The Revolutionary Writings of Mary and Royall Tyler: Marital, Medical, and Political Discourse in an Early-Nineteenth-Century Family

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THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS OF MARY AND ROYALL TYLER:
Marital, Medical, and Political Discourse in an Early-Nineteenth-Century Family

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Royall and Mary Tyler’s marriage was the crucible of a distinctive shared political
and familial ideology. By comparing Royall’s *The Contrast* (1787) and *The Algerine
Captive* (1797) to Mary’s childrearing guide, *The Maternal Physician* (1811), the Tylers’
common preoccupations emerge in sharp relief. Both marriage partners used their authorship
to ponder issues of concern to the nascent American nation, including health, education, and
economic and cultural self-sufficiency, and both voiced their opposition to slavery and
tyanny in the family and the wider body politic. Royall and Mary advanced an image of the
ideal citizen that conformed to contemporary gender values and the principles of the
Enlightenment.

Royall and Mary’s attitudes were consonant with their position as literate and
politicized members of the New England elite, but they also reflected the recent colonial past.
Mary’s participation in household production and community healing were rooted in the
traditional household economy and the longstanding practices of American lay medicine. By
synthesizing the status of lay healer with the new role of “republican mother,” Mary
fashioned a unique and authoritative position for herself at a very specific, and fleeting,
moment in American medical, political, and social history. Mary exhibited a healthy fear of
the professional physician and argued assertively that a number of common medical
procedures were best performed by mothers. Citing her experience and competence as a
household practitioner, Mary engaged in dialogue with male physicians, but her book was
primarily addressed to fellow mothers and healers. In her own practice, Mary was most
comfortable amongst her female relations and friends.
Royall and Mary’s partnership was collaborative and complimentary, but it was also characterized by tension and his frequent absences from the family home. Mary’s experience of household management and single parent childrearing shaped her authorship by encouraging independence of thought and action, and by focusing her attention squarely on her “little tribe” of children. Without directly considering recent damning scholarship on Royall’s personal life, this thesis suggests Royall’s complex and ultimately peripheral presence in Mary’s world – a world populated largely by children, friends, and fellow healers.
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THE REVOLUTIONARY WRITINGS OF MARY AND ROYALL TYLER:
Marital, Medical, and Political Discourse in an Early-Nineteenth-Century Family
In 1811, Royall Tyler wrote to his publisher Isaac Riley, enclosing “a little Treatise upon the nurture & management of Infants... written by an American Lady.”\(^1\) If Riley did not know then he surely must have suspected that Royall was intimately connected with the author of that “little Treatise,” *The Maternal Physician*, a guide for mother’s informed by the work of prominent medical writers and the author’s own childrearing experience.\(^2\) Like Royall, whose first play was attributed to “a citizen of the United States,” the author chose to publish anonymously; but unlike her husband, Mary Palmer Tyler’s authorship does not appear to have been widely recognized by her contemporaries.\(^3\) Her private, parochial existence, raising children and spinning flax in Brattleboro, Vermont, contrasted with her husband’s very public roles, as Harvard prodigy, New York playwright, and Vermont Chief Justice.\(^4\) Although Mary’s *Maternal Physician* was less widely read than Royall’s bestselling novels and popular plays, it was sufficiently well received to warrant a second edition in 1818. It was stocked alongside texts by the great physicians of the period, including Benjamin Rush, William Buchan, and Michael Underwood, at Moses Thomas’s specialist medical bookstore on Chesnut Street in Philadelphia; in 1813, it was sold along with Royall’s *Reports of Cases Argued in the Supreme Court... of Vermont* at the couple’s local bookstore in Brattleboro.\(^5\)

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2 Mary practiced what Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has termed “social medicine,” her knowledge was “incremental, a slow build-up of seemingly casual experience.” See Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York, N.Y., 1990), 61-62.
Royall and Mary Tyler are not understudied but remain poorly understood. By attempting to fit Royall and Mary into a collection of stock Revolutionary models – the patriot, the rake, and the republican mother – historians have largely ignored the unique dimensions of the Tylers’ works and papers. Immortalized in John and Abigail Adams’ letters as a disreputable suitor, Royall appears in the Adams historiography as a shadowy, untrustworthy figure, a theme expanded on more recently in sensational biographies of the Peabody sisters. The specter of the reformed Royall, the first American playwright, the committed public servant, is equally well represented in the literature, and perhaps more so in Vermont, where the state university’s theater bears his name. In 1991, acknowledging Royall and Mary’s powerful contributions to Vermont history and culture, the residents of Brattleboro gathered together at Brooks Memorial Library to share in a dramatization of their lives. Richard Bushman details Royall’s iconic rise from infamy to respectability, noting the particular irony of Abigail Adams subsequent marriage to William Stephens Smith, whose finances failed just as Royall reached the height of his literary success with The

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[6] Studies of Mary’s Peabody relations have generated renewed speculation about Royall’s relations with Mary’s mother and sisters. Megan Marshall portrays Royall as an abusive womanizer who fathered his first illegitimate child at Harvard. Citing correspondence between Mary Cranch and Abigail Adams and an anonymous article by Eliza Palmer Peabody detailing the ruin of a mother and family, Marshall alleges that Royall conducted an affair with Mary’s mother, Betsey, while boarding with the family in Boston, resulting in the birth of Mary’s younger sister Sophia. Nathanial Cranch Peabody later noted Sophia’s likeness to Royall and the fact she and Royall both suffered from cancers of the eyes. Bruce A. Rhonda asserts that Royall was “ambitious and manipulative,” Mary “sweet but unworldly”; Marshall suggests that Royall had also abused Mary’s sister Eliza. The Peabody historiography hints at a wide gulf between Royall’s true conduct and the idealized constructed self presented in his writings and Mary’s memoirs. Nonetheless, if the legacy of these events shaped the character of the Tyler marriage, it is not immediately apparent in the Tylers’ correspondence or writings. Marshall suggests that Mary was away from the family home at the time of Royall and Betsey’s affair and was consequently unaware of the unspoken scandal. See Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston, Mass., 2005), 28-37, 469; Rhonda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 11, 21-24. One of Mary’s letters to Royall could perhaps be read as an allusion to gossip or public criticism – in January 1806, she assured him, “we will happily let the world frown as it will – they cannot deprive us of the sweet delights of mutual love and friendship – nor the heartfelt pleasure of seeing our precious little ones growing into life amiable and lovely.” The nature of the troubles the Tylers were facing is not clear. See M.T. to R.T., 28 January 1806, Tyler Collection 45:6.

Because scholars have focused largely on Royall’s courting of a founding family and his years of literary and political prominence, few have examined Royall’s qualities as a husband and father. When Royall established his legal practice in Guilford, Vermont, in 1791, he made a very deliberate break with his past, and it is this latter phase in Royall’s life that framed the circumstances of Mary’s emergence as an author in her own right.

_The Maternal Physician_ has been read by historians as an exemplar of early republican ideas about gender and the family; “a classic statement of republican motherhood.” In the only study to consider the history of _The Maternal Physician_ as a text, Christina Gibbons argues that Mary’s writing was motivated by a sense of “civic responsibility” and a concern for “public welfare,” even if its timing was also informed by her eldest son’s coming of age, which added the cost of university tuition to the family’s financial commitments. Gibbons notes Mary’s debt to prominent medical writers, such as British physician William Buchan, whose _Domestic Medicine_ emphasized the importance of breastfeeding. Moreover, she hints at Mary’s intellectual collaboration with her husband by suggesting that Royall supplied the poetic quotations that punctuate Mary’s prose. Marilyn S. Blackwell has ably utilized Mary’s writings to explore how New England women interpreted shifting concepts of womanhood and applied them in their daily lives. Her analysis centers on Mary’s relationship with her children and her attempts to shape their characters in ways that were consonant with the values of the Revolution. Blackwell recognizes that expressions of Revolutionary ideology were colored by contemporary gender

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8 Bushman, _Refinement_, 201-202.
constructs. Royall served the republic in the public sphere, "upholding the rule of law," while Mary "sought personal security and community control by shaping individual character" within the private sphere.\(^{12}\) Nonetheless, neither Gibbons nor Blackwell consider how Royall and Mary’s political ideologies intersected in their writings.

As Edith B. Gelles notes, the model of the republican mother has both quantitatively expanded and qualitatively limited the scope of Revolutionary women’s histories. By emphasizing the new roles that Revolutionary women – those, at least, in the reading and writing classes – shared, historians have devalued what is unique and individual about female figures.\(^{13}\) Emphasizing the dimensions of Mary’s writings that conformed with the ideology of republican motherhood and patterns of female authorship in the new republic, Blackwell and Gibbons do not adequately consider the significance of Mary’s *Maternal Physician* as a medical text that bears witness to women’s roles as practitioners – roles that were in decline in the Revolutionary period, even as women achieved greater status and legitimacy as household managers and authors. By wedding her Revolutionary childrearing ideology to older principles of household and community medicine, Mary gave women’s healthcare practice new political significance and placed herself as the center of contemporary medical debates about proper infant care. The critical emphasis on Mary’s performance as a republican mother has also directed attention away from the Tylers’ marriage. Royall and Mary’s union was the crucible for Mary’s remarkable authorship and the shared political philosophy evident in both partners’ literary works. Mary’s writing, in particular, can only be understood within the context of her marriage and familial situation.

