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Confronting Institutionalized Misogyny: Reading Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* in the #MeToo Era

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Amelia Opie's (1769-1853) sentimental novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) has long garnered and divided critical opinion. The novel's heroine Adeline rejects the institution of marriage, lives out of wedlock, and is socially ridiculed and isolated for it. Adeline's idealized acceptance of her lover Glenmurray's radical philosophy against marriage leads to social consequences for her reputation, safety, and happiness. However, following the death of Glenmurray, Adeline eventually repents her previous beliefs and marries Glenmurray's cousin, Berrendale, only to be trapped in an abusive marriage. Ostensibly written to test the practicality of radical politics, the novel has most commonly been read as an expression of post-Revolutionary conservatism. Matthew Orville Grenby argues that Opie's novel questions the morality of Adeline and Glenmurray's cohabitation, but through the various trials Adeline faces as a fallen woman, Opie "returned a decisive and conservative verdict" (89). Mark Zunac labels *Adeline Mowbray* as counterrevolutionary and "a more politically palatable response to the Revolution's excesses," (1). Additionally, Clayton Carlyle Tarr asserts that Glenmurray and Adeline's death represents conservatism and its social customs' triumph over radical practices. More recently, critics have found radical veins within Opie's seeming didactic conservatism. Roxanne Eberle argues that Opie undercuts the didactic moralizing of the novel by depicting a highly hypocritical society. Andrew McInness asserts that Opie subverts and undermines the institution of marriage by portraying failed, unhappy, and even violent marriages throughout the novel. Melissa J. Gantz posits that Opie's radicalism lies in her privileging of female community and ties. Gantz notes that even on her deathbed, Adeline is surrounded by a community of women rather than dying alone, as is often the fate of a fallen woman (215). These

two lines of critical thought highlight the novel's political ambiguity and interpretive difficulties.

<2>Instead of following this already significant line of critical work that considers the conservatism or radical philosophical ideology underlying the novel, I argue that Opie paves an alternate path that subtly critiques early nineteenth-century middle and upper-class British society by showcasing the exploitation of women through their labor, marriages, and child-rearing. Scholars have often focused on Adeline's opinions and experiences, and on whether they reveal the novel's radical or conservative principles while neglecting Opie's representation of the impact of those principles on the individual lives of lower, middle, and upper-class women. Opie's primary concern in *Adeline Mowbray* is the tension between radical and conservative theories on parenting and marriage and their practical implications in early British nineteenth-century society. By exposing the inconsistencies of both theoretical applications through the narrative's depiction of parental, social, and marital bonds, Opie forms a sophisticated critique of her society's gendered codes of conduct. I argue Opie exhibits four intersecting issues for women in an oppressive society: parenting, education, matrimony, and autonomy.

<3>Opie was an author aware of the political and social upheavals of her time. She often wrote on conservative and radical philosophical principles associated with the French Revolution. *Adeline Mowbray* was published at a time when the violence and trauma of the French Revolution were still vividly felt and feared. Elizabeth Dolan notes that Opie was a staunch abolitionist and wrote "literature designed to increase British citizens' sympathy for the suffering of slaves" (10). In *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie sentimentally depicts various hardships women and specifically Adeline face, including abandonment, harassment, poverty, and illness. She also demonstrates how both radicals and conservatives can be complicit in and even cause suffering. Opie highlights the conditions of conduct for both married and cohabitating women and demonstrates the dangers of both states. As married women did not have legal status, marriage often became another source of suffering for women (Bild 4). A woman living out of wedlock was also socially ostracized. While marriage was often a vehicle to pass through society, it did not ensure safety. Through her novel, Opie clearly understands objections to social norms and the consequences at stake for rebelling against them. One way to reassess Opie's ambiguity is by placing her interest in philosophical pragmatism in conversation with insights and vocabulary of the #MeToo Movement. This article will examine the novel's political commitments through a framework indebted to the #MeToo movement, emphasizing Adeline's sufferings and considering the ways that gender, class, age, and race intersect and complicate post-Revolutionary narratives.

<4>Tarana Burke coined the hashtag #MeToo eleven years before its viral take off on Twitter. Burke began using the term on the social media platform MySpace to bring attention to the widespread violence against women of color and create networks of support for victims. Angela Onwuachi-Willig argues that the #MeToo movement has “rightly received praise for breaking long-held silences about harassment” and has also “rightly received criticism for both...ignoring the role that a woman of color played in founding the movement” (105). Initially, the movement appeared to privilege white, cisgender women’s stories, leaving out narratives of women of color, Indigenous women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, women with disabilities, and low-income communities. While women are not the only victims of sexual assault and harassment, the hashtag is often viewed as a feminist microphone for survivors to share their experiences and stories. Megan Murphy notes that the #MeToo movement ignited conversations about individualized experiences with trauma, harassment, and sexual abuse and also “larger societal themes, including patriarchy” (63). Scholars such as Angela Y. Davis have mapped the historical and global trajectory of “me too,” citing how gendered violence is “structural” and embedded in cultural practices and institutions (27).

