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An Analysis of Angelica Kauffman's Cornelia and Penelope Paintings as they Relate to Female Enlightenment Ideals

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AN ANALYSIS OF ANGELICA KAUFFMAN'S CORNELIA AND PENELOPE
PAINTINGS AS THEY RELATE TO FEMALE ENLIGHTENMENT IDEALS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by
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B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2010
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To my family, Mom, Nick, Tuna, and Muffin.

Most especially to my Fava Bean, even though you missed the end, I know you are always here.

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And the most special thanks goes to my dad, my Fava Bean, Tim. I dedicate this paper to you because you always pushed me to be my very best, you made sure to send me to see the art I loved, and I know you have been with me throughout this entire process.

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ABSTRACT

The neoclassical art movement exemplified the ideals formulated by German scholar and antiquarian Johan Winckelmann by portraying heroes who exhibited self-sacrifice, honor and duty to the state. Almost inevitably both painters and their subjects were male. However, at the same time female artists were depicting classical heroines in a similar fashion. Angelica Kauffman, a Swiss born artist, was able to combine Winckelmann's thoughts with Enlightenment ideals of the eighteenth century regarding women. When examined in tandem, her numerous canvases which portray Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi and Penelope, Wife of Odysseus illustrate Enlightenment ideals. The character of Cornelia, exemplifies independence, the importance of education for women, and women's ever increasing dedication to their children and motherhood. Penelope also shows independence and the necessity of education, but her character focuses more on women as respectful and respected wives within the marital sphere. By creating paintings that exhibited these notions, Kauffman portrayed her own Enlightenment leanings.

INTRODUCTION

Neoclassical art is best known for its virile and masculine paintings created by Jacques-Louis David and his followers before, during, and after the French Revolution. The style's development relied heavily on the writings of Johan Joachim Winckelmann, a German art scholar who established the basis of modern art history. Noted Winckelmann scholar, Alex Potts, explains:

From the moment of its publication in 1764,... *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*... had a far-reaching impact on the artistic and literary culture of the late Enlightenment. Its apologia for a purified and simplified Greek ideal in art played a formative role in that it intensified engagement with the sculpture of Greek and Roman antiquity we now designate as neoclassicism.¹

Winckelmann's system of classification and subdivision of various historical styles into rise, peak, and decline laid the foundation for many art historical studies into the modern era.² However, it was his focus on the noble ideals and intentions that spoke most clearly to contemporary men, especially painters of the time. Artists such as David began depicting scenes taken from classical sources, with characters who were faced with critical decisions, frequently having to sacrifice individual happiness for the betterment of the state. While neoclassicism was a more masculine style, there was a growing number of budding female artists who were able to take this very dignified and elevated style and make it their own.

One such female artist was Angelica Kauffman. From an early age this Swiss born artist received attention and praise for her ability with a paintbrush, attaining many

¹ Alex Potts, introduction to Johan Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2006): 1.

² Ibid., 1-5.

prestigious honors, which, even for a man of similar caliber, were impressive. Her upbringing, overseen mostly by her widowed father, was vastly different from that of other girls of the time. Instead of participating in games and learning “womanly crafts,” Kauffman chose to pursue a career in the art of painting. An artist himself, her father was eager to oblige her wishes, and he strove to help her make every connection she would require to succeed.

For the majority of her life Angelica Kauffman lived in Italy, with a brief sojourn in England, due to her enormous popularity among British patrons. To the Italians she was most notably a fine portraitist. The English also appreciated her portraits, but Britain granted her something that Italy could not: the opportunity to be a founding member of the Royal Academy and more importantly a history painter of significance. It was through her history paintings, created in a neoclassical style, that Kauffman was able to elevate feminine morality, as an alternative to the masculine virtues of her male contemporaries.

Kauffman was able to pursue her particular lifestyle due to advanced, Enlightenment ideals regarding women’s rights that were promoted during the preceding century. It was because of the Enlightenment that women were able to begin taking a vested interest in their own futures. Those women who were at the forefront of this movement were allowed and encouraged to pursue higher education and greater degrees of financial independence. Even lower class women began to travel and participate in leisurely indulgences that had been previously limited to men and high born women. Angelica Kauffman was also influenced by new Enlightenment ideas regarding marriage, motherhood and the family unit.