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Royall and Mary Tyler lived through a number of revolutionary transitions in American life. The Revolution itself punctuated a period of gradual change in economic and household organization, marital and familial relations, religion, and community responses to illness, birth, and childcare. Because Royall and Mary’s domestic situation was grounded in the cultural practices of pre-Revolutionary New England, their writings bear witness to the complex and slow-moving transitions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Tylers attempted to regulate the size of their family, for example, beyond the traditional practice of prolonged nursing. Mary bore eight children before the publication of *The Maternal Physician* at intervals ranging from twenty-one to thirty-five months; her average (25.7 months) corresponded with colonial fertility patterns at a time when average family size was declining in the northeast. As they sought solutions to political problems, familial crises, and ill health, Royall and Mary worked to realize a way of living that was virtuous, harmonious, and perfectible. Their written works speak to their shared desire to develop and enact a model of ideal marital, familial, and civic life: the theme is present in Mary’s support of Lockean childrearing philosophy, just as it is in Royall’s

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14 Mary’s children were born in December 1794, September 1796, June 1798, August 1800, August 1802, September 1804, January 1807, and December 1809; her three youngest children were born at longer intervals in April 1812, November 1815, and November 1818, when Mary was 37, 40, and 43, respectively. Mary’s declining fertility is mirrored in the life of Martha Ballard. The interval between Martha’s eighth and ninth children, born when Martha was 37 and 44, contrasts the neat two- to three-year intervals between her elder children. Like seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England women before her, Mary’s life took its rhythm from cycles of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Royall and Mary had a large traditional family, but they entertained modern expectations. They anticipated that their sons would be middle-class professionals and educated them accordingly. This may explain their continual financial difficulties: Stephanie McCurry has suggested that northern families no longer needed large families to work their farms, but rather had to invest more time and money — what Mary P. Ryan has termed a comprehensive “sequence of strategies” — in a smaller number of children in order to prepare them for participation in the urban middle class. See Tupper and Brown, *Grandmother Tyler*, 331; Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale*, 5, 193, *Good Wives*, 9; Susan E. Klepp, “Revolutionary Bodies: Women and the Fertility Transition in the Mid-Atlantic Region, 1760-1820,” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December 1998): 910; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, N.Y., 1995), 59; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), xiii.
opposition to slavery, and their shared preoccupation with gender roles. This philosophy was fostered in the spirit of autonomous self-discovery that surrounded the American Revolution, but it was also influenced by broader intellectual trends in American and European medicine and philosophy.

As a work of non-fiction, which elucidated women’s roles as parents, educators, and domestic medical practitioners, Mary’s book was distinct from Royall’s most successful writings – poetry, fiction, and drama. Nevertheless, the Tylers were united in their preoccupation with nascent American nationhood: it infused Royall’s most successful play and novel, *The Contrast* (1787) and *The Algerine Captive* (1797), as well as Mary’s *Maternal Physician*. Royall and Mary’s republicanism was shaped by their experiences in Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary Massachusetts, where Royall Tyler, Sr., led the committee that demanded the withdrawal of British troops and ships from Boston in 1768. Mary’s father, Joseph Pearse Palmer, participated in the Boston Tea Party, and Royall himself enlisted in the Boston Independent Company in the winter of 1777-1778.15 Importantly, their Revolutionary sentiments were fostered within their respective families. As adults, they continued to advance the republican agenda in the home, by encouraging political and personal virtues in their children and developing a self-sufficient household economy. Both paid particular attention to the role of medicine and education in the republican project. In *The Algerine Captive*, the protagonist Updike Underhill works as a school master before becoming a physician. Mary dispensed medical remedies and

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discipline in equal measure, hoping to create in her eleven children "the future guardians of our beloved country."16

This essay is a study of Royall and Mary Tyler’s shared lives and values as expressed in three texts, The Maternal Physician, The Contrast, and The Algerine Captive. By examining the texts as a single cohesive body, the issues that captivated both marriage partners emerge in sharp relief. The Maternal Physician is thus reinscribed as an expression of a singular literary voice emanating from the Tyler marriage, the product as much of the day to day negotiations and difficulties inherent in early American marriage and childrearing as it was a symbol of the political values that Royall and Mary undoubtedly shared but rarely discussed in written correspondence. The study takes its structure from Mary’s life – her courtship and marriage, childrearing, authorship, and practice of maternal and community medicine, thus borrowing from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich an emphasis on social roles as key determinants of women’s experience in early America. Mary Tyler’s position in society was shaped not only by her roles as wife, mother, and healer, but also by the commonly held belief that adequate performance of these roles was an indicator of civic virtue and good character.17 Because Mary’s authorial and social credibility was intimately connected to her status as a successful wife and mother, her writings evoke an ideal state of marital and familial harmony at odds with the Tylers’ personal difficulties and Mary’s ceaseless anxiety about the family’s future.

16 [Mary Palmer Tyler], The Maternal Physician; a Treatise on the Nurture and Management of Infants, from the Birth until Two Years Old, Being the Result of Sixteen Years’ Experience in the Nursery (Philadelphia, Pa., 1818; rpt. New York, N.Y., 1972), 273.

Mary’s writing bore witness to perhaps otherwise unexpressed tensions within her marriage, and the Tyler cannon is as contradictory and complex as it is cohesive. Nevertheless, elements of the Tylers’ singular worldview recur in the texts with remarkable consistency. Royall and Mary understood the body, the family, and the body politic as similar, interconnected, organic systems. Republicanism began in the body and the home and was fostered, on an individual and national level, through avoidance of negative and unhealthful outside influences. The body dictated proper expressions of Revolutionary sentiment for men and women – women were to breastfeed and reproduce, while men were to protect and provide. Children, slaves, and the working poor were to be freed from swaddling clothes, bondage, and the constraints of poverty so that they too could discover the right way of living that emerged naturally in a state of ideal republican liberty. Royall and Mary saw the body and the family as loci of Revolutionary sentiment. In building bodies and homes that were strong and unspoiled, they hoped to secure the future of the new republic.

The Republican Marriage of Mary and Royall Tyler

Mary Palmer Tyler’s authorship arose from the particular circumstances of her marriage and the unusual degree of autonomy she enjoyed in childrearing and household management. In 1795, Royall left her in charge of their first child at the Palmer family home in Framingham, Massachusetts, while he established his legal practice in Vermont. His election to the Vermont Supreme Court in 1801 resulted in more frequent absences from the family home: between 1801 and 1813, Royall traveled for up to ten months of the year on circuit court duty. Division of labor at the farm in Brattleboro echoed wider patterns of economic change in the northeast, where men were beginning to seek employment outside of
the household as educated middle-class professionals. Like Royall, a lawyer and judge, Underhill read books in law, as well as divinity and physic, before settling on a career in medicine.\textsuperscript{19}

Although Royall was often absent from the home, the Tylers' relationship conformed in many respects to the nineteenth-century model of companionate marriage, which emerged in the context of increased social and geographic mobility and changing attitudes toward premarital contact and parental involvement in marriage matches.\textsuperscript{20} Edith Gelles defines companionate marriage as “a love match in which there exists enduring friendship and respect,” while Anya Jabour argues that, “in a truly companionate marriage, each partner would value the love of the other above all else.”\textsuperscript{21}

Royall and Mary were certainly nothing less that besotted with one another when they were married. In their correspondence, they frequently addressed each other as best or dearest friend.\textsuperscript{22} The Tylers had known each other since her childhood, when he began to refer to her as his “little wife”; in her memoirs she confided that, by the time of their marriage, “my whole heart was bound up in him.” Mary was so deeply attached to Royall that she consented to a private marriage and conceived and carried their first child in secret, although the guilt was so burdensome that she felt physically unwell. In this matter, Royall dictated the terms of the match, making plain that he would break their engagement if she forced him to acknowledge her publicly. Mary did feel considerable affection for Royall,

\textsuperscript{18} Carson and Carson, \textit{Royall Tyler}, 24.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{[Royall Tyler], The Algerine Captive; or, the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines}, 2 vols. (London, 1802; rpt. Gainesville, Fla., 1967), 1:41, 55-56.
but she was also mindful of her mother’s dire financial position and the vulnerability of her brothers and sisters. “I looked upon my helpless mother and little children,” she admitted, “he promised to pay a good price for my board which would be a great thing for them.”\(^23\) As Jabour observes, inequality was a powerful obstacle to companionate marriage.\(^24\) Although Mary’s family did not initiate and manage her marriage match, their happiness and comfort was an important factor in her decision making, and she remained dependent on Royall for financial and practical support.

Royall’s absences provided Mary with a degree of freedom in the management of her children, but when they not infrequently disagreed about the best way to proceed, he expected her to defer to his wishes. In *The Contrast*, Royall acknowledged that women exercised moral influence over men, but expressed his faith in male intellectual supremacy. “Female conversation softens our manners,” reflects Colonel Manly, “whilst our discourse, from the superiority of our literary advantages, improves their minds.”\(^25\) Describing the family’s new farm at Brattleboro in 1801, Royall relied upon Mary and her sister Sophia to provide “the raptures and the beauties,” assigning to his own views the status of “homespun fact.”\(^26\) Mary was burdened by her household responsibilities and, at times, resentful of Royall’s freedom. Her concept of ideal family life was, ultimately, incompatible with Royall’s professional situation. Recalling his belief that “his children should be patterns of propriety and good behaviour [sic],” she betrayed contradictory wishes for *her* sons and daughters. When she was alone with the children, Mary defied Royall’s more authoritarian

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22 For example, R.T. to M.T., undated (“Sunday noon”), Royall Tyler Collection, Gift of Helen Tyler Brown, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vt., 45:1 (henceforth “Tyler Collection”); M.T. to R.T., 18 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
23 Tupper and Brown, *Grandmother Tyler*, 177, 204-206.
25 [Tyler], *Contrast*, 83.
26 R.T. to unnamed recipient, 18 March 1801, Tyler Collection 45:1.
dictates, including his prohibition on bringing young children to the dinner table. Mary’s leniency united her with her children in a conspiratorial compact to “do as we pleased,” but their victories were comparatively small.27 Even Mary’s authorship was shaped by her status as a dependent wife and mother and transacted by two men, her husband and his publisher.28

Mary’s relative powerlessness was expressed in the plaintive, often desperate tone she adopted in her written correspondence with Royall. In January 1806, she complained of “incessant fatigue,” and worried about what would happen to her children if she became seriously unwell.29 A year later, as Royall traveled around Vermont and prepared for an excursion to Canada, the family faced a crisis when Mary’s servant, Mrs. Reed, unexpectedly left. Royall Jr. then thirteen years old, conveyed the news to his father, confessing “you cant [sic] conceive how much I long for march, when I may perhaps see and talk with you.”30

Mary also communicated her anxieties to Royall, lamenting the loss of a servant who had proved “very attentive to me since you left home.” Reflecting on the poor state of her own health as she prepared for the birth of her seventh child, Mary worried about how she would care for herself and her children, “as I have not been able, scarcely to get up and down stairs this three weeks past.”31 Unable to challenge Royall directly, Mary used examples of sickness and bodily infirmity to communicate her feelings of frustration and resentment. Eleven days before Amelia’s birth, she pleaded with Royall to write more often, arguing that his short, infrequent letters were not “according to promise.” Mary’s “peculiar circumstances” rendered her anxious, physically weak, and isolated, her infirmities reflecting

27 Tupper and Brown, Grandmother Tyler, 233-234.
28 Barbara Welter offers a negative interpretation of changes in women’s roles during the nineteenth century, arguing that women became “the hostage in the home.” Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” American Quarterly 18, no. 2, pt. 1 (Summer 1966): 151.
30 Royall Tyler Jr. to R.T., 1 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
31 M.T. to R.T., 1 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
her dependent status as wife, expectant mother, and non-citizen. To make matters worse, her youngest child, two-year-old Joseph Tyler, was also unwell. "If he wakes in the night," she reported, somewhat manipulatively, "the first thing I hear is 'Why dont [sic] my dear Papa come home and see his poor sick boy.'" Mary’s letters were most patently cozening when her physical condition mirrored her legal and financial dependency. In health, safely delivered of one child and not yet pregnant with the next, she was more likely to correspond with Royall as a competent equal.