<5>Feminist readings of the British novel have long focused on the forms of psychological and physical abuse encountered by female characters, and they have done so in recognition that women novelists were amply aware of such forms of abuse. Zakarya Aldukhayil notes that seventeenth and eighteenth-century plays and novels such as Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677) and Frances Burney’s novel *Evelina* (1778) “investigate attitudes of rape... and serve as a critique of the patriarchal society” (77). Lana L. Dalley and Kellie Holzer argue that Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) voice a “spectrum of issues, including sexual harassment in public places, sexual assault, [and] the culture of rape” (n. pag). Sarah Hackenberg argues that many women writers of the nineteenth century, such as Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), depicted examples of violence against women, but also demonstrated these instances as systemic rather than individual (4). I utilize the #MeToo movement as a frame to demonstrate how women novelists writing two centuries ago, in a very different historical context, were already highlighting and diagnosing the forms of misogynistic violence that gained their widest circulation to date with #MeToo. A #MeToo framework for this article acknowledges women’s suffering and trauma and the institutional issues of labor, sexism, and racism within early nineteenth-century social structures.

<6>Scholars such as Mary K. Holland and Heather Hewett note that the #MeToo movement has reinvigorated scholarship on “addressing sexual assault, rape culture,

and the power dynamics of misogyny and structural violence in publications, classrooms, and conferences” (2). Dalley and Holzer posit that the language of the #MeToo movement offers “pedagogical opportunities in reading old texts with new frames, contemporary vocabularies, and tools largely derived from feminist activism and victim advocacy” (7). The journal *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* recently published a special issue in the summer of 2020 entitled “Victorian Literature in the Age of #MeToo” that reflects on the movement’s implications for Victorian literary studies and pedagogy (Dally and Holzer). Thus, this article builds on scholarship that posits feminist activist movements as a theoretical lens to investigate social justice in early nineteenth-century novels. Many women novelists, including Opie, writing in the nineteenth century were already highlighting #MeToo before #MeToo. I show how Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* can be read as a pre-history of #MeToo, thus aligning Opie with more progressive movements despite the conservative overtones of her novel. Specifically, the language of #MeToo helps drive this focus and reveals how Opie was writing at a time when #MeToo vocabulary was not easily recognized. Depicting trauma within family, marital, and social relationships, *Adeline Mowbray* becomes a cautionary tale set in a society that perpetuates gender inequalities and limits choices for women.

A Mother’s Mistakes

Adeline’s childhood can be described as traumatic. Christa Schönfelder identifies a framework for analyzing fictional texts through a trauma-informed lens: “focus on intrapersonal processes, on the dynamics and crises of memory and identity, and how trauma victims (re)construct their lives” (39) As Megan E. Hodges notes, “psychoanalyzing or diagnosing fictional characters” is difficult and dangerous and terms such as trauma were conceptually unavailable to authors of Opie’s generation; however, Opie clearly acknowledges and depicts that some form of trauma occurs in Adeline’s childhood (Hodges 2). Thus, identifying factors of trauma for Adeline is necessary for understanding the internal and external motivations for her decisions. The novel begins by tracking Adeline’s tumultuous childhood and introducing Mrs. Editha Mowbray as a tyrannical free-thinker, whose practice “[is] always in opposition to her opinions” (42). The novel’s omniscient narrator consistently mocks Mrs. Mowbray’s radicalism and rightfully holds her accountable for Adeline’s problematic childhood and “miseducation.” Mrs. Mowbray terrorized Adeline as a child through her “experimental philosophy,” which included restricting Adeline’s diet and refusing to give her shoes until her feet bled (43). When Adeline is not the test subject for Mrs. Mowbray’s philosophical fancies, she neglects and abandons Adeline to Mrs. Woodville, Editha’s “infirm but active mother” (46). Mrs. Mowbray spends the majority of Adeline’s childhood

away from her, studying and “perfect[ing] a system of education” rather than directly raising Adeline. (46). This absence is one culprit in Adeline’s incurred suffering. Adeline clearly feels the loss of her mother’s presence and at one point questions whether her mother “does love [her] sufficiently” (46). Anne Bentley Waddoups, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Kendra Strouf note “the effects of parent–child separation are consistently negative on children’s social-emotional development, well-being, and mental health” (387). Thus, Adeline’s studying and internalization of Glenmurray’s philosophy can be read as her attempt to feel connected to and accepted by her mother, a result of her traumatic childhood.

