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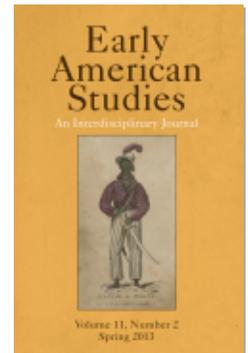
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The French Education of Martha Jefferson Randolph

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ABSTRACT The four years the young Martha Jefferson spent in a French convent school were profoundly formative of her outlook on female education, a subject that, by his own admission, Thomas Jefferson never spent much time contemplating. The years spent in the company of girls and women, devoted to the intellectual life, and supervised by an abbess who herself epitomized female intelligence, capacity, and energy, shaped her own ideas of the content and meaning of female education. Given such a model, as well as the rich pageantry that Roman Catholic liturgies presented to a Protestant Virginian, it is perhaps no wonder that Martha considered taking the veil and remaining forever. Of course, she did not; rather, she returned to Virginia, married, and learned household management. But she created a culture of learning at Monticello that in many ways looked like an Enlightenment model, emphasizing the cultivation of a rational, disciplined self. These various influences—French, Catholic, and aristocratic, on the one hand, and American, Protestant, and republican, on the other—converged in Randolph’s thought to produce a unique view of female identity that fit neither the national paradigm of republican motherhood nor the regional pattern of southern slave mistress.

When Thomas Jefferson traveled to Paris in the summer of 1784 to assume his post as minister plenipotentiary, he carried his young daughter Martha (whom he called Patsy) with him. Within three weeks of their arrival, he had installed her at the Abbaye Royale de Panthemont, one of the most fashionable schools in Paris—and by a mile the most expensive.¹ It was a school, Jefferson knew, whose ideas about female education were in accord

1. 1 “Fourchette des tarifs de pensions pratiqués par les interants payants de 1760 à 1789,” Martine Sonnet, *L’éducation des filles au temp des lumières* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987), 329.

with his: a curriculum that taught women to be devoted daughters and virtuous wives, responsible for the happiness of those around them. Eighteenth-century French philosophes crafted an enduring impression that French convent schools were not much more than elite finishing schools. But recent scholarship on women, education, religious orders, and the French Enlightenment shows that these schools were serious places of study, with high standards for their students.² Even more significantly for Patsy Jefferson, Panthemont—where she lived from ages twelve to sixteen—presented something she had never seen before in her life, nor would again: a model of a community of women, run by a talented and vigorous abbess and devoted to the education of girls and women. Twenty years after her death, her daughter, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, would recall that Martha Jefferson (later Randolph) habitually looked back to her residence in France as the “brightest part of a life much shaded & saddened by care & sorrows.”³

It was an experience that shaped the grown Martha Jefferson Randolph’s vision of female education for her own daughters—a vision that deviated in a significant way from that which her father had visited on her. For all the attention historians have lavished on Jefferson’s ideas about education, it was instead the years spent in the company of girls and women, devoted to the intellectual life and supervised by an abbess who herself epitomized

2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was prominent among Enlightenment critics of convent education. See, for example, Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 30–33. For later nineteenth- and twentieth-century works that are highly critical, following Rousseau, see Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *The Woman of the Eighteenth Century: Her Life, from Birth to Death, Her Love and Her Philosophy in the Worlds of Salon, Shop and Street*, trans. Jacques Le Clercq and Ralph Roeder (New York: Minton, Balch, 1927). François Rousseau, *Histoire de l’Abbaye de Pen-temont, depuis sa translation à Paris jusqu’à la Révolution* (Paris, 1918), 37–38, describes it as an institution devoted to worldliness, in which a devotion to feverish gossip rendered “arid” such subjects as grammar and arithmetic. For works that counter the critics, see Mita Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 112; Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

3. Entry for January 11, 1839, in Coolidge, *Thomas Jefferson’s Granddaughter in Queen Victoria’s England: The Travel Diary of Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, 1838–1839*, ed. Ann Lucas Birle and Lisa A. Francavilla (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2011), 159.

female intelligence, capacity, and energy, that shaped his daughter's ideas of the content and meaning of female education. Years later, married and living in a republic that little resembled her glittering life in Paris, the imprint of those years would be clear in the program of education she created for her own daughters and in their views about gender, the intellect, and the role of women in the young nation.

Typically, Patsy and her younger sister, Mary (Polly), who would join them in Paris three years later, are featured as a sidebar to the main story, "the Paris years of Thomas Jefferson." Historians tuck them away in Panthemont—conveniently and safely—much as Jefferson did as he pursued his business affairs and travels. But Martha Jefferson Randolph's fond recollections are a clue to the significance of this time and place in her life. During the long span of her life, she would devote herself to her eleven children, her father, and the supervision of household operations at Monticello. But in the frequency of her stories of those days, in the intellectual regimen she prescribed for her daughters, and in their own perspectives on religion and the life of the mind, the impress of Martha's French education is clear. Not for her daughters the bare-minimum literacy of most Virginia girls. Not for them an emphasis on the sewing of hems and the making of puddings. Instead, Martha's daughters would read ancient history in the original Latin, speak French and read Spanish with ease, and follow a curriculum their grandfather recommended for boys. She taught them that they were different from most. It was a lesson they took to heart. "I was brought up too tenderly—rendered unfit for an ordinary destiny," Martha's daughter Ellen would reflect wistfully at age thirty-two.⁴ Ellen's expectations had been raised to improbable heights, before hitting the brick wall of nineteenth-century gender conventions. But her hopes for her life, founded on the brilliant education she received from her mother, attest to a vision of womanhood Martha formed in Paris far more than to the influence of her famous grandfather.



Patsy's five-year sojourn in Paris introduced her to a whole new world, whose contours must be sketched before their influence on her can be appreciated. Within the walls of her convent school she encountered nuns for the first time, a thorough immersion in French language and curriculum, and Catholicism; within and without the school she spent time in company

4. EWRC, "Two Autobiographical Papers," June 15, 1828, Family Letters Project, www.monticello.org (hereinafter cited as FLP).

with lively, educated, elite women, including those who hosted some of the most famous salons in Paris. She lived in Paris at the height of the women's influence in the French Enlightenment; the fall of the Bastille, which only in hindsight signaled the end of that world, occurred mere weeks before her departure. It was the best of times for a bright young girl who soaked it all in.

Modern historians have significantly disabused the impressions left by the Enlightenment philosophes who were so critical of French nuns and the curricula they offered their students.⁵ But the convents were not cloistered islands, inhabited by women isolated from and ignorant of the world; nor were they dens of female iniquity, as portrayed in novels, in which unscrupulous nuns corrupted their innocent charges. Rather, during almost two centuries of tensions between the French government and female religious orders, nuns had developed methods of resistance and survival that clearly demonstrate both their shrewd pragmatism and their steely resolve. From 1610 the government had tried to herd religious communities of women (always suspect in a patriarchal society) into cloisters, quite literally to contain them. But the rise of teaching orders by the mid-seventeenth century combated this government initiative, so that by the end of the eighteenth century Parisian parents could choose from no fewer than forty-three convent schools for their daughters.⁶

Panthemont stood at the pinnacle of these schools, which were as varied as the economic classes they served.⁷ For one hundred livres per annum, a young girl might attend the charity school of Sainte-Famille; for a thousand, she could attend Panthemont. Charity schools attended to the basics of reading and writing for students who could barely be spared from home; at Panthemont lessons ranged from classical history to music and dance to train the daughters of nobility for their entry into the glittering world at court. A thin soup served in a pewter plate would feed the charity school student; an additional fee of two hundred livres admitted Panthemont's pensionnaires to the sumptuous fare of the abbess's table.⁸ Despite the sig-

5. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 134–38. Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Sonnet, *Education des filles au temps des lumières*; Jean Bloch, "Discourses of Female Education in the Writings of Eighteenth-Century French Women," in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, eds., *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 243–44.

6. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 18–19; Hufton, *Prospect before Her*, 112.

7. Sonnet, *Education des filles au temps des lumières*, 27.

8. *Ibid.*, 285.

nificant differences in their intellectual and material offerings, however, all convent schooling suffered the derision of critics; indeed, many of the calls for the reform of female education in the eighteenth century were attacks on the education French nuns provided.⁹ This was due in part to the secular leanings of Enlightenment philosophes who had little use for the religious bent of convent schools, derided the educational level and commitment of the nuns who served as teachers, and questioned how cloistered nuns could prepare young girls for their lives in the world. Another failing in female education might be attributed to the little time girls actually spent in formal learning: Martine Sonnet's study of seven Paris convent schools found that 60 percent of the students attended for less than two years.¹⁰ Fundamentally, however, the problem of female education was the conflict between emerging new ideas about female intellectual capacity and the pragmatic concerns of parents to groom their daughters for a culture (and marriage market) that still abhorred the *femme savant*.¹¹

Nonetheless, French convents and convent schools served important societal functions for their elite clientele: they were places to educate daughters to the religious orthodoxy expected of aristocratic women; places of refuge for widows, unmarried women, and royalty; and places for shoring up family alliances and adding prestige to the family. The Mother Superior was typically drawn from an aristocratic family; her connections would ensure the economic survival of the community, whose ability to be self-supporting had been crippled by the mandate to cloister.¹² Thus, far from being ignorant, passive, and out of the mainstream, French nuns operated within French societal structures and knew how to use their social, political, and economic connections to offset the deprivations mandated by the government.

Marie-Catherine de Béthisy de Mézières, abbess of Panthemont from 1743 to 1790, fit this pattern exactly. She was a wellborn woman: her mother, Eléonore-Marie-Thérèse Sutton d'Oglethorpe, was the daughter of an English brigadier general and courtier of the later-deposed James II. Fleeing with her family to France, where they continued to plot the restora-

9. *Ibid.*, 285–87; Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 74.

10. Sonnet's *Education des filles au temps des lumières* is the most thorough study of convent schools in Paris and much relied on by scholars of this period; see, for example, Dena Goodman's *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 74.

11. Sonnet, *Education des filles au temps des lumeries*, 285–87.

12. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 15–16; Rapley, *Social History of the Cloister*, 119–22.



Figure 1. The product of fifty years of planning, renovation, and rebuilding, Panthemont was as elegant a presence in the Faubourg Saint-Germain as any of its other aristocratic neighbors. This view shows what was the main entrance, through the garden, in Patsy Jefferson's day. Today the building houses the Ministry of Defense and Veterans Affairs. Author photo.

tion of James's monarchy, Eléonore landed on her feet with her marriage to M. de Béthisy de Mézières, a French general who possessed a shrewd head for business; his speculations in Mississippi succeeded where many others had failed. His money and her political savvy thus equipped this unusual pair to raise their four daughters to occupy exalted positions in French society: two married nobility and two headed religious communities.¹³ Marie-Catherine would save Panthemont, rescuing the convent from falling into ruin. She boldly recruited Pierre Contant d'Ivry, a member of the Royal Academy of Architecture and architect for the duc d'Orléans, to her project

13. Rousseau, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Pentemont*, 17. Catherine-Eléonore-Eugénie married Charles de Rohan-Guéméné, prince of Montauban; Henriette-Anne-Eugénie married Charles-Lamoral-Hyacinthe-Ferdinand, prince of Ligne; the third daughter headed a community of pious unmarried women, as canoness at Poussay.

and, undeterred by significant cost overruns (and d'Ivry's attempts to scale back her ambitious plans), unapologetically importuned wealthy patrons for funds. The cardinal of Luynes, for example, was clearly taken aback by her methods: "I must admit that I was quite surprised to read that you were counting on a donation, on the part of the Commission, of 60,000 livres, and that you were so confident about receiving this aid that you consequently were planning arrangements with your creditors," he wrote to her in astonishment.¹⁴ She successfully recruited postulants to her Bernadine order and wealthy young students to her school, and she even attracted women of quality seeking respectable refuge, such as the future wife of Napoleon Bonaparte.¹⁵ In all these ways, she presented a model of female energy, capability, and authority that Patsy must have found extraordinary, given the contrast with her own mother's progressively weakening stamina from each of her six pregnancies during her ten-year marriage, and her father's government of the society-in-miniature that was Monticello.

