and Poems*, 67.

tho' soft as wax to the impressions of tenderness. I have always wished to find a maiden who could love me for myself alone; in this artless fair I have found one who when my base attempt to impose upon her by a pretended marriage, was discover'd, mov'd my affection, forgave it all, and deign'd to receive the repentant sinner, tho' seemingly poor and humble. To her then, I bow, and she, if you object not, shall be the partner of my future life.<sup>8</sup>

Another surprise was in store, however, when it is revealed that Melinda is not the true daughter of her parents, John and Margaret Heartfree. Her biological mother, Meanwell's sister, married an unkind man and before her death, she left the baby girl in the care of John and asked him to take Melinda to her brother when the time was right. Meanwell embraces his niece and is happy to bless her marriage to Worthy with a dowry to match her new station in life.

Meanwhile, there is another subplot between Isabella, an ardent patriot, and Colonel Strut. Isabella is a friend of Mira's, and she cannot believe that Mira would want to marry someone accused of being a Tory, exclaiming, "I hate tories so abominably that I cannot, for my soul, think of them with patience: as long, madam, as you persist in your fondness for such animals, I shall refrain my visits, I assure you."<sup>9</sup> Strut knows Isabella will not look at any man who has not proven himself a true Patriot, so he has had himself elected as a delegate and has gained the rank of colonel in the militia. However, these things are not enough for Isabella and she forces Colonel Strut into a duel with Captain Flash. Strut refuses to engage with Flash and in the end, Isabella calls Colonel Strut "a

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<sup>8</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 124-125.

<sup>9</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 83.

paltry coward” and tells him that she will no longer be acquainted with him.<sup>10</sup> Thus ends the relationship between Isabella and Strut.

While the various love plots are developing and intertwining, additional gentlemen characters who are members of a committee are attempting to deal with the issue of the accused Tories. Before Meanwell and Trueman are called in front of these men, a group of three Scotsmen are accused of disloyalty for “every Scotchman being an enemy...they come under the ordinance which directs an oath to be tendered to all those against whom there is just cause to suspect they are enemies.”<sup>11</sup> One man, McFlint, claims he is a Scotsman, but was not born in that country and thus is innocent. The other two, McGripe and McSqueeze, refuse to take the oath and are found guilty. At this moment, Mr. Tackabout, a man who claims to be a Whig, enters the scene and says the case against Meanwell and Trueman is not yet complete and so their trial should be postponed. The case against Meanwell and Trueman is finally resolved when they meet Tackabout in the Court-house yard and he claims he no longer has a case against the two gentlemen. The paper upon which Tackabout had written the two men’s names seems to have been lost, and no other man can show proof of Toryism. Then Tackabout admits “I am a tory, sir, ‘pon honour, sir, I am” and Trueman and Meanwell are questioned to the satisfaction of the committee, who dismiss the charges against those two men and kick Mr. Tackabout out of the meeting.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the end, Brazen no longer has a reason to

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<sup>10</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 112.

<sup>11</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 103.



object to the union between his daughter, Mira, and Trueman. As Brazen proclaims, “Poh! I know him well enough. I have eyed him many a time, damn’d sharp too, you may depend. However, as he is no tory, I have nothing more to say. Here’s my hand.”<sup>13</sup> The play ends with Mira, Trueman, Meanwell, George Worthy, and Melinda happily together as Brazen invites them to join him in the next room.

The various plots in *The Patriots* are interwoven in such a manner as to recall the works of William Shakespeare. The characters are not only involved in their own story, but are connected to other characters in subplots and romances. The addition of the romantic plots bolsters the question of loyalty and that which marks someone a tory or patriot; as Rodney Baine claims, “with their lyrical, farcical, and comic elements admixed, the romantic plots serve to give a variety of suspense, romance, and humor to the play.”<sup>14</sup> Though Robert Munford only completed two full-length plays during his lifetime, they have earned a place in the repertoire of Revolutionary-era drama.

Mercy Otis Warren, on the other hand, wrote five plays (three of which were completed during the Revolutionary period) and yet not one was as polished or as well executed as those of Robert Munford. Mercy Otis Warren wrote *The Adulateur* in either late 1771 or early 1772. It was originally published in two installments in the *Massachusetts Spy* in March and April 1772. *The Adulateur* is a “satirical play written in blank verse” set in an imaginary kingdom known as Servia.<sup>15</sup> The action turns on the

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<sup>13</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 130-131.

<sup>14</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 82.

<sup>15</sup> Zagarri, *Woman’s Dilemma*, 56.

ever-plotting governor Rapatio and the group of Patriot men, led by Brutus, who oppose the governor and his henchmen. Rapatio is extremely ambitious and will stop at nothing to achieve his goals and ultimate power:

I'll trample down the choicest of their rights,  
And make them curse the hour that gave me birth;  
That hung me up a meteor in the sky,  
Which from its tail, shook pestilence and ruin.<sup>16</sup>

Rapatio's house had been attacked by the Patriots and he is seeking revenge. The majority of governmental positions are filled with "beings wholly at my [Rapatio's] service" and thus Rapatio is able to abuse the rights of the citizens without fear of the law.<sup>17</sup> He plans to attack the Patriots and "throw the state / In dire confusion, nay I'll hurl it down, / And bury all things in common ruin."<sup>18</sup> He even orders the killing of innocent citizens. Meanwhile, Brutus along with his compatriots Cassius, Portius, Junius, and Hortensius, plans to stand against Rapatio and his sycophantic supporters.

Brutus is the brave leader, modeled after Mercy's older brother Jemmy, who holds high the ideals of equality and independence. He is a calmer head among the other Patriots who wish to fight fire with fire. Brutus reminds his fellow men that what they do will be scrutinized by the common people, as well as Rapatio and his law-making friends. They must be careful how they react to Rapatio's actions and "this demands / A *cool, sedate* and yet *determin'd* spirit."<sup>19</sup> However, when innocent citizens are slain by

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<sup>16</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Adulateur A Tragedy as it is now acted in Upper Servia*, (Boston: n.p., 1773), 9. Early American Imprints no. 13063.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 12.

Rapatio's soldiers, Brutus and his Patriots are ready to fight and they send a message to Rapatio telling him to prepare for bloodshed unless he rids the streets of his men.

Rapatio meets with the Patriots and promises to remove the soldiers. While the Patriots celebrate what they believe to be a victory, Rapatio reveals that the battle has only just begun. He plans to frame the Patriots and claim they provoked the soldiers to attack. Brutus hears the news and is distraught over the state of his country and his countrymen. He cannot understand why the people continue to follow Rapatio and are not able to see his true colors. Brutus fears for the future and wishes others would come to his side and take up the banner of righteousness:

Oh! my poor country! when I see thee wounded,  
Bleeding to death – it pains me to the soul  
Long have I wept in secret—nay, could weep  
'Till tears were chang'd to blood—When will it be,  
When high-soul'd honor beats within our bosoms,  
And calls to action—when thy sons, like heroes,  
Shall dare assert their rights, and with their swords,  
Like men, like freemen, force a way to conquest  
Or on thy ruins gloriously expire.<sup>20</sup>

There is no definitive end to *The Adulateur*. The reader and audience are left wondering what the fate of Rapatio and the Patriots will be and who will emerge triumphant from the conflict. However, Mercy Otis Warren does conclude her first work with a message of hope and a belief that the country of Servia will emerge victorious from the clutches of Rapatio and his men. Brutus delivers the closing lines:

And may these monsters find their glories fade,  
Crushed in the ruins they themselves had made,  
While thou my country, shall again revive,

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<sup>20</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 31.