<8>Adeline experiences trauma from her mother, but also through the aggressive and unwanted advances of Sir Patrick, Mrs. Mowbray’s bigamous husband. This part of the narrative follows traditional #MeToo recounting of victims of sexual harassment. The novel’s narrator reveals that Sir Patrick considered women “as a race of subordinate beings, formed for the service and amusement for men” (64). Socializing with Mrs. Mowbray becomes an avenue for Sir Patrick to hunt Adeline: “Constantly, therefore, did he besiege Mrs. Mowbray with his conversation, and Adeline with his eyes; and the very libertine gaze with which he often beheld her” (64). Sir Patrick increases his advances from just leering at Adeline to at times “roughly seizing her trembling hand” (69). Kimberly Cox posits “female characters’ hands are grabbed constantly in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels. And such uninvited, undesired grips are described, without exception, as painful and sexually threatening to the female characters who suffer them” (n. pag.). Sir Patrick consistently engages in non-consensual contact with Adeline, forcing proximity through various means like “drawing his chair close to hers” and creating an uncomfortable and unequal dynamic between them (69).

<9>While scholars such as Anne McWhir have rightfully described Adeline’s elopement with Glenmurray as fleeing Sir Patrick’s schemes to sexually assault her, the novel also marks how Adeline was already experiencing forms of assault by Sir Patrick. Sir Patrick continually uses hand-grabbing as a means to exert control over Adeline, particularly as he propositions her to begin a relationship: “‘But, my lovely love,’ continued Sir Patrick, most ardently pressing her hand, ‘so much has your sweet person, and your frank and liberal way of thinking, charmed me, that I here freely offer myself to you, and we will begin the life of honor together as soon as you please’” (69). While he assumes Adeline will take up his offer, his response to her rejection is violent: “Adeline, though alarmed, bewildered, and confounded, had still recollection enough to know that... the words and looks of Sir Patrick were full of increasing insult. ‘I believe... I had better retire,’ faltered Adeline. ‘Retire!... Aye, by all means,’ exclaimed the baronet, rudely seizing her.” (69). Adeline attempts to

“free herself from his grasp,” and is only able to do so after Glenmurray enters the room (70). Sir Patrick is a physical and sexual threat to Adeline, causing her to be “in search of protection” (70). Misogyny manifests as physical violence, and this physical violence affects Adeline greatly, forcing her to seek out avenues of protection, one of them being Glenmurray.

<10>A key feature of *Adeline Mowbray* in the wake of the #MeToo movement is that it displays how women can also promote misogyny. Doreen Thierauf asserts that the “#MeToo movement...helped spark the realization that we are, in fact, still living in a rape culture, a sociality that is entirely permeated by the knowledge that men may violate women’s psychological and physical integrity, that they will be rewarded for such actions” (n. pag.). Unfortunately, Mrs. Mowbray perpetuates this realization. When Adeline attempts to discuss Sir Patrick’s behavior, Mrs. Mowbray interrupts and silences her: “‘My dear child,’ replied Mrs. Mowbray laughing, ‘that is only the usual freedom of his manner; a manner which your ignorance of the world led you to mistake. He did not mean to insult you. I am sure that, despite his ardent passion for me, he never, even when alone with me, hazarded any improper liberty’” (81). Mrs. Mowbray infantilizes and gaslights Adeline while defending Sir Patrick, motivations later revealed to be rooted in competition and jealousy.

<11>Opie gives us a case study of how attitudes unveiled by the #MeToo movement were already understood and denounced by women writers in past centuries, despite the differences in context. Specifically, Opie characterizes Mrs. Mowbray as a jealous and complicit individual in Adeline’s harassment. As Adeline attempts multiple times to confide her experiences, Mrs. Mowbray “command[s] her to be silent” and states, “‘You can say nothing that will shake my opinion of him, miss Mowbray,...so I advise you to reconcile yourself to a circumstance which is not in your power to prevent’” (81). This moment crucially denotes Adeline’s lack of autonomy in her present situation. Mrs. Mowbray and Sir Patrick strip Adeline’s agency through physical and verbal violence in terms that evoke issues of consent and assault.

<12>While the novel depicts issues of consent and assault, it also conveys the importance of believing women and their testimonies. Mrs. Mowbray’s cold attitude toward Adeline only increases, despite Sir Patrick’s confession of his “ardent passion for her daughter” (119). Mrs. Mowbray blames Adeline, rather than Sir Patrick, for her failed marriage, which can be read as a form of victim blaming. Claire O’Callaghan defines victim-blaming as “the skewed, misogynist logic that suggests that women are ‘asking for it’ (‘it’ being violence— whether physical, emotional, or sexual)” (88). Victim blaming is also another form of emotional

manipulation and abuse. Dr. Norberry, a family acquaintance, points out to Mrs. Mowbray that “every one saw that he [Sir Patrick] was in love with her [Adeline] long before he married you” (133). Mrs. Mowbray’s response is one that dehumanizes Adeline: “And it is being the object of that cruel preference, which I will never forgive her” (133). Mrs. Mowbray fails to hold Sir Patrick accountable and instead lobbies her anger toward Adeline, further pushing Adeline to the margins.

