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“In a course of publications”: Seriality, Public Recognition, and Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Gleaner* (1792–1798)

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Abstract: This article places Judith Sargent Murray’s *The Gleaner* in the context of U.S. publishing infrastructures of the 1790s, exploring Murray’s gender-switching literature as a media-rhetorical print experiment. It argues that *The Gleaner* enacts a multi-modal drag performance that both challenges and partially reconfirms the protocols of white male identity mediation in the early republic. Addressing the centrality of impersonation, self-sentimentalization, and political indignation in early American literature, the article goes on to analyze the seriality of Murray’s collection through a close reading of the first episodes of “Story of Margaretta” (a sentimental narrative embedded in *The Gleaner*). It concludes with a discussion of Murray’s transformation of classical notions of “fame” into a serial project of “recognition”, showing how central tenets and facets of early American liberalism (such as deliberation, competition, and the public sphere) were shaped by their techno-communicative conditions of possibility, particularly serial publication and serial circulation.

Key terms: Judith Sargent Murray, periodical literature, media rhetoric, sentimentalism, white feminism, liberalism, seriality, fame and celebrity, recognition, the public sphere

1 Early American Drag

In 1798, a Boston author who called herself “Constantia” published *The Gleaner*, a three-volume collection of essays, poetry, drama, and fiction. Many of Constantia’s pieces had already appeared between 1792 and 1794 in the monthly *Massachusetts Magazine*, whose subtitle announced a *Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*. Most readers of the 1798 book publication would have known that Constantia was Judith Sargent Murray, a frequent contributor to the *Massachusetts Ma-*

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gazine under that pseudonym. However, when her *Gleaner* texts were first serialized, their author was supposedly one Mr. Vigillius, whose Latinate name evoked the usual associations of republican vigilance (the periodical essayist as a watchful gatekeeper of "knowledge and rational entertainment"). Vigillius, in turn, introduced himself to his readers in the first issue of the series as a writer with a mission, which essentially consisted of further "publications", to be serially dispensed as "piece-meal commodities" (Constantia 1798: 1: 19, 1: 17).[1] One name leads to the next. To justify his project of perpetual literary production, Murray's male persona declared that he would assume yet another identity by "adopt[ing]" the "name, character, and avocation of a GLEANER" (1: 15).[2] This modest pen name, Vigillius explained, would shield him against charges of literary presumption and intellectual theft: "should an accusation of plagiarism be lodged against me", he planned to "take shelter" (1: 16) in this title, which identified him as a mere collector rather than originator of stories and ideas.

Periodical personae are thoroughly conventional in the eighteenth century, but this specific sequence of names and pseudonyms is uniquely inflected by the media conditions of the American 1790s. Recalling the conversational conceit of British journalistic "characters" such as The Tatler, The Spectator, The Rambler, or The Idler, Murray's The Gleaner projected a stance of gossipy, if evenhanded, reportage. Just as in the case of these British models, Vigillius' easy-going rhetoric of miscellaneous "gleaning" went hand in hand with the writer's astonishing serial productivity, which generated a constant flow of topics in a wide-ranging combination of genres. "[T]he versatility of the title", the Gleaner noted in the third installment, "allows the utmost latitude" (1: 27). Such stylistic and thematic flexibility was a standard feature of journalistic writing at the time. Somewhat less typically, the leisurely and gentlemanly connotations of Vigillius' pseudonym were undermined by

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1 All further quotations from *The Gleaner* are referenced simply by volume number (all italics and capitalizations in these quotations are Murray's). This article was written as part of the project "Enlightened Medialities" at Freie Universität Berlin: funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy in the context of the Cluster of Excellence Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective – EXC 2020 – Project ID 390608380. I would like to thank Maxi Albrecht, Heinrich Baumgart, Hannah Frank, Martin Lüthe, Max McKenna, Isabel Rousmaniere, Josie Schneider, Hannah Spahn, Alexander Starre, Daniel Stein, and the audiences of two lecture versions of this talk (in Siegen and Berlin) for comments and critique.

2 The name "Vigillius" does not appear until relatively late in the series, when the Gleaner becomes the narrator of his own family life. This is why Elizabeth Hewitt (2010: 311, 331), one of Murray's closest readers, distinguishes between the Gleaner (as periodical essayist) and Mr. Vigillius (as narrative character), following the more intuitive example of Watts 1998. Hewitt's distinction is important, but for practical purposes, I will use the names "Vigillius" and "Gleaner" as near-synonyms in this article.

the name's obliquely shameful meaning.[3] As an agricultural term, "gleaning" describes the act of collecting leftovers from an already harvested field – something poor people do by permission of the field's landlord. Murray's pen name thus vacillated uneasily between an attitude of relaxed self-confidence and an anxious sense of secondariness. This affective tension, already inherent in the dialectic of vigilance and gleaning, characterized Murray's entire performance as a periodical author. Vigillius' fear of being labeled a plagiarist can be taken as a case in point, perhaps even an early tell that his serial productions were grounded in gender masquerade, for in a later installment Vigillius explicitly linked the problem of plagiarism to the difficulty of female authorship (as we shall see).

As a female writer and an American one, Judith Sargent Murray was acutely aware of the politics of naming in a public sphere that was no less patriarchal than it was provincial. In fact, the "latitude" (1: 27) provided by pseudonymity, anonymity, and autonymity had a personal meaning for her: when she married John Murray after the death of her first husband, John Stevens, she pointedly changed her name from Judith Stevens to Judith *Sargent* Murray, readopting her patrician birth name – a step she justified eight years later in a private letter as being inspired by French progressivism.[4] As so often with Murray, it is not clear how seriously this explanation should be taken. After all, Murray was a staunch Federalist and no political Francophile. And yet her recruitment of the French Revolution for personal politics was no joke. Neither was her adoption of the role of Vigillius. In both cases, the appropriation of an established rhetorical stance produced more than just an effect of literary irony: it mediated deeply felt concerns of political identity.