Shake off misfortune, and thro' ages live.  
See thro' the waste a ray of virtue gleame,  
Dispell the shades and brighten all the scene.<sup>21</sup>

Mercy Otis Warren ends *The Adulateur* with a message to the people of Massachusetts on the verge of revolution. Though the play is not complete and may be categorized as more of a political pamphlet than a dramatic work, it does contain a powerful theme which her fellow colonists responded to positively. Following the original publication in the *Massachusetts Spy*, several other scenes emerged which lengthened and expanded Warren's work. Warren responded to these scenes in a memorandum to the Massachusetts Historical Society which reads "Before the author thought proper to present another scene to the public, it was taken up and interlaced with productions of an unknown hand. The plagiary swells *The Adulateur* to a considerable pamphlet."<sup>22</sup> However, when Warren anonymously published the pamphlet in 1773, she included those scenes by another hand. Perhaps she felt the additional pieces supported her plot and offered additional insights into her villainous Rapatio and laudable Brutus.

Mercy Otis Warren's next work, *The Defeat*, was first printed in the *Boston Gazette* in May and July of 1773.<sup>23</sup> In this unfinished play, Rapatio returns as the villain who is still trying to keep power out of the hands of the people and in the control of himself and his minions. In the opening scene, Rapatio reveals his plot to win over those who would oppose him:

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<sup>21</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Edmund M. Hayes, "Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat," *New England Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Sept. 1976): 440-458, 440.

A feather bribes all, but the virtuous few;  
I'll tinkle empty titles in their ears,  
And browse the rattle for the crest of fools,  
Lull the supine in thoughtless indolence,  
And sink the claim of freedom, with a nod.<sup>24</sup>

In the following scene, Proteus, a supporter and follower of Rapatio, quarrels with Honestus and Hortensius, both ardent Patriots, over a paragraph which has been published disclaiming the “authority by which the People of Servia are oppress’d.”<sup>25</sup> Honestus tells Proteus that the people are no longer deceived by Rapatio’s empty promises and wily ways. In the first installment printed in May, Warren does something which exhibits that the play was not a finished product and was probably meant only to be read and not performed as an entire piece. The next few scenes and the opening of the third act are described in stage notes, which tell of “several Tragical Scenes...and a battle” in which Rapatio and his men are defeated and “after which Freedom and Happiness are restored to the Inhabitants of Servia by the prudent and spirited Conduct of Honestus, Hortensius, Cassius, Rusticus and others.”<sup>26</sup> The action resumes as Rapatio stands alone bemoaning his downfall and unlucky fate:

Oh the reverse, the sad reverse of fortune!  
Strip of my plumes, my plunder and my peace.  
Peace did I say! that gentle heavenly guest,  
Has not resided in my canker’d breast,  
E’er since my native Land, I basely Sold,  
For flattering Titles, and more sordid Gold.  
The dreadful curses of the Slaughter’d Dead,

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<sup>24</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: Facsimile Reproductions Compiled and with an Introduction by Benjamin Franklin V* (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1980), *The Defeat*, Act I, scene i, n.p.

<sup>25</sup> Warren, *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat*, Act I, scene ii, n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Warren, *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat*, Act III, scene I, n.p.

Full vengeance pour on my devoted Head.<sup>27</sup>

Rapatio's soliloquy ends the original scenes printed in May of 1773. An additional scene was printed in July which finds Rapatio and one of his men, Limpit, deep in discussion. Letters and papers with incriminating evidence written in Rapatio's hand have been discovered by the Patriots and distributed to the people. Rapatio cannot believe his plot has been uncovered and fears:

Is the Game up? Can I deceive no more?  
Could not my Art, my Sophistry and Guile,  
All my precaution to conceal my Plan  
Prevent the quick ey'd Patriot's Search?<sup>28</sup>

Rapatio and Limpit have tried to persuade some of the Patriots to their side and have also engaged a writer to spin the story in a better light. Rapatio also criticizes some of the members of the Patriot cause, including Hortensius, who continues to speak out against the Governor despite Rapatio's efforts to silence him. Rapatio and Limpit come to the conclusion that they hope their writer will save the day, otherwise their days of plotting and authority may be over.

If the reader had read the May installment, he would know that Rapatio's fate led him to defeat on the battlefield. Despite this additional scene between Rapatio and Limpit, the work is still not a complete play. In Warren's papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society, there is an epilogue which she wrote for *The Defeat* which was to be "Spoken by the Author."<sup>29</sup> The epilogue reveals that Warren was reluctant to speak

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<sup>27</sup> Warren, *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat*, Act IV, final scene, n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Warren, *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat*, Act III, scene ii, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> Hayes, "Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat," 445, 457.

about her fellow man in such a poor light, but she felt it was important to illustrate the true character of those in power, especially since she felt her country was in danger, “A sinking nation and tott’ring state, / Distress’d and ruin’d by the insidious arts.”<sup>30</sup> Though the epilogue was never published, it still justified Warren’s actions in her mind. The fact that Mercy Otis Warren never returned to *The Defeat* to finish it suggests her purpose for writing the play was fulfilled by printing the two installments she had completed and it was not important to her to revisit the piece and offer a polished and finished dramatic work.

Warren’s third work written during the Revolutionary period, called *The Group*, was printed in pamphlet form on April 3, 1775 with the author listed as anonymous.<sup>31</sup> Rapatio is not present as an actor in this work, but he is mentioned by the other characters for he has sent letters from abroad. *The Group* is simply that, a group of Tory men who are running the government and discuss the state of affairs in their personal lives and in the political arena. There is not much action, but rather it is a meeting of the minds whom Warren perceives to be dangerous, cunning, and manipulative. The work opens with two characters, Crusty and Simple, expressing regret for some of their actions and for following Rapatio, whom they believed at first was “so wise, so just, so good” and now believe led them astray.<sup>32</sup> Hazlerod, on the other hand, supports the Tory cause

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<sup>30</sup> Hayes, “Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat,” 457.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group, a Farce: as Lately Acted, and to be Re-Acted, to the Wonder of All Superior Intelligences; Nigh Head Quarters at Amboyne. In Two Acts* (New York: John Anderson at Beekman’s-Slip, 1775), 3. Early American Imprints no. 14612.

more than ever and reprimands his fellow men for showing weakness and questioning their loyalty. Hateall concurs with Hazlerod and cries:

Curse on their coward fears, and dastard souls,  
Their lost compunctions and relenting qualms,  
Compassion ne'er shall seize my stedfast breast  
Though blood and carnage spread thro' all the land.<sup>33</sup>

Simple fears the Patriots who are standing together and showing a united front, just as Brutus had done before, while Hector Mushroom wonders if the other towns will stand and support the Tory cause. Hateall, the Brigadier, and Hazlerod, the Lord Chief Justice, reassure their wavering companions and show they are ready for whatever battles lay ahead.

