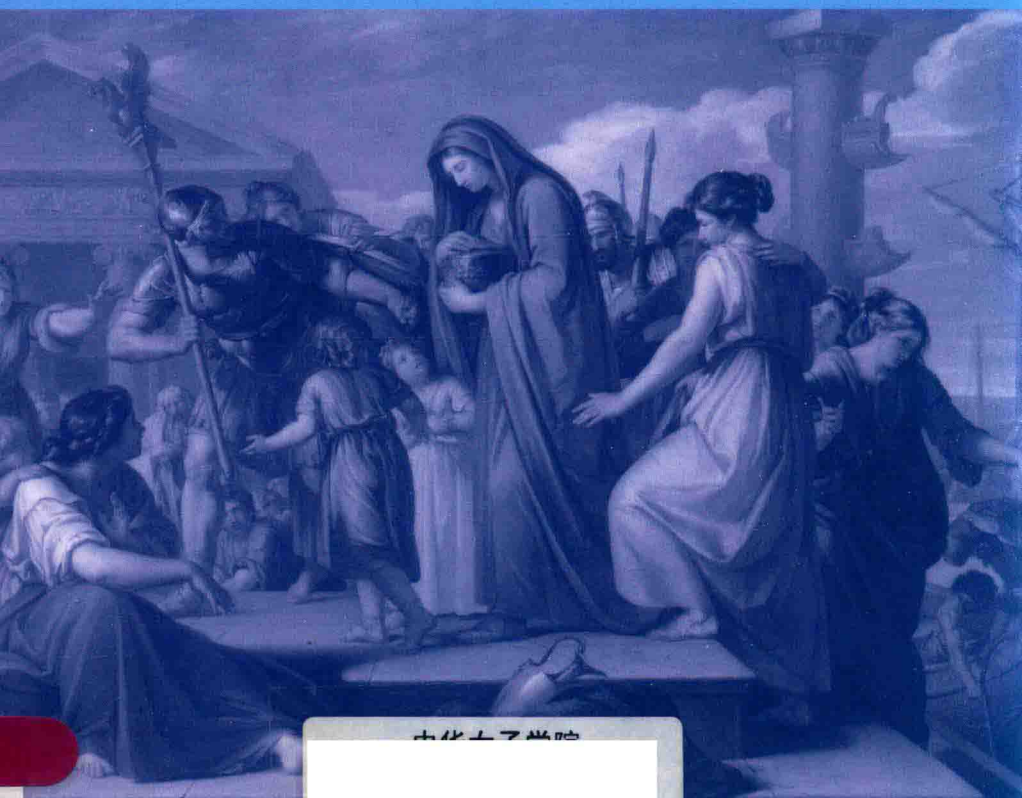


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Catharine & Mercy Otis  
Macaulay Warren

THE REVOLUTIONARY ATLANTIC  
*and the* POLITICS OF GENDER



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KATE DAVIES

# Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren

*The Revolutionary Atlantic and the  
Politics of Gender*

KATE DAVIES

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CATHARINE MACAULAY AND  
MERCY OTIS WARREN

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## Abbreviations

AA	Abigail Adams
AFC	L. H. Butterfield, (ed.), <i>Adams Family Correspondence</i> , 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963)
CM	Catharine Macaulay
EG	Elbridge Gerry
EL	Ellen Lothrop
GLC	Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York Historical Society
GW	George Warren
HE MS	<i>History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line</i> , manuscript copy, New York Historical Society
HL	Houghton Library, Harvard
HW	Hannah Winthrop
JA	John Adams
JW	James Warren
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
MOW	Mercy Otis Warren
MOWP1	Mercy Otis Warren Papers (1), Massachusetts Historical Society
MOWP2	Mercy Otis Warren Papers (2), Massachusetts Historical Society
NYHS	New York Historical Society
TH	Thomas Hollis
WAP	Warren-Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society
WW	Winslow Warren
WWC	Winthrop-Warren Correspondence, Massachusetts Historical Society



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# Introduction

## Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: Women, Writing, and the Anglo-American Public Sphere

You see madam, I disregard the opinion that women make but indifferent politicians. . . . When the observations are just and do honor to the heart and character, I think it very immaterial whether they flow from a female lip in the soft whispers of private friendship or whether thundered in the senate in the bolder language of the other sex.