We know little about Patsy Jefferson's childhood education in her father's home. Jefferson's frequent absences as she grew up between 1772 and 1782, as well as the gender conventions in this period, suggest that her mother was her primary teacher, at least at first.¹⁶ Martha Jefferson could "touch [the harpsichord] very skilfully" and was, in the estimation of one of the Hessian prisoners of war held in Charlottesville, "in all respects, a very agreeable, Sensible & Accomplished Lady."¹⁷ Martha probably schooled her daughter to

14. Paul d'Albert de Luynes to Marie-Catherine de Béthisy de Mézières, March 26, 1781, *ibid.*, 36: "Je vous avoue que j'ai été fort surprise d'y lire que vous comptiez sur un secours, de la part de la Commission, de 60 000 livres, et que votre confiance, à ce sujet, était si assurée que vous alliez, en conséquence, prendre des arrangements avec vos créanciers." (My translation.)

15. Roger Armand Weigert, *Etudes historiques: Un centenaire: Le temple de Pentemont, 1846–1946*, *Bulletin Etudes, Documents, Chronique Littéraire* (Paris: Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français, 1947), 15–20, Howard C. Rice Collection, International Center for Jefferson Studies, Charlottesville, Va.

16. Cynthia Kierner emphasized Jefferson's influence in this period; Cynthia Kierner, "Martha Jefferson and the American Revolution in Virginia," in James Marten, ed., *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 30. See also Kierner's full-length biography, *Martha Jefferson Randolph, Daughter of Monticello: Her Life and Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

17. Jacob Rubsam to unknown recipient, December 1, 1780, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009) (hereinafter cited as TJP Digital Edition).

read and write and trained her in the manners “in unison with all that is amiable and lovely,” which so charmed the daughter of Abigail Adams when they met in Paris in 1784.¹⁸ Lodged at the home of the Hopkinsons in Philadelphia in winter 1783–84 while the Jeffersons awaited their departure for France, Patsy followed a traditional curriculum for elite eighteenth-century girls that was probably similar to her mother’s tutelage: her school days were punctuated by music, dancing, French, more music, and reading and writing in English.¹⁹ This, in addition to some reading in “the graver sciences,” Jefferson contended to a correspondent, would be sufficient preparation for educating her children if she was so unhappy as to marry a “blockhead.”²⁰

Twelve-year-old Patsy Jefferson from Albemarle County, Virginia, entered a very different world in the summer of 1784, however. In its all-female structure, the delight of days devoted to studies and conversation with her peers and worldly boarders, and the formidable leadership of the abbess, Panthémont was unlike anything she had ever experienced at home, where her father was “master of the mountain.”²¹ Her lessons in drawing, dancing, and music continued; her father paid the extra fees for the respective masters, including Claude Balbastre, the renowned organist of Notre Dame.²² Her studies expanded, however, to include classical history (albeit in French or Italian), geography, and arithmetic. Dropped into a school of fifty or sixty boarders, only one of whom spoke English (and she all of two years old), Patsy’s first priority was to learn French.²³ She picked it up so quickly that by 1787 she worried that she was having “really great difficulty writ[ing] English.” She also studied Italian, struggling through a sixteenth-century translation of

18. Journal of Abigail Adams, entry for January 27, 1785, in Caroline Smith Adams DeWindt, ed., *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams, Daughter of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Written in France and England in 1785* (New York: Wily and Putnam, 1841), 45.

19. Thomas Jefferson (hereinafter cited as TJ) to Martha Jefferson (hereinafter cited as MJ, until her marriage), Annapolis, November 28, 1783, in Thomas Jefferson, *The Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Edwin Morris Betts and James Adam Bear Jr. (1966; repr., Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 19.

20. TJ, Annapolis, to Abbé François de Barbé-Marbois, December 5, 1783, TJP Digital Edition.

21. Dumas Malone, “Polly Jefferson and Her Father,” *Virginia Quarterly Review* 7 (January 1931): 81.

22. Howard C. Rice Jr., *Thomas Jefferson’s Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 65.

23. MJ, Paris, to Eliza House Trist, [after August 24, 1785], TJP Digital Edition. This is the only letter Patsy Jefferson wrote describing her life in Paris. In addition, six letters she wrote to Jefferson between March and May 1787 survive.

Livy's *History of the Roman People* in an "ancient Italian"; produced "landskips" for her drawing master; mastered her history "pretty well"; and worked hard at the challenging music her father sent her in order to be ready to perform when he called on her.²⁴ The needlework lessons Jefferson thought essential to prepare for the isolated life of a Virginia planter's wife were not available in an elite school that catered to royalty. "The only kind of needlework I could learn here," Patsy told her father in 1787, "would be embroidery, indeed netting also. But I could not do much of those in America, because of the impossibility of having proper silks." But perhaps, she concluded doubtfully, "they will not be totally useless."²⁵

This much can be gathered from the very limited record Patsy herself left behind: six letters to her father and one to Eliza House Trist in Philadelphia. But additional particulars of her reading can be pieced together from a variety of other sources. A broader picture comes into view in the collection of family books that have been returned, piecemeal, to Monticello, over the years. Patsy Jefferson's copy of *Nature Displayed. Being Discourses on such Particulars of Natural History as were Thought Most Proper to Excite the Curiosity, and form the Minds of Youth*, by the Jansenist Noël Antoine Pluche, bears a London imprint from 1750, suggesting that she may have read the natural history work in English at Panthemont, perhaps as she worked to perfect her French.²⁶ Her French grammar, *Grammaire de L'abbaye de L'abbaye Royale de Pantemont/Paris*, inscribed, "Mademoiselle Jefferson/L'Abbaye Royale de Pantemont/Paris," was indispensable in her transition to life in Paris. It must have also been a treasured keepsake; the married Martha kept it and gave it to her daughter Virginia, who in turn passed it to her daughter, Martha.²⁷

24. MJ, Paris, to TJ, May 27, 1787; MJ to TJ, March 8, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 42, 32.

25. MJ, Paris, to TJ, April 9, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 37–38.

26. Noël Antoine Pluche, *Nature Displa'd. being Discourses on such Particulars of Natural History as were thought proper to Excite the curiosity, and form the Minds of Youth. Containing what belongs to Man considered in Society* (London, 1750). Jefferson had books sent to him in Paris from England, so it is certainly possible that Patsy read this while in Paris. Kevin Hayes, *The Road to Monticello: The Life and Mind of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 284. It is also possible that she read the work in its original French (Jefferson owned a French edition) and later obtained the English translation of it for her own children. Either way, she read the work and thought it valuable enough to teach them.

27. Other inscriptions reveal the book's subsequent history: M Randolph [Patsy's signature, now married and living in] Monticello./Virginia Randolph/Monticello/Martha Jefferson Trist.

Her education immersed her in French literature: fables, novels, romances, poetry, and plays. Like all French children—even today—Patsy Jefferson owned and memorized La Fontaine’s famous fables. She read Alain LeSage’s picaresque novel *Gil Blas* (her copy is inscribed “A Mademoiselle Jefferson/à l’abbaye royale de Panthmont 1785”) and his *Diabole boiteux* (*The Devil on Crutches*), as well as *Don Quixote* (in French).²⁸ She read the romances of Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, including *Galatée: Roman Pastoral*, and *Zayde*, a Spanish-Moorish romance by Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Madame de Lafayette.²⁹ Her enjoyment of novels was well known among her friends: “Are you still reading novels?” Betty Hawkins asked her, preparing to recommend another.³⁰ In her copy of Madame de Genlis’s *Théâtre à la usage de jeune personnes* (*Theater for the Use of Young People*) she inscribed, “Marthe Jefferson Panthemont Juliet [*sic*] 1785.” She studied poetry in both French (*Dictionnaire poétique de Bailly*, a compendium of French poets, such as Nicolas Boileau, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and Alexis Piron) and Italian (*Le rime di Francesco Petrarca*).³¹ To perfect the art of natural letter writing, she was taught to imitate the much-vaunted style of Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Madame de Sévigné, whose letters exhibited, in the words of one early nineteenth-century admirer, the feminine quality of “spontaneous *sensibilité*.”³² Panthemont students learned their Sévigné well: a letter written by one of her classmates, Marie Jacinthe de Botidoux, just weeks after Patsy left Paris began with the teasing opener: “I am going to say to you, like Mde [*sic*]

28. TJ, Annapolis, to Abbé François de Barbé-Marbois, December 5, 1783, TJP Digital Edition.

29. Jean Pierre Claris de Florian, *Oeuvres de Florian: Galatée, Roman Pastoral* (Paris, 1785), inscribed, “A Mademoiselle Jefferson,” also “M. Randolph/Monticello; Cornelia J. Randolph/Monticello.” Comtesse de La Fayette, Marie Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, *Oeuvres de La Fayette: Zayde, histoire espagnole, précédée d’un traité sur l’origine des romans*, 3 vols. (1670; repr., Amsterdam, 1786), inscribed, “M. Randolph/Monticello.”

30. B. Hawkins to MJ, [1788 or 1789], Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, University of Virginia (hereinafter cited as ViU).

31. Antoine Denis Bailly, *Dictionnaire poétique de Bailly* (Paris, 1782). MJR’s copy is inscribed, “MJRandolph, Edgehill.” *Le rime di Francesco Petrarca* [London, 1784]; inscriptions show that both TJ and MJR read this work.

32. Jean-Baptiste Suard, “Du style épistolaire et de Madame de Sévigné” (1810), quoted in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 53. “The art of making extracts” and reading Sévigné’s letters were a staple of French girls’ education. Paul Rousselot, *Histoire de l’éducation des femmes en France* (1883; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 2:147.

de Sévigné, that I am giving you one hundred tries [to guess] of what news I am going to inform you.”³³

This picture of the curriculum at Panthemont comports with that of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, another of the top four girls’ schools in Paris.³⁴ Hélène Massalska remembered a typical day as a ten-year-old there: rising at 7:30 A.M.; catechism class at 8:00; breakfast at 9:00 and Mass at 9:30; lecture at 10:00; music at 11:00; drawing at 11:30; geography and history at noon; lunch and recreation at 1:00 P.M.; writing and arithmetic at 3:00; dance at 4:00; afternoon tea and recreation at 5:00; harp or harpsichord at 6:00; supper at 7:00; and in bed by 9:30.³⁵ The convent school at Liège, attended by Kitty Carroll, a Catholic from Maryland, from 1789 to 1794, likewise outlined the same basic curriculum, with a few additions that Patsy Jefferson would have recognized for older students: “reading and writing; the principles of English, French, and Italian; sacred and profane history; arithmetic . . . the art of writing letters at all stages of life; . . . geography; use of the globes; of the sphere, &c. the principles of natural history to the extent that they are suitable for young ladies; embroidery and all needlework; drawing and the painting of flowers.”³⁶ At Liège, as at Panthemont and most girls’ schools, Latin was excluded.³⁷ These comparable elite schools thus help us fill out the picture of the kind of education that Patsy Jefferson received at Panthemont.³⁸

33. Marie Jacinthe de Botidoux, Panthemont, to MJ, January 2, 1790, Papers of the Trist and Burke Family Members, Acc. #5385-aa, ViU. See Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 149–50, for an extract of Madame de Sévigné’s letter breathlessly conveying momentous news from court.

34. Sonnet, *Education des filles au temps des lumières*, 27.

35. Quoted *ibid.*, 212. This describes the day of a younger student, aged six to ten years, than was Patsy Jefferson, but its overall contours are similar to what she experienced.

36. This school’s students were trained as well in “double-entry bookkeeping, receipts and expense accounts; and weights and measures of different countries,” suggesting a somewhat different clientele from Panthemont’s nobility. *Etat et conditions de la pension pour les jeunes demoiselles, relativement à l’éducation complète qu’on continue de leur donner dans le Couvent des Religieuses Angloises, à Liège* [1770]. I am grateful to Sally Mason, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, for providing a copy of this document.

37. Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 67.

38. Recent scholarship supports this picture of elite education. See Rapley, *Social History of the Cloister*, 236–38; Samia I. Spencer, “Women and Education,” in Samia Spencer, ed., *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 84–85.