The Gleaner – Mr. Vigillius – Constantia – Judith Sargent Murray – Judith Stevens – Judith Sargent: if the personal is political in these sequential acts of naming, it is also media-rhetorical. The question of how to address a presumably non-provincial, even cosmopolitan public from a provincial standpoint was a central problem in early American writing. After 1776, the universalist philosophy of the American Revolution, which enabled its proponents to speak as "Americans" on behalf of "mankind", turned this problem explicitly into one of mediation: who assumes which roles, by which means, by which justifications, in whose name(s), and in which affective registers, to call upon – or to call into being – which literary collectives? Questions of this type already animated early revolutionary pamphlets such as John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* (1767/1768). This was not

3 On the ambiguity of the name "Gleaner", also see Wilcox (1995: 127).

4 "[In France], a female never relinquishes her name, but adds thereto that of the person with whom she is connected in wedlock: It is the present rage to copy the French, and I do not object to accepting this regulation as a precedent" (Letter to Mr. Sargent of Hempstead, 3 November 1796; qtd. in Skemp [1998: 111]).

an overtly literary text, to be sure, but it nevertheless explored the affordances of print communication when it constructed a voice that managed to speak both intimately and pseudonymously, that is, when these serial "letters" spoke in a fictional identity to otherwise impersonal audiences. Dickinson's politics of the 1760s was not yet the politics of radical independence, but its rhetoric of impersonation paved the way for the shifting narrative perspectives and unruly emotional performances of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, who in 1776 was no more an established resident of the colonies than Dickinson was a farmer in Pennsylvania. That same year, the *Declaration of Independence* came with signatures of real people, who were no media simulations, but these signatures illustrated the media-rhetorical complexity of a text in which provincial elites assumed a universal philosophical identity in public.[5] This performance was no less fictional than Dickinson's strategic masquerade as a local farmer – and as such, it required an imagined audience, which was conjured up in the text's very first sentence when the *Declaration of Independence* expressed its "decent respect to the opinions of mankind".

The fact that universalist respect in 1776 was paid to "opinions" before it was paid to "mankind" suggests that membership in the category of (hu)mankind under the *Declaration of Independence* did indeed hinge on a person's ability to hold opinions that were thought worthy of public esteem. This observation underlines the importance of a media-historical approach to eighteenth-century literature, because the ability to express opinions and be respected for them was not a purely intellectual problem. It always involved questions about social groups and their access to specific publication forms with specific mediation protocols. The period's philosophies (political, aesthetic, and otherwise) were decisively informed by their techno-communicative conditions of possibility. As we will see in the third section of this article, a culture of serial publication, in particular, shaped the operational and affective realities of key liberal principles such as recognition and the public sphere – in ways that are not always adequately captured by the standard liberal descriptions of these concepts. Media history also has implications for how we can examine the masculinity and whiteness of the American public sphere between the 1760s and 1820s. These terms (masculinity and whiteness), which are so easily essentialized, do not refer to any external – sociological or demographic – context of American revolutionary and republican literature. Rather, they delineate this literature's defining media conditions, its constitutive infrastructural existence. Seen in this light, the interesting thing about the *Declaration of Independence* is not so much that all of its signers were white

5 On the media rhetoric of *Common Sense* and the *Declaration of Independence*, see Kelleter (2009: 100–101). For a thorough discussion of the intellectual sources of Thomas Jefferson's rhetoric and its racial logic, especially in the *Declaration of Independence*, see Spahn (2024).

and male, but rather that only this fact enabled them to publicly slip into an imaginary role without pretending to write fiction. It bears repeating that the document's role-playing authors, who sentimentalized themselves in an anaphoric list of escalating grievances, in reality wrote as – and for – "the least taxed, most socially mobile, highest landowning, arguably most prosperous people in the western world" (Parkinson 2016: 21). To make sense of the *Declaration of Independence* as a media event, we need to keep in mind that this communicative stunt, and its success, depended on socially constrained technologies of identity mediation.

Another way of putting this is to say that the *Declaration*'s astonishing imaginary transfer required rather special infrastructural conditions.[6] Entirely different publication rules applied to non-male and, especially, non-white fictions of universality in the new nation. Severely restricted in their capacity for public impersonation, the writings of racialized authors such as Phillis Wheatley or Olaudah Equiano had to be framed by complicated apparatuses of authentication to be publishable at all. In principle, white female writers in the early republic had to navigate many of the same publication constraints, but they also had different media-rhetorical strategies at hand to do so, especially when they identified with the nation's political elite – as Judith Sargent Murray, who dedicated *The Gleaner* to John Adams, did most emphatically.

6 As there is a rich and growing field of Infrastructure Studies in the humanities (e.g. Larkin [2013]; Rubenstein et al. [2015]; Anand et al. [2018]; van Laak [2018]; Hurley and Insko [2021]; Pinnix et al. [2023]), I should explain my use of the term infrastructure in this article. I call "infrastructural" all technologies of time-space-compression that are deployed or sponsored by large-scale reproductive institutions (such as the state) in the service of an expansive procedural (rather than doctrinal) community virtualization. If this sounds like a theoretical restatement of the normative project of American nation-building in *The Federalist Papers* (1787–1788), with its paradoxical notion of an "extended republic", that is intentional. While my definition is obviously inspired by media-philosophical approaches (e.g. Peters [2015]) that stress infrastructure's materiality, or the *structure*-part of the term, the dialectic of compression and expansion needs to be emphasized from a cultural-historicist perspective in order to grasp the *infra*-effects of these massive constructions, that is, their historical dependence on large-scale political projects and other ventures of planned collectivization (see as classic studies: Innis [1950]; Anderson [1983]). The term "infrastructure", as I use it here, is thus a macro-concept for a macro-phenomenon whose unpredictable micrological consequences arise precisely from infrastructure's taken-for-grantedness, i.e., from the everyday invisibilization of the techno-procedural arrangements that make communication and traffic possible in a given virtualized collective. I would like to thank Max McKenna and Alexander Starre for discussing these issues with me. My approach also overlaps with Trish Loughran's starkly materialist history of the "virtual nation" of federalism (2007) and her important revision of Michael Warner's equally important analysis of "republican print ideology" (1990), but my primary interest is in texts' historical awareness of their own mediality – and the political, affective, and media-rhetorical consequences of that awareness – rather than in the methodological substitution of text-centered studies for object-centered studies.