Specifically, Kauffman's paintings depicting Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, and Penelope, Wife of Odysseus, feature strong female protagonists who bring to life dignified and morally inspiring tales of war and honor from a woman's perspective. They also serve to express new enlightened perspectives regarding women's roles of wives and mothers. These paintings, made during the latter part of the eighteenth century, were at the time revolutionary due to their portrayal of heroic women. While there have been a number of other women artists to have embraced a feminine point of view, Kauffman has had a significant impact because of her decision to portray Cornelia and Penelope as heroines numerous times in her oeuvre – for various patrons and at various points in her career.

CHAPTER 1: ANGELICA KAUFFMAN'S EARLY LIFE: A WOMAN BY CHANCE, AN ARTIST BY CHOICE

Angelica Kauffman was born in 1741 in Switzerland to Johann Joseph Kauffman and his second wife, Cleofa Lucin Kauffman. Kauffman's father, a painter himself, trained her in the basics of drawing and painting by allowing her to work beside him and reproduce his work.³ According to Kauffman's biographer Gerard, her skill developed very rapidly under the supervision of her father. "It happened in this case, as it has happened often before, that an indifferent or mediocre artist has produced a pupil of astonishing merit."⁴ Her talent was evident from an early age, as she would often copy from her father's models in his studio. Instead of copying the words and letters into her copy book, she would copy the scroll work on the sides of the page. By the time she was nine she was painting in oil and began neglecting play time in order to pursue her knowledge of art.⁵

Angelica's early life was filled with traveling due to her father's work. When her family moved to Milan in 1754, she was allowed to copy from the Old Masters, a privilege that was all but unheard of for a woman. Rumor of her talent soon reached the Governor of Milan and his wife decided to sit for Angelica for a portrait. This event

³ As noted by Roworth, the correct spelling of the last name is Kauffman, which is how the artist herself spelt it. Manners and Williamson, p.9, addressed this issue and chose to use the double "n" spelling, for they claimed "it seems to be the more accurate fashion, as it certainly is the accepted one." I am choosing to utilize the singular 'n' version, due to the dated nature of the Manners and Williamson book.

⁴ Frances A. Gerard, *Angelica Kauffman: A Biography* (London, Ward and Downey): 4.

⁵ Victoria Manners, *Angelica Kauffman, R. A. Her Life and Her Works* (New York, Hacker Art Books): 9.

sparked a number of other well-known Milanese citizens to take an interest in her skill, which gained her access to many private collections of her choice.⁶

Kauffman's mother passed away in 1757 while the family was still living in Milan. Madame Kauffman's death took an emotional toll on her husband and daughter and they decided to leave Milan. Without her mother present to restrain her, Angelica developed a large ego, which, according to Victoria Manners, made her a difficult young woman:

There is little doubt that the death of Madame Kauffmann at that particular moment was a most unfortunate circumstance for the child, because her father was not at all a wise man, and was so excited by the precocious skill of his daughter, and by the manner in which she was attracting the attention of the important people of the district and bringing in money to the family purse, that he gave her far too much freedom and flattered her pride too great an extent.⁷

In 1762, while she and her father were in Florence, she was allowed to copy in a private room in the Uffizi and was also accepted as a member of Florence's Accademia del Disegno, both great honors, especially for a woman.⁸ Father and daughter subsequently travelled to Rome in 1763, where she met the German scholar, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who served as antiquarian to Cardinal Albani, and closely collaborated with the painter Raffael Mengs.⁹ This association, particularly with Winckelmann, proved to be crucial to Kauffman's development as an artist. Kauffman's

⁶ Ibid., 10-11. However, according to Manners and Williamson, there may have been another woman who was allowed to copy with her.

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ Wendy Wassyng Roworth, "Kauffman and the art of Painting in England," *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London, Reaktion Books, 1993): 85-95.

⁹ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 14.

friendship with these men gave her access to some of the greatest collections in Rome and a wealth of important personal connections, as well as to the latest finds, ideals, and popular trends in fashionable society.