<13>Mrs. Mowbray admits to Dr. Norberry that she wished to be “styled the happiest as well as best of mothers,” to which Dr. Norberry replies, ““And so you would, perhaps, had you not wished to be wife as well as mother (136). Their dialogue reveals a double standard for women. Mrs. Mowbray’s sexual desire for Sir Patrick cannot coexist with her role as Adeline’s mother and she is punished for her failed attempt to have both. Mrs. Mowbray’s frustration derives from nineteenth-century sexual double standards. Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline are positioned as sexual rivals throughout the text and Dr. Norberry tells Adeline, ““You were her [Mrs. Mowbray’s] rival, as well as her child” (135). This dialogue is centered on the “wrongdoings” of mother and daughter, rather than the manipulations of Sir Patrick. Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline face gendered consequences for their actions because they live in a society that perpetrates blaming women. Thus, Mrs. Mowbray represents the “complex relationship between gender stereotypes, sexual politics, and victim blaming” (O’Callaghan 305).

<14>Adeline’s elopement with Glenmurray is one out of desperation, but a decision she determines as “the most proper and virtuous step” dictated by “reason” (100). Her relationship with Glenmurray offers her a semblance of protection and restores some of her personal power, as directly she tells Glenmurray, “We meet to part no more” (99). Adeline and Glenmurray’s relationship is one of the most successful unions in the text, even though it is built and sustained out of wedlock. Other relationships throughout the text depict jealous, controlling, and bigamous partners.

<15>In Opie’s historical situation, women faced constraints on conduct and were expected to uphold social institutions, such as marriage. These constraints faced by British women in the early nineteenth century were not the same as those facing women in modern Western societies today. As Opie demonstrates later in the novel, marriage was often a form of subjugation for women. Married women in the early nineteenth century had no “legal existence,” and property, earnings, and custody of children solely belonged to their husbands (Perkin 14). Women’s history scholar Joan Perkin argues that nineteenth-century public opinion regarding marriage often viewed it as an “institution of social convenience” but because of the “inequalities

of law” marriage often condoned the exploitation of wives and the tyranny of husbands (31). Divorce was also not an option for nineteenth-century wives. Though marriage for nineteenth-century women and their actions carried different connotations and stakes, the #MeToo movement has brought to light the many ways marriage is continually weaponized against women. Women today experience forms of domestic violence, including marital rape, financial abuse, emotional manipulation, and face many barriers to divorce. At its core, the #MeToo movement is a survivor-centered justice movement working to aid women through a reclamation of healing, action, and agency. Thus, through a #MeToo lens, Adeline’s refusal to marry can be seen as a reclaiming of choice and power.

<16>Throughout her life, Adeline’s agency has been denied, but her relationship with Glenmurray and principles regarding marriage are her own choices. Opie rewards this as Glenmurray and Adeline’s relationship is “cemented by one of the strongest of all ties—the consciousness of mutual benefit and assistance” (103). However, despite their successful relationship, Opie demonstrates that Adeline is continually left vulnerable whether she is unmarried or married due to the patriarchal prejudice of her society.

Community Complicity

<17>Doreen Thierauf argues that the “single most important takeaway of the #MeToo movement” is the “dispersed phenomenon [of misogyny]; gender-based prejudice resides in the minds of both men and women alike” (n. pag.). Opie depicts this through the difficult encounters Adeline experiences after she elopes with Glenmurray. Adeline often gains initial admiration from those with whom she interacts, both during and after her relationship with Glenmurray. These initial interactions serve to highlight Adeline’s moral nature but also reveal her society’s internalized prejudices against fallen women. As Joan Perkin notes, “From the point of view of the government, Parliament, and the Christian churches, marriage was a public and indissoluble contract, a legally approved sexual relationship and a validation of property and inheritance rights. It was thus the bedrock of stable society” (30). Therefore, Adeline’s refusal to marry is another political weapon used against her. However, Opie heavily critiques these prejudices. When the couple meets Mr. Maynard, he believes Adeline to be a virtuous woman, largely because he assumes she is Glenmurray’s wife, but also because of his perception of her feminine countenance: “Her own dress, manners, and expression were such an admirable comment on her words, and she shone so brightly... in the graceful awfulness of virtue...” (108). While Adeline is under the social and male gaze, she effectively passes as a virtuous woman because she is perceived as one. Adeline’s appearance

and personality initially fool those she meets, which reveals a larger critique of the importance of appearance in society rather than Adeline's actions. Despite their initial admiration of Adeline, when Adeline is revealed as Glenmurray's mistress, people within this society only see Adeline as a social and sexual violation.