(Mercy Otis Warren to Catharine Macaulay, December 1774)

My friends and fellow citizens . . . if a civil war commences between Great Britain and her colonies, either the mother country, by one great exertion, may ruin both herself and America, or the Americans, by a lingering contest, will gain an independency; and in this case, all those advantages, which you for some time have enjoyed by your colonies, and advantages which have hitherto preserved you from a national bankruptcy, must for ever have an end; and whilst a new, a flourishing, and an extensive empire of freemen is established on the other side of the Atlantic, you, with the loss of all those blessings you have received by the unrivalled state of your commerce, will be left to the bare possession of your foggy islands; and this under the sway of a domestic despot.

(Catharine Macaulay, *An Address to the People of England, Scotland and Ireland on the Present Important Crisis of Affairs*, December 1774)

My two epigraphs introduce two writers and close friends. Both epigraphs were written at the turn of the year in which a colonial crisis became a civil

war and both intimate how their authors saw themselves as participants in national and international debates. The first argues for the political significance of women's friendship and correspondence. In the second, a woman claims the language of citizenship and public exhortation. Both are suggestive of the ways in which eighteenth-century women might regard themselves as 'politicians' in an Anglo-American context.

Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren exchanged letters and ideas with one another for almost twenty years. From cosmopolitan London and Bath and provincial Massachusetts they sustained a close friendship that was almost entirely epistolary and dependent on unreliable transatlantic crossings. Their friendship and its important correspondence framed their literary and political careers. Drawn to each other by mutual admiration of their republican principles and intellectual abilities, Macaulay and Warren began writing to each other in 1773. Macaulay had already been fêted in Britain and the American colonies for her historical and political writing, while Warren was producing verse dramas which commemorated the ideals of the New England patriots she counted herself among. Both professed a thorough knowledge of classical history and commonwealth theory; both saw its application to contemporary political crises, and the republican writings of both were celebrated in different ways on each side of the Atlantic for the patriotism and learning they displayed. Their friendship was a crucible of the ideas through which both women figured in the literary public sphere. Whether sharing vital information on public matters or sympathizing with personal losses and misfortunes, each regarded the other as 'my valuable friend', who 'nor time nor distance nor the accidents of life will lead me to view with an indifferent eye'.<sup>1</sup>

As Macaulay's and Warren's epistolary friendship framed their writing lives, so their experience of the separation of Britain from its North American colonies also shaped and formed their literary careers. 'We live', as Warren put it to Macaulay, 'in an age of Revolution'.<sup>2</sup> The colonial disputes, war, and its political and economic aftermath in the United States and Britain stimulated their public interests and changed their private lives. Both women saw Britain and America irrevocably altered by the effects of intra-national conflict and its attendant debates on constitutional reform, popular sovereignty, the moral and commercial

<sup>1</sup> MOW to CM, July 1789, MOWP1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

dimensions of imperialism, and the meanings of national character. Macaulay and Warren felt that as women of learning they had a particular role to play in such debates. They were confident in the political acumen that meant they might intervene, writing letters and pamphlets, treatises and poems, which achieved different kinds of public circulation and acclaim. They also argued that their gender itself qualified them to produce what both described (with characteristic self-assurance) as the definitive republican histories of their respective nations. In their different ways, using a language of sentiment or affection, of learning or profession, both argued, in an era when public history was regarded as a definitively 'masculine' genre, that women made the best historians. Warren and Macaulay saw themselves, as women and as writers, at the intellectual heart of Atlantic political culture.

This book looks at why this was the case. The second part of my introduction sets out the critical and theoretical bases of this project in some detail. I shall begin, though, with a short biography of the revolutionary friendship of Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren.