The second act opens with a group of men, including Monsieur de Francois, Beau Trumps, Simple, Hateall, and Hazlerod engaged in a conversation of further doubts and questions concerning the future actions the Loyalists will take. Beau Trumps admits that he originally sided with the Patriots, but when he realized there was “nought to be gain’d, but save solid peace of mind, / No pensions, place or title there I found” he switched sides and has since been working with the Tory group.<sup>34</sup> In the next scene, Collateralis and Dick the Publican discuss how the Loyalist troops are sitting idly by and have not engaged in any action, while the Patriots are “more resolv’d than ever, / They’re firm, united, bold, undaunted, brave” and ready and willing to fight for their cause and their beliefs.<sup>35</sup> The final scene centers on the mindset of Sylla, the general of the Loyalist

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<sup>33</sup> Warren, *Group*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Warren, *Group*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Warren, *Group*, 11.



troops, and his vacillating frame of mind. There are sycophantic supporters constantly asking him for protection and other favors. Meanwhile, Brigadier Hateall is calling for action, immediate and decisive military movement. Sylla is not sure battle is what is best for Great Britain for as he states:

I only wish to serve my Sov'reign well,  
And bring new glory to my master's crown,  
Which can't be done by spreading ruin round  
This loyal country -----  
----- Wro't up to madness by oppression's hand.<sup>36</sup>

Sylla leaves the scene, still unsure of the next step he will take. Hazlerod vows he will “stir up his [Sylla's] soul, / To dire revenge and bloody resolutions” and quickly follows the general offstage.<sup>37</sup> The two remaining men onstage, Meagre and Secretary Dupe, are on opposite sides regarding how they think the conflict will resolve. Dupe believes the Patriots will win the day because they are so committed to the cause and the Loyalists are refusing to fight:

No all is o'er unless the sword decides,  
Which cuts down Kings, and kingdoms oft divides.  
By that appeal, I think we can't prevail,  
Their valour's great, and justice holds the scale.  
They fight for freedom...  
They fight in virtue's ever sacred cause,  
While we tread on divine and human laws.  
Glory and victory, and lasting fame,  
Will crown their arms and bless each Hero's name!<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Warren, *Group*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Warren, *Group*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Warren, *Group*, 21.

However, Meagre is not swayed and he still believes Sylla and his troops will claim victory and the estates of the Patriots will pay for the expense of the war. The remaining men exit the stage and a Lady is revealed sitting behind the curtain. She delivers the epilogue to *The Group* in which Warren warns of the oncoming violence which will overtake the countryside and will leave many men dead on the fields under the banner “Virtue’s sons lie here!”<sup>39</sup> Thus ends the last play Warren wrote during the Revolution.

Warren did write at least two other plays during her lifetime: *The Ladies of Castile* (1784) and *The Sack of Rome* (1785). Other works, including *The Blockheads* and *The Motley Assembly*, have been attributed to Mercy Otis Warren, but there continues to be controversy among historians whether these works are indeed hers. They were published anonymously, and though they contain similar themes and characters to Warren’s work, *The Blockheads* contains, according to Stuart, “language [which] was too bold for her [Mercy’s] hand” and she never claimed authorship to nor mentioned either in her letters.<sup>40</sup> However, it is certain that Mercy Otis Warren wrote *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* and all were well received by the public.

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<sup>39</sup> Warren, *Group*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 104.

### CHAPTER THREE DIFFERENCES & SIGNIFICANCE

Categorizing *The Candidates*, *The Patriots*, *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* under a Revolutionary Drama heading may seem to make sense at first glance. After all, these five works were all written between 1770 and 1780, they deal with a political theme, and they have stood the test of time and survived to give present-day historians a unique perspective on the Revolutionary era. However, there are evident differences among the plays, as well as between the authors themselves, which give credence to the argument that these plays should be given individual consideration. The differences stem from gender, geography, and, most significantly, from the unique goals of Munford and Warren.

The first obvious difference between the playwrights is their gender. Robert Munford, as a male in Virginia, had opportunities both in politics and society that Mercy Otis Warren, as a female, was never given. Both of Munford's plays are most likely based upon his personal experience serving in the House of Burgesses and participating in local elections. He had an insider's view of what really happened among the delegates and his knowledge of the election process was probably greater than that of Warren. Munford was also not inhibited by his gender. In a society ruled by men, Munford's actions were not nearly as scrutinized or questioned as those of a woman, especially in the public sphere. He was able to give his opinions freely and share his political views; though other men may not have agreed with his feelings, they could not charge it was unsuitable for him to participate in such discussions.

Mercy Otis Warren, on the other hand, worried about how a female playwright would be perceived and accepted in society. Warren believed women should be educated and felt the female had just as much intellectual capacity as the male. But as Rosemarie Zagari points out, Warren “thought the two possessed inherently different natures...men were brave, warlike...women were, in her view, delicate, weak, timid, and passive.”<sup>1</sup> She was unsure that satirical work was fitting for a woman’s character and she worried that society would reject her as being too masculine and for attempting to participate in affairs which were inappropriate for her. Warren questioned whether plays and pamphlets written in satirical fashion were a “suitable vehicle for a member of the gentler sex.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Warren initially published her works anonymously. Warren was also more fragile, and she did not accept criticism well. She feared disapproval from her husband and his close friends, especially John Adams. Perhaps that is why she did not complete *The Defeat*. Though she wrote several scenes in response to public events and personal feelings, she may not have felt it appropriate, or necessary, to finish the work, especially since it was an improper pursuit for a woman in her position. In addition, pamphlets were often “a response to...overt public events [or] chain-reacting personal polemics...in which may be found heated personifications of the larger conflict.”<sup>3</sup> Warren clearly engaged with several prominent politicians in her works and perhaps she

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<sup>1</sup> Zagari, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution 1750-1776*, Volume I (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965), 5.

felt her goal of persecuting these men was achieved by simply writing a few key scenes rather than a complete play.

Robert Munford never published his work while he was alive, so he never feared the opinions of his fellow gentlemen and society. Even if he had published his plays, though, the fact that he was a male would have saved him from any accusations that playwriting was ill-suited for gentlemen. It actually might have gained him prestige among his fellow burgesses if they had read the work and enjoyed the material.

However, as far as is known, Munford never planned or tried to publish his works.