Earlier histories dismissed this curriculum as providing not much more than “*vernis d’urbanité*,” the veneer of polished manners that distinguished the elite society of the ancien régime.³⁹ But the critics ignored two important points: the seriousness with which some nuns and students took female education and the significance of learning to write as essential to the formation of female identity. Manon Philipon (later famous as Madame Roland), a student at the Congregation of Notre-Dame in Paris, recalled that her teacher Sister Sainte-Sophie “soon attached herself to me because of my taste for study; after having given a lesson to the entire class, she took me aside and made me recite grammar, pursue geography, extract bits of history.”⁴⁰ Patsy Jefferson thought her masters “all very good” (except for the one charged with teaching drawing, with which she had struggled in Philadelphia as well), and her letters to her father, reporting her progress and struggles, show her dogged application to her studies.⁴¹ So, too, does the knowing remark of a classmate, who reminded her that she should not try so hard to impress the abbé, their instructor, by “learning her lessons so well,” because “*Priests can’t marry*.”⁴² That Patsy studied hard to produce the results that would please her father and instructors does not diminish the point that she took the content of her studies seriously. Years later, the famous Madame de Staël, a salon host and the author of *Corinne*, observed to Jefferson, “I remember her as more brilliant than all the grand dames of this old world.”⁴³

Recent scholarship has also pointed out that the lessons taught at the convent schools were significant to the formation of female identity, perhaps none more than the art of letter writing.⁴⁴ Marie de Botidoux’s playful imitation of Madame de Sévigné’s letter-writing style is only one small indicator of how girls took this lesson to heart. Published over the first half of the eighteenth century, Sévigné’s letters to her daughter modeled “the technology” of friendship, but more particularly of motherhood, the aspira-

39. Weigert, *Etudes historiques* 19–20. *Vernis d’urbanité* is, literally, “the urban varnish.” See also Rousseau, *Histoire de l’Abbaye de Pentemont*, 37–38.

40. Quoted in Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 135.

41. MJ, Paris, to Eliza House Trist, [after August 24, 1785], TJP Digital Edition.

42. J[ulia] Annesley, Panthemont, to Patsy Jefferson, April 20, 1786, Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

43. Madame de Staël to TJ, April 25, 1807, in George Harvey, ed., *The North American Review* (New York: North American Review Corp., 1918), 64.

44. This is the main argument of Dena Goodman’s *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*.

tion of upwardly mobile girls whose status promised a life of leisure, but whose sex required a way to fill that time virtuously. Dena Goodman has argued that “as a manual and intellectual practice that could display both the grace and sensibility that were central to elite femininity while strengthening individual virtue and the moral order, letter writing could be said to epitomize the goals of female education as they were elaborated in the second half of the eighteenth century.” Like letter writing, motherhood was learned. Indeed, this is exactly why the parents of Patsy Jefferson’s schoolmates sent their daughters to convent school: “to integrate the convent experience into a larger plan of education under the direction of a conscientious mother.” Mothers’ letters bridged the separation, enabled the continued exercise of maternal care, and provided the recipients with an example for their future lives. Extracting from Sévigné’s letters (and many other works), elite eighteenth-century French schoolgirls finally began a methodology of learning that boys had employed since the Renaissance. For these students, Goodman concluded, this learning was nothing less than transformational.⁴⁵ It was for the motherless Patsy Jefferson, as well.

Also profoundly transformational in Patsy Jefferson’s schooling was her exposure to Roman Catholicism, with its majestic architecture and music, mysterious rituals, and pragmatic opportunities for women. She was struck by the beauty of Catholic churches from the very first. Patsy and her father completed their journey from the coast to Paris, their carriage following the road that hugged the Seine. His planter’s eye noticed the richness of the soil, but she was taken with the beautiful architecture of the churches, which “had as many steps to go to the top as there are days in the year . . . pretty statues, [and] winders [of] died glass of the most beautiful colours.”⁴⁶ Upon installing her at Panthemont, Jefferson had to calm the anxious fears of relatives and friends, who worried that Catholicism would claim such an impressionable young girl. Jefferson himself seems not to have been worried. Jean-Armand Tronchin, minister of the republic of Geneva to France, had heard that “The abbess in charge is a woman of the world who understands the direction of young Protestant girls. There are often English girls [there]. The daughter of Mr Jefferson is a pupil there, and I know it is understood that one does not talk to them about religion, or rather controversial topics are not discussed. They certainly emerge quite as good Protes-

45. *Ibid.*, 55, 67, 58, 76, 151, 104.

46. MJ, Panthemont, to Eliza House Trist, [after August 24, 1785], TJP Digital Edition.

tants as when they entered.”⁴⁷ This policy explains Jefferson’s confident reassurance to his sister at home in Virginia: “There are in it as many protestants as Catholics, and not a word is ever spoken to them on the subject of religion.”⁴⁸ In any event, their frequent visits (at least once a week when Jefferson was in town) enabled him to keep a close eye on his daughter’s interests.

In fact, the Jeffersons had not been in Paris two months when they invited Abigail Adams and her daughter, Abigail (called Nabby by her family), to a profession ceremony at Panthemont’s chapel.⁴⁹ The setting itself was magnificent, restored during the abbess’s ambitious renovations. The chapel’s arched ceilings stretch several stories high, culminating in a dome constructed of an exquisite stone whose hues change from light tan to a rosy pink with the changing light of the sun during the course of the day. Beneath the dome, but high over the altar that sits under it, was a magnificent organ. The chapel’s prerevolutionary incarnation may have had stained-glass windows; it certainly would have had flickering candles, fragrant incense, and a crucifix bearing the image of the dead or dying Christ. Empty niches today, in the now Protestant Reformed church, suggest the presence of impressive statues of the sort that had caught Patsy’s eye when she first arrived in France. So Patsy was treated to a feast for the senses before the profession ritual had even begun.

The betrothal ceremony they witnessed possessed all the drama of a novel: Nabby’s detailed description captured its solemnity, majesty, and pathos. It began with a procession, as the abbess parted the curtain and led her nuns and pensionnaires, each bearing a lighted candle, from behind the iron grates into the chancel.⁵⁰ Attended by two richly dressed English pensionnaires, also holding candles, the two candidates for the convent followed, attired in simple cloaks, with “their hair all shaved off,” a dramatic symbol of their rejection of worldly vanities. Then began the rituals, “alter-

47. Dispatch of Jean-Armand Tronchin, March 10, 1788, translated in Marie Kimball, *Jefferson: the Scene of Europe, 1784–1789* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 13–14. The original is in the Archives de Genève.

48. TJ to Mary Bolling, July 23, 1787, TJP Digital Edition.

49. MJ, Panthemont, to Eliza House Trist, [after August 24, 1785]. For a description of the ceremony, see entry for October 14, 1784, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 23–27.

50. Today the former chancel, restricted to nuns and clergy, is now the nave of the church, where the congregation sits facing the pulpit and organ under the dome. On that day, however, to accommodate the crowd, the congregation was allowed to sit in the chancel as well.

nately kneeling and rising,” that so bewildered the Protestant Nabby, she found them “impossible to describe.” A sermon impressed on all, but especially the two candidates, the solemnity of the vows the young women were about to take. The priest detailed all the worldly pleasures they would forgo and warned them of the privations of life within the convent. Their resolution unwavering, the young women received a kiss from each of the nuns, who then withdrew from the altar. “There was [then] brought in, by eight pensioners, a pall of black, crossed with white, which was held over them.” For half an hour, while the priest prayed and the nuns chanted, the candidates lay prostrate, dead to the world under the funeral cloth. “This was an affecting sight,” Nabby admitted in spite of herself; “I could not refrain from tears.” Rising—symbolizing the new life into which they were being born—they presented themselves to the abbess. She dressed them in the nun’s habit, “fine, white woolen dresses . . . [and] white veils,” and crowned their heads with flowers.⁵¹

When the priest then exhorted the other pensionnaires to consider following their example, Nabby noticed one of the English attendants “looked sharp” at the other, “whose countenance expressed that she . . . had no such intention.” Nabby agreed wholeheartedly. “Quite right she,” she finished firmly.⁵² At nineteen, Nabby Adams observed these proceedings with a somewhat jaundiced eye, her attitude toward Catholicism probably in concert with her mother’s.⁵³ But she had also been touched to see the smile that lit up the face of one young nun as she received the habit she would wear for the rest of her life, and the unruffled serenity of the other.⁵⁴ And, in spite of herself, she had been affected to the point of tears. How much more affecting might the scene have been for a less worldly twelve-year-old, who daily lived within this community?

51. Entry for October 14, 1784, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 24–27.

52. *Ibid.*, 27.

53. Abigail Adams had confessed her “false prejudices” about the convent to Jefferson when she expressed her concern about his plan to lodge the lively Polly at Panthemont with her sister. Abigail Adams to TJ, September 10, 1787, in John Adams, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (1959; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 197.

54. Entry for October 14, 1784, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 26. The memoir of Hélène Masalska, who attended the Abbaye-au-Bois in Paris, describes a nearly identical ceremony there in her memoir, quoted in Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 537.

Patsy was smitten. Nominally, at least, she was an Anglican, but her childhood religious observances had probably been limited—at best—to prayers taught by her mother and some scripture readings at home. (The first church building in Charlottesville was not completed until 1825; until then the various sects used the county courthouse.)⁵⁵ Both the ceremony and its setting were a striking departure from anything she would have seen in Virginia (her own wedding ceremony would be a small and hastily assembled affair at Monticello) and could not have failed to stir her imagination. Indeed, this was precisely the problem that anxious friends like Abigail Adams foresaw and that moral guardians back home feared from girls' reading novels.⁵⁶

Her curiosity piqued, Patsy turned to her classmates, no doubt asking questions at first; later, relaying her deep interest in Catholicism; and, finally, confiding her resolution to abjure her Protestantism. Patsy's friend Bettie Hawkins, in several letters after her departure from Panthemont, asked repeatedly about a mysterious matter that had clearly been the subject of their conversations while classmates at the school but required complete discretion in their correspondence. "When do you make abjuration," she asked on one occasion, wondering, "How [do] you intend telling your father[?]" In another letter she fretted about Patsy's long silence, worrying that it might have been occasioned "by some tragical event concerning your abjuration." Bettie was sorry she could not be there to support her: "I regret much having quitted Panthemont before your *revolt*. . . . my fidelity & respect at least you might have depended upon." After seeing a report in the newspaper the day before that the "nuns . . . seduc[ed] Miss Jefferson, daughter of the American minister, to change her religion,"⁵⁷ Bettie rose early the next morning to transmit "the earliest intelligence of it, that you might prepare your answer to any questions your Father (who will certainly see it) might ask you on the occasion." Knowing that father and daughter would receive the paper in the same post, Bettie strained to alert Patsy, knowing that "you have never talked to him on *that* subject I imagine, as I think you never mentioned it to *me* in any of your letters."⁵⁸

55. Hugh Howard and Roger Straus, *Thomas Jefferson, Architect: The Built Legacy of Our Third President* (New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 183.

56. See, for example, Abigail Adams to TJ, September 10, 1787, in Adams, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 197.

57. *Morning Post* (London), May 16, 1788. I am grateful to my assistant, Emily Hatcher, for locating this notice.

58. These quotes come from three undated letters from Bettie Hawkins to Patsy Jefferson, (although archivists have appended the dates 1788 and 1789 in brackets),

A “revolt” (which may never have happened) or the newspaper account (which did) may well explain the nineteenth-century family legend in which Patsy sent her father a letter informing him of her desire to enter the convent, followed by his unceremonious arrival at the abbess’s doorstep and the polite withdrawal of his daughters from her school.⁵⁹ Watered down to a childish impulse to join the nunnery that a fond father wisely derailed, the story thus told contributes to the perception that Patsy’s attraction to Catholicism was a romantic girlish infatuation, easily dismissed. But it was serious enough to have attracted the attention of the papal nuncio in Paris, Antonio Dugnani, as early as Patsy’s approaching fifteenth birthday. Reporting information he may have heard from his friend Jefferson, Dugnani told John Carroll of Baltimore that Patsy “seems to have great tendencies toward the Catholic religion.” Her interest was deep enough to require her father’s efforts to distract her, in hopes that she would forgo making any decision before she turned eighteen.⁶⁰ His concern was warranted. As her schoolmate Marie Jacinthe de Botidoux astutely observed, Jefferson had no intention of permitting Patsy that choice, knowing that she “would have preferred even the convent to leaving [Paris].”⁶¹

All Patsy Jefferson saw and learned at Panthemont seems to have inspired far more than a heady youthful infatuation with ceremony, as her friends and father recognized. Bettie Hawkins’s letters do not specifically talk about reception into the Roman Church, but taken together with Dugnani’s letters (and his continued interest into the 1790s), Jefferson’s concern, and the newspaper report, that is the most likely interpretation of the “revolt” Patsy was planning. And it was prompted by her encounter with Catholic theology, not youthful impressionability. Almost four decades later, she could still vividly recall the earnestness of her faith in Catholicism. “At your age,”

Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU. With the location of the newspaper notice, it is clear the last dates to May 17, 1788.