Though only moderately successful in 1798, and not a well-known work today, *The Gleaner* may be one of the most inventive American print experiments of the 1790s. This is more than just a matter of literary ventriloquism. In the eighteenth century, literary gender crossings, including those of authorship, usually took place in overtly fictional scenarios of male-to-female impersonation. (In a way, the entire genre of the sentimental novel was initially premised on male-authored performances of female writing.) Murray's adoption of a male author persona – and a periodical one! – was highly unusual in this regard. Her interposition of a female pseudonym ("Constantia") between her journalistic character and her civil name was less so. Gibson Gay Cima (2009) notes that until 1783, most white middle- and upper-class female writers in North America published their works anonymously, pseudonymously, or under their initials. Mercy Otis Warren was one of the first American women who published under her own name, but she did so only after the success of her play *The Group* (1775). Economic concerns, such as securing international copyrights, played an important role in the gradual normalization of white female authorship in the transatlantic world, as did the search for public recognition, especially after British writers Catherine Macaulay and Elizabeth Montagu set influential precedents. Judith Sargent Murray's play with authorial personae followed a similar pattern of "strategic anonymity" (Cima 2000: 465) – afforded by class privilege, evading public censure, influenced by editorial politics (many pen names in magazines were assigned by the typically male editors). But Murray, "one of the very few women who claimed regular newspaper space" (Kerber 1997: 111), was exceptional in serializing her pseudonym.

In fact, questions of literary infrastructure are at the heart of Murray's work. Highly reflective about its own media conditions, her collection elaborates nothing less than an identitarian *publication aesthetic*. More precisely, *The Gleaner*'s publication aesthetic amounts to a multi-modal drag performance. What I mean by this is that the complicated sequence of names and pseudonyms that structures this series culminates dramatically in a final reveal of gender.[7] For the two years of his existence in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Mr. Vigillius, Murray's "borrowed character" (3: 314), as she eventually called him, supplied his readers with stories, poems, essays, and even a continuing novel-of-sorts, "Story of Margaretta", in which he himself appeared as a character.[8] But four years after the series' magazine run, the book edition featured a final chapter, titled "The Gleaner Unmasked", in which the author revealed her femininity and called herself Constantia. This chapter, in which Con-

7 On the concept of "rhetorical drag" in early American literature, see Carroll (2004; 2006).

8 Hewitt (2010: 318) argues convincingly that Margaretta's "Story" should be classified neither as a novel nor as a novella, but as an integral part of the Gleaner's essayistic writings.

stantia explains that Vigillius has been her invention all along and that she has been the true originator of all his humble gleanings, technically counts as the 101st installment of the series. As such it joins numerous other pieces that never appeared in the *Massachusetts Magazine* but were presented in the 1798 book publication as if they had (numbered consecutively, narrated by Vigillius, continuing Margaretta's story, answering questions from "readers", etc.).

Thus, after one hundred "Columns", the readers of *The Gleaner* are given to understand in a performative fashion that they have been participating in an artful mise-en-scène with major and minor roles, arguments and counterarguments, letters to the editor and other conversations. I say *in a performative fashion* because there is something fictional about this reveal, too, as Constantia already speaks in her own name in the "Dedication" and the "Preface" of *The Gleaner*, before Vigillius' first essay from the *Massachusetts Magazine* is even reprinted. The book's final aesthetic effect thus not only addresses and reverses Rousseau's contemporary insinuation that behind every successful woman writer "some man of letters sits behind the curtain to guide [her] movements" (3: 315), but it does so in another drag-like gesture of conspicuous dramatization. Manifestly stylized, Constantia's self-disclosure lifts the curtain on a veritable parallel public, in which the line between discursive prose and storytelling has never been clear because it has *all* been a fiction: a publication fiction – created by a woman (unlike Benjamin Franklin's more famous drag performance in the Silence Dogood letters of 1722). Put differently, the public sphere's infrastructural gender bias (i.e., the existence of gendered publication protocols) is dramatized in a manner that is itself infrastructurally inventive. In her double publication fiction – first periodically in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, then in the counterfeit seriality of *The Gleaner* – Murray elaborately reproduces the forms and contents of a primarily male communication domain and then reveals, in a striking but openly staged anagnorisis, that the entire arrangement has been a female simulation.

The literary eclecticism of *The Gleaner*, including the collection's breathtaking diversity of genres, has to be seen in the same context of Murray's infrastructural imagination. At first glance, such eclecticism simply certifies the author's cultural competence. Unlike other female artists of her time, however, who were also forced to conspicuously rehearse canonized formal skills, Murray does so in a dramatic act of forgery: she exhibits female literary authority by speaking publicly in a fake identity, as a man. The drag-like quality of this performance is particularly obvious in the fact that Murray's male persona speaks an expressly non-masculinist discourse. In the six years of his fictional existence, Vigillius promotes female education; he thinks about alternatives to marriage; and over four consecutive installments toward the end of the series (Columns 88–91), he unfolds a remarkably unorthodox history of gender relations – because he *can* do so, as a man. Or rather: *she* can do so, but safely only as a man. Even more impressively, in another turn of the

media-rhetorical screw, this performative difference finally becomes part of the performance itself when Constantia unmasks the Gleaner in such a way that this role is laid to rest as an "*unnecessary* disguise" (3: 313). In "The Gleaner Unmasked", Constantia stresses that she adopted her persona only because of existing prejudice, that is, because of the widespread "indifference, not to say contempt, with which female productions are regarded" (3: 313). Apart from this, Murray insists, Vigillius is indebted to no other rationality and no other stylistics than Constantia.

Most readings of Murray stop at this point or somewhere near it (to the extent that *The Gleaner* is discussed in American literary history at all). However, the communicative implications of Murray's meta-performative reveal are even more far-reaching than I have suggested in this section. With *The Gleaner*, Constantia not only demonstrates that she can credibly play the role of public authority in a male-dominated sphere, but in sustaining this aesthetic effect for a serial audience, Murray dramatizes the contingency of infrastructural gender bias in temporal terms, too. Thus, the nexus of periodical publication, serial circulation, and media modernity needs to be investigated if we are to gain an adequate historical understanding of *The Gleaner*. But before turning to the seriality of Murray's publications, I want to discuss the interdependence of impersonation, self-sentimentalization, and political indignation in the (white) literature of the revolution and early republic, because these issues qualify the meaning of Murray's feminism, which so forcefully motivates her serial drive for literary publicity.