Munford and Warren hailed from two different regions of colonial America, which invariably affected their experiences, opinions, and dramatic works. Munford had the opportunity to attend plays and experience firsthand how dramatic works were performed onstage. His plays are written in the traditional manner; *The Candidates* has three acts and *The Patriots* has five acts. The backbone of Munford's plays centered on a few main characters and then secondary characters and various sub-plots filled out the action. Baine asserts that Munford probably modeled his plays on the "comedies and farces he had seen performed at Williamsburg, Petersburg, and Hobb's Hole."<sup>4</sup> In addition, Munford also had the chance to see English dramas and comedies while he was studying abroad. He probably learned some of his plot techniques from those pieces. Virginia politics and society were also quite different from those in New England. Gentlemen were known to engage in gambling, horse racing, and drinking, while the Puritan ancestry of colonies like Massachusetts placed strict limitations on such activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 57.

Thus, *The Candidates* does not present an accurate representation of elections and politics in all colonies. Rather, it specifically illustrates the climate in Virginia.

Mercy Otis Warren's plays are also geared toward her native colony, Massachusetts. The events depicted in her works, such as the mob attacking Hutchinson's home or the Boston Massacre, all occurred in the area she inhabited. Warren was inspired by her personal experiences as well and wrote from what she encountered in her life. She never had the opportunity to see plays onstage like Munford did and her lack of experience is reflected in her works. Warren's plays are less structured, incomplete in places, and would be difficult to produce onstage. There are times when instead of having characters act out events, she describes them in stage directions: "A battle ensues...after which Freedom and Happiness are restored to the Inhabitants of Servia."<sup>5</sup> It would be difficult for an audience to comprehend this restoration of peace without a narrator or some other character guiding them through the story. Warren includes no such character, nor any other device to assist the audience. She did not intend for these early plays to be acted onstage. Legally, there would have been no playhouse or acting troupe in New England that could have produced her works.

The plays of Munford and Warren were not written merely on a whim or because these authors had a great deal of time on their hands and sought a way to spend it. Munford and Warren had specific agendas when they took up their pens and wrote these five works. Robert Munford spent the majority of his life serving as a representative for his neighbors. He witnessed the inner workings of the political world in Virginia, and in

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<sup>5</sup> Warren, *Plays and Poems of Mercy Otis Warren: The Defeat*, Act III, scene I, n.p.

his plays, *The Candidates* and *The Patriots*, Munford shared his commentary on the state of affairs before and during the Revolution. In *The Candidates*, Munford was more concerned with the relationship between voters and their representatives and how those men were elected to office; he sought, Baine argues, to explain “the responsibility of the voter to elect the best qualified candidate and the obligation of the able, qualified gentleman to accept and even campaign for public office.”<sup>6</sup> In the character of Worthy, Munford illustrated how important it was for men of high caliber to continue to serve in public office. Without Worthy as his running mate, the other qualified candidate, Wou’dbe, probably would have lost and less qualified men would have served the people instead. Munford stressed to his audience that politics was not simply a game, but an obligation to be fulfilled by all people. Each person was responsible to himself and those around him in order to insure the best men served in office and made decisions for the colony. *The Patriots*, while still focused on men in politics, turned to a question which was uniquely American before and during the Revolution: What makes a Patriot and what makes a Tory? In other words, what is the “nature of loyalty” and how is it determined among men and women?<sup>7</sup> The two main characters, Trueman and Meanwell, are accused by one man and thus their reputations are tainted and Trueman is kept from the woman he loves. Yet, it is later revealed that the accuser was actually the traitor and Trueman and Meanwell are innocent. Munford explained through his characters, according to Anthony, that true patriots “are mild, and secretly anxious for their country,

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<sup>6</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 74.

but modest in expressions of zeal. They are industrious in the public service, but claim no glory to themselves.”<sup>8</sup> A man who loudly proclaims love for his country, but refuses to serve in her hour of need is not truly a patriot and those who jump from one fashionable subject to another following the popular point of view are not patriots either. It is the men who stand by their country and their beliefs and who would give anything to aide her without expecting anything in return who are truly patriotic and loyal. Robert Munford showed the dangers of judging others too quickly and the true merits by which a person’s loyalty should be judged. The purpose of his plays was to provide political commentary on the times and bring awareness of responsibility and loyalty to his audience, while Mercy Otis Warren wrote her works with a sense of morality, republican ideals, and personal revenge.

Warren was raised in a society based on Puritan values and family solidarity, both of which are found in her early dramatic works. Warren was a staunch advocate of the republican cause and, as Anthony asserts, she “devoted her career in all its forms to the principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood.”<sup>9</sup> Brutus, a character based on her brother Jemmy, was the ideal Patriot in Warren’s eyes and she wanted to portray him as a hero to her readers. She wanted the people to understand that it was their duty to fight for the cause and to stand against oppression. These beliefs are found in all three of her works as she tells the story of a corrupt government, greedy politicians, and the brave men who stand up against these villains. Though Warren had been brought up to view

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<sup>8</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 15.



the theatre as an unsuitable place for devout ladies and gentlemen, she revealed later in life that “in an age of taste and refinement, lessons of morality, and the consequences of deviation may perhaps, be as successfully enforced from the stage, as by modes of instruction...the exhibition of great political events, opens a field of contemplation to the reflecting and philosophic mind.”<sup>10</sup> Thus theatre could also be an educational tool and Warren used her works to warn the public about corrupt leaders and the danger in allowing these men to continue in their roles as public servants. Warren also wanted to reveal the character of certain men, specifically Thomas Hutchinson, because she had personal feelings of anger and hatred towards them. Hutchinson had stolen from Warren’s family, in her opinion. Not only had he cheated her father out of a promised office, but he spoke out against her brother and followed a course of action which the Otises and Warrens believed was unpatriotic. Probably without knowing it, Mercy Otis Warren wrote Hutchinson a lasting legacy as a villain in her trilogy of plays. Not only would her contemporaries recognize his character, but historians and readers today are well aware that *Rapatio* was based on the infamous Thomas Hutchinson, a man despised by the Warren family. Warren had a particular character flaw which displayed itself in her plays; she had the tendency to blame others for her family’s problems. Zagari noted that Warren “always felt that her family members were being unfairly attacked or persecuted,” instead of taking responsibility for her family and their actions, which sometimes resulted in failures.<sup>11</sup> In writing her plays, Warren offered justification for

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<sup>10</sup> Mercy Otis Warren, *Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous* (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews at Faust’s Statue, no. 45, Newbury Street, 1790), 11. Early American Imprints no. 23035.

<sup>11</sup> Zagari, *Woman’s Dilemma*, 129.

her feelings and portrayed Thomas Hutchinson and other government officials as rapacious, which was how she personally felt about them. Due to this personal agenda, Warren's plays should be approached and read with a note of caution. She was not trying to paint an unbiased and fair opinion of all men and governments, but rather set out to "stoke smoldering civic resentments into an open flame."<sup>12</sup> Though Warren's works are considered dramatic pieces, pamphlets in Revolutionary America were far more political than literary, though Bailyn argues they did "reveal of the people who wrote them, their goals and style of mind."<sup>13</sup> Warren's purpose in writing is clearly illustrated in her attacks on specific political figures.