59. Sarah Nicholas Randolph, a great-granddaughter of Jefferson, published this story, much told in the Jefferson-Randolph family tradition. Sarah Nicholas Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson, Compiled from Family Letters and Reminiscences by His Great-Granddaughter* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 146. No documentation from either Jefferson or his daughter survives to support it, however. In any event, it was eleven months from the newspaper report to Jefferson’s withdrawal of his daughters from the school.

60. Quoted in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–) 14:356.

61. Marie Jacinthe de Botidoux, Panthemont, to MJ, January 2, 1790, Papers of the Trist and Burke Family Members, Acc. #5385-aa, ViU.

she wrote to her youngest daughter, then eighteen, “I believed most religiously that it was the only road to heaven, and looked forward with fear and terror to the possibility of never again having it in my power [upon her return to America] to profess my self a member of that church which I believed the true, and original.”⁶²

There were pragmatic reasons to convert to Catholicism, as well. With the Reformation, the convent as an alternative to marriage was closed to Protestant women. As Patsy saw in Paris, however, the church provided opportunities for women to teach as a profession, supported yet unmarried: nuns at Panthemont were usually former pensionnaires.⁶³ For aristocratic women, such as Marie-Catherine Béthisy de Mézières, it also provided opportunities to govern, and even to flex some muscle in the world beyond the convent walls. She had persuaded the dauphin of France to lay the ceremonial cornerstone of her new chapel, and she was so well respected—even by the revolutionaries—that she was permitted to spend the rest of her life in her quarters at Panthemont after they had abolished her school.⁶⁴ Indeed, nuns in revolutionary France showed the same determined resistance to government efforts to define them as their spiritual ancestors had displayed the century before. In spite of the abolition of teaching convents in August 1792, most nuns remained “equally if not more committed to their spiritual choices and independence,” asserting their continued adherence to the Old Church.⁶⁵ This is not to argue that the abbess exemplified a kind of protofeminist model that Patsy Jefferson found appealing; but it is to say, instead, that in the old regime, with its intricate systems of hierarchy (which Patsy would have well understood and did not question), Catholic women could be single and educated, and govern and exert influence. In such a setting Patsy Jefferson learned to value intellectual life for itself and for the status it upheld.

Other French women, in addition to the nuns at Panthemont, taught her the pleasures of status and learning. The daughter of the American minister plenipotentiary had occasion to meet many luminaries of French high soci-

62. MJR, Boston, to Septimia Randolph, December 2, 1832, Papers of Septimia Anne Cary Randolph Meikleham, Acc. #4726-b, ViU.

63. Rousseau, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Pentemont*, 37; Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenckman, 1975), 82.

64. Marcel Fossoyeux, “Une abbesse de Panthémont au XVIIIe siècle: Madame de Béthisy de Mézières, 1743–1789,” *Revue du Dix-huitième Siècle* 5 (1918): 1–16.

65. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns*, 176–83. Choudhury points out the irony of their position, however: “Women religious came to represent the crimes and excesses which some of them had opposed in the eighteenth century.”

ety and its salon culture. Jefferson had immediately renewed his friendship with François Jean de Beauvoir, the marquis de Chastellux, who had visited him at Monticello in 1782 and who (with his wife, after his marriage in 1787) was a frequent visitor to Jefferson's Paris household; indeed, the marquis had a hand in helping Jefferson find a school for Patsy.⁶⁶

The marquis de Lafayette ebulliently put his home—barely a ten-minute walk from Panthemont—"entirely at [Jefferson's] disposal." He also volunteered the help of his wife, Adrienne, since her "knowledge of the country may be of use to Miss Jefferson." Indeed, Patsy enjoyed excursions with her, including one to Versailles, and dined at their home.⁶⁷ Madame de Tessé, aunt of Adrienne de Lafayette, presided over a "republican salon," according to the New Yorker Gouverneur Morris; in fact, the rather conservative Morris found that his views were "too moderate" for her.⁶⁸ Because of Madame de Tessé's and Jefferson's shared interest in gardening and their political sympathies, they became great friends (they corresponded until her death in 1814). Probably the most brilliant salons in Paris were presided over by Mesdames d'Houdetot, Helvétius, and Necker, in which literature, politics, philosophy, and the sciences were the primary topics of conversation.⁶⁹ In her youth d'Houdetot was the "Julie" of Rousseau's *Confessions*; in her fifties when Jefferson met her, she lived with the marquis de Saint-Lambert, the poet and philosopher who would later translate Jefferson's *Act for Establishing Religious*

66. Marquis de Chastellux, Paris, to TJ, August 24, 1784, TJP Digital Edition.

67. Rice, *Thomas Jefferson's Paris*, 61–62. See also Chastellux to TJ, August 24, 1784, recommending Panthemont to TJ. On the invitation to Versailles, see Adrienne de Lafayette to TJ, August 26, 1786, TJP Digital Edition. On dining at the Lafayettes' home, see TJ to MJ, June 14, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 44. George Shackelford notes that "Patsy's sponsor [at Panthemont] was Comtesse de Brionne, the niece of the Abbess Béthisy de Mézières." George Green Shackelford, *Thomas Jefferson's Travels in Europe, 1784–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 172n18.

68. Gouverneur Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris: Minister of the United States to France; Member of the Constitutional Convention, etc.*, ed. Anne Cary Morris (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 35–36.

69. The function and influence of the salons in French culture is an ongoing historiographic debate, which is beyond the scope of this essay. My point here is to argue that on all sides, Patsy Jefferson saw lively, educated, elite women engaged in conversations with men about all branches of learning. On salons and gender see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger, eds., *Femmes Savantes et Femmes d'Esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); and Knott and Taylor, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*.

Freedom into French.⁷⁰ Jefferson seems to have been better acquainted with the latter two women. Helvétius was the widow of the philosopher Claude Adrien Helvétius and the beloved of Benjamin Franklin, who introduced Jefferson into her charmed circle before he returned to America. Suzanne Necker was the wife of Jacques Necker, the banker and chief financier of King Louis XVI. The naturalist Buffon, whose theories about America Jefferson refuted in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was a regular attendee at her salon, as was Diderot. Madame Necker's even more famous daughter, Germaine de Staël, had already published by 1786 and presided over what Morris called "quite the first salon in Paris."⁷¹ She would become the most famous female author in Europe. Jefferson admired the entire family.

We have nothing in Patsy's hand to say that she knew these women, but between visits to her father's home (and full-time residence after April 1789) and Parisian-style outings to balls (no more than three per week, her father decreed), the opera, the Palais Royal, and Versailles, it is even harder to conceive that she would not have met them. Gouverneur Morris noted many dinners at the Jefferson household "*en famille*," attended by a variety of people, as did Nabby Adams.⁷² Madame d'Houdetot helped Patsy shop for gifts to take home to Virginia before her departure in 1789.⁷³ Even given her youth, Nabby Adams had occasion to pay Madame Helvétius a call; Jefferson's close association with her makes it entirely likely that Patsy would have known her as well. The affectionate relationship between the Jeffersons and Lafayettes and their shared regard for both Jefferson and novels would have given Patsy and Madame de Tessé time together and much common ground on which to connect.⁷⁴ Family stories of Patsy's social life in Paris include an account of a conversation with Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, and balls attended also by Madame de Staël. Handed down by a granddaughter, these stories may well have been bur-nished over the years; nonetheless, they underscore Patsy's full participation in a social scene populated by elite women who reveled in the life of the mind and who were celebrated for it.

70. Marie Kimball, *Jefferson: The Scene of Europe, 1784–1789* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 101; Hayes, *Road to Monticello*, 297.

71. Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris*, 188.

72. See, for example, *ibid.*, 8, 166.

73. Mrs. Nicholas (Susan) Ware Eppes, "Maria Jefferson Eppes and Her Little Son, Francis," typescript, International Center for Jefferson Studies, 9.

74. De Tessé loved British novels and often conducted readings of them in her salon evenings. George Green Shackleford, *Jefferson's Adoptive Son: The Life of William Short, 1759–1848* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 24–25.

Patsy Jefferson kept company with less exalted women, as well. Madame de Corny was a particular favorite of the Jeffersons; she escorted Patsy to the opera in 1788. Kitty (Catherine) Church, niece of Alexander Hamilton and one of Polly Jefferson's best friends at Panthemont, stayed with de Corny.⁷⁵ At Jefferson's home, a center for Paris-based Americans, Patsy dined with Mrs. Nathaniel Barrett, wife of an agent for Boston merchants, and a Mrs. Montgomery.⁷⁶ Like Nabby Adams, Patsy probably knew Anne Willing Bingham, a stylish Philadelphia woman who frequented the salons and the Palais Royal, and debated gender roles and politics with Jefferson. Bingham alternately awed Nabby with her beauty and intelligence and distressed her with her adoption of French fashion—especially rouge.⁷⁷

The venues of these encounters varied, but one place where Parisians of all ranks met was the Palais Royal, which had been converted by the duc de Chartres from a private residence into a kind of mall. Newly opened when the Jeffersons arrived (their first lodgings were adjacent to it), the Palais Royal featured shops, cafés, and entertainments in the three galleries that, together with the original palace on the fourth side, enclosed an enormous garden. There, the artist Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun recalled, “good society assembled in its best clothes,” meeting by day to promenade the graceful allées, sip coffee and chocolate, shop, and visit. Sundays featured concerts so crowded that the air was redolent of the perfume of the women's nose-gays and men's hair powder.⁷⁸ Jefferson loved it; he thought it “one of the principal ornaments to the city.”⁷⁹ Patsy undoubtedly frequented what another entranced sightseer called its “Scene of Gaiety and Business, and Cheerfulness!”⁸⁰ Perhaps one of the charms of the Palais Royal, and indeed of Paris, for American women was the apparent freedom enjoyed there by

75. TJ, Paris, to MJ, June 16, 1788, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 44–45. Andrew Burstein, *The Inner Jefferson: Portrait of a Grieving Optimist* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 108.

76. TJ, Paris, to MJ, November 4, 1786, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 31.

77. Entries for January 20 and February 22, 1785, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 44, 50.

78. Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun is quoted in Marie Kimball, “Jefferson in Paris,” *North American Review* 248 (Autumn 1939): 73–86. Nabby Adams recorded two January 1785 visits to the Palais Royal: one with her brother, after the theater, and another to meet Anne Bingham; entries for January 3 and 20, 1785, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 39–40, 44.

79. TJ, Paris, to Dr. James Currie, January 14, 1785, TJP Digital Edition.

80. Frances Anne Crewe, *An English Lady in Paris: The Diary of Frances Anne Crewe, 1786*, ed. Michael Allen (St. Leonard's, U.K.: Oxford-Stockley, 2006), 69. Quoted in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 167.