2 "Making My Exit" … in the Preface

What does it mean when colonial elites speak in assumed roles of wounded humanity, in a super-addressed language of universal protest that is at the same time a language of civic self-sentimentalization? The scope of this question covers more than half a century of American writing, not starting with the *Declaration of Independence* and not ending with *The Gleaner*. Concerning the latter, it should be noted that Judith Sargent Murray challenged the gendered constraints of the new national public of the 1790s specifically for women of her own class. What her biographer Sheila Skemp has described as Murray's "abiding sense of entitlement" (1998: 17) is representative in this regard of the revolutionary elite at large. Feeling as if "the enemy is constantly laying in ambush for our destruction", as Murray wrote about her financial worries in 1786, she saw her socio-economic status as perpetually endangered in post-revolutionary times.[9] As several commentators have noted, Mur-

9 Letter to Madame Walker, 31 January 1786; qtd. in Skemp (1998: 48).

ray's feminism was deeply grounded in feelings of having been robbed of some inheritance; scenes of resentment and embattled privilege are omnipresent in her writings. Thus, Murray's call for "justice, justice, justice" (from a letter written in 1810) was often a call for personal reinstatement to a position of social respect and financial wealth that she thought she had been cheated out of by political circumstances – specifically by the "custom" of gender politics.[10] Hence Murray's view that "class divisions were real [i.e., natural and legitimate], while gender divisions were artificial [i.e., unnatural and illegitimate]" (Skemp 1996: 110). Hence also her understanding of "independence" as first and foremost economic independence: a view of things that fed into her proto-liberal conviction that the ideal society would be a "genderless" but well-ordered and stable "meritocracy" (Skemp 1996: 111).[11] Echoing republican ideas about a "natural" aristocracy – an aristocracy of merit, not birth, as advocated by the first generation of U.S. politicians across party lines – the Gleaner praised "[o]ur admirable Constitution" for instituting "an order of nobility [...] to which all our worthies may pretend – *the order of Virtue* – which, in truth, is alone ennobling, and since the career being open to all, we may with democratical equality pursue the splendid prize" (1: 40). This is Vigillius speaking, but Murray expressed similar beliefs in private letters.

Murray's meritocratic convictions, and even more so her intense protectiveness of privilege and her chronic fear of dispossession, make her look like an early godmother of what is often called 'white feminism' today. If we consider Murray's infrastructural imagination, it might be more accurate to say that her writings display many core features of an emerging liberal media-rhetoric in the United States at large. It is not surprising, for example, that Murray dedicated her book to President John Adams, the ideological opponent of the Jeffersonian Republicans during the fierce political debates about the French Revolution and the constitutional meaning of the term "freedom of the press" in the 1790s. What is surprising, or at least remarkable, is the rhetoric of this dedication. Directly addressing Adams, Constantia writes in 1798: "I indulge a hope that your name may not only shield me from the oblivion I dread, but possibly confer a degree of celebrity, to which my own merit may not furnish a title" (1: vi). While the last phrase seems to channel the author's

10 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Jackson, 7 July 1810; qtd. in Skemp (1998: 54). On "custom", see Murray's quasi-Kantian, definitely anti-Rousseauian argument in her most famous essay, "On the Equality of the Sexes", published in the *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1790 under the pseudonym Constantia (not as part of the Gleaner series): "Grant that [a brother's and a sister's] minds are by nature equal, yet who shall wonder at the *apparent* superiority [of the brother], if indeed custom becomes *second nature*; nay if it taketh place of nature, and that it doth the experience of each day will evince" (Murray 1995: 6).
11 Schloesser (2002) discusses Murray as "the founder of liberal feminist thought in the United States" (157). On Murray's proto-liberalism, see also Kerber (1997); Skemp (1998: 111–114).

fear of "oblivion" and her hope for "celebrity" back into the safe waters of a classical humility topos, the following "Preface" speaks a different language. Anticipating her own departure from this world – a scenario that customarily calls for humility again – Constantia confidently introduces herself as a woman who not only desires but also deserves "celebrity":

> My desires are, I am free to own, aspiring – perhaps presumptuously so. I would be distinguished and respected by my contemporaries; I would be continued in grateful remembrance when I make my exit; and I would descend with celebrity to posterity. (1: vii-viii)

Interestingly, already Vigillius in his self-introduction in 1792 had turned the humble name of "gleaner" into a title of self-assertion. Identifying himself as "*rather* a plain man" (1: 13), he nevertheless admitted to "a *violent* desire to become a writer", indeed a "restless desire" and an "ungovernable mania", "an insatiable thirst for applause" (1: 14–15). Evoking the contemporary and generically plausible examples of Addison, Swift, and Pope, but then grandiosely extending this line of predecessors to Virgil and Homer, this plain and humble gleaner suddenly pronounces: "I would be Cesar, or I would be nothing" (1: 14).

At first glance, these playful inversions of the humility topos – first by Vigillius, then Constantia – seem to evoke another classical motif: the "pursuit of fame" (1: 15), projected now onto posthumous readers who grant a kind of future recognition that can coexist with the author's affected humility in the present. Yet fame is also a republican concept, typically glossed as "esteem" in the Anglophone enlightenment, not only by John Locke, but also by John Adams.[12] *The Gleaner* can tell us something about how it came to be so, that is, how classical notions of fame were transformed and modernized in the 1790s under conditions of a serialized public sphere. The first thing to note in this context is that expressions of humility are repeatedly staged in *The Gleaner* as breaking points of public – which means specifically: published – discourse. As a rhetorical strategy, this remodeling of humility is in line with Murray's drag aesthetic, advancing a proto-liberal feminism that understands gender roles as something dependent on communication and its technologies. Vigillius' preoccupation with plagiarism has its roots here. Note, for instance, that when the Gleaner in his first essay objects to "property, originality, and every thing of this nature" (1: 17), the argument is really media-rhetorical. Charges of plagiarism, Vigillius says, document the infrastructural power of those who bring them up: "cannot an original thought be twice conceived?", he asks in No. 57 (2: 232). To support this point, he offers the hypothetical case of a Native American storyteller who

12 On the role of fame in American republicanism, see Adair (1974); Braudy (1986). On Adams's theory of recognition, which stresses productive "esteem" over destructive "ambition", see Spahn (2012).

lived at the time of Homer and created sublime epics. If we know nothing about this genius, Vigillius speculates, it is because no print media helped him achieve immortality. A few pages later, Vigillius emphatically exchanges the standard masculine pronoun of literary genius for a feminine one, anticipating Virginia Woolf's famous reflections, 130 years later, on "Shakespeare's sister" (1929):

> I had lately an opportunity of conversing on this subject, with a female, to whom I am *naturally attached* – she has for many years been a scribbler, and she feelingly lamented that she had repeatedly seen ideas, and complete sentences, issue from the press, which had long been contained in her manuscripts, and which she had flattered herself with the privilege of presenting, as *original thoughts!* (2: 235)

The inside drag joke in the italicized phrase "*naturally attached*" invites the readers of *The Gleaner* to assume that the man who speaks here is literally that woman's creation. Embedded in a gender-crossing publication fiction, this passage thus stages what it claims: public recognition results not simply from the substance of an argument, but always also from the writer's access to the means of intellectual production – and this publication access is not free and equal, as one would expect in a meritocratic republic, but gendered. According to *The Gleaner*, then, literary genius – and with it the rational reputation of about one half of the human population – is dependent on the political economy of modern media.