The main characters in Munford's and Warren's plays may be lumped together under the simple heading of politicians, but this would be doing a great disservice to the complexity and meaning of the specific figures that Munford and Warren wrote about. There is a great difference between Munford's generic characters and Warren's specific targets. Robert Munford was not personally driven to write about certain men like Mercy Warren. He did not have a vendetta against the political figures of Virginia. Rather, according to Baine, Munford created characters with "type names...in the traditional fashion of English satiric comedy...aiming at a general, universal effect."<sup>14</sup> It was more important for Munford that his audience was able to relate to his characters and situations. It did not matter if they were recognized as actual historical figures. Munford

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 59.

probably did base some of his characters on his fellow delegates and men he knew from his service and work in Virginia. For example, in *The Patriot*, Colonel Simple is similar to Henry Deloney, a representative for Mecklenburg County in the House of Burgesses, and Thunderbolt, a military officer, is reminiscent of Thacker Burwell, who served on the local committee.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that several of the secondary characters in his plays may have been drawn from people in his life, Munford was striving for a broader caricature of Virginia politics. He did not intentionally single out any one town or county. Instead he wrote in an attempt to illustrate “the abuses, the extremes to which the Committees went all over Virginia and all over the other Colonies.”<sup>16</sup> The names he gave his figures are more descriptive of the characters themselves than of any particular person. Mr. Strutabout struts around the stage as though he were entitled to a seat in the House, while Mr. Smallhopes has very few qualifications and his chances of winning are quite small. There is also Guzzle and his wife, Mrs. Guzzle, who are quite fond of drink; he is a “drunken beast of a husband,” according to his wife.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Worthy is indeed the worthiest candidate of all and as soon as he announces he is back in the race, the outcome seems inevitable. These types of characters, Adair and Hubbell point out, were present in Munford’s real life and in towns all across Virginia; “in every county the wealth and social position held by one or two families gave the *Worthys* such an overwhelming

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<sup>15</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 83-84.

<sup>16</sup> Baine, *Robert Munford*, 84.

<sup>17</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 32.

interest at the polls that their political power was, in effect, hereditary.”<sup>18</sup> Munford’s characters were easily recognized by his audience as similar to men in their own lives. The generalization of his characters makes Munford’s work readily accessible to present-day audiences, readers, and historians. No specific background knowledge of historical figures is necessary to understand the story or make connections with current political and social trends. While it might be helpful to research the various figures in Munford’s life to gain a better understanding, lack of such knowledge does not detract from the effectiveness of the plays and the stories they tell.

Mercy Otis Warren based her characters in *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* on specific figures from her life and in doing so she created a lasting portrait of how she personally felt toward the political leaders of the Revolutionary period. The Patriots mentioned in *The Adulateur* and *The Defeat* were given names based in Roman history. Warren hoped to invoke the memory of those who saved the Roman Republic, just as she felt her brother and his comrades were attempting to save the republican ideals of America. Quinn notes how she assigned the names “Brutus, Cassius, Junius and Portius, [to] represent James Otis, John Adams, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock.”<sup>19</sup> These four Roman men were involved in the plot to assassinate Julius Caesar, whom they believed was a danger to Rome and planned to take over Rome as a dictator. The use of Roman history and figures was typical of the pamphlets written during the Revolution.

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<sup>18</sup> Jay B. Hubbell and Douglass Adair, introduction to *The Candidates; or, The Humours of a Virginia Election. A Comedy in Three Acts*, by Colonel Robert Munford (Williamsburg: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1948), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 35.

Writers used a basic knowledge of the Roman Empire and the names of those remembered in the works of Livy, Cicero, and Sallust to evoke specific feelings from their audience. Warren used the ancient world to stir up images of men sacrificing their lives for the greater good. Bailyn points out that the use of the classics “contributed a vivid vocabulary... a universally respected personification... [and] heightened the colonists’ sensitivity to ideas and attitudes.”<sup>20</sup>

Warren had her brother on a pedestal as the first leader of the Revolution, thus she called his character Brutus, the savior of the Roman Republic. He was the noblest of the group, a man who was willing to do anything and everything in his power to save his country:

Gods! Are we men?  
And stand we still and bear it? Where’s our sense?  
Our ancient sense of freedom? Even the boy,  
Should we be tame, would feel his pulse beat high:  
And nobly grasp the sword he scarce could wield.<sup>21</sup>

Warren believed her brother and the men who joined his cause were American heroes who dared to stand against those in power and demand justice for the common people. Warren captured this spirit and the actions of these men in her plays. She wanted every person to be aware of the sacrifice that was being made to insure a free republican society.

In some ways, the threat of Julius Caesar in the Romans’ eyes was similar to the threat Otis, John and Samuel Adams, and Hancock saw in the dealings and power of

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<sup>20</sup> Bailyn, *Pamphlets of the American Revolution*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 11.

Thomas Hutchinson. In her *History of the American Revolution*, Warren described Hutchinson as “dark, intriguing, insinuating, haughty, and ambitious...the extreme of avarice marked every feature of his character.”<sup>22</sup> Though Warren claimed to be just and fair in her descriptions of historical figures, the contempt she felt for Hutchinson clearly found its way into her work as it did when she wrote the character of Rapatio. He showed no loyalty to his fellow countrymen, affirming,

O'er field of death, with hastning step I'll speed,  
And smile at length to see my country bleed:  
From my tame heart the pang of virtue fling,  
And mid the general flame like Nero sing.<sup>23</sup>

The sycophantic men who followed Rapatio's leadership were just as terrible; with names such as Dupe, Limpit, and Bagshot, Warren labeled these characters as mindless, untrustworthy, good-for-nothings. In *The Defeat*, the one play in which Rapatio does not appear, Warren replaced him with equally reprehensible figures. Hazlerod and Hateall emerged as the new leaders who continued with Rapatio's plans of domination and destruction. John Adams, a great admirer and supporter of Mercy's work, compiled a list of the characters in *The Group* alongside their historical figures late in his life. On this list, Hazlerod is paired with Peter Oliver and Hateall with Timothy Ruggles, while Meagre is matched with Hutchinson's brother, Foster Hutchinson.<sup>24</sup> Warren knew when her peers read her plays they would recognize the figures she praised and lampooned.

Richards claims that her works “provided American Whigs [with a] mocking attack on

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<sup>22</sup> Zagarri, *Woman's Dilemma*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *Adulateur*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> George O. Seilhamer, *History of the American Theatre*, Vol. II (New York: Benjamin Bloom, Inc., 1968), 6.

political figures.”<sup>25</sup> These character names even found use among her husband’s circle of close friends. For example, John Adams referred to Hazlerod in one of his letters to James Warren and Rapatio was mentioned in several letters, including one from Sam Adams to a friend. “Rapatio is now gone to Middleboro to consult with his Brother Hazlerod,” he wrote.<sup>26</sup> The historical basis of the figures allows readers to undertake further research and gain a greater understanding of men such as Hutchinson and James Otis, Jr. It also gives the reader an idea of how Warren viewed her fellow colonists. While the factual events the plays are based on give readers and audiences an inside look at the Revolutionary period, those without any historical knowledge or background information are at a distinct disadvantage. Warren’s contemporaries certainly knew of Hutchinson and James Otis, Jr. as well as the other prominent figures as they were well acquainted with the history behind the plays and could easily draw connections with the characters and situations.