French women. Nabby Adams noticed that “In company here, every one consults his own pleasure; the ladies walk about, view the pictures if there are any, [and] chat with any one who pleases them.”⁸¹

But these freedoms also harbored perils, particularly for young women unaccustomed to them. Panthemont, and convent schools like it, appealed to parents precisely because they were designed to shelter their daughters. With its strategic mix of the worldliness of the boarders and strict protocols for its students, Panthemont both prepared and protected its young charges.⁸² Boarders, called *dames des chambres*, lived in a different wing from the students.⁸³ Although required to attend chapel, they were otherwise free to receive visitors and go abroad, subject only to a nightly curfew. But just as profane and respectable rubbed shoulders at the Palais Royal, so too did the women and pensionnaires at Panthemont. A former student from the elite convent school of Port-Royal in Paris remembered many evenings in which she spent two hours “chez une dame en chambre,” with whom she talked “politique, finesse, usages, galanterie.”⁸⁴ While dining at the abbess’s table provided lessons in deportment, voice modulation, and the arts of pleasing conversation, it may have also provided a glimpse of French marital mores. Patsy’s report (pointedly ignored by her father) of the man who killed himself because he thought his wife did not love him—concluding with her arch observation that “if every husband in Paris was to do as much, there would be nothing but widows left”—certainly echoes the gossip overheard at school.⁸⁵ The abbess may well have tried to suppress such talk

81. Entry for November 28, 1784, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 34.

82. Frederic Masson, quoted in Weigert, *Etudes historiques*, 20. Following Masson, Andrea Stuart argues that the Caribbean-born Rose de Beauharnais’s sojourn in Panthemont was key to her integration to French society and polishing the presentation that would, one day, attract the attentions of Napoleon Bonaparte. Andrea Stuart, *The Rose of Martinique: A Life of Napoleon’s Josephine* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 76–79.

83. Danica Zujovic, *A Short History of Pentemont*, in the collections of the International Center for Jefferson Studies. This pamphlet includes floor plans for the three floors of the convent and school. The separation of boarders from students was a common practice. Rapley, *Social History of the Cloister*, 236.

84. Jeanne-Louise-Henriette Campan, quoted in Fossoyeux, “Une abbesse de Panthémont au XVIIIe siècle,” 5. See also Lee, *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France*, 7.

85. MJ to TJ, April 9, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 37–38. Patsy seems to have both conveyed and received gossip. While they were both still students, Bettie Hawkins told Patsy, “The story you told me today of her & the Eaton boys really

among the boarders when her students joined her, but it would not have surprised her. She was very much a woman of the world, on whom many parents counted to engineer suitable connections for their daughters among the elite families represented at the school.⁸⁶

Other news filtered through Panthemont's permeable walls, as well. It is perhaps not surprising that the daughters of nobility, royal officials, and diplomats should be particularly interested in political news, especially in the changeable climate of 1780s France. Three princesses, distinguished by the blue ribbons they wore over their shoulders, attended the school, and a dozen of the 129 families represented at Panthemont in that decade were English, in addition to the American Jefferson girls.⁸⁷ While her father was touring southern France, Patsy acknowledged the swirl of rumors she was hearing about the doings of the Assembly of Notables, but she refused to divulge them, "for fear of taking a trip to the Bastille for my pains, which I am by no means disposed to do at this moment."⁸⁸ On another occasion, a copy of the "king's speech" to the Assembly was circulating in the school. So too were speculations about who was to occupy the cell at the Bastille being prepared by a minister of the king's household (some thought it might be Madame de Polignac, the dauphin's governess, who—it was whispered—may have been pocketing some of the royal allowance).⁸⁹ After Patsy's departure from France, her friend Marie de Botidoux gleefully recounted heated arguments in which she delighted to take the republican view, was unrepentant in the face of an Abbé Maury's efforts to exorcise her "demon of democracy," and begged to know what Jefferson thought of the Assembly's decrees, for "you know he is my oracle."⁹⁰ Botidoux's lively letters could also dispense the latest gossip of pairings, alliances, and intrigues at court, the knowledge of which Madame Roland had once observed was necessary to be able to write letters like Madame de Sévigné. Even lodged at Pan-

shocked me"; Bettie Hawkins to MJ, n.d. [1786], Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

86. Rousseau, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Pentemont*, 39; Samia I. Spencer, "Women and Education," 86; Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 78.

87. Entry for October 14, 1784, in Adams, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams*, 27; Sonnet, *Education des filles au temps des lumières*, 96; Mary (Polly) Jefferson joined her sister in the summer of 1787.

88. MJ, Panthemont, to TJ, March 25, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 33.

89. MJ, Panthemont, to TJ, March 8 and May 3, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 32, 39.

90. Botidoux, Panthemont, to MJ, November 4 and December 4, 1789, Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.



Figure 2. A view from the rue de Grenelle of the exterior of Panthemont's chapel, the site of the profession ceremony that so impressed Patsy Jefferson and Nabby Adams. Jefferson was more probably taken with the graceful architecture of the dome and the beautiful hues of its stone, which change with the advance of the day. Author photo.



Figure 3. A 1788 view of the recently refurbished Palais Royal, playground and meeting place for Parisians of all ranks. Note the promenades formed by the planting of the trees. Shops and restaurants occupied the galleries surrounding the enclosure and the subterranean area, capped by the structure in the center. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello.

themont, Botidoux was (to borrow Roland's words) "at the heart of the . . . brilliant social circles, that is to say, at the center where interesting anecdotes, pretty things, great affairs, important little nothings, happen; where the easy phrase, the friendly tone, finesse, the graces, are given to, are joined to, all that is done."⁹¹

The abbess had strict rules to protect her charges against the hazards of the world. Pensionnaires were allowed trips abroad, but, Patsy found to her chagrin, only if the abbess had written permission from the parents.⁹² Even when out with their parents, students had a curfew that was apparently enforced to the minute. "Know exactly at what hour they will shut your

91. Quoted in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 149.

92. MJ, Panthemont, to TJ, April 9, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 37.

doors in the evening,” Jefferson warned Patsy, as she prepared to go to the opera, “and as you come down to the carriage see exactly what o'clock it is by the Convent clock that we may not be deceived as to the time.”⁹³ The abbess also maintained strict protocols of rank, by station and age. The daughter of the duc d'Orléans took her meals apart from the other pensionnaires, in company only with a girl whose family was associated with the royal household.⁹⁴ Students wore different colored uniforms depending on their ages, but they were housed in common sleeping quarters. Patsy's good friend Julia Annesley complained petulantly, “I think *we* are kept rather too strict for such great girls, and that there ought to be some difference made between ours and an infantine age. But,” she admitted ruefully, in a clear acknowledgment of the abbess's ironclad law, “it is of no use to complain, as it will not mend the matter.”⁹⁵ Entrusted with the most prominent daughters of the land, the abbess was immovable on matters respecting their status and virtue, knowing their futures depended on it.

Within a year of living under the abbess's rule, however, Patsy could declare that she was “charmed” with her new life.⁹⁶ She had learned to speak French like a native and, in her bearing and posture, was indistinguishable from the nobility. When her sponsor, not recognizing Patsy on the playground one day, was informed who she was, she replied, “Ah! mais vraiment elle a l'air très-distingué.”⁹⁷ Bettie Hawkins teasingly called her “your ladyship” in their correspondence.⁹⁸ In these critical years of her life, Patsy developed a sense of herself that was shaped by the mutually reinforcing elements of her time in Paris: the curriculum, Catholicism, and the blend of convent school life with her social outings. She learned about the benefits of status and education for women, and she saw the ways in which even the Church countenanced and used female ability. And as Madame de Sévigné urged, she cemented her friendships with the notes and letters they exchanged even while still in school. “I am very angry with my dear Jeffy

93. TJ to MJ, June 16, 1788, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 44–45.

94. Rousseau, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Pentemont*, 38.

95. J[ulia] Annesley, Panthemont, to MJ, April 20, 1786, Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

96. MJ, Panthemont, to Eliza House Trist, [after August 24, 1785], TJP Digital Edition.

97. Sarah Nicholas Randolph, “Mrs. Thomas Mann Randolph,” in Sarah Butler Wister and Agnes Irwin, eds., *Worthy Women of Our First Century* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1877), 17–18. “Oh, but truly, she has a very distinguished air.”

98. Bettie Hawkins, [England], to MJ, n.d., Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

for not having yet answered my letter,” Julia Annesley wrote playfully, after waiting a week, “and am resolved to be revenged by not speaking to you for 100 years to come, if I do not hear from you this very day.”⁹⁹ Patsy’s sense of her elite status would never be entirely dislodged by her return to America; years later, for instance, as a matron in Virginia, she would look down on a neighbor as “not of my sort.”¹⁰⁰

No one immediately comprehended the storming of the Bastille as the death knell to the ancien régime. Yet it was precisely for their participation in this world that Panthemont was preparing its students; as a mother of eleven, Martha recalled that she was educated for a future as “heiress to a great estate.”¹⁰¹ But the salons, the acceptable sites of female intellectual engagement, had changed in that crucial decade: those that had earlier been devoted to literature, philosophy, and science had become increasingly politicized. From his regular attendance at her salon, for example, the American revolutionary Gouverneur Morris recognized that Madame de Tessé’s zeal for republicanism far outstripped his own. The dangers of female political expression were rapidly realized and suppressed; Madame Roland was one of many women who would fall in the Terror. Convent schools would be targeted for closure, even though the best education they offered had always been limited by its cross-purposes: ideas about improving female education clashing with fears about producing unmarried *femmes savantes*. Yet even this modest program, it turned out, was dangerous. And in the postrevolutionary backlash, female education would aim at the middle classes, rather than the nobility, and prepare women for domesticity, not displays of learning or exertion of political influence.¹⁰²

Jefferson removed his daughter from this scene just as she was turning seventeen, a marriageable age on both sides of the Atlantic. He may well have decided it was time to separate her from the “most untamed spirits” she would later recall having seen “in the wildest young Frenchman.”¹⁰³

99. J[ulia] A[nnesley], Panthemont, to MJ, April 27, 1786, Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

100. MJR, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, September 25, 1823, Copies of Trist Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina (hereinafter cited as SHC, UNC), Acc. #3470, ViU.

101. Randolph, “Mrs. Thomas Mann Randolph,” 55.

102. Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 19; Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

103. MJR, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, June 25, 1823, Acc. #3470, ViU.

Patsy did not want to go. She had arrived in Paris a girl but lived at Panthemont during critical developmental years. She had matured; as Bettie Hawkins once remarked to her, “your lady ship stands much on *Punctilio* & has a great deal of the “old maid” in her composition.”¹⁰⁴ And she had clearly voiced her fears about life in America to her friends: Elizabeth Tuffton hoped that Patsy would find that “the *idea* you had formed of America was an unfavorable one, and that you will spend your time more agreeably than you imagined.”¹⁰⁵ Patsy must have sketched a bleak picture of Charlottesville to Bettie Hawkins, married by that time, who wanted a full accounting when she returned. “Pray tell me if you have Balls, Plays & all the amusements we enjoy in Europe?” the new Mrs. Carson wondered. Assuming that in the backwoods of Virginia “you cannot get every article of dress with as much facility as we do,” she also helpfully offered to procure for her “anything you may want.”¹⁰⁶ And as we have seen, Marie Botidoux knew that Patsy preferred the convent in Paris to life in Virginia. Even a new acquaintance, Nathaniel Cutting, who spent several days with the Jeffersons in Le Havre on the eve of their departure, noticed “some emotion of chagrin at the thought of being separated from the engaging circle” of her friends in Paris.¹⁰⁷

Reentry was not easy. So thoroughly French had she become that she had difficulty reverting to English upon her return.¹⁰⁸ Decades later, as her daughter Ellen was adjusting to married life and the culture of urban Boston, she confessed to Martha, “I think sometimes of the situation in which you were placed on your return to your own country after being educated out of it, & fancy that I can now enter far better into your difficulties & feelings than I could ever have done before.”¹⁰⁹ Patsy and her sister renewed acquaintances with forgotten friends and relatives as they made their way from the port of Norfolk to Monticello, a journey that took almost a full

104. Bettie Hawkins to MJ, [1788], Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU. None of Patsy’s letters to her schoolmates have been located.

105. Elizabeth Tuffton, [London], to MJ, December 19, 1789, Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, Acc. box 1, #1397, ViU.

106. Bettie [Hawkins] Carson, [London], to MJ, [late 1789], Papers of the Randolph Family of Edgehill, box 1, Acc. #1397, ViU.

107. Nathaniel Cutting to MJ, March 30, 1790, in Jefferson, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 16:207.

108. MJR, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, September 1, 1822, Acc. #3470, ViU.

109. EWRC, Boston, to MJR, August 1825, FLP.

month. Two months after that, she was married. “A greater contrast between her single and her married life” could not be imagined, Ellen reflected, but her mother “bore [it] with true female heroism.”¹¹⁰ The life of wife, mother, and plantation mistress—a goal to which all other white Virginia girls aspired—was, after Paris, a trial so arduous as to require “heroism” to be endured.