<18>Many of the women in the novel view Adeline as an inherent sexual threat because her relationship with Glenmurray challenges notions of chastity. Miss Maynard and Mrs. Wallington, Mr. Maynard's sisters, are depicted as vain and envious, hoping "to find [Adeline] unworthy of...admiration" (108). Mrs. Norberry and her daughters are also depicted as jealous women and Adeline's fall in status is seen as "source of triumph" (126). Even Glenmurray's two female cousins are described as being "more remarkable for their beauty than their virtue" (157). However, the crux for Adeline is that while she is generous, kind, and intelligent, she is living out of wedlock and cannot be accepted within this society. Tracie Nicholls argues that "one of the ways that cultural acceptance of toxic masculinity works to produce complicit femininity is by inculcating the idea that sexually active women are somehow more questionable—more deviant, more irresponsible, more dishonest and anti-social—than sexually active men" (78).

<19>While Adeline is socially rejected due to her marital status, Opie also mocks hypocritical nineteenth-century conventions surrounding marriage through her representation of Glenmurray's cousins. She writes of how "[o]ne of them was married, and to so accommodating a husband, that his wife's known gallant was his intimate friend...The other lady was a young and attractive widow, who coquetted with many men, but intrigued with only one at a time" (158). While Adeline's virtue is grounded in fidelity to Glenmurray, she is still judged, rejected, and isolated; Glenmurray's cousins operate under the cloak of marriage, allowing them to be socially accepted in spite of their behavior. The same women who directly judge Adeline are often described as inferior to Adeline's morals and complicit in her treatment. However, the narrative demonstrates that Adeline's inherent morality does not matter in this society; she must operate within society's perceived virtues.

Misogyny in Marriage

<20>Throughout the novel, Opie reveals there is often no peace or protection for women in a society that supports misogyny and prejudice, as the first half of the novel details Adeline's stubborn constitution and theories confronting society's moral standards. Still, her later conformity to marriage is shown to come out of a desperate need for safety. As Thierauf asserts, the #MeToo "movement's fundamental narrative is centered on an individual precariously navigating a world

that is not organized around her needs for physical autonomy and safety” (n. pag.). Thus readers of Opie’s novel see that Adeline is subjected to a series of harassments following the death of Glenmurray. In one scene, Adeline attempts to meet with Mr. Langley, an attorney, to discuss Glenmurray’s financial affairs. During this meeting, Mr. Langley “forcibly squeez[es] her fingers” and even “forcibly kiss[es] [her] ungloved hand” (203). Adeline is again subjected to what Cox identifies as the “sexual significance of the forceful, repeated, nonconsensual hand-grabbing” (n. pag.). After leaving Mr. Langley’s office, Adeline is followed by two men who are described as “pursuers” and they both put their hands on Adeline by “patting her on the back” and putting their “arm around her waist” (204). The impending threat of rape causes Adeline to “use the sacred name of wife” to force the men to leave her alone (204). Adeline is not safe in either the domestic or public space and “a #MeToo framework urges us...to re-read depictions of...women anew for the real dangers presented by simply being in public” (Dalley and Holzer).

<21>Adeline is repeatedly abused and degraded for her “mistress” status; however, this abuse does not end once she is married. Adeline marries Berrendale, Glenmurray’s cousin, to have a “legal protector,” but Adeline’s marriage proves to be a domestic nightmare (204). While Berrendale’s physical and sexual appetites increase in marriage, Adeline is forced to bear the weight of her husband’s indulgences. Berrendale’s list of abuses includes starving Adeline, adultery, emotionally berating her, abandoning her and their daughter, Editha, and committing bigamy. The narrator notes that Adeline feels “the neglect of Berrendale” and he isolates and excludes her from the company of other women and men: “[S]he found that he never even wished her to go [out] with him, though the friends whom he visited were married, and he met, from his own confession, other ladies at their tables. She therefore began to suspect that Berrendale did not mean to introduce her as his wife” (208). The narrator further reveals that Berrendale is “resolved to keep her still in the retirement to which she was habituated” (208). Adeline is neither protected in the public nor domestic space through her marriage. Marriage does not promise social acceptance and interaction either. Adeline admits that she thought her marriage would “restore” her relationships with other married couples, but Berrendale deprives her of such “social enjoyments” (209). Even though Adeline marries, Opie subverts the “protection” of marriage by highlighting how oppressive and unsafe marriage can be for women.

<22>Before Adeline’s marriage, Opie uses Adeline’s open defiance to push against social structures. However, rather than affirming her initial views on marriage, Adeline sees her marriage to Berrendale and her trials as reifying the importance of legal matrimony. Yet Adeline’s shifts in viewpoints cannot completely be seen as a

reform to conservative standards. Within Adeline's marriage, Opie indirectly demonstrates how Adeline's acceptance of social conduct is now inconsistent. Adeline ultimately repents her previous beliefs stating, "I became a wife...from a change of principle on assurance of error, and not from interest, or necessity" (237). However, this contradicts her previous claim to marry for personal protection. This is not Adeline's only inconsistency, as she espouses aphorisms about the utility of marriage for children and society:

I shall therefore only mention the argument which carried at length full convention to *my* mind...the argument I allude to is founded on a consideration of the interests of children...It is evident that on education given to children must depend on the welfare of the community...Hence it follows that marriage must be more beneficial to society in its consequences, than connections capable of being dissolved at pleasure because it [marriage] has a tendency to call forth and exercise the affections, and control the passions (256).