In a next step, Vigillius' performative reconfiguration of literary humility allows Judith Sargent Murray to preface her book publication, six years after the Gleaner made his first appearance in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, with an introduction that puts even the boldness of her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft to shame. (The tonal difference between these two authors points to a substantive difference about women's rights: Murray's republicanism, unlike Wollstonecraft's, anticipates a liberal feminism of individual empowerment rather than a radical feminism of social reorganization.) In stark contrast to the humility topoi of most of her American peers, the revealed female author of *The Gleaner*, speaking as Constantia now, declares:

> [T]his my *ruling passion*, a fondness to stand well in the opinion of the world, having given a prevalent hue to every important action of my life, hath operated powerfully upon my ambition, stimulated my efforts, and implanted in my bosom an invincible desire to present myself before a public which I reverence [...]. I cannot urge in defence of my temerity, that the importunity of friends hath drawn me forth – certainly not. (1: vii-x)

"Certainly not"! Courting no less than "the opinion of the world" – semi-quoting the *Declaration of Independence*, another super-addressed role-playing performance of American literature – Murray tears off the standard formula of early modern publicity (the humility topos stating that the book was published only because friends

and family have asked the author to do so) like an unbecoming mask. Beneath it, we find the very desire that Murray's gender-switching impersonation dramatizes and to which it responds: the desire to be seen by anonymous others, to be admired in an extended media sphere, to be *recognized*. This is the principle of *spectemur agendo*, which John Adams, prime strategic addressee of *The Gleaner*, theorized at the same time and in the same nation – in the same media public – as the anthropological driving force of all republican politics. In *Discourses on Davila: A Series of Papers, on Political History, Written in the Year 1790, and Then Published in the Gazette of the United States, by an American Citizen* (1805), Adams writes:

> There is [no human passion] more essential or remarkable, than the *passion for distinction*. A desire to be observed, considered, esteemed, praised, beloved, and admired by his fellows, is one of the earliest, as well as keenest dispositions discovered in the heart of man. [...] *Spectemur agendo* [to be seen acting] expresses the great principle of activity for the good of others. [...] To be wholly overlooked, and to know it, are intolerable. [...] A sense of duty; a love of truth; a desire to alleviate the anxieties of ignorance, may, no doubt, have an influence on some minds. But the universal object and idol of men of letters is *reputation*. It is the *notoriety*, the *celebration*, which constitutes the charm that is to compensate the loss of appetite and sleep, and sometimes of riches and honors. (2000: 311–318)[13]

This is no longer *fame*, as Adams learned the hard way. First developed during the acrimonious American newspaper battles of the 1790s, Adams's theory of distinction (*spectemur agendo*) understands that new modes of public communication have penetrated so deeply into political lives that classical notions of fame, humility, or virtue no longer apply. By comparison, Judith Sargent Murray still holds on to a more conventional language of fame, but the infrastructural gambit of *The Gleaner* also highlights how this language conflicts with the media realities of her own status as a female writer and publicist. No doubt, Murray's hope for an "exit" that would be honored with "respect", "grateful remembrance", and "celebrity" continues to speak of fame as the finalizing confirmation of a character: something that vindicates a definitive personal achievement. But then she talks about her *exit* in the "Preface" of her book, that is, at the *outset* of a breathtaking, often breathless, series of shifting appearances, characters, and roles. This moment of media vertigo not only transforms the initial humility topos into something that looks much less like a topos; it also modernizes the classical principle of fame into the more demanding process of continued recognition. Under conditions of serial circulation – palpable

13 John Adams syntax (though not his exact argument) recalls Adam Smith's earlier discussion of recognition in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/1976): "To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from [emulation]. It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us" (1974: 50; cf. Spahn [2012: 536]).

in the potentially endless numbering of magazine publications (1 to 100 in the case of *The Gleaner*) and in the sub-title and the immediate reception of Adams's *Discourses on Davila* – fame is fleeting, when granted at all. It is never enjoyed conclusively. Rather, in the timelier form of recognition, it is destined to become a perpetual and ever-productive obsession, as Murray's often feverish word choice and her seemingly uncontainable sprawl of masks, pseudonyms, and other techniques of impersonation suggest.

3 Fake Publics Are Real Too: Recognition and Seriality in *The Gleaner*

Public recognition, due to its dependence on publications, must be renewed again and again. Understood as a modern preoccupation, the search for recognition is a serial process because the liberal public sphere that sustains it is itself inherently serialized. Put more abstractly, the public in its liberal manifestation can be understood as a self-observing feedback system in which narrative seriality and media seriality constantly co-evolve and reflect each other.[14]

In *The Gleaner*, narrative seriality is most pronounced in the "Story of Margaretta", an embedded sentimental narrative in which Vigillius appears as both character and narrator, telling the story of his adopted daughter. A more detailed examination of "Margaretta" than I can undertake here might explore the plot's similarity to other sentimental novels of the time, bearing in mind that Murray uses Margaretta's story as a rather transparent vehicle for her theories about education and communication, sometimes even as a narrative of blatant wish-fulfillment in which she pictures fantastic solutions to her own financial problems. Instead, I want to focus on the reflexive relationship between narrative seriality and media seriality in Murray's most elaborate attempt at storytelling. For this purpose, let us consider the moment when the "Story of Margaretta" is introduced in *The Gleaner*, which happens in the very installment that establishes the series *as* a series, in Column No. 2. Tellingly, this column is all about questions of temporality – a key concern of magazine seriality, as Mark Turner emphasizes: "Time, however you think about it, is essential to what periodical print media is. By [their] very defini-

14 On the feedback logic of popular seriality, see Kelleter (2017). For an insightful recent study of the larger issue alluded to here, investigating how the seriality of narratives and the seriality of a medium interact in practices of "remaking", see Loock (2024). On seriality and feminist media studies, see Sulimma (2020).

tion, periodicals [...] are continually on the move, across time" (2002: 183).[15] Vigillius is quite aware of this when, speaking partly as an essayist and partly as a storyteller, he reflects on the propriety of *delaying* narrative information in a magazine publication. In his second appearance as the Gleaner, he essentially tells his readers: I'm going to tell you this story now, but I'm going to leave out a number of details *at this point*, because you probably first want to hear what happened and not get distracted by "prospects extensive, and views truly picturesque" (1: 19). Let's not bother with these details *now*, Vigillius suggests, because this is a serial publication, and we will have time and opportunity to come back to them *later* and fill in any remaining gaps:

> were I not hasting to give a solution to the reader's question, I might perhaps amuse him very tolerably, in the descriptive line, through two or three pages close printing; but in a course of publications, I may possibly again recur to exhibitions which pleased me so highly at the time, when I may be more at leisure to *glean* whatever flower recollection may furnish. (1: 19)

Interestingly, this rather unhurried declaration of haste (which is more extensive in the original than quoted here) occurs while the reader is still waiting for the beginning of the story of Margaretta – a character who has been announced "without any further prefatory address" (1: 17) in the column's cold open (as we would call it today):

> Bless me! cried Margaretta, while, in the hope of meeting something from the pen of Philenia, she threw her fine eyes in a cursory manner over the index of the February [issue of the Massachusetts] Magazine. But pray, it may be asked, who is Margaretta? (1: 17–18)

Ventriloquizing his impatient readers, Vigillius does not proceed to answer his own question but instead enters into a long-winded discussion on the value of "Curiosity" (1: 18), that crucial driving force of serial storytelling. When the text at last switches to a narrative mode, the first thing we see is not the mysterious Margaretta, but an old lady leisurely pouring tea: "The second day after our arrival, as the good woman [our landlady] was pouring the tea, which we had chosen for breakfast, a gentle tap at the door drew our attention" (1: 19–20). After Vigillius' lengthy meditation on narrative speed, this is another suspenseful digression in the name of haste: a veritable delay of non-delay.

When some pages later Margaretta finally arrives, she comes equipped, as any good serial character does, with stories within stories within stories. A woman who

15 For an "infrastructuralist" take on the same issue, see Mitchell's reflection on infrastructure as a mechanism that helps "place the future further away" (2020: n.pag.) through both delay and acceleration. I am grateful to Max McKenna for this reference.

seems to be Margaretta's mother, but turns out not to be, introduces herself to Vigillius with the promising words: "I will briefly recount to you the outlines, if I may so express myself, of my life" (1: 22). And so she does and so it goes on. Within eight pages of "close printing", the initial question ("But pray, who is Margaretta?") spawns no less than three serial mothers for our promised central character "in a course of publications" (1: 19): the biological mother, whose death-bed scene is related by the foster mother ("Mrs. Thrifty"), and Vigillius' wife, Mary Vigillius, the future mother who adopts Margaretta, "our new acquisition" (1: 25), at the end of the episode – with many more flashbacks to the girl's family history still to come.

"The Gleaner" No. 3 then opens in medias res again, with Margaretta no longer a child but a young woman engaged in the act of reading "The Gleaner" No. 2. The first sentence of the third column repeats the opening of the second column, but serially so, that is, with a difference that makes a difference: "'Bless me!' cried Margaretta, 'as I live, here is, in this Magazine, a publication entitled the Gleaner!'" (1: 25). A few pages later, lest we get lost in the intervening proliferation of timelines, Vigillius provides some of the missing temporal links and helpfully re-orients us again: "The reader will remember that at the time of this confab, the second number of the Gleaner was not written" (1: 27). After this, rather than continuing the story, the bulk of the third number consists of a paradoxically protracted critique of "that pernicious habit of idly dissipating time" (1: 30). "The lapse of time", Vigillius muses, is "ever progressive, no hand can roll back its career" (1: 28). Therefore, people should not procrastinate, but "economize [...] the disposition of time" (1: 28). Six hours of sleep are quite enough, Vigillius calculates, because "how many months may be thus added to a common life" (1: 29), not to mention a reading life? This call for temporal "Order" culminates in a celebration of the bourgeois family, which Vigillius describes as a rational time-saving machine, committed to "the habitation of tranquility" and organized in no small degree by female rationality: "[the family] is a well ordered community; it is a complicated machine, the component parts of which are so harmoniously organized, as to produce none but the most concordant sounds" (1: 30).

The social philosophy that inspires this vision of dynamic stability is obviously the philosophy of republican motherhood, which lies at the heart of Murray's Federalist feminism.[16] Vigillius' text also realizes the communicative ideal that governs Murray's theory of female education, as shown by Jennifer Desiderio (2008), who argues that the relationship between Vigillius and Margaretta mirrors the relation-

16 On republican motherhood, see Kerber (1976); Kritzer (1996). Kerber describes Murray as "perhaps the most vigorous single voice [...] of the ideology I have called republican motherhood" (1997: 120).

ship between magazine and reader, with the periodical playing the role of a parental monitor that filters polyphonic information into gentle persuasion. In this, we find a standard feature of sentimental discourse, but with strong Federalist inflections in Murray's case.

However, serial readers might also suspect a touch of reflexive irony when this essay against the dissipation of time constantly digresses, establishing a pattern of thematic contingency that prevents the narrator, at least in this column, from resuming the story he has set out to tell. But this only means that the *promise of storytelling* – a media promise! – is continued, and at this pace probably for a very long time indeed. And so Vigillius, the advocate of time-saving efficiency, ends the third column without closure when he literally interrupts himself mid-sentence:

> When Crastinatus [the procrastinator] hath paid the great debt of nature, his affairs will lay open to the inroads of fraud, his widow and his orphan children will be the sufferers, and the probability is, that an insolvency will take place. Whereas had he – But it is time that I recollect myself, it may be thought that I encroach too far upon a department, which may be considered as already filled. Well then, having gleaned thus much, I will only add, that a late ingenious writer would have observed – Crastinatus "doth not work at night." (1: 31)

Maybe this is a cliffhanger, because: pray, who is Margaretta? Coming episodes will tell. Or rather, they will continue to do so "[w]ithout any clear end point" in sight, as Elizabeth Hewitt has summarized Murray's media theory of serial time (2010: 317). Narrative delay here becomes a function of media continuation, pushing forward a type of seriality that hopes to go on for as long as its specific publication infrastructures will allow.