Mary used emotive descriptions of illness and suffering at Brattleboro to enhance her appeals for cash: she concluded her account of Joseph’s 1807 illness with a request that Royall send “a little of the one thing needfull [sic]... whenever you can spare it.” Heavily pregnant, with sick Jody and five other children, no help in the house and no milking cows, Mary felt able to argue that “under present circumstances I feel disagreeably to be meanly destitute of necessaries.” Despite the difficult circumstances, Mary continued to fulfill her roles as lay medical practitioner and household manager. She nursed Jody through his illness, paid for her boys’ schooling, and set aside some money for household emergencies.

In 1806, she managed the purchase and distribution of wheat and rye for the family. Mary tried to balance the family’s finances, but, often found herself with little to work with. She kept long hours to make shirts for her sons, relying on Royall to send money in order to reimburse her creditors for the cotton. In January 1806, she admitted that “poverty has rather the better of us,” joking that she would happily accept ten thousand in prize money from the

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33 M.T. to R.T., 18 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
34 M.T. to R.T., 1 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
Battenkill Road Lottery, “or even five – I would not reject!”\(^{36}\) In May 1806, Royall purchased a ticket for the Piscataqua Bridge Lottery from a contact in Boston and, tellingly, shortchanged his acquaintance by fifty cents.\(^{37}\)

The Tylers’ partnership was most successful in the matter of parenting, and both formed strong and loving attachments with their children. Traveling away from home, Royall asked Mary to convey his love to the two eldest boys remaining at home, “Edward – the sailor & William the Philosopher.” He promised his eldest daughter, Mary Whitwell Tyler, a new gown; the youngest children, George and Charles, would have some cake, in Charles’s case, “to pay him for taking his Medicine so well.” Joseph was also remembered by his father, and playfully reminded not to eat the family’s entire supply of rhubarb before his father’s return.\(^{38}\) Royall’s letters are consistent with Mary’s description of an affectionate and indulgent father “who sits laughing on the sofa, whilst his favorite little Joseph is drawing his watch tied to a string around the carpet for a plaything.”\(^{39}\)

It was Royall who sat at his eldest son’s bedside as he succumbed to typhus fever, resolved that “I shall not leave him until he recovers entirely.”\(^{40}\) Royall spent the days procuring medical care and remedies, marshalling support from family members, and worrying about the health of his other children. “I pray you to take a reverend care of you health,” he instructed his second eldest son John. “A simple cold unattended to in time has brought Royall to a bed of sickness from which if he ever arises to health it must be

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\(^{36}\) M.T. to R.T., 28 January 1806, Tyler Collection 45:6.

\(^{37}\) J.T.B. to R.T., 13 May 1806, Tyler Collection 45:6.

\(^{38}\) R.T. to M.T., undated (“Sunday noon”), Tyler Collection 45:1. Royall’s mention of Charles Tyler dates this letter sometime between April 1812, when Charles was born, and November 1815, when Mary gave birth to another son, Thomas Pickman Tyler. In 1812, the two eldest Tyler sons, Royall Jr. and John, were already living away from home: Royall Jr. was at the University of Vermont and John was working as an apprentice to his uncle, George Palmer, in Boston. See R.T. to John Tyler Jr., 15 May 1812, Tyler Collection 45:3.

\(^{39}\) [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 165.

\(^{40}\) Jabour notes that older children were often cared for primarily by their fathers. Jabour, *Marriage*, 81.
considered almost miraculous."\textsuperscript{41} Mary is conspicuously absent from the letters surrounding Royall Jr.'s death. Perhaps she was too busy with young Charles Tyler and the other children to leave the farm, but she may also have been unwell and, undoubtedly, was deeply distressed by her son's illness. It was Royall who shouldered the burden of comforting his son in his final illness and making practical arrangements for his care. He adopted, for a short while, familial duties normally fulfilled by his wife, and it is here that we see the supportive and collaborative nature of their partnership. In the difficult period surrounding Mrs. Reed's departure, Joseph's illness, and Mary's pregnancy, Mary took to the chamber she shared with Royall. "Every thing [sic] in, and about it, reminded me so much of you," she confided, "that I could not bear to leave it."\textsuperscript{42} Royall understood the work that Mary did in the home and praised her for her contributions. In 1801, he assured her that the governor had found Mary's housekeeping, children, and servants "a perfect picture of Domestic peace & happiness."\textsuperscript{43}

Like Abigail Adams, Mary was forced to address the discomforting reality that her husband was more committed to public service than familial duty, and like Adams, she became a competent household manager. Her authorship was analogous to Adams' forays in business – a rather extraordinarily expression of intellectual independence that had antecedents in many smaller, more mundane successes, attempted out of necessity rather than choice, during Royall's long absences.\textsuperscript{44} Mary was devoted to Royall, but she did not, in truth, love him "above all else." Their relationship stopped short of Labour's definition of a truly companionate marriage, for Mary's children were the center of her life and the focus of

\textsuperscript{41} R.T. to John Tyler Jr., 4 October (misdated) and 6 November 1813, Tyler Collection 45:3.
\textsuperscript{42} M.T. to R.T, 1 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
\textsuperscript{43} R.T. to M.T., 9 October 1801, Tyler Collection 45:1.
\textsuperscript{44} Gelles, Portia, 3-4, 34-35.
her authorship. She developed a particularly strong relationship with her son Edward, with whom she enjoyed a deep religious fellowship that was absent in her marriage.\textsuperscript{45} In *The Maternal Physician*, Mary’s world is populated almost exclusively by her “little circle” of children.\textsuperscript{46} Royall’s comings, goings, and eventual death ultimately had little effect on the steady rhythm of family life, which comprised domestic work, childrearing, social visiting, and medical practice, at home and in the community. As her husband declined and her children grew, Mary increasingly relied on her sons and daughters for companionship and financial support. It was with them that she enacted her ideal miniature republic on the farm in Brattleboro.

**The Body Politic: Political Themes in the Tyler Texts**

Royall Tyler’s literary career began in 1787, the year of his future wife’s twelfth birthday, when his play *The Contrast* was first performed at the John Street Theatre in New York City. In writing *The Contrast*, Royall wished to give Americans “a piece, which we may fairly call our own,” a comedy that reflected American manners and values. “Why should our thoughts to distant countries roam,” Royall asked, “when each refinement may be found at home?”\textsuperscript{47} In creating a native literature, Royall hoped to provide Americans with a common cultural vocabulary that would cement ties between citizens.\textsuperscript{48} Royall’s efforts are preemptively rejected by his antagonist, Billy Dimple, whose manners have been spoilt by travels in England. Billy finds nothing of amusement or pleasure in America, “unless you dignify with that title the hopping once a fortnight to the sound of two or three squeaking

\textsuperscript{45} M.T. to Edward Tyler, 19 December 1819, Tyler Collection 47:7.
\textsuperscript{46} [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{47} [Tyler], *The Contrast*, xxix, 20.
fiddles, and the clattering of old tavern windows, or sitting to see the miserable mummers, whom you call actors, murder comedy and make a farce of tragedy." Arguing that the glorification of European high culture was immoral and unpatriotic, Royall encouraged Americans to emphasize simple, emotive literary forms and take pride in their own nascent cultural institutions. Through The Contrast’s hero Manly, he challenged the cultural importance of European literature and travel. “There is a laudable partiality,” Manly observes, “which ignorant, untravelled [sic] men entertain for everything that belongs to their native country.” In The Algerine Captive, Underhill travels to England and North Africa, only to conclude that America is, indeed, “the freest country in the universe.”

Mary’s writings were similarly nationalistic, echoing Royall’s efforts to “contrast” European and American manners and customs. Mary administered saffron tea at the first sign of illness although the plant was out of vogue with European physicians, and experimented with native American plants like dragon root, or wild turnip, finding it to be useful as an emetic and treatment for oral thrush. Like Colonel Manly, she rejected “the gay delirium of the rout, the ball, the concert, and the play,” for the more virtuous pleasures of American domesticity. Mary believed that British mothers’ “over-refined delicacy” and devotion to society drew them away from their children and encouraged them to abandon biologically-mandated, “natural” maternal duties like breastfeeding. The practice of wet nursing was a product of “fashions and opinions totally repugnant to the finest feelings of the soul,” largely of European provenance, but perhaps also associated with the American

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49 [Tyler], Contrast, 91.
50 Tanselle, Royall Tyler, 10-18; Carson and Carson, Royall Tyler, 17-20.
51 [Tyler], Contrast, 91-92.
52 [Tyler], Algerine Captive, 2:227.
53 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 56-57, 88.
South. Mary hoped to eradicate it entirely, positing that a mother who entertained such practices risked exposing her child “to sickness and sorrow, if not to death.” Mary argued that women should sacrifice everything but life itself to fulfill their breastfeeding obligations, citing her own sufferings when she took “humour [sic],” probably thrush, from the mouth of her sickly first son, Royall Jr., resulting in an agonizing nipple infection. In Mary’s treatise, the family became the social site where self-denial and service to others – the hallmarks of a cooperative republican community – were learned and practiced. Familial bonds provided a model for relations between citizens: in *The Contrast*, Colonel Manly’s Revolutionary company form a family of “brother-soldiers” whose wellbeing remains a source of concern many years after the war’s conclusion.

The character of Royall and Mary’s marriage, family life, and literary output was shaped by both the colonial past and the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century ideology of republicanism. Mary, in particular, seems to have participated in what Jay Fliegelman has identified as the “American revolution against patriarchal authority,” which emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency and independence in children and prepared Americans for their separation from the “parent” country. Her father, Joseph Pearse Palmer, encouraged her development as a reader and writer, offering advice with a

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54 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 64, 33-34.
57 Mary P. Ryan has argued that the family became “the cradle of middle-class individuals” during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Within the family, children were socialized in the ways of the emerging middle class, with an emphasis on sobriety and restraint. Ryan, *Middle Class*, 238-239.
58 [Tyler], *Contrast*, 94.
59 Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 1, 5, 9-10, 15.
characteristic caveat: “My lovely girl, must ever view what I write as fruit plac’d before her for her choice – if she does not like it – throw it aside.”