There were no balls in Charlottesville, no plays, few amusements. Hasty preparations for her wedding may have dulled the disappointment of return, but six days after Patsy’s marriage to Thomas Mann Randolph on February 23, 1790, Jefferson departed to take his office as the new president’s Secretary of State in New York City.¹¹¹ He had sent Polly (ever afterward called Maria) back to her cousins’ home at Eppington, from which she had been summoned to Paris, so Martha was deprived of the company of the two people she loved most. Living at first on the undeveloped farm of Varina, given as a wedding gift by the groom’s father, Martha found her isolation complete. Nor did the couple’s move back to Monticello in the fall of 1790 remedy that situation substantially.

Part of the problem, of course, was the obvious difference between urban and rural environments. But Martha encountered a kind of intellectual isolation as well. Her education in Paris was unmatched in Virginia, or anywhere else in America; with the exception of Aaron Burr’s daughter, Theodosia, who was trained in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and French, Martha Jefferson Randolph had few peers in educational attainment.¹¹² Indeed, it was only at this pivotal moment in American history that female education had at last become a subject of interest and reform. In Philadelphia, Dr. Benjamin Rush had proposed a plan of education for young ladies that became the curriculum for the school he helped establish in 1787, one of the most forward-thinking schools for girls in the infant nation. In the following decade, Judith Sargent Murray would publish her arguments for

110. Entry for January 11, 1839, in Coolidge, *Jefferson’s Granddaughter in Queen Victoria’s England*, 160.

111. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 252–53.

112. Roger G. Kennedy, *Burr, Hamilton, and Jefferson: A Study in Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61. In addition, Kennedy notes, Theodosia Burr studied “botany, natural history, and the classics of political theory. When she became a woman, he [her father] gave her his portrait of [Mary] Wollstonecraft to remind her of the *Vindication* he had used as a primer for her education.”

the equality of the male and female intellect.¹¹³ Susanna Rowson opened her renowned school for girls in Boston in 1797. These examples come—unsurprisingly—from the north, where female literacy had been an important value in the colonial period for both Puritans in New England and Quakers in the Middle Atlantic. Girls in states south of Pennsylvania possessed significantly fewer opportunities for schooling. The female academies that were to dot the landscape by the 1820s did not yet exist in the 1790s. Even elite girls, such as Martha’s future sister-in-law, Judith Randolph, received an inferior education compared to that available to boys, and they knew it. Envyng Patsy’s opportunity in Paris, and “without a tutor” herself, Judith mourned, “My prospect for a tolerable education is but a bad one, which in my opinion is one of the greatest disadvantages which the Virginia Girls are attended with.”¹¹⁴

As the mother of six surviving daughters and five sons, Martha Jefferson Randolph devoted herself to their education. So admirably did she accomplish this work that Jefferson turned to her when he received an inquiry from Nathaniel Burwell in 1818 about the best plan for female education. Admitting that the topic “has never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me” (his own daughters’ education only “occasionally requir[ing]” his attention), Jefferson then sketched out his recommendations in broad strokes: select novels only (most being inclined to produce “a bloated imagination [and] sickly judgment”); select poetry (for the same reason), to promote “style and taste”; French, dancing, drawing, and music. It was an utterly conventional program, essentially unchanged despite thirty eventful years of revolution and republic building. Of lessons in “household economy,” Jefferson knew “I need say nothing,” since that was a given for future American mothers.¹¹⁵

The catalogue he appended, however, was by his own acknowledgment compiled by Martha and one of her daughters (probably Ellen) and not by him; and it shows a very different approach. Her own education and formation at Panthemont are reflected in a more substantial program for female scholars, even for those of less exalted origins than her children: French

113. Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes,” *Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*, March 1790, 132–35.

114. Judith Randolph, Tuckahoe, Va., to MJR, February 12, 1785, Nicholas Philip Trist Papers, SHC, UNC, Acc. #2104.

115. TJ, Monticello, to Nathaniel Burwell, March 14, 1818, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.



Figure 4. Miniature of Marie de Botidoux, a classmate of Patsy Jefferson's at Panthemont. Her barely repressible smile hints at the vivacity that animates the more than one hundred pages of letters and journals she sent to her friend after Patsy's departure from Paris. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello; photograph by Edward Owen.

literature, the luminaries of English literature, ancient history, modern histories of Europe, America, and Virginia, mathematics, geography, natural history, and science. Perhaps no works on the list manifest the continuing influence of her French education more than the writings of Madame Genlis; she recommended no fewer than four different titles. Genlis, whose *Adèle et Théodore* (1782) earned her “an international reputation as an educator,”¹¹⁶ believed in the rational capacity of women and in the transforma-

116. Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 238.

tional effect of education.¹¹⁷ The tutor of Louis-Philippe, the future king of France, Genlis was a firm believer in home education as much for the benefit of mothers as for their children. As Sania Spencer explains, for Genlis the role of teacher “gave the mother a strong sense of identity and made her life happier, more meaningful, and more fulfilled. . . . [Genlis] designed educational programs that would make [her students] active and useful members of society, as well as responsible and respected individuals.”¹¹⁸ Genlis furnished nothing less than the blueprint for Martha Jefferson Randolph’s life in rural Virginia.

In some respects, Martha’s suggestions very much mirrored the Anglo-American culture to which she had returned: William Shakespeare’s plays, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, John Dryden’s *Tragedies*, Alexander Pope’s *Works*, and the models of style and wit since the colonial period, the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, and the *Guardian*. A single volume each, Nicolas Pike’s *Arithmetic* and John Pinkerton’s *Geography*, covered those subjects; the Reverend Jeremiah Joyce’s three-volume *Scientific Dialogues* (aimed at a young audience) and the *Histoire naturel de Buffon* provided all that a young woman needed to know about science and natural history. Histories of modern Europe, Charles V, England, Scotland, America, and Virginia were all by English authors.¹¹⁹

But Martha’s immersion in French culture thirty years earlier is apparent also. French plays, novels, and histories, as well as French adaptations of classical literature constituted a significant portion of a well-rounded girl’s education. Martha recommended the works of Molière, Racine, and Corneille; the plays and novels of Madame Genlis; *Gil Blas*; a French translation of *Don Quixote*; and the moral tales of Jean-François Marmontal. Her students read modern French history: Voltaire’s *Histoire générale* and his *Louis XIV*; Claude Millot’s *Histoire de France*; and the duc de Sully’s *Mémoires*.

Her emphasis on classical learning is particularly interesting. Martha recommended Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Millot’s *Histoire ancienne* as contexts for a plethora of primary sources from the ancient period. Titus Livy was best appreciated in English; so too were Cicero’s *Offices*, Dryden’s *Virgil*, Pope’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Sallust, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch. But she recommended Abbé Lagrange’s French

117. Suellen Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books, and Sex in the French Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 99, 98.

118. Spencer, *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, 92.

119. TJ, Monticello, to Burwell, March 14, 1818.

translation of Seneca.¹²⁰ Two other works in French were inspired by the classics but were a modern take on them: Fénelon's famous *Les aventures de Télémaque* and Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce*. Adapted from the *Odyssey*, Fénelon's tale followed the search of Telemachus for his father, which became a journey of self-discovery as well. Sent to Greece from Macedonia for his education, Barthélemy's hero produces a travel account in the manner of those popular in the eighteenth century. Both works were ubiquitous in France, particularly as an introduction for young students to the ancient world. From this reading girls would learn about virtue in public life, about tyrants and seekers of liberty, and about the moral life. Her own daughters loved it: from childhood, Ellen recalled, "my heart would swell and my eyes would fill over the characters and exploits of the heroes of Greece and Rome."¹²¹

Martha took her daughters' curriculum even further, however: they also studied Latin. As a girl in Panthemont, Martha had complained frequently to her father about plowing her way through "tite live" ("*Titus Livius* puts me out of my wits," she cried on one occasion, and, "it serves to little good in the execution of a thing almost impossible," on another), but she had read him in an "ancient Italian," not Latin.¹²² Although he had once remarked that the greatest gift his father had given him was a classical education, Jefferson had not considered bestowing such a gift on his daughters.¹²³ So Patsy had been trained in French and Italian instead. But *her* daughters would not be deprived of that conventionally male curricular component. How she did this remains a mystery.¹²⁴ Like the abbess of Pan-

120. Primary sources included Cicero's *Offices* (in English); Lagrange's French translation of Seneca; Dryden's translations of Virgil; Pope's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; Titus Livy (in English); Sallust's histories, translated by Thomas Gordon; Plutarch's *Lives*; Arthur Murphy's translation of Tacitus; Suetonius's *Lives of the Poets*, translated by Alexander Thomson. TJ to Burwell, March 14, 1818.

121. EWR, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, December 1823, FLP.

122. MJ, Panthemont, to TJ, March 25, May 27, and March 8, 1787, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 33, 42, 32.

123. TJ, Monticello, to John Brazier, August 24, 1819, in Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Albert Ellery Bergh and Andrew Adgate Lipscomb, 20 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1904–7), 15:210. Jefferson wrote, "I think myself more indebted to my father for this [knowledge of Greek and Latin at Maury's school] than for all the other luxuries his cares and affections have placed within my reach; and more now than when younger, and more susceptible of delights from other sources."

124. Perhaps MJR relied on Ellen's elder brother, Jeff, to teach her as he himself was learning; or she may have sat in on his lessons with their father, Thomas Mann

themont, who dunned without ceasing, however, Martha Randolph could also “lay siege” to her father when she wanted something, and one way or another she secured Latin for her daughters.¹²⁵ At age twenty-three, Ellen recalled her visits to her grandfather’s retreat, Poplar Forest, where she too had found respite from the madding crowd; she ambled from “room to room” in the house, savoring memories of when she had “devoted from seven to eight hours to my latin,” and “poured over volumes of history which I should in vain have attempted to read at Monticello.”¹²⁶ Like her grandfather, she appreciated the gift of Latin; having mastered it well enough to read Virgil, Ellen swore, “I will never again tolerate a translation.” The difference between the original and Dryden’s translation she likened to that “between a glass of rich, old, high flavored wine, and the same wine thrown into a quart of duck-water.”¹²⁷ Her sisters also studied Latin. Anne was translating the work of the historian Justin at age eleven.¹²⁸ Unable to find time to devote to her Latin, Mary fretted about “the precious time I am wasting from my *precious* studies. . . . I have a great mi[nd] to learn latin in a fortnight . . . but I dont know how th[at] would be compatible with my house keeping duties.”¹²⁹

Martha’s program of education for her daughters thus differed from her father’s for her in significant ways, but it was not unlike that which Jefferson had recommended for young men over the years. In 1785, for example, he sent his nephew Peter Carr a long letter containing a plan of education that (unlike that for his daughters) he had “long digested” and that he would “Detail to you from time to time as you advance.” Begin with a “course of

Randolph. The least likely, yet still possible, alternative was that she struggled to teach them herself. Abigail Adams complained to her husband about the difficulty of teaching Nabby and John Quincy Latin without knowing it herself. Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 20.

125. MJR, Monticello, to Virginia Jefferson Randolph, January 10, 1822, Nicholas Philip Trist Papers, Acc #2104, SHC, UNC.

126. EWR, Poplar Forest, to MJR, July 18, 1819, Correspondence of EWRC, FLP.

127. EWR, Poplar Forest, to MJR, August 11, 1819, Correspondence of EWRC, FLP.

128. Anne Cary Randolph, Edgehill, to TJ, February 26, 1802, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 217. She was translating Marcus Junianus Justinus, *De historiis Philippicis et totius mundi originibus*.