Not only was Kauffman very talented as a painter, but she also excelled in music. She possessed such skill in both disciplines that, by the time she reached her teenage years, she felt she had to choose between the two to pursue her future profession. Unsure of which to pick, she consulted her local priest, who told her that while music would be more lucrative, it would also pose a greater threat to her religion. He also said that painting would eventually bring greater rewards, but might take longer to achieve greatness.¹⁰ Wendy Wassyng Roworth notes that Kauffman's biographer Giovanni De Rossi felt particularly inclined to relay this story because other young ladies of the time would not have been concerned with choosing a career. The inclusion of the story portrayed Kauffman in a positive light, showing that she was "hard-working and ambitious" but also ensured that she was viewed as a "proper" lady.¹¹

She commemorated this decision later in life with her *Self Portrait: Hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting* from 1791 (Figure 1). The subject was based on the theme "The Choice, or Judgment, of Hercules" wherein Hercules had to choose between Pleasure, who offered him an easy life, and Virtue, who offered him a difficult but overall more glorious life. Naturally, being the hero that he was, he chose Virtue.¹² This story was also treated by the Italian Baroque painter Annibale Carracci in his *The Choice of Hercules* (Figure 2), from 1596, for the ceiling of Cardinal Farnese's family

¹⁰ G.G. De Rossi, *Vita di Angelica Kaufman* (Florence, 1810):16-18.

¹¹ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 15.

¹² Xenophon, *Memorabilia*. II, i. 22



Figure 1: Angelica Kauffman, *Self-Portrait Hesitating between the Arts of Music and Painting*, 1791, oil on canvas, 147 x 216 cm, The St. Oswald Collection, Nostell Priory. (The National Trust)

villa. Given Kauffman's extensive travels throughout Italy, there can be no doubt that she was familiar with Annibale Carracci's paintings. Victoria Manners even points out that, "In July, 1756, [Kauffman] was again in Bologna, attracted by the works of the various members of the Carracci family..."¹³ There are indeed several similarities between Annibale's painting and Kauffman's.

The Choice of Hercules (Figure 2) features a static, rigid, frontal nude of the hero seated on a rock between the allegorical female figures of Virtue and Pleasure. Pleasure stands to the right, her back to the viewer, draped in a diaphanous robe. She glances to Hercules and presents him with symbols of merriment and excess. Virtue,

¹³ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 15.

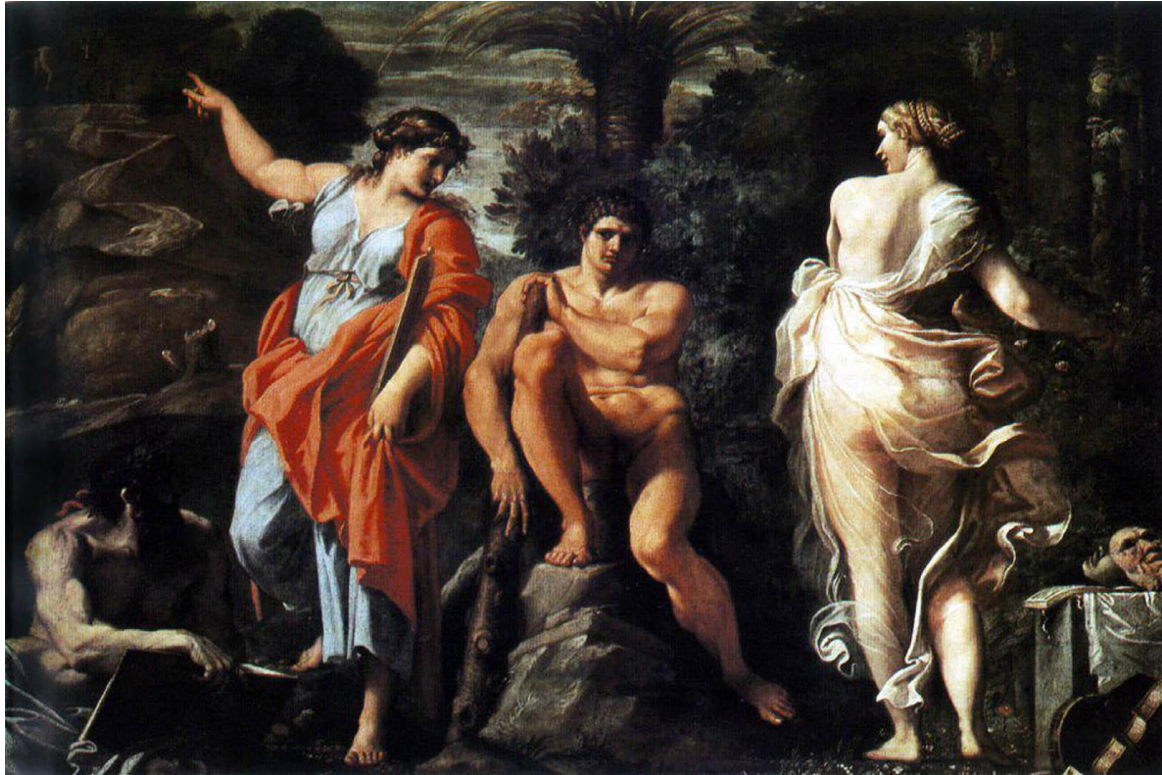


Figure 2: Annibale Carracci, *The Choice of Hercules*, 1596, oil on canvas, 167 x 273 cm, National Museum of Capidimonte, Naples.