In her childrearing practices, Mary subscribed to the tenets of Lockean sensationalism, which held that “all knowledge was a function of experience in the world.” She encouraged her children to gather experiential knowledge through play, and counseled that all children should be able to exercise their limbs unimpeded by excessive clothing and anxious parents. Mary was so deeply committed to the principles of fresh air and exercise that she encouraged her adolescent children to walk home from their respective schools and colleges. Royall Jr. walked home to Brattleboro from the University of Vermont at Burlington in November 1812; in February 1819, Mary instructed her son Edward to walk home from Phillip’s Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, assuring him that “your health and Spirits will be benefited from the excursion.” Mary believed that just as children crawled and walked due to “a natural propensity to imitation,” infants were endowed with an innate moral sense that allowed them to distinguish right from wrong. She recognized that certain undesirable tendencies, like left-handedness, were beyond parental control. Mary encouraged parents to exercise restraint in all matters, believing that children were naturally endowed with strength and virtue, and counseled that the healthiest and most elegant children were those subject to the least parental intervention.

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60 Joseph Palmer to Mary Palmer, 12 July 1789, Tyler Collection 47:3.
61 Fliegelman, Prodigals, 12.
63 M.T. to Betsey Palmer, 6 June 1813, Tyler Collection 47:5; M.T. to Edward Tyler, 28 February 1819, Tyler Collection 47:7.
64 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 128.
Mary regarded the ideal family as a miniature republic founded on just and egalitarian governance. A model republican childhood was characterized by limited governance and frequent reminders of the ties that bound families and citizens in mutual duty and interdependence; discipline was to be “tempered with tenderness and moderation.” It was a mother’s responsibility to guide her children gently toward right behavior while protecting them from sources of possible corruption. Mary advised mothers to become acquainted with their individual children and to discipline them in accordance with their own character and needs, “lest at any time they should wound, by undue severity, the tender and affectionate heart; rouse to anger and resentment the noble and heroic soul; or intimidate and discourage the diffident and humble spirit.” Equally, “a haughty and obstinate temper” was not to be encouraged by “misplaced indulgence” or “indiscriminate approbation.” A good parent carefully balanced encouragement and guidance with patience and acceptance, and sought always to avoid harsh, indiscriminate punishment. Naturally disposed to citizenship, children would wisely resist all forms of “arbitrary government.” For the Tylers, right behavior arose almost instinctively when the body was properly attuned to the ideals of the Revolution. In The Algerine Captive, Royall described prophetic dreams as one manifestation of the body’s innate desire for liberty and virtue. Reflecting that his mother, after a dream in which her infant was captured by Indians, became “sure Updike was born to be the sport of fortune, and that he would one day suffer among the savages,” Updike concludes that her innate sensitivity to savagery and injustice allowed her to accurately foretell his future enslavement in North Africa.

65 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 152-153.
66 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 157-158.
67 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 128-129, 163.
While much has been made of family and motherhood as vehicles for republican ideology, few historians have examined the importance of medicine and the body. In Revolutionary America, citizens employed the language of the body to describe ideal familial, social, and political relations, rejecting early patriarchal models that identified the king as the head of the body politic and constructing new political values inspired by the ideals of corporeal balance and domestic harmony. Benjamin Franklin compared the human body and the body politic, arguing that nature determined the size of the former, whereas the size and strength of the latter were dictated wholly by the quality of its government and constituent parts, while Thomas Jefferson and John Adams rooted their constitutional philosophies in notions of natural laws and physical balance that were derived from Isaac Newton. I. Bernard Cohen has argued that the Founding Fathers employed

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68 The literature on republican mothers and republican families is expansive. In her seminal study, Linda K. Kerber posited that mothers were assigned political significance in the new republic: “The Republican Mother’s life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue,” argued Kerber, “she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband’s lapses from it.” Ruth H. Bloch argued that the elevation of women’s status was a transatlantic phenomenon, but agreed with Kerber that women’s new social influence arose from their perceived status as “chief transmitters of religious and moral values.” Bloch suggested that mothers’ political roles led to improved female education (for Benjamin Rush’s observations on the importance of educating women, see Reiner, “Republican Child,” 158-159; Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 [June 1978]: 118). Mary Kelley explored the cultural consequences of women’s domestic roles, characterizing nineteenth-century female novelists as “literary domestics,” whose narratives imparted republican values like virtue and self-denial. Mary Beth Norton finds that the new ideological significance of mothers was reflected in the iconography of Revolutionary America: women were increasingly portrayed alongside their children and without male figures. See Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective,” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 202; Bloch, “Moral Mother,” 117-118, 101; Kelly, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, N.Y., 1984), viii, 222, 59-61; Norton, “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 614. For discussion of marriage and family as microcosms of the republic where citizenship skills could be nurtured, see Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d series, 44, no. 4 (October 1987): 689-721; Reiner, “Republican Child.”

natural, biological, and botanical metaphors for rhetorical purposes because they believed that science was "the supreme expression of human reason."^70

Nevertheless, analogies drawn from nature and the body also held explanatory power in the Revolutionary period. Melvin Yazawa has analyzed the republican ideology of Benjamin Rush, finding that Rush conceived of bodies and bodies politic as organic "republican machines." In Rush's worldview, vice and disease were related afflictions that could be treated with medicine and rational thought, just as "virtue was a response that could be mechanically induced." Pathological conditions, like excessive self-love, manifested personally, as mental derangement, and politically, in the weakening of ties between citizens. As individual and national health were inseparable, the most important state-building work was performed by parents, religious leaders, philosophers, and physicians, as well as legislators.^71

Rush's belief that the body politic took its character from the corporeal and domestic virtues of its constituent parts was rooted in the childrearing ideology of the Enlightenment. Like Mary, the philosophes emphasized the importance of early childhood experience and the necessity of maternal breastfeeding. Rousseau regarded wetnursing as the "first depravity" in a long chain extending from the familial and domestic to the national and political. Believing that health would always be compromised when natural processes were impeded, Linneaus cited the dangers of employing lower class wetnurses, known for their poor nourishment, excessive drinking, and predisposition to disease. He also expressed concerns for the health of mothers who employed wetnurses, because milk, pressure, and

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humors could build in their breasts, leading to illness. In her study of changing European attitudes toward breastfeeding, Londa Schiebinger notes that European women had always selected wetnurses from among social groups deemed “closer to nature,” such as peasants, Indians, and Africans. The Enlightenment altered European perceptions of breastfeeding by softening its natural and animal associations and elevating its political and social importance. “What would become of the tender little lamb,” Mary questioned, “if the shepherd, like some physicians, and many nurses, should insist that it should not suck until the third or fourth day after its birth?”72 Women like Mary desired nursing precisely because it connected them with natural processes that were, by definition, salubrious and proper.73

Revolutionary attitudes toward breastfeeding were rooted in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, but they also had antecedents in traditional beliefs about the medicinal and recuperative qualities of breastmilk. Marylynn Salmon finds evidence of the use of breastmilk for the nourishment of weak adults as well as children in England and the Anglo-American colonies. It was also incorporated in a variety of medicinal recipes as a childbirth aid, pain reliever, and treatment for “hysteria, faintness, and blindness.”74 Breastmilk was employed as a cure for deafness in Sicily, and as a treatment for consumption in sixteenth-century Germany.75 New philosophical interest in breastmilk and its role in infant health resurrected and popularized traditional remedies. In Enlightenment Europe, as in the new United States, “returning to nature and its laws was seen as the surest way to end corruption and regenerate the state, morally as well as economically.” As Schiebinger observes,

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72 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 49.
74 Salmon, “Cultural Significance of Breastfeeding,” 247-249.
emphasis on serving the republic by honoring the natural cemented women’s roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, and encouraged exclusion from the public sphere.76

In another pertinent study, Christine Rose finds that breastmilk was perceived as a conduit not only for disease, but also for national identity, in the imperial ideology of nineteenth-century Britain. Just as American republican mothers were deemed crucial to the success of the republican project, British women came to be seen as pivotal in the cultivation of strong imperial subjects.77 In the childrearing literature of nineteenth-century Britain, the mother became “an humble instrument for improving the race of our children – England’s priceless treasures!”78 Through breastfeeding, health, virtue, and national identity were passed from the body of the mother to the body of the child. British childrearing authorities attacked working-class wet nurses, suggesting that they could “leak disease into the foster baby,” corrupting bodies and homes. They echoed Mary’s pronouncements that leaving a child with a servant or wet nurse was tantamount to infanticide. Indian wet nurses also exercised indelible influence over their charges because their milk, which was thought to be infused with exotic spices and drugs, “transmitted the cultural characteristics of India.”79 Rose’s observations on the relationship between spice and otherness in British imperial discourse help to contextualize Mary’s emphasis on bland diet, which was at once native, non-threatening, and unlikely to over stimulate.80

As Yazawa and Rose suggest, the early nineteenth century perceived the body, the family, and the nation as mechanical systems naturally predisposed to harmony and self-

76 Schiebinger, Nature’s Body, 41-42, 70.
77 Similarities between Rose’s sources and Mary’s writings support Ruth H. Bloch’s argument that changes in the status of American women were one manifestation of a broader, transatlantic shift in attitudes toward mothers. See Bloch, “Moral Mother,” 117-118.
regulation, but they were also susceptible to corruption if “fed” improperly or subjected to excessive external interference. “The spectre of the unruly body, its needs, desires, hungers, and excesses,” Betsy Erkkila observes, was a source of considerable anxiety in Revolutionary America. Royall and Mary believed that wayward appetites invited corruption, vice, and dependence. Mary recounted the cautionary tale of a woman who could not bear to deny her child, the mother’s “mistaken fondness” precipitating the child’s death from worms.

Simple foods, breast milk, fresh air, and vigorous exercise produced dependable citizens with strong constitutions, while moral guidance prepared children for social and political participation in adulthood. Mary believed that a wholesome diet of bread, milk, and rice was crucial to the promotion of a healthy constitution in infants, and advised against the consumption of meat and excessively rich or abundant foods. She regulated her children’s consumption through attentive household management and domestic production of dairy products and textiles. The coral and bells, long employed as a teething aid in the Atlantic world due to coral’s reputed protective powers, were cast aside in Mary’s austere nursery, where their jangling sound and “gaudy” appearance proved offensive and ultimately unsatisfying to the senses. Ever practical and rarely superstitious, Mary recommended cork instead.