While much of the novel creates tension between theory and praxis, Adeline's new theoretical perspective on marriage about the "interest of children" is tested and found lacking in the first half of the novel (256). Mrs. Mowbray, Adeline's mother, consistently neglects and abandons Adeline in her first and second marriages. Berrendale also abandons his daughter for a new life in Jamaica with a second wife. Even Mrs. Mowbray's parents seem to abandon her to her own intellectual pursuits, which in part creates the cycle of miseducation that the novel also critiques. There is no guarantee that marriage will result in positive interests for children. Her argument that "marriage must be more beneficial to society...because it has a tendency to call forth and exercise affections, and control the passions" does not align with what she has experienced (256). While Adeline may believe what she states and writes, the inconsistencies between her new arguments and the experiences represented in the novel encourage readers to question Adeline's endorsement of marriage.

<23>Furthermore, Adeline's position on divorce reinforces this sense of the problematic antinomy of women's social positions. While Berrendale does not respect the sanctity of marriage, the threat of his bigamous actions, mainly the truth of his marriage to Adeline, is something Berrendale fears. When Savanna uncovers his plot to marry another, Berrendale convinces her that he will end the marriage, but makes Savanna "return a promise of not imparting to the servants, or to any one, that he [has] a wife in England" (223). The possibility of Savanna spilling his secret is what motivates him to have her enslaved again. Opie demonstrates that accessible

divorce could result in husbands leaving their wives on whims with little to no accountability. However, divorce in the novel can also be read as a means to liberate wives from their abusive spouses. When Colonel Mordaunt asks Adeline if her situation has made her wish divorce was more easily obtainable, she makes clear her beliefs:

By no means, interrupted Adeline, understanding what he was going to say: to BEAR and FORBEAR I believe to be the grand secret of happiness, and ought to be the great study of life: therefore, whatever would enable married persons to separate on the slightest quarrel or disgust, would make it so much the less necessary for us to learn this important lesson; a lesson so needful in order to perfect the human character, that I believe the difficulty of divorce to be one of the greatest blessings of society (238).

However, Adeline experiences more than an argument with Berrendale. She suffers physical, verbal, and financial abuse. Melissa Gantz argues that while Adeline believes that her trials will educate her daughter on the errors of her initial dismissal of marriage, “the novel suggests that Adeline’s suffering actually stems from her union with Berrondale” (185). Even though Adeline is ridiculed and embarrassed as Glenmurray’s mistress, she is still able to find happiness in their relationship. Berrendale’s departure for Jamaica is one of the few times Adeline feels happiness while being married: “Adeline’s heart, spite of herself, bounded with joy at this discovery” (Opie 216). In Berrendale’s absence, Adeline experiences “a feeling of liberty and independence” (217). In a reversal of her previous relationship with Glenmurray, Adeline has a divorce with Berrendale in every aspect but name. Adeline’s feelings of liberation following Berrendale’s departure invite readers to consider the possibilities of divorce as freeing.

Communal Care and Female Solidarity

<24>As much as the novel depicts failed relationships and jealous acquaintances, some of the most important and beneficial connections are those made between women. Within the framing of the #MeToo movement as an act of feminist collectivity, the need for unity and community among women is clear and vital. Characters such as Emma Douglas, Savanna, and Mrs. Pemberton serve as reminders of the power of female friendships while also critiquing the misogynistic structures that seek to sever female ties.

<25>The Douglas women, Mrs. Douglas and Emma Douglas are described as “of a different class of women from the sisters of Maynard” (114). Emma is specifically

marked for her sympathy: “Unexposed, therefore, to feel those petty jealousies, those paltry competitions, which injure the character women in general, Emma Douglas’s mind was the seat of benevolence and candor” (114). Scholar Cecily Erin Hill argues that Emma is Opie’s “obvious contrast” and undefiled version of Adeline, but Emma is also rebellious (741). When Major Douglas confronts Glenmurray about his mistress, Emma and Mrs. Douglas are found to be “eaves-dropping” and even after the disclosure of Adeline’s status, they each brainstorm ways to aid Adeline (117). Additionally, Emma petitions to see Adeline in person because “it is [her] duty to do all [she] can to save a fellow creature from ruin; and words spoken from the heart are always more powerful than words written” (118). Adeline is often viewed as a contagion that could possibly infect others; therefore, Emma’s willingness to see her in person is significant.