129. Mary J. Randolph, Monticello, to Virginia J. Randolph (later Trist), January 31, 1822, Nicholas Trist Papers, FLP.

antient history,” Jefferson recommended, “reading every thing in the original and not in translations.”¹³⁰ Two years later he appended a list that included all the classics Martha would later recommend for girls, as well as the histories of Edward Gibbon and Claude-François Millot.¹³¹ He closely supervised the education of his grandsons, in which the study of Latin figured prominently. Thomas Jefferson Randolph (Jeff) began his Latin education under his father’s tutelage, but then branched out to a series of tutors recommended by his grandfather.¹³² In his retirement Jefferson offered to give daily two-hour Latin tutorials to his grandson Francis Eppes. In that same letter, he noted that at Monticello Francis would also experience “total immersion” in French, “with aunt and cousins who speak it perfectly.”¹³³

Jefferson’s program of education for his nephews and grandsons was, of course, much fuller than that for girls. Boys added a variety of sciences—botany, chemistry, astronomy, anatomy, and agriculture—since they, and not girls, looked forward to a life’s work that would “advance the arts and administer the health, subsistence, and comforts of human life.”¹³⁴ For the same reasons, boys required deeper study in mathematics, history, geography, and politics. As Jefferson remarked to Martha’s husband, science was excellent preparation for planters, but the other subjects would be useful if they had to “resort to professions.”¹³⁵ But to his mind women, who would neither contribute to what eighteenth-century Americans called the “outdoor affairs” of men nor populate the “professions,” had no need of such advanced study. His letters to his school-aged daughters are remarkable for his persistent emphasis on their progress in drawing and music. Indeed, less than a year after his return, he seems to have regretted Martha’s Parisian education. Offering to take his nephew Jack Eppes to Philadelphia to study, he warned Jack’s mother, “Load him on his departure with charges not to

130. TJ, Paris, to Peter Carr, August 19, 1785, TJP Digital Edition.

131. TJ, Paris, to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787, TJP Digital Edition.

132. MJR, Edgehill, to TJ, April 16, 1802, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 222. “Jefferson is reading latin with his Papa but I am seriously uneasy at his not going to school.”

133. TJ, Poplar Forest, to John Wayles Eppes, June 1, 1815, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Copy at International Center for Jefferson Studies.

134. TJ, “Report to the Commissioners,” August 4, 1818, in Roy J. Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* (1931; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 250.

135. TJ, Monticello, to Thomas Mann Randolph, July 30, 1821, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

give his heart to any object he will find there. I know no such useless bauble in a house as a girl of mere city education.”¹³⁶ Nor would Martha’s husband, Thomas Mann Randolph, have been the impetus for their daughters’ unusually high level of education; he argued, instead, that “The *elegant* and agreeable occupations of *Poetry* and the fine arts, surely become the delicate sex more, than tedious & abstruse enquiries into the causes of phenomena.”¹³⁷ If Ellen Wayles Randolph was, as Elizabeth House Trist once observed, “perhaps one of the best Educated Girls in America[,] a perfect Mistress of the french Italian and spanish languages,” it was because of the aspirations of her cultivated mother, rather than of her father or grandfather.¹³⁸

Martha’s program for her daughters was remarkable for her time, even compared with female education in the North (generally conceded to have exceeded that in the South).¹³⁹ Mary Kelley has identified the 1820s as a crucial decade in which female seminaries began to teach such subjects as Latin, natural philosophy, and botany. In a room barely fifteen by fifteen feet that Jefferson allocated for Martha’s use, her daughters were studying those subjects a full decade earlier.¹⁴⁰ The practice of extracting from their reading, a fixture of both Martha’s education and later antebellum female academies, was central to Martha’s daughters’ learning as well. When all Ellen’s treasured keepsakes were lost in transit from Monticello to her new home in Boston, her sister Mary mourned the losses not only of Ellen’s writing desk and family letters, but also of “your own notes & extracts the

136. TJ, Monticello to Elizabeth Wayles Eppes, Monticello, October 31, 1790, TJP Digital Edition.

137. Thomas Mann Randolph to Anne Cary Randolph, May 1, 1788, quoted in Jan Lewis, *The Pursuits of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 150.

138. Elizabeth Trist, Henry County [Va.], to Catherine Bache, August 22, 1814, FLP.

139. Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). For example, Martha Laurens Ramsay’s sons read the New Testament in Greek, but she confined her daughter’s language training to French. Winterer, *Mirror of Antiquity*, 70.

140. Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 28. See also Kelley, “Female Academies and Seminaries and Print Culture,” in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 2, *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 336–38. Thomas Woody’s survey of seminaries shows Latin, Greek, and French appearing in female seminaries, but his survey covers an even later period, 1830–71.

accumulation of which has been the employment of years.” These pursuits (and Ellen’s meticulous material record of them) had taught her to think of herself as a “bluestocking,” an elite female thinker.¹⁴¹ As she told her mother of the preparations her husband’s parents were making to welcome another daughter-in-law into the family, preparations that, to her mind, were “much more hospitable and affectionate than my own reception,” Ellen sniffed, “the daughter of an orthodox and federal family, who is believed to have received a *useful education* is really more welcome than a *blue-stocking Unitarian democrat* could possibly be.”¹⁴²

Ellen’s remark cuts to the central problem of female education in her lifetime: what purpose should it serve? At Benjamin Rush’s Philadelphia school, girls took lessons not in French, drawing, and music, but in book-keeping, to become useful and economical wives; Judith Sargent Murray wanted girls educated to self-sufficiency, even as she argued that would not present a challenge to men; and Eliza Southgate emerged from Susanna Rowson’s Boston school “with a head full of something, tumbled in without order or connection,” but at a loss as to what to do with it.¹⁴³ All agreed,

141. Susan M. Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), treats the significance of the ways in which women preserved the historical memory of their families in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania.

142. EWRC, Boston, to MJR, Monticello, August 19, 1828, Correspondence of EWRC, Acc. #9090, ViU. At times, however, Ellen was critical of her own education. She wrote to her sister Virginia the following year that she had been “dazzled” by the “false glare which quick parts and the love of literature threw . . . [so that] I never knew how deficient I was in my useful qualities until called on for the exercise of them. . . . my object ever since has been by pawning my jewels to procure my linen, or in other words, I am constantly trying by the sacrifice of my brilliant qualities to acquire those of ordinary usefulness, which it is equally disgraceful and uncomfortable to be without.” EWRC to Virginia Jefferson Randolph Trist, May 3, 1829, FLP. Her critique echoes that of her kinswoman Judith Randolph, who bemoaned the useless education she received that did not prepare her for the challenges of her rapidly declining family fortunes. Cynthia Kierner, “‘The Dark and Dense Cloud Perpetually lowering over us’: Gender and the Decline of the Gentry in Postrevolutionary Virginia,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Summer 2000): 189. Indeed, neither Judith Randolph’s traditional ornamental education nor Ellen’s more substantially intellectual one seems to have served southern women well; nonetheless, Ellen was disdainful of her future sister-in-law’s “useful education” and continued to see some kinds of labor as better relegated to servants.

143. Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 1801, in Nancy F. Cott, Jeanne Boydston, Ann Braude, Lori Ginzberg, Molly Ladd-Taylor, eds., *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 100.



Figure 5. Thomas Sully, *Martha Jefferson Randolph* (1835). Painted in Philadelphia a year before her death, this portrait illustrates the “delicate likeness” she bore to her father, as well as her lively intelligence and “perfect temper,” famously unruffled despite the many storms of her life. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello; photograph by Edward Owen.

however, that female education should be put to the service of the family, not to self-actualization. This is key to understanding the limits of the various curricula, even one as advanced as Ellen’s. Caroline Winterer has observed of the classicist curriculum of nineteenth-century American girls’ schools, “Ancient history was acceptable for women, but the classical lan-

guages (especially Greek) were not; admiring the heroism of Cicero or Scipio was acceptable, but tying the heroism to prescriptions for modern statecraft was not; reading about ancient orators was acceptable, while declaiming aloud less so." As was true of French schoolgirls in the ancien regime who attempted a grasp of classical studies, American girls also had to do so "with narrow boundaries."¹⁴⁴

Martha Jefferson Randolph widened those boundaries considerably with her gift of Latin, but her daughters otherwise remained confined by gender. This was in large part dictated by the gender conventions of antebellum America, whether in Boston—as Ellen found—or in Charlottesville. But it was also shaped by writers on female education, such as Madame Genlis, whose works, including her *Letters on Education*, Martha admired and recommended. An ardent Catholic and conservative, Genlis did not challenge the idea that women were best suited for motherhood in the home. In that, she agreed with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas on female education, as illustrated in his novel *Emile*. She parted company with Rousseau, however, when she argued that women's intellectual capabilities were the equal of men's.¹⁴⁵ As the historian Suellen Diaconoff has stressed, "The primary and constant message that Madame de Genlis communicates to women throughout her works is their capacity as rational, rather than emotional, beings." For Genlis, all reading—even the novels critics feared evoked wild flights of imagination and passion—was valuable for the purpose of self-improvement.¹⁴⁶ This process of transformation required self-discipline, as Genlis understood from her own preparations to teach her two daughters and the four children of the duc d'Orléans (cousin to the king): "I cultivated my mind and talents with a new ardor in order to be of greater service to my students, as well as to my daughters."¹⁴⁷ In turn, Clarissa Campbell Orr explains, Genlis taught her students that they "must earn their privileged position in society by their responsible behavior, not by an assumption of birthright." But a happy result of this approach was that "elite men and women [could] see how they could deserve their position."¹⁴⁸ Thus, Genlis did not teach Martha Jefferson Randolph to make a natural rights argument

144. Winterer, *Mirror of Antiquity*, 14–15.

145. Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 243.

146. Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass*, 99, 98.

147. Quoted in Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 245.

148. Clarissa Campbell Orr, "Aristocratic Feminism, the Learned Governess, and the Republic of Letters," in Knott and Taylor, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, 319.

for the equality of the sexes; but she did provide her with a model for interpreting her life, both in Paris and in Virginia. Women's capacity for rational thought, combined with the rigors of self-discipline in study, made them as capable of achieving nobility in a moral meritocracy as men.

This was not quite republican motherhood, as it was being articulated in the national conversation about the role of women in the new nation. Emerging from a history as subjects, to creating one as republican citizens, Americans were redefining what citizenship meant. A long history, stretching back to ancient Greece, emphasized that the polity belonged to men only. And increasingly, white men of all ranks asserted their equality in a system that became defined by "one man, one vote." An egalitarian rhetoric both promoted and reflected these changes, as the franchise broadened, state by state, cutting down the property requirements that previously barred poor white men from the ballot box. Jefferson's own party took the lead in this direction (not incidentally disenfranchising free blacks in the process). Barred from the ballot box, some American women nonetheless claimed the language and philosophy of republicanism in their writing, teaching, and mothering of future citizens.¹⁴⁹

But egalitarianism was not what Genlis had in mind; rather, it was the preservation of rank by the cultivation of the rational mind through rigorous self-discipline. There were few venues in the early republic for such display of learning and assertion of rank, particularly for women. Federalist women in 1790s Philadelphia attempted to counter the democratizing tendencies of the Jeffersonian Republicans by organizing a genteel life around visits, promenades, and salons that served as visible markers of elite status within the new republic. Several women who had experienced salon life in Paris attempted to re-create it in Philadelphia; Anne Willing Bingham's gatherings were particularly notable.¹⁵⁰ Alice Izard, a New Yorker married to South Carolina's Ralph Izard, and her daughter, Margaret Izard Manigault, found the national capital a perfect ground for the visible display of elite women as a part of political society.¹⁵¹ But the salons survived neither the

149. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

150. Susan Branson, *Those Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 133–41.

151. Daniel Kilbride, "Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (1999): 221–56.

move to Washington City nor the transition of power from the Federalists to the Jeffersonian Republicans, although women remained political players, albeit in social settings, until the presidency of Andrew Jackson.¹⁵² Elite women attempting to exercise political muscle had become suspect in a polity increasingly defining itself as male. In any event, Martha Jefferson Randolph did not visit Philadelphia when it was the nation's capital; and when she visited her father in Washington during his presidency, she performed the filial duties of a loving daughter, rather than the presiding duties of a salon hostess. At home in Virginia, she followed Genlis's precepts, devoting herself to the service of her students in her exclusive mountaintop home school. Both at Edgehill, within sight of her father's rarefied home, and later at Monticello she bestowed on her daughters an education unlike any then available in America, teaching them to deserve the elite position into which they had been born. Years later, when Cornelia wrote dejectedly in 1828 from an impoverished Monticello that she had "given up all ambition and all pride and put down the dusting brush or the needle, smooth my hair and come out to receive company feeling as much a lady as I have done when I *laid* by my book or drawing for the same purpose," she allows us to see the link she too understood lay between her rational, educated pursuits and her status as a genteel woman.¹⁵³