Royall likewise wished to direct his readers’ tastes, cautioning that consumption of British novels exposed American readers to the vice-ridden values of an alien society and “excites a fondness for false splendor.” He rallied against luxury, “which renders a people

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80 Rose, “Bodies,” 305; [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 29, 36.
82 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 186-187.
83 Tupper and Brown, Grandmother Tyler, 209-210, 266-267, 282-283.
weak at home, and accessible to bribery, corruption, and force from abroad." Like his wife, he encouraged Americans to produce what they consumed. This was the surest way to enliven America’s infant economic and cultural institutions and protect against encroachments from outside. "If our wives and daughters will wear gauze and ribbands," he reasoned, recalling the boycotts of the Revolutionary period, "it is a pity they are not wrought on our own looms." Despite their best efforts, Mary remained anxious about the possibility of moral or bodily corruption among the Tyler children. Her letters exhibit a preoccupation with the health and moral wellbeing of family members, and she advised her readers to be constantly vigilant for signs of illness or infirmity. She confided in Royall that she would willingly see her sons reduced to poverty and forced to subsist "by the sweat of their brow," but she could not bear to see them veer from "the ways of Honour & Uprightness." For Mary, virtue was synonymous with vigorous moral and physical health, upon which rested the integrity and survival of the family.

Royall and Mary’s opposition to the consumption of British novels and goods produced outside the home was more than a simple issue of taste. Both marriage partners sought to discover and uphold the "natural" state of man and society, and both frowned upon what they deemed artificial, perverse, and contrary to man’s true state, ranging from the rituals of society to elaborate literary devices and overly rich foods. The Tylers’ critique of the man-made world was contradictory, for they too were constructing, in their writings and their home, an ideal model of political, communal, and familial relations, no less ritualized and prescribed than the one they opposed. Nevertheless, their commitment to the rule of

85 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 103-104.
86 [Tyler], *Contrast*, 79.
87 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 1:x-xi.
88 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 16.
nature, as the Enlightenment conceived it, links the disparate elements of their shared philosophy. It also helps to explain their idealization of the pastoral, and their decision to settle on what Christina Gibbons’ called “the rude frontier of Vermont.”\textsuperscript{90} In the \textit{The Algerine Captive}, Royall described the literacy of the “worthy farmer,” and the easily corruptible virtues of “the farmer’s daughter,” and portrayed New England as a rural idyll characterized by simplicity and morality.\textsuperscript{91}

Mary’s life conformed to Thomas Dublin’s portrait of a pre-industrial New England culture in which couples produced large families and raised them on small plots of land, supplementing their farming production with small scale dairying and textile production. She lived in a world largely untouched by the rise of commercial farming and developments in water and steam power, which ultimately propelled the rapid industrialization and urbanization in the northeast.\textsuperscript{92} Consequently, she lacked the intense class consciousness evidenced in America’s emerging cities. Mary’s financial situation fluctuated many times in her life, and she worked alongside her neighbors with a humility borne of rapidly changing economic fortunes. She cherished the support of Mrs. Goodwin, a friend and lay medical

\textsuperscript{89} M.T. to R.T., 1 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
\textsuperscript{90} Gibbons, “Mary Tyler,” 33.
\textsuperscript{91} [Tyler], \textit{Algerine Captive}, viii-xi. In \textit{The Port Folio}, edited by Royall’s colleague Joseph Dennie, the Federalist image of the industrious and pious husbandman was contrasted with the supposed Jeffersonian vision of appropriation and expansion, “the simple ownership of arable acres.” For contributors to \textit{The Port Folio}, “land speculation thus becomes the grand metaphor for the money or market society unrecognized as such by its own deluded citizenry, an atomized aggregation of separate or isolated individuals rapidly losing touch with any larger vision of community.” Mary and Royall’s commitment to traditional pastoral ways and values was one dimension of Royall’s Federalism, but it was also indicative of a conservative tendency shared by both marriage partners. Wedded to a model of rural and familial life already under threat in many parts of America, they feared the degrading influences of the market and city. Editing under the name “Oliver Oldschool,” Dennie echoed this conservatism, announcing “that \textit{The Port Folio} will speak from a moral perspective in which the memory of a coherent past always provides the basis for a critique of modernity.” See William C. Dowling, \textit{Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and The Port Folio, 1801-1812} (Columbia, S.C., 1999), 20-23, 28-30.
practitioner from Guilford, and relied, however grudgingly, on help from local farm girls.\textsuperscript{93} Nevertheless, as the wife of prominent and comparatively well-paid public figure, she held reservations about the childrearing practices of the rural poor.

Mary’s concerns echoed Royall’s fears that American democratic republicanism was under attack, both within the union and without. Like their British counterparts, Mary and Royall believed that the bodies of the poor were potentially weak, dirty, and corrupted. Mary often complained about the impossibility of finding good household help. She asserted that her servant Phebe “cannot be left alone in the Kitchin [sic], any more than a child,” and worried about who would look after the children “if I should be realy [sic] sick.”\textsuperscript{94} Mary’s recommendations can be read as a partial critique of servants and poor women unable to dedicate themselves to full time childcare.\textsuperscript{95} She believed that the children of working women were likely to become “deformed and rickety, from no other cause than want of exercise and attention.” Parents who failed to change their children’s clothes regularly were apt to ignore potential sources of irritation and infection, and the “foul air” and general squalor that pervaded wherever the lower sorts lived predisposed children to convulsions and ill health.\textsuperscript{96} Illness was increasingly attributed to poverty and vice in the course of the nineteenth century as infectious disease thrived in the poor neighborhoods of northern cities.\textsuperscript{97} Disease and bodily weakness among the working classes were national problems, because ill health and vice were contagious, and because corruption sapped national

\textsuperscript{93} Sophia Palmer to R.T., 29 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6; Tupper and Brown, \textit{Grandmother Tyler}, 223-224.

\textsuperscript{94} M.T. to R.T., 28 January 1806, Tyler Collection 45:6.

\textsuperscript{95} Christine Stansell has argued that nineteenth-century working-class women were doubly burdened. As the household economy declined, they were forced to seek work outside the home and to balance this paid work with their domestic responsibilities. Christine Stansell, \textit{City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860} (Urbana, Ill., 1987), 106.

\textsuperscript{96} [Tyler], \textit{Maternal Physician}, 27, 81 128-129.
resources and prevented the citizenry from performing civic duties like military service. Mary distinguished herself from "the common people" in her consumption of coffee and chocolate, which were substituted in poorer homes by avens root, "a powerful stomachic," but a profoundly negative status signifier.\textsuperscript{98} Contrary to elite rhetoric, epidemic diseases thrived in all sectors of society – Royall and Mary’s own son, Royall Jr. died during a typhus outbreak at the University of Vermont in 1813.\textsuperscript{99} In spite of her own financial difficulties, Mary was not fully cognizant of the pace of social and economic change and the ways in which altered modes of production were creating and compounding impoverishment, especially in cities. Instead, she viewed the distasteful conduct of the poor as a conscious moral failure.

If the American poor posed a threat to the health and harmony of the union, the nation was also regionally divided in a way that threatened the moral and physical integrity of the body politic. Royall implored his readers to draw together at the conclusion of \textit{The Algerine Captive}, reasoning that "our first object is union among ourselves." Nevertheless, Royall was uncompromising on the issue of slavery, which represented the ultimate perversion of man’s natural state. Slavery robbed the African of his rightful liberty, but it also invited the white man to become a tyrant, destroying his natural propensity for virtue and good citizenship. In Royall’s first novel, the protagonist Underhill experiences slavery from the perspective of both master and captive, serving as a physician on a slave ship before his capture and enslavement by North African pirates. He is shocked by the indifference of the slave traders and finds the process of physically examining slaves for signs of sickness and
physical defects “equally insulting to humanity and common decency.” Royall’s description of rape, filth, disease, and desperation on the slave ship juxtaposes the heartlessness of the crew, who attribute Updike’s concerns to “some yankee nonsense about humanity.” Royall was particularly troubled by the morality of holding converted Christians in bondage, because religious faith and strong familial attachments among slaves provided irrefutable evidence of their innate humanity. With palpable sympathy, Updike describes “the peaceful husbandman dragged from his native farm, the fond husband torn from the embraces of his beloved wife, the mother from her babes, the tender child from the arms of its parent, and all the tender endearing ties of natural and social affection rendered by the hand of avaricious violence.” Africans exhibited many of the characteristics that Mary valued, including cleanliness, exercise, and the pursuit of a healthful diet. Like good republicans, they willingly sacrificed their own comfort and safety to protect family members. In one instance, Updike’s life is saved because a slave from the ship gives him food and water.100

The virtues of enslaved Africans contrasted with the dubious morality of the South, where social and economic successes were contingent on sport, betting, drinking, and swearing. On attending church in the South, Updike is scandalized to find the preacher – a foul-mouthed and abusive slaveholder – taking bets on horses after the service.101 Southern culture was abhorrent in part because it echoed the traditions and values of Europe: slavery, like tyrannical parenting practices, was an affront to nature and the values of the republic. It

100 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 1:165-166, 169-177, 2:50, 228.
101 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 1:135-138, 143.
recalled the suffering of British industrial and agricultural workers, who labored under inflated taxes, oppressive laws, and indiscriminate punishments.\textsuperscript{102}

The Tylers were convinced that the worst examples of physical and political corruption in America could be found in the South: Mary believed that smallpox was largely restricted to the Southern states, although the Revolutionary period had seen devastating outbreaks across the northeast.\textsuperscript{103} European and Southern social problems were related to bodily corruption through excessive consumption of rich foods and alcohol, insufficient exercise, and wet nursing by working-class and slave women.\textsuperscript{104} These practices contradicted humanity's natural inclinations – to subsist simply, to exercise and take fresh air, and to raise and nurse their own children. When Billy Dimple abandons an active American life for European idleness and luxury, his loss of virtue is manifested physically, in the color of his complexion and his manner of walking. This once "ruddy youth, who washed his face at the cistern every morning," had become "a flippant, pallid, polite beau, who devotes the morning to his toilet, reads a few pages of Chesterfield's letters, and then minces out to put the infamous principles in practice upon every woman he meets."\textsuperscript{105}