Munford was not as politically motivated as Warren. He was not part of a greater political pamphlet movement and he did not include historical references to Rome. His plays were more literary than political and his purpose in writing them was closer to entertainment than the personal mission which Warren sought to fulfill. Warren, writing in Massachusetts, was caught up in the wave of pamphleteering and it was a logical step for her to reprint her plays in full as a pamphlet, once they were so well received in the newspapers. She also attempted to conform to a specific style, while Munford was free

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<sup>25</sup> Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 37-38; Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 49.

to write in whatever way he saw fit. Though he did attempt to write in the comedic format of a three-act or five-act play with multiple plots, Munford was able to choose his own themes and create his own characters. His goal did not include lampooning his personal or political enemies. Perhaps that would have been frowned upon in Virginia society, while it was a normal occurrence in Massachusetts. Or maybe Munford confronted his enemies in other arenas. For some reason, Munford chose not to base his characters on historical people; Warren was confined by her goal of persecution thus she did not create fictional characters. Her plot was limited by public events and actual figures.

Female characters are found in both of Robert Munford's works, but there is only one woman in Warren's three plays and she is simply called the Lady. In *The Candidates*, there are four females listed in the dramatis personae: Mrs. Guzzle, Lucy Twist, Catharine Stern, and Sarah Prize. They are the wives of the freeholders. Munford actually has these women participate in the debate over the various candidates rather than standing idly by as the action occurs around them. The opening scene of the second act finds Lucy, Catharine, and Sarah with their husbands discussing the virtues of Mr. Wou'dbe. Lucy Twist tells her husband that "If the wives were to vote, I believe they would make a better choice than their husbands."<sup>27</sup> The women praise Mr. Wou'dbe and scold their husbands for considering a vote for Strutabout or Smallhopes. Catharine reminds her spouse, Stern, "Husband, you know Mr. Wou'dbe is a clever gentleman; he

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<sup>27</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 26.



has been a good friend to us.”<sup>28</sup> The inclusion of this scene may seem surprising to some readers, especially since Robert Munford was a male who had no obvious reasons for including females in his works. He did not seem to support any hopes of women gaining a voice in politics and there is no evidence that his wife was particularly active in his political career. However, it is interesting to note that perhaps Munford witnessed scenes in his own life such as those he wrote about and thus was attempting to illustrate more accurately the events of an election. It could also be a reflection of his English education in the dramatic arts.

Playwrights, such as Shakespeare and Molière, wrote female characters into practically every play they wrote to give their work a more realistic feel and open a whole other opportunity to create tense situations or comic relief. Mrs. Guzzle is used for precisely that comic purpose in Munford’s work. She and her husband are the town drunks and their scenes are marked by physical buffoonery and ridiculous circumstances. During one such moment, Guzzle places his passed out wife next to Sir John, who is also drunk and asleep. When Mrs. Guzzle awakens, she finds herself lying next to a man who is not her husband. She panics and when her husband re-enters the scene she asks “How came that man to be lying with me? it’s some of your doings I’m sure; that you may have an excuse to be jealous of me.”<sup>29</sup> Guzzle feigns ignorance and explains Sir John and Mrs. Guzzle were both brought together by “rum, sugar, and water.”<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Guzzle

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<sup>28</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 39.

turns on Sir John and begins to beat him for she believes something untoward has occurred. Eventually, Guzzle stops his wife and explains the situation and they leave the stage supporting the confused and beaten Sir John. A comic scene such as this relieves some of the tension onstage and offers the audience a chance to laugh and enjoy themselves before returning to the more serious matter of the election. It also illustrates the role that rum and alcohol played in the lives of Virginia politicians and freeholders.<sup>31</sup> The scene would not be nearly as amusing without Mrs. Guzzle and her belief that she has committed a sin against her husband. Thus the role of the females in *The Candidates* offers varying circumstances and different opportunities for Munford as a playwright.

Women play an even more prominent role in *The Patriots*. The dramatis personae again lists four female characters: Mira, Isabella, Melinda, and Margaret Heartfree. However, in this play only one is the wife of a male character: Margaret Heartfree. The other women are involved in relationships which serve as three of the plots throughout the play. Mira is the love-interest of Trueman and her role is straightforward as the young, innocent, in-love ingénue. Isabella, on the other hand, is not a typical female in her role as a staunch patriot. Though she claims to be looking for a man, her true love is her country. She proudly states she is “determined never to marry any man that has not fought a battle” nor could she love “a man who knows nothing of war and Washington.”<sup>32</sup> Isabella is unique in that she does not act like a conventional woman. She is not demure or shy, nor does she wait to be spoken to. Isabella speaks her mind

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<sup>31</sup> Beeman, “Robert Munford and the Political Culture,” 178.

<sup>32</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 60.

freely and staunchly believes in her role as a patriot. She is even described by a male character as “A man in petticoats, by God!”<sup>33</sup> It is interesting that Munford chose to create a character who was so proudly patriotic and outspoken towards independence and yet this character is a female. There are plenty of male characters in the play who could have filled this role, but Munford specifically chose to illustrate this characteristic through Isabella, a female. Perhaps he knew a woman who acted similarly in his life or perhaps he wanted to make a point regarding the role of women in politics. Isabella is clearly at the far end of the patriotic spectrum. She is so far past what a respectable woman should be that she is accused of being too much like a man. In Isabella’s character, the reader discovers Munford’s distaste for those who are overzealous and almost too patriotic. It also illustrates Munford’s beliefs concerning the role of a woman in society. It is tolerable for female characters who are married (or soon will be) to voice their opinions, but a woman who claims to be stronger and better than a man is unacceptable. Isabella is also an intriguing part of Munford’s *The Patriots* for she is reminiscent of the character of Katherine in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, a woman so wild and opinionated that it takes the cunning of a man, Petruchio, to tame her. However, even Kate does not fully match Isabella’s role for Isabella is the one attempting to train and mold Strut to her liking, not the other way around. Isabella stands alone in the end, without a man to fight her battles. She fights for herself and claims her own

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<sup>33</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 112.

“trophy of my victory.”<sup>34</sup> Thus her relationship ends the only way in which it could, Isabella fighting for and continuing to love her country, the only true man in her life.

