

NJS Presents**NJ Studies Academic Alliance Graduate Student Awardees****In this Issue:*****“Government in Petticoats”: Gender Poetics in New Jersey’s******Newspaper Literature, 1789-1807*****By Scott Zukowski****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v5i1.193>**

This essay analyzes the literature (poetry, anecdotes, fiction, and miscellanies) of New Jersey newspapers between 1789 and 1807, a period when many of the state’s women were legally enfranchised. Scholarship concerning New Jersey’s ephemeral texts by or about women and the vote during these years has been limited, often because of the archive’s perceived limitations: there is little direct reference to women’s suffrage to be found there. However, by concentrating on the literary texts often overlooked in favor of more expository, essayistic pieces, this study sheds new light on early republican anxieties to define and control gender in the public sphere, and it offers a new critical perspective of shifting and interrelated notions of womanhood, gender, and early American ideologies of liberty, equality, and rights.

The following poem, entitled “Ejaculation over the Grave of My Wife,”¹ appeared in the December 23, 1806 issue of the *New-Jersey Journal*:

“And does this little space contain
The person of my wife?
Who, when alive, no house could hold,
Her tongue!!! — Ah! What is life?”

¹ T.B., “Ejaculation over the Grave of My Wife,” *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town), 23 December 1806. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm. The poem is reprinted in the *New-Jersey Journal* and seems to have been written originally for *New-York Weekly Magazine*, where it was published on 24 July 1796. Theodore, “Ejaculation over the Grave of My Wife,” *New-York Weekly Magazine; or Miscellaneous Repository, Volume II* (New York, 1797), 31.

The impropriety of the poem is striking: its male speaker stands at his deceased wife's resting place and is moved not to mournful lamentation but to comedic reflections on her imprudent "tongue." His identification of her vociferousness aligns her with the trope of the nagging wife,² but it also suggests a disruption of the gender norms of the early American Republic—an intrusion into the public, male vocal sphere by a female voice extending beyond its assigned place within the confinements of the "house." Furthermore, the scene does not just dismiss any gravitas that would traditionally characterize a graveside elegy;³ the poem's title insinuates a *sexualized* celebration of male triumph over female vocalization.⁴

This poem appears in a single column with three others concerning the unbalanced relationship between husband and wife. In the "Miscellany" section that follows, a short narrative extracted from a London newspaper details the deceptive behavior of a discovered illicit affair between a young lady and an "elderly gentleman." These columns of ephemeral literature indicate the importance of gender-power dynamics in early republican New Jersey. More specifically, it is the struggle to *define* and *control* gender in the public sphere that surfaces in the poetry, anecdotes, fiction, and miscellanies of the state's periodicals between 1776 and 1807.

This period of focus is not arbitrary. Many New Jersey women were legally enfranchised between 1776 and 1807,⁵ and despite being just one of eight original states with non-gender-specific language in its constitution, New Jersey was the only state in which women engaged in

² I will be using this phrase not as an exact, delimited category, but as a general pattern found in culture and in literature in particular.

³ This poem may have played on a genre of ejaculative graveside elegies, but there is only scant evidence of such a genre. Wordsworth's 1803 poem, "Ejaculation at the Grave of Burns," and Elizabeth Clarke's 1995 study of George Herbert's poetic use of "ejaculation" lead me to think that there is more to be discovered about this topic. Elizabeth Clarke, "Herbert's House of Pleasure? Ejaculations sacred and profane," *George Herbert Journal* 19, no. 2 (1995): 55-71.

⁴ The *OED Online* suggests that "ejaculation" was used to describe "the discharging of male sperm" as early as 1603. "ejaculation, n." *OED Online*. January 2018. Oxford University Press. Accessed 27 March 2018.

⁵ Joan R. Gundersen, "Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution," *Signs* 13, no. 1 (1987): 65.

the electoral process.⁶ Revolution-era ideologies of liberty, equality, and rights continued to saturate the public sphere in the post-war decades, provoking discursive debate about marginalized people's relationship with those core American values,⁷ and New Jersey in particular was, as one scholar phrased it, "at the cutting edge of the political continuum,"⁸ making it a unique object of analysis for a study of early Republican gender politics.

Several scholars have examined late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century public print media to trace social reactions to the period's changing gender roles. Most often, their focus has been national, and any discussion of New Jersey has functioned as a brief side-story.⁹ The research that *has* centered on New Jersey's unique situation has often been stymied by a notable lack of direct archival references to women's voting rights or the period's larger shift in gender roles. And while at least one scholar has suggested that the perceived lack of early Republican newspaper material on the subject of women's voting is because researchers are looking in the wrong newspapers,¹⁰ I offer a new argument: that the researchers are looking in precisely the right places, but they are overlooking the densely rich poetry and creative literature found there. I contend that, by analyzing the poetry, anecdotes, miscellanies, and serialized fictions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New Jersey newspapers, an intense anxiety surrounding the disruption of gender norms becomes evident. My scope of literary texts will include not just original works, but also reprints, which attain new and valuable significance in the context of New Jersey's

⁶ Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 61.

⁷ Jan Lewis, "Women and the American Revolution," *OAH Magazine of History* 8, no. 4 (1994): 25; Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 21.

⁸ Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, "'The Petticoat Electors': Women's Suffrage In New Jersey, 1776-1807," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 2 (1992): 163.

⁹ See: Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120; Gunderson, "Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution," 65-66; Rosemarie Zagari, "American Women's Rights Before Seneca Falls," in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005): 668-9.

¹⁰ Irwin N. Gertzog, "Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807," *Women and Politics* 10, no. 2 (1990): 48.

newspapers during the 1790s and early 1800s. As the poem above—itsself a reprint—exemplifies, the era’s periodical literature reflects early American apprehensions about how to define and control gender—specifically femininity, and specifically in the public sphere.

This paper aims to advance the work of scholars who have laid the groundwork for thinking about the American woman of the early Republic, but who have often focused disproportionately on the extant sources celebrating women’s struggles for more independence, equality, and rights. The groundbreakers on whom I construct my argument—Zagarri, Davidson, Gundersen, Klinghoffer, Elkis, Lewis, and others—acknowledge the existence of conservative, polemical responses to women’s advancement, but too often discount them as minor voices of disagreement and rarely consider the texts as objects of *literary* investigation. And, by focusing so exclusively on the period’s progressive texts and Habermasian “modes of communication and places of debate,” scholars have risked aggrandizing the scope of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women’s advancements in power.¹¹ By paying due consideration to those elided polemical texts, this chapter offers a new critical perspective of shifting and interrelated notions of womanhood, gender, and early American ideologies of liberty, equality, and rights.

I will begin now with a brief review of women’s roles and statuses in America during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In many ways, the American Revolution upended the gender norms that restricted women to subordinate domestic positions and prescribed economic authority and social and political engagement to men. The war required American women to fill the roles of men who left home to fight in the war and who sometimes never returned. American wives took charge of their husbands’ businesses, ran the day-to-day, season-to-season, and year-to-year

¹¹ Toby L. Ditz, “Masculine Republics and ‘Female Politicians’ in the Age of Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, (2015): 263, 268.

operations of family farms, and managed domestic finances and family matters.¹² Yet, in doing so, women more intensely encountered the legal restrictions that hindered their ability to efficiently maintain their families. It became evident that it was not woman's "inferior" capacity but a legal, political, and cultural framework that relegated her to a subjugated existence. Cathy Davidson posits that "the War ambiguously emphasized to women both their private capability and their public powerlessness,"¹³ and the resulting frustration would prove difficult to assuage.

The rhetoric of "equality and natural rights" characterizing the Revolutionary Era bore meaning for not just the thirteen rebelling colonies, but for the women of the new nation as well. As Zagari asserts, "the story of postrevolutionary America is the story of how American women and men sought to define—and ultimately to limit and restrict—the expansive ideals they had so successfully deployed against Britain."¹⁴ The newspaper was a key forum for that struggle of definition and delimitation, for writers and readers alike, both male and female.¹⁵

The results that surfaced during the Revolutionary and early Republican Eras were markedly public, yet oftentimes subtle, condemnations and commendations of the ideals of women's rights and the women who personified them. In a 1779 poem written in Trenton and published in Burlington's *New-Jersey Gazette*, a male speaker describes his dissatisfaction with the "perverse" American women who "vex" men as much as they "please" them, "Either in Friendship or in Love."¹⁶ This type of misogynistic male complaint has a long history in western culture,¹⁷ and yet there is a relatively sparse record of it during the Revolutionary Era, likely

¹² Cathy N. Davidson, "Privileging the Feme Covert," in *Revolution and the World: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 120.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ "What perverse things most girls prove," *New-Jersey Gazette* (Burlington, NJ), 24 February 1779. Microfilm.