<26>Furthermore, Emma is described as Adeline’s champion and she defends her later to the Maynards: “‘We feel very differently on that subject,’ she [Emma] replied. ‘I shall ever regret, not that I saw and conversed with Miss Mowbray, but that I did not see and converse with her again and again’” (249). Emma’s interjection bears incredible weight, considering Adeline’s lack of support before and after her elopement and eventual marriage. When Dr. Norberry tells Mrs. Mowbray that “every one” was aware of Sir Patrick’s feelings toward Adeline, he is acknowledging his and “every one” else’s complacency, which is one of the reasons Sir Patrick is able to repeatedly terrorize Adeline (133). However, Emma intervenes on her behalf, even when Adeline is absent. While Emma does not necessarily agree with or support Adeline’s previous actions, she is in solidarity with Adeline and her plights. Emma reinforces the power of believing women. After Emma’s declaration, the gossip surrounding Adeline stops in Emma’s presence.

<27>Opie demonstrates the value of support and loyalty through Savanna, a fugitive enslaved person, and friend to Adeline. Adeline prevents Savanna’s husband, William, from being arrested and Savanna becomes Adeline’s servant. While the novel does enforce racial hierarchies, Adeline tells Berrendale that Savanna is “the only person in the world, perhaps, who loves [her] with sincere and faithful affection” (212). Savanna is also a prominent champion and protector of Adeline and is the only individual to stand up to Berrendale’s abusive behavior: “‘You man!’ she cried at last, ‘You will kill her; she pine at your kindness; –and if she die, mind me, man! Never you marry, amen. –You marry, forsoot! You marry a lady! true bred lady like mine! No man! –You best get a cheap miss from the street and be content’” (211). Savanna also exposes Berrendale’s infidelity and is a key character in proving the legitimacy of Adeline’s marriage. At the novel’s conclusion, Adeline dies surrounded by a community of women, but specifically on the “bosom” of Savanna,

“[her] nurse, [her] consoler, and [her] friend” (280). Savanna proves to be a genuine support system for Adeline.

<28>That being said, the novel has also been critiqued for its portrayal of Savanna. Susan S. Lanser argues that while “intimacies forge female solidarity across boundaries of race and class, the novel is also laced with racism: Savanna’s speech is rendered as dialect; she is frequently called ‘the mulatto’ rather than properly named; and [is] separate[d] [from] her from her own husband and son” (234). Savanna can easily be read as a woman often forgotten or left out of the #MeToo movement. *Adeline Mowbray* is a novel that tests female solidarity for both Savanna and Adeline, but also privileges whiteness. Savanna is a woman of color and arguably is in greater danger than Adeline. This is proven as Berrendale coordinates Savanna’s re-enslavement while they are both in Jamaica: “Berrendale...contrived to find out the master to whom she belonged before she had escaped...and as she had never been made free, as soon as he arrived, and on a summons from Berrendale, seized her as his property” (223). Adeline also often has conflicting responses to Savanna’s intervention. After Savanna confronts Berrendale, Adeline reprimands Savanna, telling her, “‘Leave the room; you have offended me past forgiveness’” (211). However, Berrendale pressures Adeline, using his status as her husband as a means to force Savanna’s dismissal: “‘Then I conclude, Mrs. Berrendale, that you will have no objection to discharge your mulatto directly... You are *silent* madam,’ said Berrendale; ‘what is your answer? Yes, or No?... A wife who resents as she ought to do, injuries offered to her husband, cannot hesitate for a moment to discharge her’” (212). While Berrendale uses his title of “husband” to exert authority over Adeline, Savanna experiences the double-edged sword of both Berrendale and Adeline’s whims. Savanna reveals the vulnerability of women of color living under early nineteenth-century social structures and experiencing racial inequalities.

<29>As previously discussed, Adeline and Savanna have a unique relationship; however, even as Adeline recounts her previous dismissal of Savanna and convinces Berrendale to allow Savanna to stay, Adeline reinforces the racial social conventions of her time. Despite her feelings for Savanna, Adeline “conceal[s] subordination as an act of love” (Lanser 238). Savanna is still subject to Adeline and Berrendale’s actions as a former enslaved person, and their relationship with Savanna is entrenched on “the axis of colonialism, enslavement, and class exploitation” (Lanser 238). Savanna and Adeline mimic how, despite the #MeToo Movement's origins in bringing attention to the widespread violence against women of color, the movement has often been coopted by white women. Savanna and Adeline represent how many women can face abuse, discrimination, and harassment, but privilege, power, and access affect and further marginalize people differently. Opie indirectly depicts a

case study for viewing the intersection, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, of race, class, and identity and how this impacts the injustice Black women experience. In this sense, *Adeline Mowbray* demonstrates the necessity of recognizing how systems of oppression, whether fictional or in reality, make “female agency...uneven, nonlinear, and vulnerable” (Lanser 242). Both Savanna and Adeline represent the complicated tensions of female solidarity, as they are both committed to caring for one another until Adeline’s death.