Melinda is another female figure in *The Patriots*. She is involved in the plot by Pickle, who woos her and arranges a false marriage under the pretense that he is Meanwell, which is eventually discovered and stopped. However, there is a twist in Melinda’s story. It turns out the lying, manipulative Pickle is truly a handsome, wealthy gentleman and she has won him over with her love, honesty, and purity. The couple decides to get married and live happily ever after. It seems reminiscent of a Sleeping Beauty-type fairy tale, for Melinda is “a poor girl” (or so she thinks) who does not believe a man of higher station would deem her fit for marriage, but in the end it turns out she herself is of a higher station and is fit to marry Pickle (or George Worthy as it were) and everyone is happy.<sup>35</sup>

Melinda and her romantic travails provide comic relief throughout the play. The audience knows Pickle’s plan and they are aware of the trap Melinda is walking into, but no one is quite sure how the story will end and Munford includes not one twist, but two in that both Pickle and Melinda are not who the audience originally believes them to be. These twists and turns and hidden identities are reminiscent of Shakespeare and perhaps Munford took additional inspiration from the Bard as he attempted to create his own dramatic masterpiece. The female characters in both *The Candidates* and *The Patriots* add an important dimension to the works, a dimension Warren’s three plays lack.

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<sup>34</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> Munford, *Collection of Plays and Poems*, 66.

At the very end of *The Group*, the only woman in Warren's three plays speaks and her sole purpose is to deliver the epilogue of the piece. Warren describes her in the stage directions as "a Lady nearly connected with one of the principal actors in the group, reclined in an adjoining alcove, who in mournful accents accosts them."<sup>36</sup> The Lady foretells of the impending bloody scenes that will fill the countryside and informs the people that:

Till British troops shall Columbia yield,  
And freedom's sons are Masters of the field;  
Then o'er the purpl'd plain the victors tread  
Among the slain to seek each patriot dead,  
(While Freedom weeps that merit could not save  
But conq'ring Hero's must enrich the Grave).<sup>37</sup>

The Lady appears to be predicting the future of the American Revolution. Even though Mercy did not know exactly what would happen, she seemed to have an idea of where the colonies were headed and she warned her readers to be ready for the battles to come.

The Lady is the only instance when Warren created a type-character similar to that of Munford. The generic characterization of this sole female character suggests Warren sought to include a character that more women readers could relate to. Though the majority of Warren's audience was male, there probably were women who read newspapers. Perhaps Warren wanted them to feel represented in her work. Another possibility is that Warren had no actual female to style her character after and thus she made The Lady a combination of women she knew. Maybe Warren wanted her readers

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<sup>36</sup> Warren, *Group*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Warren, *Group*, 21.

to create their own image of this woman or perhaps she hoped people would see herself in the figure that closed her last Revolutionary play.

The Lady is where female participation ends for Warren, at least in her first three plays. However, Warren does have several characters in *The Group* discuss wives. The opinion of these Loyalists is that their women should do whatever they are told. If a wife disobeys her husband, one declares,

Let her solicit charity abroad;  
Let her go out and seek some pitying friend  
To give her shelter from the wint'ry blast,  
Disperse her children round the neighb'ring cots.<sup>38</sup>

The terrible treatment suggested for these wives may be a tactic Warren used to elicit anger and loathing from her audience. On the other hand, women were expected to be obedient and respectful of their husbands' wishes and decisions. If men, such as Publican and Hateall, wanted to board British soldiers then their wives were supposed to acquiesce and ready their homes for the occupation. Warren even went so far as to have Hateall suggest "the green Hick'ry, or the willow twig, / Will prove a curse for each rebellious dame / Who dare oppose her lord's superior will."<sup>39</sup> Even Munford, though he was not an admirer of the patriotic Isabella, did not include physical abuse toward his female characters. Warren did not support such treatment. After all, she supported education for women and was encouraged by the men in her life to voice her opinions and pursue her literary talents. Warren may have known men in politics though who did treat their wives in such a manner and perhaps she included it as part of her historically-based description

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<sup>38</sup> Warren, *Group*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Warren, *Group*, 15.

of these characters. However, it is clear abusive treatment of women was not tolerated by Warren and she associated this deplorable behavior with the Loyalists in her plays. It was simply another reason for her audience to detest those unpatriotic characters.

It is interesting to note that a woman whom historians have called one of the first American feminists chose not to include females in her first forays into the dramatic world. Perhaps the lack of women is due to the fact that Warren based her characters on actual politicians and there were of course no females involved in Hutchinson's administration. However, Warren could have based characters on herself or on Abigail Adams -- two women, who though not directly involved, were in contact with two of the Patriot characters of *The Adulateur* and were probably privy to certain conversations and information. Warren herself was known to host meetings among her husband, John Adams, Samuel Adams and others in front of her fireplace. Yet, she was diffident enough about penning her works that she may have been hesitant to include herself directly as a character.

Warren also believed, as Stuart asserts, that it was important that "women must appear, if not be, subservient to men" and including female characters may have been taking her writing privileges a step too far.<sup>40</sup> Warren also wrote her pieces for immediate publication in newspapers and pamphlets, so she had editors' and readers' opinions to consider. Perhaps Warren felt her work would not be as well received if she included female characters. Later in life, however, Warren made up for her lack of female characters and heroines by writing two plays, *The Sack of Rome* and *The Ladies of*

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<sup>40</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 112.

*Castile*, in which women played prominent roles and men were the secondary characters. Though these plays were also based on historical events, Warren chose to dramatize stories in which women held the power and made the decisions. Perhaps this was her opportunity to illustrate strong women, since she did not have that chance in her earlier plays. Maybe Warren was trying to reach out to other women and encourage them to take action in their own lives. For some reason, she specifically chose to write her last dramatic works about women changing the lives of men. Nevertheless, the lack of females in *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group* is a weakness in Mercy's repertoire and leaves the reader and the audience wondering how women did fit into the society Mercy described. Munford's two works paint a more complete picture of colonial society than Warren's three works because he does include women and not simply as subjects of conversation. The women in Munford's works are an integral part of the plot, while Warren's female moments could be left out and the audience would never know what they were missing.

Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren left a lasting legacy with their five works; they were significant not only during the Revolution, but still are for historians and audiences of today. Robert Munford's *The Candidates* offers a unique perspective on the political climate in Virginia prior to the Revolution. It also illustrates the inner workings of an election and the various characters who filled the political scene. Historians, however, do not agree on the accuracy of Munford's description. There are those who claim the play is "principally distinguished for its accurate and vivid picture of electioneering in Virginia in the latter part of the eighteenth century," while others argue



it is “more a description of the way Munford thought things *ought to be* than a description of the way things actually were.”<sup>41</sup> Though the play may not accurately depict the election process in Southside Virginia where Munford lived, it is reminiscent of what is known about politics in the more developed regions of eastern Virginia during the colonial period and thus is an important source for historians, even though it was written for entertainment.

Munford’s plays should be assessed as complete dramatic works. His plots are functional and entertaining and each story ends with a solid conclusion and no questions left unanswered. He also has fully developed characters and various subplots which add comic relief and dramatic tension. Munford’s work has suffered in historical terms; originally they were attributed to another author, then an incomplete copy of *The Patriots* was discovered in Philadelphia and an assumption was made that the playwright was from the city. However, now that Munford’s authorship has been established, it is surprising that his works have not received more treatment on the stage. Considering that the themes of his plays would resonate with audiences today, especially during election time, one wonders why no one has resurrected these lost pieces of dramatic art. Perhaps that will be the next step in the Munford saga as not only the historical value of his plays is fully realized, but the entertainment value is also recognized and brought back to life.