¹⁷ For a concise, critical history of misogyny and Western literature, see: Paula M. Rieder, "The Uses and Misuses of Misogyny: A Critical Historiography of the Language of Medieval Women's Oppression," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 1-18.

because the struggle for independence garnered greater attention. And often when women *were* written about in newspapers during the 1770s and 1780s, it was to praise their contributions to the revolutionary cause. This poem, however, reflects anxieties of both women's growing agency and men's lack of control over women's sexuality during the war. First, identifying a strategy that domestic women may employ to gain influence, the speaker notes that women "disobey, to show [their] power" and usurp male authority.¹⁸ He explains that he gave a woman "a print of [the British] General Howe" so that her "fine hand with care might trace / each feature of his martial face," but he observes that Howe's "manly charms" and "beauty" are "lov'd by all the *fair*; / Who ogle more a hat that's lac'd / Than parson in a pulpit plac'd." He outwardly criticizes female vanity and appearance-based judgments, but he also betrays sexual jealousy of the "bold and gay" General Howe. This politicized jealousy suggests a need to shield American women from British power—militarily, ideologically, and sexually. It associates Revolutionary women's growing independence and agency with sexual licentiousness.¹⁹ When the male speaker seeks reassurance of the woman's loyalty, however, she allays his concern, explaining that "he still is but my Country's Foe; / While such, he'll be to me, indeed, / An object, not of *love*, but *dread*." Thus, the poem affirmative ending reminds the reader that American women's political resolve, domestic dedication, and sexual control were crucial for the Revolution's success.

Two decades later—at the starting point of this article's literary analysis—transatlantic newspapers and refugees of the French Revolution migrating to America brought with them radical ideologies of womanhood that amplified tensions.²⁰ A 1791 issue of *The New-Jersey Journal and*

¹⁸ "What perverse things most girls prove," *New-Jersey Gazette*.

¹⁹ For more on this concept, see: Wendy Martin, "Women and the American Revolution," *Early American Literature* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1976-7): 333.

²⁰ Sarah Knott, "Benjamin Rush's Ferment: Enlightenment Medicine and Female Citizenship in Revolutionary America," *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005): 656.

Political Intelligencer,²¹ for example, provides an account of the toasts made at two Liverpoolian commemorations of the French Revolution. While several of the toasts are distinctly British, and several employ a male-centered rhetoric (“the rights of men to all men”), the ideology they espouse in toto is one of liberty, justice, and equal rights. The language used in the second commemoration is especially encompassing: “May the natural rights of man be universally extended”; “May the seeds of liberty [...] yield a plentiful harvest, and may all nations participate”; “May the monument, raised to liberty in France, serve as a lesson to the oppressor, and an example to the oppressed.” The toasts depart from the immensely prevalent patriotic ephemeral literature of the prior two decades, which specifically lauded American liberty, justice, and rights.²² The periodical texts about the French Revolution provided not only the opportunity for American readers to bridge a cultural divide with Britain; they provided American readers with a model for applying notions of rights and equality to any—or, potentially, *every*—nation or group of people. As such, texts on the French Revolution became part of the public discourse of women’s rights.

The most significant text to arrive in the United States was Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*, first published in England in 1792, and soon reprinted many times in Britain and the United States.²³ The text is Wollstonecraft’s response to the absence of a push for female-oriented educational reform and equality that she perceived in the French Revolution and in the writings of revolutionary thinkers like Thomas Paine.²⁴ She advocates fiercely for women’s educational and economic advancement, and she directly imposes

²¹ “Liverpool Commemoration of the French Revolution,” *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer*, (Elizabeth-town), 28 September 1791. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

²² See, for example: Hortentius [NJ Governor Livingston], “To His Excellency George Washington,” *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Morristown, NJ), 01 April 1778; Adolphus, “The Future Glory of America,” *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Morristown, NJ), 20 May 1778; “Let venal poets praise a King,” *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Morristown, NJ), 18 August 1779; “The great unequal conflict past,” *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Morristown, NJ), 23 December 1783. Microfilm.

²³ Knott, “Benjamin Rush’s Ferment,” 656.

²⁴ Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 41.

revolutionary rhetoric onto the discussion of women's rights. She identifies male hegemony as "the tyranny of man," from which she asserts "the greater number of female follies proceed;" she urges, "Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated;" she discusses women's "obedience" to men's "despotism" in notably civic terms: "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it and that will bring an end to blind obedience; but because blind obedience is always sought for by power, tyrants...are right to try to keep women in the dark: the tyrants only want slaves...."²⁵ The repeated identification of males as tyrants, of their unchecked power as despotism, and of women's role as obedient subjects illustrates the potent influence of revolutionary political rhetoric on American women of the 1790s.

Immensely popular, *Vindication* was available in about thirty percent of American libraries,²⁶ more than Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*.²⁷ It was republished in periodicals and magazines, and it was frequently alluded to in poetry, fiction, humor, and essays throughout the 1790s.²⁸ Many authors titled their texts, "Rights of Woman," in allusion to Wollstonecraft. One scholar has identified *Vindication* as "the single most important theoretical contribution to the egalitarian cause,"²⁹ and another noted that it forced Americans to consider ideas of equality and natural rights in the context of the American woman.³⁰ One result of these emerging forces was that over four hundred institutions of female education were founded by the early years of the nineteenth century,³¹ providing American women with more tools for public engagement.

²⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication for the Rights of Women: with strictures on political and moral subjects*. By Mary Wollstonecraft. Vol. I, 2nd ed. (London: J. Johnson, No 72, St. Paul's Church Yard, 1792), 449, 451, 44-45. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Accessed 27 March 2018.

²⁶ Davidson, "Feme Covert," 131.

²⁷ Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 41.

²⁸ Zagarri, "American Women's Rights," 670-671.

²⁹ Davidson, "Feme Covert," 131.

³⁰ Zagarri, "American Women's Rights," 679.

³¹ Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 51.

Finally, the 1790s brought radical changes for New Jersey women in particular, as the language of state laws was amended twice to specifically enfranchise women. In 1776, the state constitution made no reference to gender, only specifying that “all inhabitants” with “50 pounds clear estate” and certain residency conditions could vote.³² The constitutional language’s intentionality and implications have been subject to much unresolved debate,³³ but, intentional or not, it sparked a series of events that would alter the gender norms of New Jersey over the next thirty-one years. Yet, evidence of women utilizing the vote in the first decade of their enfranchisement is scarce, if not nonexistent.³⁴ The first archival mention of women executing their voting rights dates from 1787, when two women are listed as voting in Burlington, NJ.³⁵ Following its 1789 birth, the Federalist party of New Jersey quickly changed the language of the voting law, in 1790 employing the phrase “he or she” in the law’s identification of legal voters.³⁶ The wording explicitly pertained to the southern seven counties, but Jan Lewis argues that the law only reaffirmed what was already implicit in the 1776 law, and therefore did not prevent women in the northern six counties from voting as well.³⁷ Thus, although the 1790 law may not have changed practice, its visible inclusivity may have affected the state’s social consciousness.

For an idea of what the social climate was regarding women a year before the new law, I will now turn to the *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer*’s 1789 publications. In that entire year, the paper printed fourteen texts relating in any way to women (seven poems, six short

³² Gertzog, “Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807.”

³³ See: Gertzog, Klinghoffer, Zaggari, Lewis.

³⁴ Klinghoffer and Elkins state that, “from 1776 to 1807, women routinely participated in the state’s electoral process,” but they provide no evidence. Klinghoffer and Elkins, “Petticoat Electors,” 160.

³⁵ Henry C. Shinn, “An Early New Jersey Poll List,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 44 (1920): 79-81.

³⁶ Gertzog, “Female Suffrage,” 49; Klinghoffer and Elkins, “Petticoat Electors,” 172. Jan Lewis argues that the wording of the 1790 provision did *not* prevent females in the northern counties from voting. Lewis, “Rethinking Women’s Suffrage,” 1023.