<30>Finally, Mrs. Pemberton, the novel’s moral mentor, has often been read as Opie’s conservative endorsement, but Mrs. Pemberton’s espousals also provide a subtle critique of traditionalism. Mrs. Pemberton is often defined by her moral rigidity and self-command, but even she deviates from these principles at times. Mrs. Pemberton’s main critique of Adeline is that she is “one of the enlightened...who disregarding the customs of ages, and the dictates of experience, set up their own opinions against the hallowed institutions of men and the will of the Most High” (154). However, Mrs. Pemberton often contradicts her own customs. Initially, she refuses to employ Mary Warner, Adeline’s first servant, because of Adeline’s fallen status: ““But in contemplating thy union itself, she [Mary] has lived in the contemplation of vice; and thou wilt own, that, by having given it an air of respectability, thou hast only made it more dangerous”” (152). However, against her initial judgment, Mrs. Pemberton decides to take Mary into her employment. Additionally, Mrs. Pemberton enforces strict control over emotions and expects others to do the same. In her encounters with Mrs. Mowbray, she describes Mrs. Mowbray’s emotions as “unseemly and detrimental,” “incorrigible,” and “impatient” (263). However, Mrs. Pemberton is unable to halt her emotions upon seeing Adeline dying: “Mrs. Pemberton aware of the blow which impended over her...but throwing herself into Mrs. Mowbray’s extended arms, she forgot her usual self-command and sobbed loudly on her bosom” (282).

<31>Mrs. Pemberton’s connection with Adeline outweighs self-imposed restrictions and social regulations. Following the death of Glenmurray, Mrs. Pemberton rushes to Adeline’s side, “just as the carriage was preparing to take her and her sick friend to Lisbon” (187). Mrs. Pemberton prioritizes Adeline’s emotional and physical needs and Adeline’s actions are not factors in her decision to comfort her: “She forgot Adeline’s crimes in her distress; and knowing she had no female friend with her, she hastened on the errand of pity to the abode of vice” (187). Mrs. Pemberton is well acquainted with the grief Adeline experiences, as she “ha[s] seen a beloved husband expire in her arms” as well as her two children (187). In this particular scene, the narrator notes that Mrs. Pemberton used her religion as a means to overcome her grief. However, Mrs. Pemberton later reflects that she “would have

sunk under...but for the watchful care and affectionate attentions of the friend of her youth, who resided near her” (266). Adeline and Mrs. Pemberton are more alike despite their initial disagreements and their shared trauma of grief and loss seem to forge a connection that extends past social rules. While Mrs. Pemberton actively advocates for conservative ideology, she consciously or unconsciously forms an unconventional bond with Adeline that is grounded in their shared grief.

Conclusion

<32>Reading *Adeline Mowbray* in the era of the #MeToo movement allows us to see the impact that violence, misogyny, and trauma have on communities as much as individuals. The novel emphasizes internalized misogyny and its manifestation through social customs and practices. Opie’s political ambiguity reiterates how “violence is not an individual act that arises spontaneously; it is the product of a certain cultural figuration that affects and, arguably, is perpetuated by everyone” (Thierauf). While the novel focuses on Adeline’s experiences, many of the women in the text also experience violence, harassment, and prejudice. Even though Mrs. Mowbray perpetuates her own misogyny, she is still manipulated, misled, and abandoned by Sir Patrick. Additionally, Emma Douglas and her marriage to the reformed Colonel Mordaunt has often been read as a redemption and hopeful symbol of marriage, but even it begins questionably. After witnessing Emma’s defense of Adeline, Colonel Mordaunt initiates physical contact with Emma by suddenly “raising Emma’s hand to his lips...imprint[ing] on it a kiss” (250). The narrator reveals that Emma is both “embarrassed and flattered” but “said not a word” (251). Emma’s silence mirrors many individuals’ responses to unexpected or unsolicited physical contact, especially one that Maynard describes as “lover-like” (251). What attracts Mordaunt to Emma is her chastity and he resigns that he prefers Emma, “who had never erred” to Adeline “who had” (254). Women are judged and commodified based on their purity but live in a society that constantly endangers their bodies.

<33>A #MeToo framework signals that violence within *Adeline Mowbray* does not happen within a vacuum and only to Adeline based on her idealized philosophy. While *Adeline Mowbray* does not provide concrete solutions for addressing institutionalized misogyny and violence, it does offer hopeful representations of communal care. At the novel’s conclusion, Adeline’s relationship with her mother is restored, Mrs. Mowbray agrees to raise Adeline’s daughter, and Mrs. Pemberton vows to never leave them or Savanna (282). Opie ends the novel depicting a revitalized community of women that has been formed and solidified through the bonds of friendship, admiration, and loyalty. A #MeToo *Adeline Mowbray* helps frame women’s narratives beyond the political backdrop of the early nineteenth

century, particularly those focused on women's education, child-rearing, and marriage. Opie inserts sympathy and concern for both radical and conservative systems while showcasing that neither can be efficient for women within the operations of a patriarchal society. In recognizing the structural violence within the novel, we can then apply these insights to recognizing and fighting rape culture and working toward communities of care.

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