In Mary's estimation, mincing, preening, and womanizing were among the worst possible male characteristics. Mary believed that familial relations were a barometer for the health of the body politic; when men and women began exhibiting unnatural tendencies in their behavior and relationships, it boded ill for the state of society as a whole. To ensure that they were suitably masculine in adulthood, mothers were advised to limit boys' exposure

\textsuperscript{102} Royall wrote, with barely concealed glee, of downtrodden British commoners "rotting in dungeons, languishing wretched lives in foetid jails, and boasting of the glorious freedom of Englishmen." [Tyler], \textit{Algerine Captive}, 1:147-149.
\textsuperscript{104} For Southern wet nursing, see Fox-Genovese, \textit{Plantation Household}, 112-113, 279.
\textsuperscript{105} [Tyler], \textit{Contrast}, 26-27 (my emphasis).
to society and fashion lest they conclude that "true excellence consists in sporting with superior grace the lily hand and diamond ring." Excessive vanity in men was unacceptable, so Mary advised parents to limit their attention to the complexions of infant boys. Young men must learn to distinguish between "well earned honour which is at once the basis and reward of true courage and real merit, and that air bubble which owes its existence to the breath of the multitude."\textsuperscript{106}

Mary believed that sport and fashion, the keystones of southern masculinity, actually resulted in effeminacy in boys.\textsuperscript{107} Royall shared his wife’s assessments of Southern honor and employed satire to illuminate the patent absurdity of traditions like duelling and racing. Updike is baffled when he received a letter from a Mr. Jasper T----- expressing "grate parsonal esteem," and requesting "the onner of wasting a few charges of powder with you on the morrow." A friend born in Carolina finally assists Underhill is deducing that he had been challenged to a duel. "You have been bred in yankee land," his friend remarks. In the South, "men of honor are above the common rules of propriety and commonsense."\textsuperscript{108} In \textit{The Contrast}, Colonel Manly risks public reprobation by refusing to duel. He cannot bring himself to conform to social conventions but would "ride, or rather fly, an hundred miles to relieve a distressed object, or to do a gallant act in the name of his country." He knows which rules to break and which to follow, forthrightness in personal relations and courageous national service. Indeed, he is naturally disposed to virtue, being finely attuned to "the emotions of patriotism" and true honor.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{106} [Tyler], \textit{Maternal Physician}, 276-277.
\textsuperscript{107} For an examination of honor and masculinity in the South, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellions, the Pro-Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South} (Princeton, N.J., 1996).
\textsuperscript{108} [Tyler], \textit{Algerine Captive}, 1:81-82.
\textsuperscript{109} [Tyler], \textit{Contrast}, 39, 43, 82, 111-112.
Women's Work: Charity, Healing, and Traditional Medicine in the Early Republic

In 1801, Mary had embarked on isolated farm life with a heady enthusiasm that contrasted Royall's skepticism about the family's rural prospects. At least in this matter, it was she who had the upper hand. "The plan of purchasing a Farm is entirely Marys [sic],& I have some apprehensions of our success in yeomanry." Royall did not find the house in Brattleboro beautiful, and although the lands were abundant — one hundred well-fenced, fertile acres sown with wheat and rye, enough apples to produce between fifty and one hundred barrels of cider, plums, cherries, pears, peaches, chestnuts, butternuts, asparagus, currants, gooseberries, hogs, poultry, and twenty-three sheep that had already produced eight lambs between them — they were also "higgledy piggledy" in a way that proved not wholly satisfying. "It would amuse you," Royall related to an acquaintance, "to see Sophia & the Children — surrounded with Sheep Lambs Geese Ducks Turkeys & hens." The farm boasted enough pasture to feed thirty head of cattle, and although the Tylers kept only eight cows in their first year, Mary had ambitious plans for milk and cheese production. Happy to be an absentee landholder, Royall entered into negotiations with a neighbor, Mr. Peck, who maintained the farm with the help of two hired hands. The farm was undoubtedly secluded. Royall noted that the house was situated up a lane where "you will scarce see three persons in as many days."110 Nevertheless, the Tylers had moved just a short distance from their previous home in Guilford, and they continued to receive support from the community

110 R.T. to unknown recipient, 18 March 1801, Tyler Collection 45:1.
there. During her pregnancy with Amelia, Mary was attended several times by her old friend Mrs. Goodwin.\textsuperscript{111}

The garden and farmland at Brattleboro furnished Mary with the therapeutic tools needed for the practice of traditional, plant-based lay medicine.\textsuperscript{112} By incorporating plant-based medicine into her concept of ideal feminine conduct, Mary was drawing on a long American tradition of women’s healing. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Rebecca J. Tannenbaum have illuminated women’s medical practice in its colonial context in their studies of the Maine midwife Martha Ballard and the New Haven healer Elizabeth Davenport. Both women gathered local plants and used them to treat members of their community for a wide range of complaints. Ballard made “salves, syrups, pills, teas, and ointments” from fifty-three local plants; like Mary, she knew how to lance, blister, and purge.\textsuperscript{113} For Davenport, the “kitchen and herb garden served as an apothecary shop.” She employed numerous New England plant varieties, including anise, fennel, mallow, flaxseed, comfrey, and mint.\textsuperscript{114} Davenport and Ballard were the most prominent and prolific healers in their respective

\textsuperscript{111} Sophia Palmer to R.T., 29 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6; Tupper and Brown, \textit{Grandmother Tyler}, 223-224.

\textsuperscript{112} Londa Schiebinger suggests that specific areas of scientific enquiry were identified as “feminine” in the nineteenth century. These included botany, which emerged from “herbal healing and gardening – fields in which women had long been active.” In the sixteenth century, “women root cutters” supplied knowledge and medicinal plants to Carolus Clusius, a practitioner in Vienna and Leiden. Botany was particularly popular during the Revolutionary period. Empirical study of plants was facilitated by the publication of books detailing Carolus Linnaeus’s system of plant taxonomy – Cohen suggests that laypeople could identify known species and discover new ones by following the Linnean system. Nevertheless, efforts were made to make botany even more accessible to laypeople in the early nineteenth century. Noting the popularity of botanical lectures in the city of Boston, Jacob Bigelow lamented the dearth of English language books on the subject, and offered his own \textit{Florula Bostoniensis} as a possible remedy. Another popular work of botany, Benjamin Waterhouse’s \textit{The Botanist}, was published in the same year as \textit{The Maternal Physician}. See Schiebinger, \textit{The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science} (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 240-241, and \textit{Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World} (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 96; Cohen, \textit{Founding Fathers}, 46-47; Bigelow, \textit{Florula Bostoniensis: A Collection of the Plants of Boston and its Environs, with their Generic and Specific Characteristics, Synonyms, Descriptions, Places of Growth, and Time of Flowering, and Occasional Remarks} (Boston, Mass., 1814), v; John C. Greene, \textit{American Science in the Age of Jefferson} (Ames, Iowa, 1984), 22.

\textsuperscript{113} Ulrich, \textit{Midwife’s Tale}, 11, 354-359.

\textsuperscript{114} Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, “What is to Be Done for These Fevers”: Elizabeth Davenport’s Medical Practice in New Haven Colony,” \textit{New England Quarterly} 70, no. 2 (June 1997): 269-270.
communities – women provided the majority of medical care in mid-seventeenth-century New Haven and the late-eighteenth-century Kennebac. Ballard herself attended sixty percent of births in Hallowell in 1787. Mary was not a professional medical practitioner, but she provided similar services for her neighbors in Brattleboro. In 1822, she administered an emetic to Mrs. Burnham’s sick baby, attempted in vain to save Mrs. Dickerman’s child, and cared for Judge Dennison’s dying wife. She also experimented with bathing and poultices in an effort to relieve her daughter Amelia’s lameness before finally deferring to the doctor, who recommended “Blistering – and Physic.”

Mary encouraged her readers to explore natural remedies themselves, providing them with practical guidance on how to identify and prepare herbs and plants commonly found in the American northeast. Angelica, a sweet cure for flatulent complaints, was widely available in Vermont, as was dragon root, which could be distinguished by the striped purple and white sheath that grew over the plant in the spring and the appearance of red berries in July and August, as well a distinctive pungent smell and offensive taste. Cases of dysentery could be treated with bayberry or tea made from fever bush, both plants being abundant at Brattleboro; baum or balm could be found in almost any American garden and put to use in the treatment of fevers. Balsam of fir could be extracted from evergreen trees native to the northern United States and Canada and was effective in the treatment of “green wounds and inward bruises.” Mary’s repertoire of American remedies was the product of wisdom and experience shared amongst lay medical practitioners and only partially rationalized in European medical texts like the Edinburgh Dispensatory. She and her colleagues also benefited from the knowledge of local Indian tribes, whose use of ash as a topical and

115 Ulrich, Midwife’s Tale 28.
systematic treatment for cancers was known to her. By experimenting with native plants, she created innovative treatments that rivalled the drugs favored by professional physicians. recommending another American plant, blood root, to "the attention of gentlemen of the faculty," Mary cited its multiple uses as an emetic, cathartic, and treatment for excess bile or bleeding in the lungs or stomach. Thorough wort or stanch blood was entirely absent from the Edinburgh Dispensatory but well known to the inhabitants of New England, for whom it proved useful in the treatment of biliousness and internal bleeding.117

The Revolution expanded the therapeutic repertoire of American practitioners by encouraging experimentation with native plants and herbs. John C. Greene argues that Americans documented their natural resources with renewed vigor in the period immediately following the Revolution, believing that scientific accomplishment could benefit the new republic and "prove to the world that republican institutions were as favorable to intellectual achievement as they were to liberty." American scientists were particularly anxious to ensure that American resources were documented and used by their fellow countrymen.118 Native plants also had more practical post-Revolutionary applications: bark of sassafras, a useful purifying agent, had first been used as an alternative to imported spices among "many highly patriotic people" keen to disentangle themselves from the colonial economy during the Revolutionary era.119 From the vantage point of Mary's garden in Brattleboro, it seemed that America contained plants enough to meet every conceivable medical need. “The