³⁷ Lewis, “Rethinking Women’s Suffrage,” 1023-1025.

fictions or anecdotes, and one historical extract). Even at this early point, the sentiments within these texts are mixed: one poem celebrates women's contributions to the war, several texts caution against improper behavior and the wiles of rakes, several celebrate bachelorhood, and several provide marital advice.³⁸ In a fragment entitled, "The Unfeeling Father," Molvolio refuses to admit his daughter, Miranda, into his house because she "broke the sacred bonds of nature" when she "left a father's fond protection, and a mother's tender care, to pursue the fortune of the only man on earth whom they detested."³⁹ This is but one example of early Republican sentimental literature's common trope of the daughter who resists her parents' rational advice and pursues her own desires, only to meet a catastrophic end. The trope would recur throughout the 1790s and early decades of the nineteenth century, most notably, perhaps, in Hannah Webster Foster's 1797 epistolary novel, *The Coquette*, in which the protagonist, Eliza, defies the advice of family and friends, is seduced by a rake, and tragically dies. The difference between "The Unfeeling Father" and many sentimental texts like *The Coquette*, however, is that, in the latter, the daughter is to blame, but in the former, the blame is the father's.

Imploring her father for forgiveness, Miranda invokes Christian principles: "An heavenly father...forgives the sins of his children: and shall an earthly parent deny the charitable boon a repentant child demands him?" The plea appeals to the ethos and pathos of the reader, but it does not affect her father, who replies, "To that heavenly father then...I recommend you." His obstinance contrasts with the patience and forgiveness that Eliza's family and friends show her. When Miranda exclaims, "But these children, Sir! Alas! what have they done? Leave me to the

³⁸ There is no clear way to quantify this data, because often the texts perform multiple functions.

³⁹ "The Unfeeling Father. A Fragment," *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 25 February 1789. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm. This fragment would later be reprinted in 1795 in *The New-York Magazine; Or, Literary Repository*, in 1813 in *The Juvenile Port-Folio*, and *Literary Miscellany*, again in 1826 and 1827 in *The Ladies Museum* and *The New London Gleaner*, respectively, and in 1830 in *The Boston Masonic Mirror*. I have not been able to find a publication—as a fragment or a larger work—before the 1789 appearance in the *New-Jersey Journal*.

cruel fate that awaits me, but suffer them not to perish,” Molvolio replies by completely disowning them. In the morning, the “clay cold corpse” of Miranda is found on the doorstep. Overwhelmed with grief, Molvolio’s heart is changed: he takes the children in from the cold and loves them, although “peace abandoned him forever.”

The fragment shows none of Miranda’s foolish decisions and it never portrays her as a weak-minded woman. In fact, it characterizes her as a woman and a mother of strength and resolve. Displaying values that anticipate the emerging cult of domesticity, Miranda returns from an error and seeks to establish her family on a firm foundation—returning for the sake of her children and even offering her own life for their protection. Miranda is like a prodigal son who should be accepted and forgiven, but instead is rejected by an erring father. It is not Miranda’s actions that undo her, but oppressive patriarchal authority. Like other sentimental literature of the era, “The Unfeeling Father” “reveals women dominated by larger social and economic forces, controlled by selfish parents, sadistic husbands, or strong-willed seducers.”⁴⁰ It engages in the post-war debate about women’s capabilities and rights, and it uses the platform of the newspaper, the readership of which was more male than the largely female readership of sentimental novels. Thus, while the story is a form of “birth control”⁴¹ for young women, warning them against the perils of rakes and rash decisions, it also counseled men on their role as fathers.

In the same year, a short excerpt, “From Andrew’s History of the late War”⁴² was printed in the same paper. It tells of “the zeal” that women “felt in their country’s cause” at the outbreak of the war, and it celebrates their fundraising, which allowed them to create a “suit of colors” for a local military outfit. The women’s actions are notably public, notably male. This is reaffirmed

⁴⁰ Davidson, “Privileging the Feme Covert,” 117.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “From Andrew’s History of the late War,” *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 21 January 1789. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

when it is noted that “the gentlewoman who was appointed by the others to present them in their name to the regiment, made a very gallant and spirit speech on that occasion” and “charged...the officers and soldiers, never to desert the colours of the ladies, if they ever wished that the ladies should list under their banners.” The excerpt’s focused attention on the women is unique for the *New-Jersey Journal and Intelligencer*, and the language is assertive: a “gentlewoman” gives an admirable speech and “charges” not just men, but officers and soldiers, to be courageous in battle. Furthermore, she intimates a threat that their women will in some way disown them—or deny them sexually—if they fail. There is no indication of who submitted the excerpt for publication, but whoever it was, it appears that he or she supported such behavior by women.

Yet, for each of these 1789 texts that seems to advocate for an expansion of women’s spheres and rights, there appears a text that criticizes the same. In one poem, entitled “The Bachelor,” the speaker explicates all the joys of his peaceful life and concludes: “I live in harmony, and free from strife; / For I’m not *blest*, good Heav’n! with a wife.”⁴³ This poem is just one in a long tradition of jokes, poems, and witticisms that employ the trope of the nagging wife for comedic effect and homosocial bonding. In another 1789 issue, “A Matrimonial Anecdote” tells about a prostitute who tricks a lord into marrying her, thus illuminating the deceitful arts of women. These two texts reflect a male anxiety over marriage, and in both that anxiety stems from concerns over economics and power. In the former, the speaker’s wealth and power are key to his happiness: “My servants wait, obedient at my hand, and cheerful execute the mild command,” while, in the latter, it is somebody from the bottom rung who upends the lord by gaining access to his wealth and exerting her powerful charms over him. These ephemeral texts reflect and contribute to a male anxiety over female encroachment in the private male universe.

⁴³ Cavis, “The Bachelor,” *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 23 September 1789. Courtesy of the New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

Yet, paradoxical social tensions become evident in the same newspaper's other poems that provide sober advice to women on the process of courting and marriage. In "Maiden's Choice of a Husband," young women are urged to seek a virtuous husband who is "genteel," "noble," "generous," "brave," "learn'd," and "still entertaining, engaging and new."⁴⁴ The poem closes with the condition that he be "Never tyrannical; But ever true." The contrast between this poem and the ones described above is striking: the male perspective dreads the usurpation of one's power by a female, and it does so based upon a caricature of an antagonistic wife, but the female perspective constructs the male epitome of virtue as its object. The political rhetoric of tyranny and executed commands reflects the tensions of power inherent in late eighteenth-century American society: power that male forces wished to preserve and power that female forces sought to balance out.

Analysis of publication statistics is revealing. While fourteen texts from all 1789 issues of the *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* relate to women at all,⁴⁵ there are only seven such texts in the 1790 issues, eight in 1791, and seven in 1792 (see Figure 1 at the end of this paper). Other than the change in overall output of female-related texts, an additional shift is observed: in 1789, there was one text (a poem) claiming to be written by a female author; in 1790, two; in 1791, three; in 1792, three again. Small numbers though they may be, they reveal that self-representation of women was on the uptick, from about seven percent to just above forty percent. Thus, while women were gaining political voice at the polls, they were also gaining a public literary voice.

⁴⁴ "The Maiden's choice of a Husband," *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 18 March 1789. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm. This poem was originally part of British poet and playwright Henry Carey's hit 1729 comedic ballad-opera, *The Contrivances*. Henry Carey, *The Contrivances* (London: printed for W. Mears, at the Lamb, without Temple-Bar, and sold by J. Roberts, in Warwick-Lane, 1729), 9. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Accessed 31 March 2018. Suzanne Aspden, "Carey, Henry (1687-1743), poet and songwriter," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed 31 March 2018.

⁴⁵ Within this category are texts that feature female characters, that claim to be written by a female author, or that discuss or refer to the subject of women.