If one considers Vigillius' serialization of genres in the context of Murray's infrastructural performance, which keeps transforming narrative seriality into media seriality, then the discrepancy between form and content in "Story of Margaretta" is far less puzzling than it appears at first glance. The narrative's dual interest in the economization of time and money is particularly significant in this respect. As Hewitt points out, *The Gleaner*'s "textual economies" seem to contradict the text's financial philosophy. On the one hand, there is Murray's "commercial poetics" ("a literary mode that emphasizes highly mediated and deferred relations between numerous consumers and producers"); on the other hand, there are the orthodox "economic lessons emphasized in the pages of *The Gleaner* – live within your means and be generous in forgiving others when they are in financial tumult" (2010: 313, 321). Here a media aesthetic of excess, there a narrative model of thrift and prudence. The solution to this paradox lies in Murray's identitarian publication aesthetic, her liberal-feminist theory of publicity. Aware that individual recognition, and the pecuniary benefits that come with it, require constant female role-play, Murray designs both "The Gleaner" (1792–1794) and *The Gleaner* (1798) as vehicles of infra-

structural empowerment. By their very seriality, then, these publications produce "a remarkably astute rendering of the marketplace" (Hewitt 2010: 325), implicitly grasping the systemic conditions of their own existence – what Hewitt calls the "reticular structure" of early capitalist literary commerce (2010: 326).

By contrast, the ultimate objective of Murray's publication aesthetic is fairly straightforward: *The Gleaner* is designed to produce conclusive and lasting profits in the marketplaces of attention (literary reputation) and assets (financial recompense). This is Murray's justice project: the fanciful re-translation of modern recognition into classical fame. True, Murray has "no interest in sentimentalizing the vast and tangled network of individuals and nations that comprise global capitalism", but when she "mimetically reproduc[es] this complex network" (Hewitt 2010: 327), her literature's primary motivation is not analytical. Like so many other American productions of the time, these interlocking publications are meant to remedy authorial grievances and settle their author's debt. In the words of Hewitt again: "Murray had firsthand knowledge of the ways that financial attachments (like debt) transcend corporeality: Long after the person of her [first] husband was gone, she was affected by his imbrications in a wide net of financial dealings" (2010: 326). In a nutshell, the affective stance of this literature toward the network it hopes to navigate – a network of anonymous circulations in which Murray's every movement is agonizingly determined and limited by "remote actions and agents" (Hewitt 2010: 330) – is a stance of resentment.

This explains *The Gleaner*'s countervailing affinity for wish-fulfillment, not just as a plot device (a fantastically rich savior appears at a moment of high financial crisis to save the day for Margaretta) but as a full-fledged infrastructural fantasy. Like any periodical publication, Murray's *Gleaner* series and its author-personae are forced to continuously readjust themselves to the effects they produce in the sphere of literary consumption – the sphere of "the opinions of mankind", as the American revolutionaries philosophically called it twenty years earlier. But what if the wider world does not care? What if its media do not properly mediate? Such are the questions that trigger classic scenes of liberal resentment. To get what she believes she deserves – a vibrant media world of *spectemur agendo* – Murray invents it. Her series is peppered with letters from readers who respond to Vigillius' humble gleanings with opinions, questions, suggestions, and criticisms. Most scholarship on *The Gleaner* takes note of these letters and their concerns but finds it difficult to come to terms with their apparent fictionality. It is therefore important to stress that these correspondents, just like Margaretta and Vigillius, are serialized characters in a larger publication fiction. Their vehicular quality is particularly evident when they object to the Gleaner's habit of randomly dropping in and out of Margaretta's story rather than delivering a straightforward plot. One such reader, whom Vigillius encounters anonymously "at a table [...] in a public house" in Boston, spec-

ulates that the Gleaner's generic inconsistency – i.e., his constant back and forth between expository and narrative styles – serves the purpose of depriving the "Story of Margaretta" of "the air of a novel" (1: 54–57). Vigillius emphatically confirms this to be true ("I could hardly forbear taking my advocate in my arms") and, with an orthodox Biblical justification, emphasizes the didactic function of storytelling as "authorized and sanctioned [...] by a divine example" (1: 57–58).

What does it mean that *The Gleaner* is the talk of the town only in *The Gleaner*? How can scholarship deal with the fact that the "Story of Margaretta" is a popular narrative only in Vigillius' pedagogical telling of it (and in the counterfactual estimation of some literary historians who believe that Murray could easily have published her "Margaretta" sections as a stand-alone narrative – something rendered nearly impossible by the text's structure)?[17] Simulating public controversies can be a strategy for producing public controversies: not unlike the more famous American publicists of 1776, who declared a state of independence that had yet to become fact, Judith Sargent Murray in the 1790s creates an elaborately fake public that nonetheless speculates on real effects. As the projected realities fail to materialize, mediation intensifies. To imagine "The Gleaner", impossibly, as a coffeehouse sensation requires the work's increasingly radical serialization, its spill beyond any one generic or textual container – so much so that *The Gleaner* of 1798 even fictionalizes its own serialization, when it includes in its media fantasy numerous conversations and stories – and two entire plays – that never appeared in the *Massachusetts Magazine* at all.

Constantia addresses the resulting publication confusion, including "the toil of writing letters to myself" (3: 317), in "The Gleaner Unmasked". This disclosure act at the end of her book is notable not only for its dramatic drag structure but also for its lingering rhetorical nervousness. Murray's argument in these final pages seems almost willfully convoluted, the language stilted to the point of impenetrability. Hinting at some unspecified "facts, which were productive of much infelicity" and "a *serious accusation* [that] *was presented against me*" (more intimations of plagiarism), Constantia's explanation for "*why* the Gleaner was not continued in the Magazine" obscures more than it reveals. Almost like a dark-romantic narrator, she evokes a powerful but unnamable "*real cause*" that has prevented "the completion of my plan", so that *"my design"* is now "superseded" (3: 316). These tortured passages illustrate that the infrastructural imagination of *The Gleaner* cannot be separated from the authorial anxieties that drive their media reflexivity. Murray's artistic setbacks after 1794, when "The Gleaner" was discontinued in the *Massachusetts*

17 Sharon Harris has attempted to realize this fiction of a fiction in her *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray* (1995), which presents "Story of Margaretta" as if it were a continuous text. The result reads much more fragmented and much less like a contemporary novel than it is probably intended to.