### *I Friends and Republicans*

The third of thirteen children, Mercy Warren was born on 14 September 1728 into one of Massachusetts' most prominent, wealthy families.<sup>3</sup> Catharine Macaulay was born three years later to a family no less prominent in England's south-east.<sup>4</sup> Warren's grandfather, John Otis, had

<sup>3</sup> Only seven of Warren's brothers and sisters survived their childhoods. My account of Warren's life draws on Rosemarie Zagari's short biography, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1995), and Jean Fritz, *Cast for a Revolution: Some American Friends and Enemies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). On Warren's writing, the best and most comprehensive account is Jeffrey Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Twayne, 1995). Other useful accounts of Warren in this context include: Katharine Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution: The Life of Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Doubleday, 1958); Maud McDonald Hutcheson, 'Mercy Warren, 1728-1814', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 10 (1953), 378-402; Marianne B. Geiger, 'Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: Historians in the Transatlantic Republican Tradition', Ph.D. Diss. (New York University, 1986), Mary Elizabeth Regan, 'Pundit and Prophet of the Old Republic: The Life and Times of Mercy Otis Warren, 1728-1814', Ph.D. Diss. (American University, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> My account of Macaulay's life owes much to the ground-breaking scholarship of Bridget Hill, *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Other useful accounts of Macaulay in this context include: Mildred Chaffee Beckwith, 'Catharine Macaulay: Eighteenth-Century Rebel', Ph.D.

been an agent for the New England Company and a key member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in the early eighteenth century. He was Barnstable's leading merchant and, in his lifetime, tripled his family's assets through his canny management of the trade in herring, whale oil, and box iron, as well as more luxury colonial commodities like mohair and plate.<sup>5</sup> As John Otis rose to economic eminence in provincial Massachusetts, Catharine Macaulay's grandfather, Jacob Sawbridge, became embroiled as an MP and director in the disastrous collapse of the South Sea scheme. His expropriated assets did remarkably little damage to the estate that enabled his family to figure large in the political life of the Kentish countryside and the City of London.<sup>6</sup> The family fortunes of both women were rooted firmly in the imperial commercial mechanisms of which their writing later offered such important critiques.

While Mercy Warren's biographers have stressed the rigorous gravity of her parents and the industry to which she was encouraged as a child, it would be hard to miss the sense of entitlement as well.<sup>7</sup> The household in which Warren lived until her marriage included a black slave and a host of indentured Indian servants whose debts and labour maintained the fortunes of colonial merchant families like hers.<sup>8</sup> Less the stable 'little

Diss. (Ohio State University, 1953); Florence and William Boos, 'Catharine Macaulay: Historian and Political Reformer', *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 3 (1980), 49–65; Lucy-Martin Donnelly, 'The Celebrated Mrs Macaulay', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 6 (1949), 172–207; Geiger, 'Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren'; Carla Hay, 'Catharine Macaulay and the American Revolution', *The Historian*, 56 (1994), 301–16; Bridget Hill, 'Daughter and Mother: Some New Light on Catharine Macaulay and her Family', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22 (1999), 35–49; Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, '"The Brood-Hen of Faction": Mrs Macaulay and Radical Politics, 1765–75', *Albion*, 11 (1979), 33–45; Susan Staves, '"The Liberty of a She-Subject of England": Rights Rhetoric and the Female Thucydides', *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, 1 (1989), 161–83.

<sup>5</sup> On John Otis, see John Waters, *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 59. See also David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), and Gary Nash, *Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> On Jacob Sawbridge and the South Sea Bubble, see Hill, *Republican Virago*, 5; Geiger, 'Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren', 21–6 and John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London: Cresset Press, 1960), 34–6, 110–17.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*; Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*; Fritz, *Cast for a Revolution*.

<sup>8</sup> James Otis (senior's) legal duties notoriously included the 'guardianship' of the Wampanoag, against the inequities of which Mashpee was established as an autonomous

commonwealth' than a family unit defined by the disputes between the native and colonial populations which her father and uncle oversaw, it was perhaps inevitable that Warren would later adopt a critique of Indian affairs that differed from that of her male relatives.<sup>9</sup> Always close to her brother James, Warren was educated alongside him in the home of her uncle, Jonathan Russell. Though she was not introduced to the classical languages that would qualify the male Otises for their Harvard educations, Warren read very widely, was encouraged to write creatively, and developed there that interest in republican political theory and history that would remain a lifelong preoccupation.