The themes of the poetry remain similar, but, in some poems, the presence of those themes is more pronounced and more central to the text. On April 11, 1792, for example, a poet self-identified as “A Phoenix-Hunter” published his poem, “The Choice of a Wife.”⁴⁶ The speaker explains that he “long[s] for honey, / And all the sweets of matrimony” but is cautious about his selection of a wife: “But as I won’t run helter skelter, / I wish to bargain for my halter.”⁴⁷ These first four lines illustrate the tensions that mark the period’s attitudes toward marriage and gender. “Matrimony” brings “honey” and “sweets,” but at the sacrifice of a male’s individual liberty: to taste the pleasures of marriage, the American male must agree to wear a “halter,” a noose for restraining an animal or hanging a person. The man’s sexual interest is evident in his longing for honey and sweets, and yet he demands that his wife be “virtuous,” and “no forward mynx” who is “intent to see and to be seen.”⁴⁸ In other words, he desires a wife who is sexual, but according to his authority: the coquettishness of a minx and her desire “to see and to be seen” emasculate his power—they suggest a female agency that operates in the public sphere. This concern is reiterated in his stipulation that she not have a “giggling air” and a “tongue” that “an inch or two might spare.”⁴⁹ Speech, the reader is reminded, is a powerful tool that can upend a man’s power in the domestic and public spheres alike, and thus, despite women’s recent gains in an electoral voice, the poem’s speaker insists on a wife “not prone to speak”—a wife who presents no threat to his authority.⁵⁰

The speaker draws particular attention to clothes throughout the poem. He criticizes women who are “lavish of dress,” asserting instead that “the girl for me, / Must wear *auld fashion’d*

⁴⁶ Phoenix-Hunter, “The Choice of a Wife,” *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 11 April 1792. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7, 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

modesty.”⁵¹ Clothing is significant because it is a public representation of a woman’s interior, so the speaker’s call for a woman who wears old-fashioned modesty is a call for her to “wear” both conservative clothing and conservative virtue.

The decoratively-attired woman, the speaker states, will “walk up stairs, / And take her stockings, primly sitting, / And mind her monkey or her kitten.”⁵² The lines imply that the woman whose clothing attracts too much attention will become an old maid, undesired by virtuous men. Yet the poem carries the punishment of the coquettishly dressed woman a step further and sexualizes her sorrow. English language feline euphemisms for female genitalia are documented as far back as the seventeenth century, and a similar, sexualized meaning of “monkey” is noted to have emerged in the nineteenth century.⁵³ The woman who dresses provocatively is, according to this poem’s paradigm, guilty from the start of licentiousness and disruption of the conventional gender norms. Thus, it is her licentious sexuality that she is left with at the end. Critic Wendy Martin points out that “good citizenship and female chastity [were] linked” in the early Republic, and there was a perceived danger that female “political liberty will permit general license...that female eros will undermine, even destroy, the new Republic.”⁵⁴ In this way, women’s clothing, women’s sexuality, and American politics are inextricably linked.

Reflecting similar anxieties about women’s dress, the speaker in “The Choice of a Wife” exclaims that, “Tho’ blest with millions— what are riches, / If I must feel she wears the breeches?”⁵⁵ Pants specifically for men, breeches are an easy, even clichéd, symbol of the gendered power dynamic in a marriage. For a woman to wear breeches would be a gross departure from the

⁵¹ Ibid., 9, 59-60.

⁵² Ibid., 52-54.

⁵³ “pussy, n. and adj.2” and “monkey, n.,” *OED Online*. January 2018. Oxford University Press. Accessed 27 March 2018.

⁵⁴ Wendy Martin, “Women and the American Revolution,” *Early American Literature* 11, no. 3 (1976): 332-333.

⁵⁵ “Choice of a Wife,” 31-32.

feminine sphere and a usurpation of the male sphere, another threat not just to husbands, but to the American Republic in general.

American women's clothing choices created palpable anxiety in the male population, and this is perhaps most obvious in a poem published in the *Journal and Political Intelligencer* in 1790, about six months before the new voting language was instituted. Entitled, "To the Ladies,"⁵⁶ its speaker tells his imagined audience of females that "when women dress like boys, / The attractive power is gone; / Their sex forgot and all its joys, / When once [men's] clothes are on."⁵⁷ This initial argument centers on the connection between clothing and a woman's visual aesthetics, essentially imposing his opinion that women who dress in men's clothing become unattractive. It is an appeal to the *pathos* of the female reader.

But the next stanza shifts to address a male readership, warning them about women who wear men's clothes: "Those who would take the marriage vow / This lessen [sic] sure it teaches, / That girls in coats and waistcoats now / Will one day wear the breeches."⁵⁸ The explicit connection is once again established between women's dressing habits, women's power, and men's power. The speaker admonishes his male readers to beware of women who do not dress conservatively and femininely enough, foretelling that those women will one day command *them*. Clothing aside, this serves as a warning to New Jersey readers that small extensions of leniency to women now will only contribute to an uncontrollable tide of change in the future.

The final stanza returns to the female reader, telling her that, "From nature and from beauty's line, / Your sex have strangely err'd."⁵⁹ Here, the "absurd" cross-dressing (or possibly

⁵⁶ "To the Ladies," *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 31 March 1790. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-16.

even just transgressive dressing) of women is not just damaging to aesthetics and “beauty’s line,” or to the established social patriarchy, but to “nature” itself. This strategic mention of nature invokes ideas of natural or divine law—innate truths and religious rectitude—and it also foreshadows the emergence of a new, scientific, and biological discourse about women, their bodies, and their social roles.⁶⁰

“The Choice of a Wife” did not go unanswered, however. The newspaper was a public forum, and readers—male or female—could respond to one week’s text in the next week’s issue. Such is the case with “The Choice of a Wife,” to which an author calling herself Lavinia responded in the next issue with a poem entitled, “The Lady’s Choice of a Husband.”⁶¹ The pseudonym refers to the mythological young woman who is courted by many men who hope to become the ruler of her father’s kingdom, framing the author—and presumably speaker— as a powerful and desirable figure. The poem commences with bold sentiment from the female speaker: “Should e’er it come to pass, that I / A wedded life am doom’d to try, / Let me in simple verse relate / My chief essentials in a mate.”⁶² Her assertion that marriage would be her “doom” is strikingly disruptive. It defies not just the expectation that she would be happy to pursue her end (marriage); it defies the gendered conventions of public speech as well. The audacity of a female speaking so bluntly and in the public platform of the newspaper against the institution of marriage continues the trend of female encroachment into the male sphere and the female threat to patriarchal control.

Yet, the speaker abandons her bold tone immediately after these lines and instead tells of her ideal husband: truthful, honorable, “gentle,” and of a “generous, candid, honest heart.” Additionally, she expounds that “mental beauty” outweighs “outward form, or dress, or air.” Her

⁶⁰ Knott, “Benjamin Rush,” 660; Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 7.

⁶¹ Lavinia, “The Lady’s Choice of a Husband,” *New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 18 April 1792. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1-4.

criteria for a husband are exactly what one would expect from the mouth or pen of any other women of her time, and she shrinks back from any challenge to male power by acknowledging her own meekness, hoping that her husband would have “Good nature enough not to spy / My failings with an angry eye.”⁶³ In fact, she dedicates her longest stanza to self-deprecating demonstrations of her humility. She details her lack of “beauty,” “wit,” “wealth,” and “arts,”⁶⁴ reminding the reader that she is now remaining in line with the expectations of a young, early Republican woman, convincing him that she is not the threat he might have perceived her to be. Indeed, the “one thing she boasts” that makes her an appealing candidate for marriage is “an unaffected wish to please.”⁶⁵ While the poem begins with an assertion of her independence and a list of *her* demands in a husband, it turns into an advertisement of herself as an available marriage prospect—an advertisement in which she relegates herself to a position of subjugated servitude. In fact, although the poem’s first lines identify marriage as a “doom,” by the concluding stanza, the speaker frames marriage as a priority: “But shou’d I never in wedded life / Sustain the character of wife; / May I with cheerful temper still / Submit to heaven’s appointed will!” These lines suggest that her goal is marriage, but that if she does not wed, she will resolve to find the happiness incumbent in marriage in some other realm. Specifically, the word “still” implies that wifedom is the natural primary goal for a woman—both in the eyes of “heaven” and of society in the early American republic.