standing to the left and garbed in a blue dress and vibrant red shawl, faces the viewer and fixes her stern gaze upon Hercules and points to the more difficult, but ultimately more rewarding path.

Kauffman places herself in the role of Hercules, with Music as Pleasure and Painting as Virtue. She chose Painting, the more difficult, but also more rewarding, of the two. Kauffman's figures of the two allegorical women are reminiscent of Annibale's. While both figures are dressed closer to the fashion of Kauffman's own time, she chose to portray Virtue wearing the same colored garments, but also mimicked the pose, as she, too, points to the more difficult road up the mountain. However, it is important to note that at the time, music was seen as the more "proper" and elevating choice between the two for aristocratic women, and by denying it, she chose to place herself in

the sphere of the male painter.¹⁴ Equally important is the notion of a woman deciding for herself to have a career, an idea that was only possible because of the ground work of the Enlightenment discourse of the previous century. But Kauffman went one step further by foregoing a life that would define her as a wife and mother. Her self-directed choice between two different careers would have been inconceivable for most of her female contemporaries.

In 1765 Angelica Kaufman went to Venice and met Bridget Lady Wentworth, wife of the British Consul John Murray, who took a marked interest in Kauffman's skills and offered to take her back to England. Kauffman jumped at the opportunity in hopes that the move would prove profitable for her because the Italians were not buying or commissioning as much art as she would have liked, and it was instead the English visitors on the Grand Tour who were her most faithful patrons.¹⁵ The timing of her arrival could not have been better, as she was chosen by Sir Joshua Reynolds to be one of only two women who were included as founding members of the British Royal Academy.¹⁶ Both Kauffman and fellow female founder, Mary Moser, were even included in the portrait of the founding members, but only appear as oval portraits placed on the wall, emphasizing their inability to attend regular model sessions and classes with their fellow members.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 16. Roworth notes that a visit to Kauffman's studio became a must do for those participating in the Grand Tour, which is significant since most contributing in the Grand Tour were well to do young men. It is an interesting point to note that Kauffman, as a female artist, would be considered important enough to warrant a spot in their schedules.

¹⁵ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 15-16.

¹⁶ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 38.

¹⁷ Gerard, *Angelica Kauffman*, 116.



Figure 3: Angelica Kauffman, *Augusta, Duchess of Brunswick*, 1767, oil on canvas, Royal Collection, Buckingham Palace.

One of Kauffman's earliest and most notable commissions while she was in England was a large state portrait from 1767 of *Augusta, Duchess of Brunswick, George III's Sister* (Figure 3). Kauffman wisely chose to model the portrait of the Princess from an existing Greek allegorical statue of Peace holding Wealth. This choice is alluded to in the foreground of the painting by a small homage to the original, painted as a relief sculpture on an urn, depicting Mars, Venus, and Cupid signifying Love's victory over

War.¹⁸ The Duchess is painted standing in the middle of the composition, dressed in a pristine white dress, trimmed in elaborate gold embroidery. Draped over her shoulder is a gold and blue sash, which flows down her back and comes to rest and gathers on the ground at her feet. On the right of the composition is her child, covered in a diaphanous garment, and seated on a plush red cloth, atop a classical pedestal.

It seems that this painting was meant to bring the King's attention to Kauffman's work, an undertaking which met with success, since the King of England's mother, the Princess of Wales, personally paid a visit to Kauffman's studio in order to see the completed portrait.¹⁹ This event marked the beginning of collaboration with a long line of highly esteemed patrons, who would continue to support and commission work from Kauffman for the rest of her career.

Throughout her early life, Kauffman was well known for her flirtatious habits. Her list of possible romantic attachments includes Nathaniel Dance, Joshua Reynolds, the Duke of Devonshire, printmaker William Ryland, and revolutionary journalist Jean-Paul Marat. With such a large number of impressive suitors, it may seem surprising that she entered into her infamously scandalous marriage to a man known as "Count Frederic de Horn."