Unlike Warren's, Catharine Macaulay's education was often described as a matter more of accident than design. At their impressive home at Olantigh, the daughters of John Sawbridge received little formal instruction. Macaulay and her sister were left to the care of a governess, and it was later said that they were never encouraged in any activity beyond the narrow expectations of their rank and sex.<sup>10</sup> Her dedicated and solitary pursuit of her own interests in classical history and politics from the volumes of her father's extensive library (and, no doubt, from the rectory at nearby Godersham from where she also borrowed books) has very often been mythologized (and not least by herself), yet

district in 1763. On the Wampanoag's petition against James Otis and Sylvanus Bourne, see Francis G. Hutchins, *Mashpee: The Story of Cape Cod's Indian Town* (Tilton: Amarta Press, 1979), 72–3. See also Amelia Bingham, *Mashpee: Land of the Wampanoags* (Mashpee, Mass.: Mashpee Historical Commission, 1970), 39, Marion Vuilleumeir, *Indians on Olde Cape Cod* (Taunton: Sullwold Publishing, 1970), 58. On Indian indenture in eighteenth-century Cape Cod, see David Silverman, 'The Impact of Indentured Servitude on the Society and Culture of Southern New England Indians, 1680–1810', *New England Quarterly*, 74 (2001), 623–66, and '“We Chuse to be Bounded”: Native American Animal Husbandry in Colonial New England', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 60 (2003), 511–49. As Silverman writes, 'the best way to press Indians into service was to allow them to run up debts with English merchants, then demand the balance and bring them to court when they could not pay . . . Indians became increasingly dependent on store credit for clothing and sustenance.' One of these stores was Otis's in Barnstable. Silverman, 'Indians and Indentured Servitude', 625. The female servant whose death Mercy Warren mourned in 1771 (after her marriage and her move to Plymouth) was evidently Indian.

<sup>9</sup> Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 8. Zagarri is citing John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). See my discussion of Warren's account of, and interest in, American Indians in her *History* in Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Hays, *Female Biography, or, Memoirs of Illustrious Women, Alphabetically Arranged*, 6 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1803), v. 289.



Macaulay's struggle to acquire the intellectual independence she coveted and claimed is undoubted.<sup>11</sup> In later life, she criticized the deep inequalities of male and female education; denounced 'those to whose care my infancy was committed', and wrote with understandable resentment of 'the unremitting industry... necessary to the task of cultivating ones own mind and the pursuing and undertaking science in a girl's place without a guide'.<sup>12</sup>

Macaulay's 'natural love of freedom' and the analogous appeal she found in 'the annals of the Roman and Greek republics' may well have been represented as spontaneous and unintentional, yet her intellectual interests were clearly influenced by a shared familial identity.<sup>13</sup> The attraction of particular kinds of political and historical writing to the young Macaulay and Warren was self-consciously bound up with the brands of oppositional Whiggism their families had espoused by mid-century. As the Otises pitted themselves against Thomas Hutchinson's embattled loyalism, so the Sawbridges maintained the virtue of distance from the disappointing capitulations of a Pulteney or a Chatham.<sup>14</sup> If family meant that both women associated themselves with the legacy of the commonwealthmen, then marriage afforded both an environment in which such political identifications flourished.<sup>15</sup> As I suggest in discussions of George Macaulay and James Warren later in this book, part of the evident assurance Macaulay and Warren felt as political writers in the 1760s and 1770s was derived from partners who were so thoroughly

<sup>11</sup> See, for example [unattrib.], 'Account of the Life of Mrs Catharine Macaulay Graham', *European Magazine and London Review*, 4 (1783), 330, and Hays, *Female Biography*. See also Hill, *Republican Virago*, 10. An intriguing later representation of Macaulay's self-directed education is found in Joseph Johnson, *Clever Girls of our Time and how they Became Famous Women* (London: Gall and Inglis, 1888). I discuss Macaulay's account of her own education in the 'Introduction' to her *History* in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> Science here carries the broader eighteenth-century sense of knowledge in general. CM, *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London: E. & C. Dilly, 1790), 30; CM to Ralph Griffith, Nov. 1790, GLC. There is a useful account of Macaulay's and Griffith's exchange by Devoney Looser, "'Those Historical Laurels which Once Graced My Brow are Now in their Wane': Catharine Macaulay's Last Years and Legacy", *Studies in Romanticism*, 42 (2003), 203–25.

<sup>13</sup> CM, *HE MS*, vol. i, introduction.

<sup>14</sup> On the Otises and Hutchinson, see Fritz, *Cast for a Revolution*, and Bernard Baylin, *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974). On the Sawbridges and William Pultney, see Hill, *Republican Virago*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* [1959] (New York: Athenaeum Press, 1968).