In 1797, another major change occurred in New Jersey’s voting law. The new law specifically repeated the 1790 phrase, “he or she,” thus “reiterating explicitly...commitment to the

⁶³ Ibid., 11-19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26-32.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

enfranchisement of propertied single women.”⁶⁶ The bill passed with “Yeas 32—Nays 4,” and its report in the Newark’s *Centinel of Freedom* states: “By this bill, the election throughout the state is made uniform...”⁶⁷ After this change, women’s voting skyrocketed, due in part to the efforts of the vying Federalist party and Democratic Republican party to recruit votes from respective supporters.⁶⁸

In the aftermath of the first election that October, an anonymous poet published “The Freedom of Election. A New Song,”⁶⁹ the only poem focusing on women’s enfranchisement in New Jersey. Zagarri has interpreted the first half of this poem as satire and the second half as the true sentiment of the poet, but her brief analysis too easily dismisses some irreconcilable tensions in the poem. I suggest, however, that while Zagarri assumes the speaker to be one, static voice, the poem is indeed heteroglossic, incorporating the various voices populating the public discourse surrounding women’s rights. In other words, there are multiple speakers that provide contradictory perspectives on women’s rights and equality. I contend that the first three stanzas represent the voice of a Federalist speaker (including two lines in which that speaker assumes a Democratic Republican voice) while the last three stanzas involve numerous voices.

Noting the state’s nourishment of “arts” and “science,” and its noble actions “in freedom’s cause” during the Revolution, the speaker in the first stanza lauds the “genius that...befriends” New Jersey. He, or possibly she, proclaims New Jersey as “the *oracle of Laws, / and Freedom of Election!*”⁷⁰ Despite strongly asserting support for the suffrage rights of women, the second stanza makes clear the political agenda behind the praise: “Let Democrats, with senseless prate, / maintain

⁶⁶ This was also the first time that the vote was granted to women explicitly in all thirteen counties. Lewis, “Rethinking Women’s Suffrage,” 1024.

⁶⁷ “Legislature of New-Jersey,” *New-Jersey Centinel* (Newark, NJ), 25 March 1797. Microfilm.

⁶⁸ Lewis, “Rethinking Women’s Suffrage,” 1024.

⁶⁹ “NEW-JERSEY hail!” *New-Jersey Centinel* (Newark, NJ), 18 October 1797; qtd. from Edward R. Turner, “Women’s Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807,” in *Smith College Studies in History* 1, no. 1 (October 1915): 171-2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-8.

the softer sex, sir.” Then, mimicking the voice of a Democrat, the speaker states: “Should ne’er with politics of state their gentle minds perplex, sir.”⁷¹ The speaker reveals him or herself as a Federalist jockeying with the Democratic party for women’s support and a progressive image. By denouncing the Democrats as dismissive of women’s equality and rights, the speaker identifies the Federalist party as the one of moral rectitude. He or she also claims that Federalists hold “such vulgar prejudice” and make “no objection” to female advancement, insisting instead that “New trophies shall our brows adorn, / by *Freedom of Election*.”⁷² The speaker actively disrupts the establishment of women in the domestic sphere, telling that, while in the past a woman’s responsibility “[w]as to direct the wheel and loom,” now, it is “to direct the nation.” Furthermore, he or she identifies the social, legal, and economic restrictions placed on women as detrimental binds: “While woman’s bound, man can’t be free, / nor have a *fair Election*.”⁷³ Put another way, women’s political involvement and participation in the public sphere is vital for the success of American democracy.

Those first three stanzas decidedly support women’s enfranchisement, but the entire poem shifts in tone after a dividing line of asterisks. In the stanza following, a seemingly new speaker tells of widows in a “parade” to the polls, “marching cheek by jole” and “beat[ing] the air” while “press[ing]” forward.⁷⁴ These lines draw attention to the female enfranchisement’s accompanying vocal and public transgressions of late eighteenth-century gendered spheres. The women are militant, loud, assertive, and publicly visible. They have been granted access to the public sphere and are now behaving like a belligerent mob, reflecting the apprehensions of the early American patriarchy. The speaker then reveals that the female vote was a “prank” coordinated by “men of

⁷¹ Ibid., 9-12.

⁷² Ibid., 13-16.

⁷³ Ibid., 19-24.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 25-28.

rank” to take sexual advantage of “maid[s],” “wives,” and “daughters” at the polls.⁷⁵ The joke here is on the women who were championing rights, equality, and advancement, but who were exploitatively drawn into further subjection in the process. The joke is also on the men who supported the female vote, whose masculinity, together with the virtuous masculinity of New Jersey, is violated in the sexual conquest of the state’s women. The message to not breach society’s gendered norms is clear.

The fourth stanza includes two competing voices. The speaker of the first two lines vows that “this precious clause of section laws / we shortly will amend, sir,” referencing the laws that explicitly granted women the right to vote.⁷⁶ But the next two lines promise that “woman’s rights, with all our might, / we’ll labour to defend, sir.”⁷⁷ This representation of two distinct perspectives in dialogue reflects the tensions of gender and equality that the female vote exacerbated.

The poem then turns toward the future, positing that “To Congress, lo! Widows shall go, / like metamorphosed witches! / Cloath’d with the dignity of state, / and eke, in coat and breeches!”⁷⁸ These lines shift the tone once again, but I suggest that the first and third of these lines, which unproblematically assert women’s (albeit radical) progress, represent one voice—the voice of an advocate of women’s equality and rights. The second and fourth lines, however, act as another voice’s interjections that upend the celebratory nature of the first voice. Whether they are meant seriously or satirically, the suggestions that political women are in some way similar to “metamorphosed witches” and that they will be wearing men’s clothing reflects the same palpable anxieties of women’s empowerment that were so present in the poetry of New Jersey newspapers more than half a decade earlier.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-40.

The poem's concluding stanza continues this dialogue without resolving it. Echoing the language of Mary Wollstonecraft and perhaps suggesting that this is the female voter's perspective, the speaker prognosticates that, once women are represented politically, "no longer shall man tyrannize, / and rule the world in terror: / Now one and all, proclaim the fall / of Tyrants!"⁷⁹ The political rhetoric carries two functions: it posits that women's voting will guide the state's future by keeping unjust leaders from gaining power, and beneath this veil it carefully pronounces the hope that men will cease to be "tyrants" in the domestic "world" of women. Yet the last three lines appear to be a different voice again, mocking the prospect of females in government: "Open wide your throats, / And welcome in the peaceful scene, / of government in petticoats."⁸⁰ The reference to petticoats is an oft-repeated pejorative synecdochical way of referring to progressive, politically and socially engaged women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸¹ Thus, the poem concludes with the image of female impropiators "shoving" the female vote "down people's throats," as Zagarri phrased it.⁸²

Yet, the poem is decidedly ambiguous about—if not perhaps leaning towards support of—female suffrage. The heteroglossia of the poem presents not an argument for or against the right to vote, but instead it reflects New Jersey society in a variety of its many parts: men, women, Democrats, Federalists. Newspaper readers could consider the poem's competing voices and decide for themselves which was right.

More often, however, ephemeral literature that featured undecided mulling or enthusiastic support of women's suffrage was outweighed by the prevalent periodical literature that foregrounded anxieties about women. One writer said that women voting were "in direct violation

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43-46.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 46-48.

⁸¹ Klinghoffer and Elkis, "Petticoat Electors."

⁸² Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 35.

of the spirit and intention of the law,”⁸³ but many New Jersey newspapers would publish poems and anecdotes—both originals and reprints—over the coming half-decade that reflected these anxieties in more subtle ways.

The two themes perhaps most present in the poetry of New Jersey newspapers between 1797 and 1801 are the trust between a man and a woman and the related risk of sexual violation. Between May of 1798 and March 1799, at least twenty-three pieces of creative literature that overtly concern women appear in Morris-Town’s *Genius of Liberty*, or more than two per month. This total number includes eighteen poems, two comedic letters, two maxims, and an epigram. Of all of those, eleven explicitly concern the topics of spousal (or pre-spousal) trust or sexual violation.

In June of 1798, for example, *The Genius of Liberty* printed a pair of poems, one written by a man, and another “written by a young Lady, who claims an equal rank in the sisterhood of the muses, and the graces.”⁸⁴ In “Trust not Woman,” the speaker warns that women are dangerous to men, and not as they appear on the exterior: “Trust not Woman, she’ll beguile you, / All her smiles are form’d by art; / First she’ll flatter, then exile you, / Sighing with a broken heart!”⁸⁵ His portrayal of women suggests that women are self-interested, using feminine “arts” and “smiles” to benefit themselves at the expense, once she exiles them, of men’s happiness and masculinity. Thus, the speaker provokes suspicion and urges caution. Then, reflecting the early Republican uneasiness

⁸³ *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), 2 November 1802. Qtd from Turner, “Women’s Suffrage,” 174.