Warren wrote her works with the intent of delivering a message to her readers. She wanted them to understand the menacing men who were ruling the government and she wrote to reveal their underlying motives and ambitions. Her plays are set in fictional

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Moody, ed., *Dramas from the American Theatre 1762-1909* (Cleveland & New York: World Publishing Company, 1966), 11; Beeman, “Robert Munford and the Political Culture,” 175-176.

locations, but they are based on real people and events. Thus, when the significance of her works is assessed, argues Brown, it must be done “with reference to her background and environment” and with an understanding of how she hoped her works would be viewed.<sup>42</sup> None of her three plays are truly complete works, nor are they excellent examples of the dramatic arts. Compared to Robert Munford’s plays, Warren’s are confusing, incomplete, and not nearly as entertaining. However, she was not striving to write a masterpiece, but simply desired to convey her message to her readers. Her main purpose was to expose the true nature of her characters. Late in life, Warren herself asserted “all who are acquainted with the historic records of those times will compare historic and dramatic narration and accede to the justice and truth of the description” of those men.<sup>43</sup> In Warren’s eyes, she had achieved her goal. Even though her plays probably could not be mounted on a stage in their present condition, historians can still use them as a source of knowledge and information regarding the state of affairs in Massachusetts before and during the Revolution. Warren may have included some of her own bias towards specific characters, especially Rapatio, but that offers her biographers a glimpse into her personal feelings and allows readers to better understand the playwright herself.

Robert Munford’s and Mercy Otis Warren’s plays are significant for several reasons. They offer an insight into historical events and practices, depict realistic pictures of people who lived during the Revolutionary period and, Quinn concludes,

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<sup>42</sup> Brown, *Women of Colonial and Revolutionary Times*, 137.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 245.

“they represent the feeling of the time in its most intense moods...the hopes, fears, and agonies...[and] preserve all that is left of the drama of the Revolution.”<sup>44</sup> In short, the five plays written by Munford and Warren are an important part of the American literary catalogue and should be studied and performed in an effort to gain a greater understanding of our dramatic and historic past.

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<sup>44</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 60.

## CONCLUSION

Fortunately, the works of Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren have survived the past two and half centuries and are available for present-day historians and audiences to examine and enjoy. Munford and Warren both addressed the political state of affairs in the colonies and illustrated how men in power conducted themselves and strove to reach their goals. Both presented colorful characters who followed their personal ambitions, whether that was to achieve ultimate political power or to enter into the perfect marriage. Both based their plot-lines on personal experience and events which occurred in their lives. However, there are a number of distinct differences and unique attributes between Munford's and Warren's works which suggest that these playwrights and their plays should be considered separately. These variations are a result of Munford's and Warren's differing genders and geographic locations, but most importantly because of the distinct goals each had in writing their works.

This study examined the various differences between Munford's *The Candidates* and *The Patriots* and Warren's *The Adulateur*, *The Defeat*, and *The Group*. The background of the playwrights offered the first distinction. One was a male raised in Virginia who served in the House of Burgesses, while the other was a female raised in Massachusetts who lived vicariously through her father, brother, and husband. Robert Munford wrote plays that were complete dramatic pieces probably with the intent of performance at some point, whereas Mercy Otis Warren wrote works that, Hutcheson

claimed, were “rabid conversation pieces, propaganda, intended primarily for reading.”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Munford wrote his plays as political commentary offering a snapshot into the world of Virginia politics. Mercy Otis Warren wrote plays to communicate republican ideals, morality, and to exact personal revenge on men such as Thomas Hutchinson.

Robert Munford loosely based some of his characters on historical figures, but overall his cast included a broad picture of the types of men and women found in colonial Virginia.

The audience can relate to these characters and their story without additional knowledge of the period or the people. Mercy Otis Warren based all her characters on historical figures and wanted her audience to recognize certain men in her work. Additional knowledge of the figures and the occurrences between the Otis and Hutchinson families adds layers to the play and its meaning. Munford included women in both his plays and, in his second work, they performed a substantial role in the plot. Despite the label of feminist attributed to Warren, she only included one female in her first three works; this character had the smallest role and simply delivered the epilogue. The differences discussed in this study are explained by the fact that each wrote with a specific purpose and in the end, Munford offers a broad overview of events, while Warren focuses more closely on certain events and people.

Robert Munford’s and Mercy Otis Warren’s plays are significant works of American Revolutionary drama, but they need to be considered under their own unique circumstances. Robert Munford produced complete dramas and thus his work may be judged accordingly as a piece which was meant to be performed. Mercy Otis Warren, on

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<sup>1</sup> Maud Macdonald Hutcheson, “Mercy Warren, 1728-1814,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 10, no. 3 (July 1953): 378-402, 383.

the other hand, wrote plays that Weales describes as “more weapon than work of art” so though they are unfinished, unpolished, and lack fully developed characters and a deep and interesting plot, as pieces of propaganda they were well received by her contemporaries and accomplished the goal she set when publishing them.<sup>2</sup>

These five plays offer a commentary on the American Revolution that is different from that found in letters, diaries, newspapers, and books. The dramatic arts are a special medium where figures can be fully fleshed out, stories are enacted before the audience’s eyes, and the feelings of the playwright permeate through the words spoken by their characters. The theatre was an outlet for new ideas, opinions, and views, even those that were considered propaganda. Robert Munford and Mercy Otis Warren each offered a distinct point of view on the state of the colonies before and during the American Revolution, especially Virginia and Massachusetts. Though these five works may not be the pinnacle of American theatre they are, according to Quinn, “noteworthy [for] the more closely they are studied in relation to their inner meaning, the greater their significance becomes...in them not figments of the fancy but real people live and move.”<sup>3</sup> Historians can study these five plays to find a better understanding not only of the colonies, but of Munford and Warren themselves. There is a decent amount of work surrounding Mercy Otis Warren and her role as what Stuart terms the “muse of the Revolution,” especially studies written in the last half-century. However, knowledge surrounding Robert Munford is scarce and there are only a handful of works which

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald Weales, “The Adulateur and How It Grew,” *The Library Chronicle* 43, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 103-33, 106.

<sup>3</sup> Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, 60.

examine his life and works.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it is time for a resurgence of study and interest in the early American playwrights and the significance of their works. After all, where would Broadway be today without those who first put pen to paper and presented plays for the stage?

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<sup>4</sup> Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, xiv.

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### About the Author

Kylie A. Horney was born and raised in Ridgewood, NJ. She graduated from the College of William & Mary in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Theatre. She also received a Master of Arts in Education from William & Mary in 2008. Kylie completed her Master of Arts in History at the University of Richmond in 2009. She will begin a Ph.D. program in History at the University of Georgia in the fall of 2009.