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116 Mary Tyler Diary, 11, 14, and 18 December 1821, 23 March 1822, 10 and 12 May 1822, and 9, 11, 12, and 14 December 1822, Tyler Collection 49:1.
117 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 245, 248-249, 251-253, 254-255, 260, 268. By discussing America’s natural resources, Mary was (perhaps unwittingly) engaging with an ongoing debate about the relative virtues of American flora and fauna. Cohen suggests that Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia was in part a response to European intellectuals, including the Comte de Buffon, who posited that the plants, animals, and peoples of the New World were inferior to their Old World counterparts. See Cohen, Founding Fathers, 74-75.
118 Greene, American Science, 6, 10-11.
119 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 266-267.
beneficent creator has enriched our country,” she marveled, “with many simples calculated to relieve the diseases incident to our climate.”\textsuperscript{120} Widespread availability of therapeutic plants enhanced Mary’s belief that America was a society uniquely and divinely endowed. God himself had smiled on the Revolution, furnishing Americans with everything they needed to build strong citizens and a viable, virile body politic.\textsuperscript{121}

For Mary, the practice of plant-based medicine was an expression of American intellectual and economic independence: by using naturally occurring products, Americans could reduce their consumption of “compounded drugs,” the staples of the British medical establishment.\textsuperscript{122} Writing six years after the first publication of \textit{The Maternal Physician}, Jacob Bigelow, professor of materia medica and botany at Harvard, echoed Mary’s pronouncements on the efficacy and importance of American native plants. “It is certainly better,” he argued, “that our own country people should have the benefit of collecting such articles, than that we should pay for them to the Moors of Africa, or the Indians of Brazil.” Bigelow resented the outflow of capital for products that could be supplied or substituted within the United States, but he also feared the effects of war or commercial restrictions, which would limit supply and elevate prices. Even more worrying, American physicians and their patients had to consider the possibility of “frauds of adulteration which may be

\textsuperscript{120} [Tyler], \textit{Maternal Physician}, 243-244.
\textsuperscript{121} Anders Stephanson suggests that Revolutionary ideology combined Protestant notions of America as a promised land with secular political theory. “What unified the sacred and secular,” he posits, “was precisely the idea of ‘America’ as a unique mission and project in time and space, a continuous \textit{process}.” The complex intertwining of religious and political ideology in Mary’s writings reflect this worldview. For Mary, the wealth of the American landscape was evidence of both America’s political potential and its singular position as a nation under God. By marshalling America’s resources – its plants, talents, and children – Royall and Mary hoped to advance the republican project and see the nation’s potential fulfilled. See Stephanson, \textit{Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right} (New York, N.Y., 1995), 4-6.
\textsuperscript{122} Dragon root, for example, could be used instead of borax in the treatment of oral thrush. [Tyler], \textit{Maternal Physician}, 56-57, 244.
practised [sic] by savages."123 Reliance on foreign products and traditions undermined American autonomy and exposed the citizenry to sources of potential corruption, while drugs placed strain on the system and disturbed the body's natural balance. Mary cautioned repeatedly that they should be consumed in limited quantities and only administered when plant-based household remedies proved ineffectual. "It is certainly best," she asserted, "never to give infants medicine if it is possible to avoid it."124

Mary's book was part of a broader movement directed toward the creation of distinctively American medical institutions and practices. Greene identifies the Jeffersonian era as the "formative" period of American science, a development that Raymond Phineaus Stearns attributes to population increase, improved communications, and the rise of the city.125 In Boston, the incorporation of the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1781 introduced a degree of standardization in physicians' fees and regulation in the quality of medical care.126 The growth of the American medical profession was reflected in birthing practices, with male physicians attending births from the 1760s. Although women continued to provide the bulk of midwifery and post-natal care, male physicians' education, elevated social status, and control of resources like forceps and opium served to challenge the authority of traditional female practitioners.127 As Scheibinger notes, the professionalization of medicine and the demise of the wetnurse, the midwife, and the woman healer were

123 Jacob Bigelow, American Medical Botany; Being a Collection of the Native Medicinal Plants of the United States, Containing their Botanical History and Chemical Analysis, and Properties and Uses in Medicine, Diet, and the Arts, with Coloured Engravings, 3 vols. (Boston, Mass., 1817-1821), 1:viii
124 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 70.
interconnected processes. Ironically, Mary was largely isolated from these developments and, consequently, her traditional role as a practitioner remained unchallenged.

Like Martha Ballard and Elizabeth Davenport, Mary was most familiar with the traditional, community-based responses to illness. She was under no illusions about the safety and efficacy of nineteenth-century medicine. She accepted the care of a physician during Royall Jr.’s delivery, finding herself “too ill to be fastidious” when she began laboring prematurely. Nevertheless, the young and inexperienced doctor was a “dreaded” figure, his very presence indicating the likelihood of serious complications or death. His unwelcome visage was contrasted by the warm presence of Mary’s “very kind and attentive” neighbors, her preferred partners in matters medical and maternal. Mary believed that “a mother is her child’s best physician, in all ordinary cases.” Professional medical practitioners were to be employed in cases of extreme sickness when lay practitioners found their remedial repertoire exhausted and the dangers posed by the illness outweighed the risks of consulting a physician. Royall clearly sympathized with his wife’s ambivalence toward regular physicians. He had satirized the worst among them and their alternately bizarre, hazardous, and ineffectual practices in *The Algerine Captive*. One of Underhill’s acquaintances stuns his patients into submission with quotes from Lilly’s Grammar but administers only burnt crust, chalk, juice of beets and carrots, and beer, leading him to boast, “I have borne down these country quacks by superior effrontery.” Physicians were actors engaged in the business of performing knowledge, and the most successful were rarely the best qualified. As Royall

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129 Tupper and Brown, *Grandmother Tyler*, 209.
130 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 7, 70.
131 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 1: 108-111, 116-118.
noted, physicians’ best opportunities to practice arose in cases “where no reputation is lost if the patient dies, and much gained if he recovers.”\textsuperscript{132}

Alive to these dangers, Mary argued that mothers should always perform routine but delicate operations like gum lancing, tongue cutting, and removal of the scurf caused by cradle cap. Physicians could not be relied upon to perform these procedures with necessary care, tenderness, and attention. Even in instances of serious illness, household remedies were potentially safer, more economical, and more convenient alternatives to professionally administered medicines. Mary experimented with a number of different treatments in the course of Royall’s long sickness with cancer, recording the progress of treatment in her diary. Just a month before Royall’s death in August 1826, she administered juice of chivers, grimly noting four days later, “chivers made my Husband very sick.”\textsuperscript{133}

Together with her friends in Brattleboro, Mary enacted female healing rites quite separate from the performance and practice of professional medicine – what Tennenbaum has termed the “ritual of the sickbed,” and Richard and Dorothy Wertz, the tradition of “social childbirth.”\textsuperscript{134} Women who tended to birthing mothers and the sick performed an important social function, but they also cemented bonds between themselves and other community members. Both Wertz and Wertz and Judith Walzer Leavitt identify strands of “female solidarity,” even feminism, in these traditional responses to birthing and illness.\textsuperscript{135} When women visited each other’s homes as carers and healers, they became privy to the intimate details of each other’s lives and exchanged news and gossip about their own families and others in the community. Tennenbaum suggests that women’s healing also affirmed their

\textsuperscript{132} [Tyler], \textit{Algerine Captive}, 1:117-118.
\textsuperscript{133} Carson and Carson, \textit{Royall Tyler}, 27.
status in society, because the practice was traditionally adopted by clergymen’s wives and other prominent local figures. When Mary adopted the role of female medical practitioner, she articulated her identity as a woman and an educated member of the reading classes whose service to the community mirrored her husband’s own contributions as a public servant. Nevertheless, female birthing and sickbed rituals had leveling elements. Because most women acted as both carer and patient over a period of years, there was a certain equality in their relationships.136 Community practitioners knew their patients, and their care extended beyond the simple administration of plants and remedies. Women could comfort each other in ways that professional doctors could not, and they helped each other to come to terms with the realities of serious illness. In December 1822, realizing that Mrs. Dennison would soon die, Mary discussed death and eternal life with her friend. “Death loses all its terrors in a case like hers,” Mary wrote in her diary. In the company of her friend and coreligionist, Mrs. Dennison seemed “to meet him with joy rather than sorrow.”137

As writers and marriage partners, Mary and Royall contemplated proper masculine and feminine conduct, while Mary and her mother engaged in an ongoing dialogue about the appropriate extension of women’s natural maternal and wifely roles. Betsey Palmer’s letters to her daughter are filled with examples of women who successfully balanced family life and gender-appropriate submissiveness with civic or religious service. Mindful of the disruption and deprivation caused by the War of 1812, Betsey participated in a scheme to provide outwork for women whose husbands had died or were otherwise indisposed due to military service. The society purchased cotton and allowed the women to spin it in return for cash and supplies. “We often have 5 or 6 women here Every Monday Morning,” Betsey related to

135 Wertz and Wertz, Lying-In, 4; Leavitt, Brought to Bed, 4.
her daughter, "who come to bring home their work, and get their weekly allowance."\textsuperscript{138}

Charitable societies were commonplace in the northeast in the early nineteenth century. They provided middle-class women with opportunities to expand their moral and maternal roles into the public sphere by engaging with social problems caused by the Revolution, the War of 1812, and later the Civil War.\textsuperscript{139} Supporting servicemen and their suffering families if not the war itself, Betsey Palmer envisaged her participation in the charitable society as a small contribution to her community and the wider body politic. Mary emulated her mother’s example as a healer and, later, as a contributor to women’s charitable organizations, serving in the Maternal Association and the Martha Washington Society.\textsuperscript{140}

Royall explored the limits of female autonomy through the character of Maria, \textit{The Contrast}’s chaste and learned heroine.\textsuperscript{141} Maria instinctively shrinks from Dimple, her fiancé, sensing his unscrupulous character.\textsuperscript{142} She seeks learning in books and wishes for a love match in marriage, much to the displeasure of her father, Mr. Van Rough, who believes – in the manner of high-bred Europeans – that marriage is nothing more than a tool for securing economic and social alliances. Maria accepts that she cannot extricate herself from

\textsuperscript{137} Mary Tyler Diary, 11 December 1822, Tyler Collection 49:1.
\textsuperscript{138} Betsey Palmer to M.T., 18 April 1813, Tyler Collection 47:5.
\textsuperscript{139} Carolyn J. Lawes finds that women occupied important public roles in charitable sewing circles and the Children’s Friend Society (1848) in Worcester, Massachusetts. These organizations built on women’s traditional roles as mothers and household producers. Christine Stansell notes that participants in middle-class charitable organizations were often ignorant to the realities under which working-class women labored. The Asylum for Lying-In Women in New York, for example, required character references and proof of marriage, documents that many needy women were unable to supply. Outwork provided working-class women with ways of earning money while attending to their domestic duties, but this made it difficult to women to produce enough to earn a significant wage. Outwork prevented working-class women from congregating together and contributed to their marginal social position. Lawes, \textit{Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815-1860} (Lexington, Ky., 2000), 1, 62-63, 83; Stansell, \textit{City of Women}, 70-71, 106.
\textsuperscript{140} Blackwell, “Mary Palmer Tyler,” 33-34.
\textsuperscript{141} Manly and Maria’s characteristics conform well with the ideal republican gender characteristics identified by Ruth H. Bloch, which included heroism, courage, glory, and fame in men, and emotionalism, tenderness, delicacy, chastity, and simplicity in taste and manners in women. See Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” \textit{Signs} 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 44, 52.
\textsuperscript{142} For republican notions of women’s heightened sensitivity to issues of virtue, morality, and religion, see Welter, “True Womanhood,” 152-153; Lewis, “Republican Wife,” 720.
Dimple unless her father releases her or Dimple otherwise disqualifies himself, but she retains a sense of what is right and wrong throughout her misfortunes because she has a pure, well-cultivated mind. She recognizes that marriage guarantees her bodily safety and provides her with a domestic space in which she can fulfill her political duties to the republic. "The only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can find," she states, "is in the arms of a man of honour. How naturally, then, should we love the brave and the generous; how gratefully should we bless the arm raised for our protection, when nerv’d by virtue and directed by honour!"