⁸⁴ “Trust not Man” and “Parody,” *Genius of Liberty* (Morris-Town, NJ), 07 June 1798. The *Genius* reprinted the poems, which were originally printed in the *Massachusetts Magazine*. It is unclear who penned which poem: the note to the editors states that the “Lady” wrote the parody, but that would suggest that each wrote a poem denigrating his and her own respective sex. While this is possible (there are numerous examples of female opposition to women’s equality and male support of it (see Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 43-44), I suggest, considering also the use of the pronouns “they” and “us” in each poem, that the printers mixed up the original poem and its parody poem. Thus, I address as “he” the author of “Trust not Woman,” and likewise address as “she” the author of “Trust not Man.”

⁸⁵ “Parody,” 1-4.

with the female usurpation of the gender hierarchy, the speaker continues: “Form’d by nature to pursue us, / They outstrip the fleetest men; — / Ah! How sweet, they *bill* and *coo* us, / But how *proud* they triumph then!”⁸⁶ He is critical of women’s pride—it is not just their deceptive actions for which they are guilty, but the additional crime of being proud, a trait incongruous with the traditional, eighteenth-century, humble housewife.

And, revealing the post-Enlightenment paradigm in which he has been steeped— the paradigm of “nature’s” relationship to one’s behavior and character traits— the speaker states that women are “form’d by nature to pursue” men, to “beguile” them. The discourse of woman’s “nature,” biology, and socio-political role was increasing in intensity in the few years leading up to the new century, resulting in a new model of thought that identified women as different from men not because of “custom, education, or upbringing,” as the eighteenth-century model held, but instead because of biological, scientific, and medical reasons: women’s bodies were biologically different from and inferior to men’s bodies. For some, this would mean that women should not be able to vote; for this speaker, it means that women are inherently designed to “pursue” men, to seduce them, to dispose of them, and finally to feel pride at their conquest. In other words, women are coquettish and ought never to be trusted in love or other serious matters. Thus, the speaker concludes by comparing men to fish and women to bait, urging “*Lovers of the hook, beware!*”⁸⁷ He warns against women, against coquettes, and against any sympathetic support one might feel toward women.

In a similar way, the “young Lady” parodying the man’s poem warns against the wiles of men. Just as the male speaker characterized women in general as coquettes, this female speaker suggests that all men are rakes: “Trust not man, for he’ll deceive you; / Treachery is his sole intent;

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

/ First he'll *court* you, then he'll *leave* you, / Poor deluded! to lament."⁸⁸ While her emphasis on the deception and "treachery" of men is direct, it should be noted that the female speaker's immediate concerns do not seem to extend beyond matters of romance and sex. She asserts that men were "Form'd by nature to undo [women]"⁸⁹—to "ruin [them] by seducing"⁹⁰ them. If, in the Republican Era, the woman was a symbol of American virtue that needed male protection, then this poem's speaker points to men not as noble protectors of American virtue but as self-interested consumers and destroyers of that virtue that is foundational to American society.

Furthermore, while the immediate concern of the poem is the male's predisposition toward the sexual conquest of women, the poem reflects the late eighteenth-century perceived weakness in the female mind, bearing with it significant political implications. One result of the same biological and scientific studies of gender and sex mentioned above was that women's bodies were concluded to have had more receptive nerves, thus increasing their sensibility and leading to a stronger sense of morality.⁹¹ The exercise of such sensibility and morality, however, "weakened perception" in women: "reason and sensibility were at odds."⁹² This logic suggests that women were "form'd by nature" to be moral figures, ostensibly in the domestic sphere, and that they were biologically unfit to engage in politics, an arena in which their lack of reason would lead to their being "deluded" and "undone" by the "deception," "treachery," and "woo[ing]" rhetoric of self-interested politicians. These ideas form the foundation of the paradigm of Republican motherhood, which was "a moderate, non-threatening response to the challenge of the Revolution for women. It was a formulation that kept gender status quo intact,"⁹³ and newspaper literature reveals the

⁸⁸ "Trust Not Man," 1-4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁰ "undo, v.," *OED Online*. January 2018. Oxford University Press.

⁹¹ Knott, "Benjamin Rush's Ferment," 660.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 661.

⁹³ Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 5.

tensions between New Jersey's increasingly politicized women and the rising national tide of Republican motherhood in the late 1790s and early 1800s.

The anonymous author of an 1801 letter entitled, "A Few Friendly Hints. To the girls of the present age," published in Trenton's *The True American*, explicates the coquettish behavior of "the pretty girls of the present age."⁹⁴ He observes the change in behavior between "the women of the last age [who] were more respected because they were more reserved" and the "flirts" of the current generation who "have many admirers, but few lovers," and who are marked by a "want of a proper reserve." His descriptions of "reserve" primarily regards women's behavior in the process of courting: "the flirts now a days make the fellows so saucy, that there is hardly to be found a respectable lover;" "they make themselves too cheap to keep up their consequence, without which they can never be respectable. To speak Philosophically, a woman must repel before she can attract." In other words, the forward, risqué behavior of young women is not just frustrating to men who, as a result, treat them "with contempt;" the behavior is also distinctly masculine. The young women—the very same ones who, as maids, were allowed to vote—are not "reserved" and passive in their desires, but are active agents in the pursuit of their desires. In taking control of their immediate universe, young women exert a degree of power that is radically unfeminine and that reflects the gains they were simultaneously exercising in the male political sphere.

The same tensions are present in a brief September 1801 epigram published in the same newspaper: "Said Celia to Damon can you tell me from whence / I may know a coquette from a woman of sense, / Where the difference lies? 'Yes,' said Damon, 'I can, / Every man courts the one, t'other courts every man.'"⁹⁵ In addition to reflecting the gendered anxieties of the early

⁹⁴ "A Few Friendly Hints. To the Girls of the present age," *The True American* (Trenton, NJ), 28 April 1801. Microfilm.

⁹⁵ G.L., "Said Celia to Damon," *The True American* (Trenton, NJ), 15 September 1801. Microfilm.

Republican Era, these texts acted as agents of control. Damon's answer to Celia may have been comical or vindicating to some readers, but its contribution as a publicly printed and disseminated text to the discourse of women's rights, equality, and sexuality is perhaps its most significant influence. Damon's quip reminds the reader what socially-acceptable behavior for a woman is, and, like the letter-writer above who condemns the "flirts" of the "present age," this author, too, affirms a patriarchal structure of behavior that creates an extralegal framework of proper gender etiquette. The increase in the presence of such ephemeral literature in New Jersey during this era suggests that there was a surge in anxieties about women's behavior, and that the surge was partially in response to the disruption of traditional gender spheres by women's suffrage.

In a similar vein, the author of an 1800 poem in the *Centinel of Freedom* recognizes the changes in women's stations.⁹⁶ Like others before and after him, he assigns a symbolic role to the clothing that women were wearing: "Some few years ago, when stays, corsets and bodice, / Display'd the fine shapes of the fair [...] belles, / Each female possess'd the bright form of a goddess." Women of the preceding era, in other words, dressed reservedly, and thus, he explains, they "were guided by prudence and reason, / and wives were all modest yet lovely and gay."⁹⁷ A clear and distinct connection is drawn between women's attire and women's behavior: modest clothing reflects modest behavior.

The speaker continues that "rapid transitions of fashion" have allowed "folly [to] govern the world at her will," thereby intimately linking fashion and reason.⁹⁸ It is significant that folly, or erring reason, is personified as female, emphasizing the idea that women are incapable of exercising the rational thoughts required for civic participation. The speaker concludes by

⁹⁶ Senex, "Modern Fashion," *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NJ), 14 January 1800. Microfilm. This poem had appeared in the *Ladies Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* in 1798.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-3, 5-6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

advocating modesty: “Reflect then, ye fair, on the words of the poet, / Whose classical talents we proudly may boast, / That ‘beauty needs no foreign patches to know it, / For unadorn’d beauty adorn’d is the most.’”⁹⁹ The call that he issues is for modest dress, but because fashion is so closely connected to behavior, it is a call for modest behavior.

In the years between 1797, when the NJ voting law was modified again to explicitly include women, and 1807, when the right would be rescinded, women’s participation in elections increased, as did their level of general engagement in the public sphere that would have been considered exclusively male just a few years earlier.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, party politics on both the national front and in the local New Jersey scene intensified, largely because of the Embargo Act, the Quasi-War with France, and the burgeoning newspaper industry.¹⁰¹ Granting women access to the realm of civic engagement was a way for each party to bolster its numbers and increase its voice, but along with these advances came further anxiety and pushback.