In her teaching, Martha followed the formula by which Genlis herself had lived. In 1781 Genlis's daughter Caroline ruminated, "It is curious indeed that at her age, when she was still young, pretty, and so talented, that she would renounce society life and all its pleasures in order to devote herself to her children and to their education. . . . I don't know how Mama withstands the life she leads: ten lessons to give every day, after which she works at her desk until two or three o'clock in the morning." As a wife and mother, Martha Jefferson Randolph displayed self-discipline in the scheduled order of her days and in her habits of industry, which was remarked on by all who observed her. Her father's overseer for twenty years, Edmund Bacon, commented that "Mrs. Randolph was just like her father . . . she was always busy. If she wasn't reading or writing, she was always doing something. . . . As her daughters grew up, she taught them to be industrious

152. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). Martha herself would make use of her connections to secure a place in the navy for her son George Wythe, but that did not denote a sense of political participation

153. Cornelia Jefferson Randolph, Monticello, to EWRC, Boston, July 6–8, 1828, Correspondence of EWRC, Acc. #9090, ViU.

like herself.”¹⁵⁴ When Jefferson took Ellen and Cornelia to Poplar Forest, he told their mother that they “are the severest students I have ever met with. They never leave their room but to come to meals.”¹⁵⁵ Virginia was so desperate to find a place at Monticello where she could study uninterrupted that she converted a wasp-infested attic space into her “fairy palace,” furnishing it with a couple of cast-off chairs, a sofa (minus the cushions), and two small tables.¹⁵⁶ Counseling her struggling daughter Septimia, Martha spoke from experience when she admitted that desultory application to lessons “will weary you and you will not retain much of what you read under such circumstances. But the habit will in time be formed and the improvement to your own mind and character my dear Septimia will repay you most amply for the weariness of your initiation.” Through self-disciplined application to study, Martha was convinced that “to cultivate the good, and smother the bad [was] in the power of every rational creature.”¹⁵⁷

For her strenuous efforts on their behalf, Genlis was rewarded by the devotion of her children. Caroline declared that she “prefer[red] a thousand times more a quarter hour of conversation with Mama to all the parties and pleasures of Paris.”¹⁵⁸ Caroline was writing about her mother, but her words could just as easily have come from any of Martha’s children about her. Writing from a gay social whirl in Richmond, Ellen worried that her “mind would sink to the level . . . of stupidity,” since “the folly and frivolity of the beings with whom I associate” completely lacked the “feast of reason” that was conversation at home at Monticello.¹⁵⁹ A year later, as she worried about her mother’s health from Poplar Forest, she was cheered to hear of her brother “Jefferson’s attentions” to her, which were “just what I should have expected from his devoted attachment to you; an attachment which all your children feel to a degree that makes it a ruling passion.” After dinner that evening, as she listened to her grandfather reflect on the “excellences”

154. Hamilton W. Pierson, *Jefferson at Monticello: The Private Life of Thomas Jefferson from Entirely New Materials* (1862; repr., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 87.

155. TJ, Poplar Forest, to MJR, August 31, 1817, in Jefferson, *Family Letters*, 419.

156. Virginia Jefferson Randolph, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, June 5, 1823, Nicholas P. Trist Papers, Library of Congress.

157. MJR, Boston, to Septimia Randolph, December 2, 1832, Papers of Septimia Anne Cary Randolph Meickleham, Acc. #4726-b, ViU.

158. Quoted in Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 245.

159. EWR, Richmond, to MJR, January 28, 1818, Correspondence of EWRC, Acc. #9090, ViU.

of her siblings, she agreed with his assessment that it was due to the “education and the influence of example” that Martha had provided.¹⁶⁰ The historian Mary Seidman Trouille has written that “Genlis was a demanding instructor and a rigorous disciplinarian who carefully monitored every moment of her students’ day. Thanks to her charismatic personality, boundless energy, and genuine affection for her charges, however, she was able to capture their love and enthusiasm, to draw the best from them, and to create a warm, closely knit group.”¹⁶¹ A more fitting description of Martha Jefferson Randolph and her students’ devotion could not be found.

Her daughters remembered it all with both fondness and gratitude. They recalled the stories of her convent days that Martha told so often. Ellen would write in her diary in 1838, “How well I remember the two Abbesses who reigned at Panthemont whilst my mother was there.” Through her mother’s vivid narrations, “aristocratic Nuns,” lay sisters (including a “kind, rough, half scolding, half laughing, honest, sort of *good fellow*, called by the young ladies Papa”), and students from France, England, the West Indies, and America all inhabited the schoolroom at Monticello as they had at Panthemont. Ellen and her siblings listened raptly, “enter[ing] into their characters, habits, studies, sports, and adventures.”¹⁶²

But these stories were more than entertainment. Martha Jefferson Randolph knew the attractions of novels and stories over pedantic sermons; she had studied La Fontaine’s fables, after all. So she used her stories to teach moral lessons to her children. They were particularly effective, Ellen explained, because they “combined for us, all the interest of fiction with the force of truth.” They possessed the immediacy of Martha’s personal experience: real-life stories, with real-life consequences; but they also possessed the virtues of distance in time and space. Rather than pointing to one of her own children as an object lesson, Martha presented a convent school girl’s behavior instead, which she held up as an example to emulate or avoid. Martha’s stories, her daughter believed, contributed to an education conceived with “great care and wisdom.”¹⁶³

The stories must have been detailed, vivid, and related frequently over the years: at least two of Martha’s daughters considered joining the Roman Catholic Church. Decades after Patsy’s return from France, both Ellen

160. EWR, Poplar Forest, to MJR, July 28, 1819, FLP.

161. Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 245.

162. Entry for January 11, 1839, in Coolidge, *Thomas Jefferson’s Granddaughter in Queen Victoria’s England*, 162.

163. *Ibid.*

(b. 1796) and her youngest sister, Septimia (b. 1814), expressed more than a passing interest as teenagers in converting to Catholicism, an extraordinary occurrence in a viscerally Protestant America, and all the more notable given Jefferson's religious views.¹⁶⁴ By her own admission, Martha had been a "thoroughgoing Catholic" at Septimia's age. She ultimately rejected Catholicism, entirely repudiating its central theology of transubstantiation. But she had also feared ridicule if she discovered she had made a mistake. As she cautioned her daughter, "if once you profess the religion and after a few years change your mind the horror that the catholics feel for a renegade to their faith will ruin you with them and give you a character of levity with others."¹⁶⁵ One hears Jefferson's reasonable voice in these arguments, smoothly cajoling his young daughter out of a schoolgirl "infatuation." But certainly elements of Catholicism retained their appeal in her memory and were transmitted to her daughters. Perhaps Septimia's case is not so remarkable; like her mother before her, she was persuaded by schoolmates and teachers at her Catholic school in Washington, D.C., that only Catholics possessed the avenue to heaven. Ellen, however, who told her mother to remind Septimia that "at fifteen she to[o] had strong notions of catholicism but that she had outgrown them all," is less explicable.¹⁶⁶ There were no churches or convent schools in Charlottesville, no friends to "seduce" her away from her religion. Only Martha's depiction of life in a French convent, with all that Catholicism could offer a single woman—a career, teaching, and power and authority in the world, as the abbess had possessed—could have made Catholicism so appealing.¹⁶⁷



Martha's French education significantly influenced her ideas about female education, in part because of the curriculum, but also because of the example of Abbess Marie-Catherine Béthisy de Mézières and the other elite

164. MJR, Boston, to Septimia Randolph, December 2, 1832, Papers of Septimia Anne Cary Randolph Meickleham, Acc. #4726-b, ViU.

165. MJR, Boston, to Septimia Randolph, January 1, 1833, Papers of Septimia Anne Cary Randolph Meickleham, Acc. #4726-b, ViU.

166. MJR, Boston, to Septimia Randolph, December 2, 1832, Papers of Septimia Anne Cary Randolph Meickleham, Acc. #4726-b, ViU.

167. Indeed, given the context of rising anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feeling, MJR was remarkably broadminded with respect to Catholics. In addition to sending Septimia to a Catholic school in Washington, D.C., she conceded that if Septimia converted, she would not abandon her: "as our saviour says, 'in my fathers house are many apartments' so must there be many roads leading to that house." *Ibid.*

women in French society whose learning, wit, and conversation presented her with a model of womanhood that showcased female learning. Martha drank deeply of the curriculum in all these venues and, as result, educated her daughters in a way that differed from those of her father and even the most reform-minded American schools. But her ambitious plan of education for her daughters was not an assertion of gender equality; rather, it was designed to preserve their elite status. She was no more able to challenge gender norms than was her father. Instead, she tried to mitigate the consequences of being born female by identifying with the intellectual life of her father and teaching her daughters to do the same.

Yet, like Eliza Southgate before her, Ellen wondered what she was supposed to do with her brilliant education. At age twenty-seven, Ellen wrote of her regret that she had not read John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* years earlier. "I have been all my life in the custom of reading a good deal, but I can truly say that I never knew *how* I ought to read until I had grown too old. . . . in former years I read because it amused me and because I wished to make myself a companion for those intelligent and well-informed persons in whose society I most delighted [her mother and grandfather], . . . but to understand I conceived to be nothing more than to have an image presented to my mind. . . . nor was I aware that the proper and healthy employment of the mind [wa]s *to think*, and not to *dream*." She concluded ruefully, "was I a man, could my studies have any object of sufficient importance to stimulate my exertions, I would now, even now, [re]commence my education. . . . as it is, I am nothing but a woman, and could promise myself no competent reward for so much trouble."¹⁶⁸ Without any apparent destination for female education, then, Ellen questioned the journey. Despite all the attention that Martha Jefferson Randolph devoted to her children's education, it was not meant—for the girls at least—to cultivate an autonomous self, able, in Jefferson's words, to judge "what will endanger or secure his [her] liberty." Rather, it followed Genlis's aim: women should learn just what they need to know to be successful wives. Martha's efforts, however, raised her daughters' expectations to an unattainable level, as Ellen had belatedly realized. She was, she knew, "rendered unfit for an ordinary destiny. My friends, in their love, seem to have thought that I could command fortune and direct the events of my life."¹⁶⁹

Martha Jefferson Randolph's story, like those of Genlis and de Staël, highlights the tenacity of traditional gender conventions even in the age of

168. EWR, Monticello, to Nicholas P. Trist, March 30, 1824, FLP.

169. EWRC, "Two Autobiographical Papers," June 15, 1828, FLP.

the trans-Atlantic revolutions said to have ushered in the modern world. As it turned out, both Genlis and de Staël were shunted out of France, and women's tentative claims to participation in the polity were similarly shunted aside in the United States. The world was not prepared to receive such well-educated women. But even they themselves did not always understand the power of their intellect as sufficient cause for exercising authority. It is striking that Madame de Staël, who was such a thorn in the side of Emperor Napoleon that he banished her and her salon from Paris, did not even own a desk until after the successful reception of her second novel, *Corinne*. "I really want a big table," she told her cousin longingly, "it seems to me that I now have the right to one."¹⁷⁰ Martha's great revolt, stymied in Paris, would fizzle to the "regular siege" she mounted—at age forty-nine—to persuade her father to turn a bed alcove in her room into a closet. Whether it housed her clothing or a tiny writing space, complete with table, chair, and writing implements, we shall never know. However she used it, she was pleased with her small victory. "You have no idea how much it has added to my comfort," she sighed with satisfaction.¹⁷¹ Neither Napoleon's France nor Jefferson's America could tolerate elite women displaying their learning and asserting their rank; the backlash on both sides of the Atlantic channeled them toward domesticity instead.¹⁷² As Ellen acutely realized, in spite of the many proofs women evinced of their rational capacities, significant limits yet remained on their freedom to "command fortune and direct the events" of their lives.

170. Quoted in Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 235.

171. MJR, Monticello, to Virginia Jefferson Randolph, January 10, 1822, FLP.

172. For example, for the United States see Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*. For France see Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*; Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*.