Magazine and her hoped-for career as a playwright failed, provide the most likely background for these statements.[18] But already Vigillius' letter-writing readers were reparative wish-fulfillers in this sense, speaking as if Margaretta's story had been popular with masses of readers (who would have loved the story even more if it had been a real novel) and as if there had been a public debate about exactly this problem of genre in which the author could then masterfully balance moral instruction and novelistic amusement, reserving for herself "the privilege of discontinuing and resuming [such sketches], as shall suit my convenience" (1: 66).[19] For the Gleaner, serial authorship meant asserting his authority over readers' wishes and objections. For Murray, too, serial authority was measured by readers' dissatisfaction, but as long as these readers and their complaints remained fictional, so did the materialities that the series hoped to mediate into existence.[20]

Two general conclusions about seriality and the American 1790s can be drawn from this discussion. First, Murray's play with progression and delay, storytelling and editorializing, miscellaneity and self-authorization, may be (media) worlds away from the type of literary irony that contemporaries knew from *Tristram Shandy*, but this aesthetic is highly self-reflexive about its own publication conditions. Indeed, there is no way for periodical literatures not to be so, not to feed back into themselves, especially if they are involved, as *The Gleaner* so obviously is, in an economy of recognition, competition, and commercial ambition. The fact that Murray published her book with high hopes for cultural and financial restitution should not be seen as an incidental idiosyncrasy in this regard, but as something which defined *The Gleaner*'s media-historical conditions of possibility. Like many other acts of political publicity in revolutionary America, the publication of *The Gleaner* was meant to redress deeply felt artistic and economic injustices. This reading of Murray thus supports a systemic theory of popular seriality, which stresses the recursivity of serial continuation (its looped rather than straightforwardly progressive character) as well as the interplay between narrative seriality and media seriality (an infrastructural, hence necessarily political issue), by using an early U.S. example of commercial-periodical publication.

Secondly, the Gleaner's vacillation between narrative seriality and media seriality sheds new light on Murray's bourgeois-feminist inversion of literary humility.

18 On Murray's disappointments as a playwright in 1795 and 1796, see Skemp (2009: 234–266).

19 On the liberal foundations of "reparative" aesthetics (and its neoliberal manifestations), see Stuelke (2021).

20 Schellenberg (1996) even suggests that most Anglophone novels of the period were sequels of sorts, because they performed authorizing gestures meant to correct 'false' reader-reactions to earlier novels. On the inherently conflictive and competitive structure of popular-serial authorship, see Stein (2021).

In doing so, it invites us to rethink the notion of the American public sphere for the late eighteenth century. The Gleaner's first three columns redefine the modest act of "gleaning" as a serialized business of always publishing more. But if to publish something means to *continue publishing*, this has consequences for the very idea of the public sphere in its liberal manifestation. There is a larger argument to be made here about the systemic operations of modern media, one that deviates significantly from late-eighteenth-century conceptions of the public sphere.[21] The media reflections of Judith Sargent Murray, John Adams, and other representatives of the republican elite still wavered indecisively between a model that conceived of the public sphere as a deliberative meeting place and one that conceived of the public sphere as a competitive marketplace. In terms of intellectual history, this simply means that economic liberalism and political liberalism were often indistinguishable from one another at the time; their nascent differentiation, though already shaping the period's party rivalries, had not yet produced competing vocabularies of liberalism – or even the word "liberalism".[22] But liberal auto-theories are not the only options we have to talk about the public sphere of the 1790s. The actual media-rhetorical practices that structure this moment suggest a third model beyond deliberation and competition: publications such as *The Gleaner* and *Discourses on Davila* invite us to understand public communication that operates under conditions of serialized recursivity as a system of ongoing mutual observation among differently enabled individuals or groups.[23]

The historical actors typically experienced this type of communication as both an outsized opportunity for recognition and a massive threat of self-exposure. The striking discrepancy between Murray's "aggressive subscription campaign" (Desiderio 2008: 1) for *The Gleaner* and her obsessive fear of public condemnation is a case in point.[24] No doubt, Murray's resentments and anxieties reflect her difficult status as female contender in a male-dominated publication sphere – one among many other female competitors, it should be noted.[25] But we also see here something

21 See Starre (2015) on systems theory as a type of media theory.

22 On the semantics of proto-liberalism, see Rosenblatt (2018).

23 See also Werron's systems-theoretical discussion of competition and the public sphere (2009).

24 Murray immediately withdrew her first two plays from production following poor reviews. Thus, *The Medium*, written in 1795 (reprinted in *The Gleaner* under the title *Virtue Triumphant*), was only performed once. A year later, *The Traveller Returned* received mixed reviews, but the negative ones affected Murray so strongly that she banned all further performances of the play. In 1804, Murray wrote a third play, *The African*, which was not performed until four years later, without mentioning her authorship, but after a failed premiere, Murray "demanded the immediate return of all existing copies of the manuscript" (Skemp 1998: 103).

25 Desiderio describes the tense sense of literary "rivalry" that Murray's announcement of an anthology edition of *The Gleaner* in 1796 provoked among her peers. Reacting "frantically" to "the threat of

typical about the republican elite. The coexistence of Murray's paranoid style with a language of high ambition (both in *The Gleaner* and in her letters) points to a constitutive feature of the new nation's emerging media public, as John Adams's worried musings on recognition make clear. In fact, already George Washington's surprising refusal to seek a third term as president is perhaps best understood as a reaction to the changing communicative realities of the 1790s, specifically the structural transformation of classical fame into modern recognition.[26] Washington's successor grasped this when, in *Discourses on Davila*, he described the new national public as essentially a tribunal. Adams's rhetorical response to this dilemma was to discuss the search for recognition as if it were an anthropological given. This allowed him to adopt a reassuringly melancholy attitude, not yet available to aspiring authors like Murray, although Murray shared Adams's conviction that her grievances expressed some universal plight of humankind. (There is indeed something liberal about the tendency to generalize personal interests into anthropological principles.) But if we view the 1790s through the lens of a theory of seriality, we will want to stress, and take seriously, the prefix in the word *re*cognition. We will understand the contemporary desire for recognition not so much as a natural driving force of human life, as Adams and Murray did, but as the nervous effect of media-political realities: something that was impossible for Murray and Adams to enjoy or even achieve in a serialized public, precisely because liberal recognition, always prone to resentment, requires unceasing, obsessive – and obsessively recursive – continuation.

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Murray and '600 pages of The Gleaner'" (Desiderio 2008: 1), periodical authors such as Sarah Wentworth Morton and Mercy Otis Warren readily joined the list of subscribers (which also included George and Martha Washington), but not without sending letters back and forth that articulated their "competing claims to fame" (2008: 2). Morton, incidentally, also published under the name "Constantia" in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, until Murray claimed sole ownership of the pseudonym, despite her otherwise lenient attitude toward plagiarism. Morton, "perhaps the most popular poet of her day" (Desiderio 2008: 1), subsequently published as "Philenia" in the *Massachusetts Magazine* (the poet Margaretta is looking for when she first leafs through the magazine in "The Gleaner" No. 2).

26 Cf. Kelleter (2002: 592–611).

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