In 1802, Trenton’s *True American* published a “Witticism” that encapsulates the increasingly vocal opposition to women’s equality—specifically to the movement for equality in women’s education, largely initiated by Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* a full decade earlier.¹⁰² The witticism’s form is a brief dialogue: one “query” and one “answer.” The query asks, “why chemistry, geography, algebra, languages, &c. are not as becoming in a Woman as in a Man?” After teasing that “I do not say that they are not entirely unbecoming, but I think a very little of them will serve her purpose,” the answer states that “a Woman’s knowledge of *chemistry* should extend no farther than to the melting of butter; her *geography*, to a thorough acquaintance with

⁹⁹ Ibid., 21-24.

¹⁰⁰ Gertzog, “Female Suffrage in New Jersey,” 52.

¹⁰¹ Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, Chapter 3.

¹⁰² “Witticism—an Extract,” *The True American* (Trenton, NJ), 16 February 1802. Microfilm. The extract appears to be taken from a dialogue in London’s *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal* in 1801. *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal, Enlarged: From September to December, inclusive... volume xxxvi* (London: Printed by A Strahan, Printers-Street, for r. Griffiths; and sold by T. Becket, in Pall Mall, 1801), 62.

every hole and corner in the house; her *algebra* to keeping a correct account of the expences [sic] of the family..." The speaker firmly asserts that the American woman's station is entirely within the domestic sphere and his answer is in direct response to the prospect of an increase in women's education and power—whether in the form of the preceding query or in the cultural climate of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New Jersey. He concludes by answering the question of women's learning of "languages" by referring to them as tongues: "and as for *tongues*, Heaven knows that one is enough in all consciences, and the less she uses that the better!" The answer to women's educational, social, and political advancement is not to encourage it, but to silence it and to silence the women themselves.

Three years later, the *True American* published an extract from Timothy Dwight's "Greenfield Hill."¹⁰³ In the newspaper, the lines were titled, "A Female Worthy," and were prefaced by a brief note from the editor. The note reads: "We trust many of the virtuous, frugal, and benevolent Matrons of New-Jersey may see their own image in the following plain picture of A Female Worthy; And hope that many of our younger females will endeavor to copy after so good a pattern." This editorial addition functions as much newspaper literature before it had done: as an extralegal defining and policing of women's behavior. It reestablishes a "pattern" of behavior that is acceptable for women, and in doing so it reestablishes a "pattern" of behavior that is simply unacceptable. Then, it thrusts those patterns directly into the public discourse by publishing it in a widely circulated newspaper. The note and the republication of the poetic lines reflect the perceived dangers of women's advancements in the 1790s and the early 1800s.

¹⁰³ "A Female Worthy," *The True American* (Trenton, NJ), 20 May 1805. Microfilm. The extract published in *The True American* runs from line 471 to 538 of Dwight's original. I will provide line numbers from Dwight's full version rather than the microfilmed newspaper, which is not as accessible as the former. See: Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: a poem, in seven parts....* (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Accessed 27 March 2018.

The first stanza vividly describes a pastoral scene of beauty and bliss—a scene that is “beyond that hillock,” somewhere in the speaker’s longing imagination and just beyond his reach.¹⁰⁴ There are “scatter’d trees” of the “freshest green,” a “glassy brook” without “weeds, nor sedges.” There are “budding willows” and “red breasts” that “safely nest, and sing.” The most significant inhabitant of this idyllic world, however, is the “female Worthy” who lives there.

The “female Worthy” is early Republican America’s ideal woman: “She, uneduc’d by dress and idle shew, / The forms, and rules, of fashion never knew; / Nor glittering in the ball, her form display’d; / Nor yet can tell a diamond, from a spade.”¹⁰⁵ Unlike the disruptive women of other poems whose attention to fashion, decoration, and display is considered indicative of weak reasoning capabilities and coquettish personalities, this woman is unaffected by the trappings of fashion. She is not just resistant to the allure of clothing and social attention; she is “uneduc’d” by it, suggesting that her sexuality is firmly protected and laudably reserved. Furthermore, rather than focusing her cares on her own public visibility and status “in the ball,” she has no greater care than her domestic work—her “spade.”

She is dedicated to improving her family’s welfare and to improving the general weal through her conduct in the domestic sphere: she tends to “the sick man” and “the poor man,” she “see[s] her daily duty done,” encourages her husband, and she “mould[s] her children, from their earliest years.”¹⁰⁶ She is the epitome of the Republican mother, who effects greater change by caring for and influencing her family—most specifically, her husband and children, the latter of which will eventually shape society by employing the virtues their mother instills in them “from their earliest years.” The speaker emphasizes the economic importance of the Republican

¹⁰⁴ Dwight, “Greenfield Hill,” 471-8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 479-482.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 485-490.

mother—the humble, happy, providing mother—for her family’s economic security and success: “Small is her house; but fill’d with stores of good[s],” which are “in the clean cellar, rang’d in order neat.”¹⁰⁷ The cellar is marked by abundance: “casks of meat,” “bins [of] apples,” “cyder-butts,” a “granary,” “flax” and “fleece,” a “long wood-pile, and “White...swine” and “poultry plump and large.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, it is specifically the Republican mother—here symbolized as “Gay-smiling Plenty”¹⁰⁹— who is responsible for this success. The speaker asserts that “every creature thrives, beneath her charge.”¹¹⁰ The Republican American man “relies” “on her love, her truth and wisdom tried,” and it is because of his wife’s influence and care that he “From little, daily saw his wealth increase,” until he “died resign’d, / And, dying, left six thousand pounds behind.”¹¹¹ Even beyond her immediate household, Dwight’s ideal woman is a “parent to the poor” and a host to passing “travellers.”¹¹² Thus, the poem forcefully insists that the American woman’s best way of serving her family and contributing to the greater good is by performing her domestic tasks that support her husband, train her children, and ensure her family’s and community’s prosperity: the “creature[s] that thrive, beneath her charge” are not just “swine” and “poultry,” but her family, her community, and her country.

The official disenfranchisement of New Jersey women in 1807 was the result of several factors. Men, women, girls, and boys alike took advantage of women’s suffrage with considerable amounts of voter fraud in the 1807 election.¹¹³ Fearing that the women would side with their Democratic-Republican foes, Federalists advocated strongly for women’s disenfranchisement.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 491, 493.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 494-501.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 494.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 502.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 523-525, 526-527.

¹¹² Ibid., 508, 510.

¹¹³ Gertzog, “Female Suffrage in New Jersey,” 55; Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 36.

¹¹⁴ Klinghoffer and Elkis, “Petticoat Electors,” 177-178.

Similarly, the Democratic-Republican Party divided between 1804 and 1807, and part of the negotiated compromise for their reunification was the elimination of the female and black vote.¹¹⁵ New, lessened regulations on men's property requirements threatened to upset too many constituents, so the withdrawal of the women's vote was a form of appeasement to other voters.¹¹⁶ The same new requirements forced the legislature to clearly define the criteria for voter eligibility, thus establishing new specifications of who can and cannot vote—of who had and did not have equal access to rights.¹¹⁷

One of the most significant factors leading to the 1807 law was that vocal, civically-engaged women—or “female politicians,” as they've been called—exacerbated party divisions and led to destructive divisions in American society.¹¹⁸ Female politicians also introduced the divisive issues of the public, political sphere into the domestic realm of the home, threatening the stable foundation of early Republican society.¹¹⁹ The adverse effect of this heightening of tensions was that women's engagement helped to fuel arguments against female suffrage and civic involvement, favoring instead the paradigm of republican motherhood. The space for women was in the home, instilling virtue in their husbands and children.

The titles of the literary pieces published in the *New-Jersey Journal* in 1805 and 1806 attest to the anxieties surrounding women's equality and its feared emasculation of men. Some titles and first lines reflect the threat of women's recent gains in power: “A Learned Lady,” “A Great Woman Is Not Imperious,” “Female Beauty and Ornament,” “To a Languishing, Ugly, Talkative Old Maid,” “A Celebrated Female.”¹²⁰ Others maintain the trope of the nagging wife, including a poem

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹¹⁶ Zagari, “American Women's Rights Before Seneca Falls,” 673.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 5-6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116-120, 130-134.