Through his treatment of Maria, Royall contemplated the delicate and imperfect balance between female independence and dependence: Maria understands republican values better than most men of her acquaintance, but she is helplessly bound to Dimple until Manly exposes his duplicitous conduct. While republican women could seek to quietly influence those around them, they could not ultimately determine their own destiny, and girls were reared to accept this curious contradiction. When Mary taught her girls or sent them outside to exercise their bodies, she nevertheless anticipated that duty and convention would eventually consign them to the domestic sphere.

In childbirth and illness, women articulated their physical discomfort and anxiety within this exclusively female space amongst their mothers, sisters, and friends. In the female domains of the bedside and the nursery, illness was experienced communally, but it could not be discussed frankly in public, and even within the family, women’s experiences were often euphemized. When Mary’s sister Sophia reported Amelia’s birth to Royall, she

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144 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 273-274.
described Mary’s labor as a brief and vague sickness.\textsuperscript{145} Because women managed many health problems amongst themselves, their difficulties are often peculiarly absent from the historical record. Joan M. Jensen concludes from physicians’ records that women in the Brandywine Valley of Pennsylvania suffered from few birth-related medical complications and “were healthy during and after childbirth.”\textsuperscript{146} Mary’s forthright prose suggests that women were frequently uncomfortable, but they developed communal coping mechanism that eased the worst of their difficulties.

Mary spent the majority of her time in dialogue with other women – in person, as a member of Brattleboro’s community of women, and in print. She directed her work to fellow mothers and healers, “my amiable friends,” in sentimental language crafted to excite their “tenderness” and anxiety.\textsuperscript{147} In her writing, she exhibited the same candor that characterized women’s shared community healing strategies. When Royall transacted the publication of \textit{The Maternal Physician}, he assumed a degree of control over the text, but his attempts to market it to professional physicians and urban readers suggest a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose, power, and significance as one contribution to an exclusively female dialogue.\textsuperscript{148} Almost certainly, Royall’s alienation from Mary’s world was mental as well as physical: he was not privy to her most intimate experiences and, consequently, he could not truly imagine her position.

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{145} Sophia Palmer to R.T., 29 January 1807, Tyler Collection 45:6.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Jensen, \textit{Loosening the Bonds}, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{147} [Tyler], \textit{Maternal Physician}, 14, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Cathy N. Davidson discusses the contradictory role of authorship and reading in Revolutionary America. Reading was an important symbol of American democratic values, but women’s reading also represented a threat to the social structure. For many women, the “reading revolution conferred an independence as profound as that negotiated on Independence Hill.” \textit{The Maternal Physician} facilitated women’s participation in the republican project and contributed to the preservation of traditionally female social practices. Davidson, \textit{Revolution and the Word}, vii, 58, 62, 72.
\end{footnotes}
Despite Mary’s commitment to community healing, the Tylers did believe that skilled physicians were divine instruments. Royall, in particular, celebrated the best of medical art in *The Algerine Captive*. In one passage, Updike Underhill makes use of a spring tourniquet during an amputation, drawing admiration from less innovative North African physicians. Updike gradually accumulates knowledge through his own reading and the counsel of the physician to whom he is apprenticed, a man celebrated for his ability to restore sight. Armed with virtually godlike abilities, Updike’s mentor “opened the eyes of the actually blind, made the dumb to sing, and the lame and impotent leap for joy.” Access to even the best professional care was a decidedly mixed blessing in the early nineteenth century, but it was nevertheless a “luxury” that only elites could afford. With little understanding of the economic constraints under which the lower classes labored, Mary criticized their mistrust of physicians, arguing that “thousands of helpless little infants suffer greatly” because of unwillingness to consult medical professionals. Mary conceived of household medicine as a trinity, comprising mothers, professional physicians, and the “Infinite Wisdom,” who bestowed knowledge and supplied the natural substances “so wonderfully adapted to mitigate the diseases incident to fallen man.” She envisaged an ideal compact between mother and physician, each supporting the other in the work of raising healthy children and citizens.

Royall and Mary’s writings provide unique insight into the state of the medical profession in the Early Republic. When Royall alternately ridiculed and praised doctors in his writings, he anticipated that his readers would understand the contradiction inherent therein. In the aftermath of the Revolution, Americans were understandably wary of employing professional physicians, but they nevertheless relied on them to provide oft-

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149 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 1:56-57, 2:75-76.
150 [Tyler], *Maternal Physician*, 71.
misplaced hope when serious illness threatened, and their successes were lauded as examples of republican reason and practicality.  

Like her marriage, Mary’s relationship with the professional physicians she so often invoked was both deferential and confrontational. She sought to capitalize on physicians’ authority, but she was not afraid to subtly challenge them when she believed that her own experiences contradicted theirs. Mary employed extracts from the British physician and author Michael Underwood to describe the character and severity of the morbid snuffles and the efficacy and safety of gum lancing. Her account of the proper treatment of the umbilical cord, which often became infected with tetanus before the introduction of modern antiseptic practices, she attributed to another prominent British physician, William Buchan. She also used quotes from Underwood to support her pronouncements on the importance of light dress and simple diet.  Nevertheless, she held fast in her belief that the treatments advocated by professional physicians were often best administered by mothers.

Paul Starr argues that the period of Mary’s authorship constituted a “democratic interregnum,” of which lay medicine was the most potent expression. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, medicine was demystified as never before, but it was not yet reserved solely for trained male professionals. Writing during a period of transition in the history of medicine in America, Mary drew on two medical paradigms: the emerging

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151 [Tyler], Maternal Physician, 72-73.
152 Sheila M. Rothman explores the relationship between physicians and terminally ill consumptives, finding that doctors offered ambiguous, often hopeful, prognoses that were products of limited medical knowledge and the need to preserve normalcy and optimism. “As they saw it, the medical profession had the duty to give comfort. But at the same time, physicians were themselves uncertain about the specific course of the disease.” Only when death was imminent did doctors admit the impossibility of cure. See Rothman, Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History (New York, N.Y., 1994), 114-115.
professional medical establishment with its assumptions of expertise and authority, and the longstanding lay therapeutic model. Because the professional paradigm had not yet gained complete ascendancy, Mary retained a connection with empowering traditions of plant-based medicine and collaboration between female household practitioners. She enjoyed a place within America's diverse medical system that was almost entirely eroded by the late nineteenth century as medicine became the exclusive domain of educated male professionals. Women's involvement in plant-based medicine and community healing was already being challenged in 1817 with the publication of the first volume of Bigelow's *American Medical Botany*. Claiming plant-based medicine for the professional medical establishment, Bigelow praised the male botanist, through whom "the natural resources of a country become developed, and its natural disadvantages compensated."156

Even as she drew on women's traditional roles as lay healers, Mary benefited from mothers' enhanced status in the new republic as arbiters of moral, intellectual, and physical health in the home. Synthesizing colonial and contemporary female roles, and rooting herself in the ancient traditions of female practice, the specific milieu of American herbal medicine, and the ideology of the Revolution, she produced an advice book that was authoritative and self-assured in a way that masked the insecurities and difficulties of her personal life. Mary's defiant assertions of intellectual and national independence are particularly notable because they were articulated by a woman who frequently felt enfeebled and disempowered. As a partner in a marriage that was in many ways more companionate

155 Joseph F. Kett suggests that the "decisive transformation" occurred between 1880 and 1910, when unlicensed practitioners were banned in America. See Kett, *The Formation of the American Medical Profession: The Role of Institutions, 1780-1860* (New Haven, Conn., 1968), vii.
156 Bigelow explicitly refers to the idealized American botanist as "him," and draws information and examples from medical and botanical texts produced by professional men. See Bigelow, *Medical Botany*, 1:ix.
than eighteenth-century analogs, Mary nevertheless felt her dependent status acutely, especially at times of bodily infirmity or financial difficulty. She worried about fulfilling her duties as a republican wife and mother, and struggled to cope with Royall’s inadequacies as a father, husband, and provider. The Tylers’ reflections on ideal familial and civic relations were prescriptive rather than descriptive, and they remained anxious about their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the republican project.

Mary perceived all aspects of family life and household management as conscious contributions to the culture of the community at large, and the Tylers worked together to advance a particular concept of American nationhood that encompassed every dimension of familial and civic life. They found evidence of citizenship and service in the practice of breastfeeding, the development of a self-sufficient household economy, the traditions of American herbal medicine, and the creation of healthful bonds between members of families and communities. In much the same way as the charitable societies that emerged in the nineteenth century, Mary’s recommendations allowed women to expand their domestic roles in ways that were patriotic and political. She recast longstanding lay medical traditions as articulations of American intellectual and national independence. Her experimentation with natural remedies confirmed her faith in a benevolent creator and her reverence for the bountiful American landscape. If America was, indeed, “the freest country in the universe,” its qualities were a synthesis of people and place. Republicanism ensured that the essential virtues of citizens were preserved, while the environment provided Americans all they needed for the maintenance of health and strength within families and the wider body politic.  

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157 [Tyler], *Algerine Captive*, 2:227.
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