¹²⁰ *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 05 December 1805; 26 November 1805; 22 October 1805; 20 August 1805. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

titled, “The Husband,” an anecdote about “A Man, Plagued with an Ill-Tempered Wife” who drowns himself to be free of her, and an epigram about a widower hoping that the rain would not resurrect his dead wife from the grave.¹²¹ Poems like “Ruin’d Mary,” “The Seduced Daughter,” and others about rakes continued to express concerns regarding the vulnerability of America’s young women.¹²²

One medium length, comedic prose piece reveals the anxieties of emasculation that I attribute to the unsettled gender norms of New Jersey politics and society. “The Adventures of a Bashful Man” tells of a clumsy, bookish man whose “heart has failed [him]” repeatedly when meeting with young ladies.¹²³ Previous to his first visit to a gentleman and his five daughters, the “bashful man” takes dancing and bowing lessons with a professor, hoping that his “new acquirements would enable [him] to see the ladies with tolerable intrepidity.” Time after time, however, the man embarrasses himself. First, he trips while bowing, but is comforted by the ladies of the house, whose “cheerfulness” and “familiar chat” enables him to “throw off [his] reserve and sheepishness.” Then, he accidentally knocks a row of fake books off a shelf and topples over a “wedgwood inkstand,” leaving ink “streaming” onto the family’s carpet. The tone of subtle sexual embarrassment is evident in this scene, and it becomes more pronounced when the gentleman’s eldest daughter compliments the man’s clothes. His nervous reaction results in the spilling of soup in his lap, so that “for some minutes [his] legs and thighs seemed stewing in a boiling cauldron.” He tells that he “firmly bore [his] pain in silence, and sat with his lower extremities parboiled,

¹²¹ *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 25 November 1806; 25 June 1805; 16 July 1805. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

¹²² *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 13 August 1805; “The Seduced Daughter,” 17 June 1806. “Love and Folly,” 09 September 1806. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

¹²³ “The Adventures of a Bashful Man,” *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 21 October 1806. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm. This is an excerpt, reprinted from either an original or another reprint. The earliest publication of this text (although with some minor changes) is from: *The gleaner; or Entertainment for the fire-side*, compiled by J. Watson (1801), 256-259. The text is cited as “From ‘Variety;’ a Collection of Essays.”

amidst the stifled giggling of the ladies and servants.” While the protagonist is naturally a bashful person, it is the repeated embodied, sexualized mistakes, together with the laughing of the women, that most upends the stability of his mind. Later in the meal, when addressed by another daughter, he unthinkingly places his hot food in his mouth, scalding his “tongue, throat, and palate.” Then, given a drink of strong brandy to cool his mouth, he panics and cannot swallow. He recalls: “clapping my hand over my mouth, the cursed liquor squirted through my nose and fingers like a fountain, all over the dishes. I was crushed by bursts of laughter from all quarters.” The laughter is primarily female in this story, and for that reason it is significant: each time a woman addresses the protagonist, he finds himself inferior to her and loses his reason and physical integrity. The three sexually suggestive instances of liquid “streaming,” “squirting,” or “stewing in [his lap]” result in the subtly-mocking laughter of females, upsetting the hierarchy of gender dynamics in early nineteenth-century America, and demonstrating again that women’s voices and disruptive assumptions of new status were perceived as threats to individual males and to the patriarchal society of the nation in general.

For this reason, the poem that opens this chapter is particularly relevant. “Ejaculation over the grave of my wife” represents the ultimate male conquest of the movement for women’s rights and equality: Not only is the speaker’s wife dead, but “her *tongue*”—which “no house could hold” and which was too often too loud and too public—is forever silenced. Reversing the previous poem’s theme of the early nineteenth-century female emasculating the male, this poem celebrates the male’s sexuality as virile, independent, and in all ways superior to female influence. The speaker’s act of ejaculating on his wife’s grave is the supreme declaration of male authority, and the poem’s appearance in this newspaper comes just one year before the female vote would be rescinded.

New Jersey's periodical poetry would undergo no decisive moment of change after the 1807 disenfranchisement of women. But leading up to and following that event, there was a newly emerging poetic turn toward the American woman as the Republican mother. In one poem, entitled "The Widow, to Her Infant in the Cradle,"¹²⁴ a widow's "hope," "fears," and "soft distress" for her fatherless child are expressed with deep sympathy and reverence. As a Republican mother should, she "prays, with all a parent's fears, / for blessings on thine early years."¹²⁵ Another poem, "The Mother to Her Child," also celebrates the American mother.¹²⁶ The female speaker exclaims: "Oh! That thou may'st, sweet babe, inherit / Each virtue to [your father's] heart most dear; / His manly grace, his matchless merit, / Is still thy doating mother's prayer."¹²⁷ The Republican mother's role of the teacher of "virtue" and "merit" to her children is imperative. The poem's mother will imbue her "darling boy" with the virtues of his father, thus shaping him as a responsible citizen of the new Republic.

In the early years of the Republican Era, the debate over women's equality was intense. Between 1789 and the end of women's enfranchisement in 1807, the periodical literature of New Jersey demonstrates the public's various reactions to changes in women's behavior and social station. While most scholars have focused predominantly on the literature supporting women's equality, this essay has analyzed equally the periodical literature that responds to shifting gender norms with anxiety. Its poetry and prose focused on models of female irrationality, of sexual vulnerability and licentiousness, of clothing styles and behaviors of speech. It criticized women, it sought to sway public opinion against women's rights and equality, and, reflecting the themes of

¹²⁴ "The Widow, to Her Infant in the Cradle," *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth-town, NJ), 1 October 1805. Courtesy of New Jersey Historical Society. Microfilm.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁶ "The Mother to Her Child," *Genius of Liberty* (Morris-Town, NJ), 30 May 1808. This poem was first printed nine days earlier in New York. "The Mother to Her Child," *Lady's Weekly Miscellany* (New York), 21 May 1808.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

control from within its lines, it imposed definitions of and limitations on women's acceptable behavior. Most importantly, it was markedly more prevalent than any newspaper literature supporting women's rights, but that fact has been overlooked by generations of scholars who have neglected the tidal wave of pejorative periodical literature in the 1790s and 1800s. Thus, by including a broader range of popular genres, we find a clearer perspective of those two decades: they were not just a period of political and social gains with a clean and decisive ending. Rather, they constituted an era characterized by a prolonged struggle in which the inner anxieties and concerns of men and women across New Jersey and America were in fierce and constant tension. There is no evidence of resistance to New Jersey women's loss of the vote in 1807. The law itself was passed quickly and easily with bipartisan support.¹²⁸ There are no literary responses to it in the state's periodicals, either. In New Jersey and the rest of the new nation, the paradigm of Republican motherhood would, into the mid-nineteenth century, continue to dismantle women's public engagement and further affirm and codify women's reserved, domestic presence as the acceptable gender norm. The same revolutionary ideas of rights and equality, however, would surge back into the public discourse in the 1840s with the Women's Rights Movement, in which activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, would declare "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Klinghoffer and Elkins, "Petticoat Electors," 189.

¹²⁹ "Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," in *The American Reader: Words that Moved a Nation*, ed. Diane Ravitch (New York: HarperResource, 1991). Accessed 27 March 2018.

Figure 1: Annual # of Female-Related Fictions, Anecdotes, Poems, etc. in the New-Jersey Journal and Political Intelligencer (1789-1792)¹³⁰

	1789	1790	1791	1792
Fictions & Anecdotes	6	0	0	0
Poems	7	7	9	6
Other	1	0	0	0
Total	14	7	9	7
Female-authored texts	1	2	4	3

Scott Zukowski is a Mellon/ACLS Public Fellow at the Library of America. In 2018, he received the Stony Brook University English Department's Charles Davis Best Dissertation Prize for "Ephemeral Literature and Liberties: Early American Periodicals and the Development of American Identities," which studies the newspaper literature by and about marginalized peoples between 1733 and 1829 to better understand the breadth and limitations of early American paradigms of liberty and identity. In 2020, Scott's work will also appear in Early American Studies and Walt Whitman Quarterly Review.

¹³⁰ It would be virtually impossible to establish completely objective criteria for what qualifies as a "Female-Related" text. I have assessed all creative works published in the *Journal* during these years. Those counted in the table are works that feature significant female characters, themes of marriage, explicit discussions of women's behaviors and gender norms, or female authors. While this method is imperfect, it is nonetheless revealing.