De Horn's true name was Brandt. He is suspected to have been a valet of the actual Count Frederic de Horn, who resided in Sweden, and learned that his master was planning a trip to London. Brandt left a year ahead of the real De Horn, with papers, money, and clothes, all taken from the Count, which enabled him to

¹⁸ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 33.

¹⁹ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 24.

impersonate his master. When he finally met and befriended Kauffman, he would often arrive at her house in grand splendor. No one suspected him of not being who he claimed. He asserted that because he had not put in the proper appearances at court in Sweden, the Count's home country, he fell out of graces in his native land and would soon be summoned back to face the consequences of his neglect. He convinced Angelica that if she would marry him and make a case before the Queen of England as his wife, he would certainly be spared.²⁰ Angelica legally married him on November 22, 1767, insisting on a Catholic ceremony. This condition only added to the secrecy of the whole affair because, according to Manners, "the penal laws [which] were in force in 1767...[made it] a crime for any Catholic priest to marry two [Catholics], punishable with death...[or] with imprisonment...[T]here must have been large fees paid to have induced the priest to carry out this ceremony."²¹ Her father knew nothing of her marriage until it had already taken place, but thereafter was quick to raise his concerns with Angelica regarding the Count.

The truth of the "Count's" identity, according to Manners, was uncovered because of the Queen of England's intervention. When the Queen heard of the marriage she told Angelica that she would like to see her husband at court. The imposter Count offered up a number of excuses: "His baggage had not arrived, that he was waiting for a friend, a Swede of high rank, who would present him at Court; also that some of his remittances had gone astray and he was not in a position... to make his appearance in satisfactory fashion."²² Not long after this scene, the real Count

²⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

²¹ Ibid., 30-31.

²² Ibid., 31.

Frederick de Horn arrived and all was revealed. Brandt was in actuality, according to De Rossi, an illegitimate son of the Count de Horn's, and thus he was able to produce money, jewels, and proper paperwork to keep up his charade.²³

After numerous attempts at extortion and threats, a certificate of separation was signed and the ordeal was finally over. However, Angelica Kauffman never officially annulled her marriage until Brandt was near death and she was trying to marry another man, Antonio Zucchi. Roworth believes that it was possibly because of Angelica's "scandalous" first marriage that she could live her life outside the social constraint of nuptials. "Kauffman in effect exempted herself from the traditional expectations of love followed by marriage and family, a situation that would likely have curtailed the high aspirations and heavy workload she maintained."²⁴ It is also noteworthy that even though she was involved in a scandal, it did not interfere with her relationships with her high society patrons or her success.

In 1781, she married fellow painter Antonio Zucchi, and they returned to Italy with her father.²⁵ On their journey to Naples the trio stopped in Venice, where her father became very ill. He succumbed to his illness in January of 1782. Kauffman's grief was severe. On their way to Naples, the Zucchi's stopped in Rome to arrange for their home to be prepared. Once these affairs were arranged they continued on to Naples.²⁶

²³ Ibid., 32.

²⁴ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 14.

²⁵ Ibid., 87.

²⁶ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 65.

Upon their arrival, the Neapolitan Queen Maria Carolina took great interest in Kauffman and her work and commissioned the creation of a number of paintings, including a royal family portrait. Kauffman was also asked to instruct the princess in drawing and was even offered the position of court painter, although she declined in order to maintain her independence.²⁷ She returned to Rome and was able to continue painting with the assistance of her husband, who was “a man of good personal taste, and of more than average intelligence and cultivation, so that he was able to advise her in her compositions, besides being always at hand as a tactful critic.”²⁸ She lived and worked in Rome almost exclusively, save for a few sojourns elsewhere, until her death on November 5, 1807 at the age of 66.²⁹

²⁷ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 87.

²⁸ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

CHAPTER 2: ENLIGHTENMENT IDEALS AND IMAGES OF WOMEN

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was a seventeenth- and eighteenth- century intellectual movement that emphasized logic and reason as opposed to earlier beliefs which relied heavily on superstition and faith. New Enlightenment ideals focused on the individual: a person's happiness, independence, equality, and the freedom of speech and thought. Fueled by the previous discoveries of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment movement expanded rapidly and influenced many writers and philosophers to comment on and add to the zeitgeist of the Enlightenment. Writings by thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, as well as the crucial *L'Encyclopédie*, all made significant impacts on the ideas which governed new societal norms.³⁰

While the earliest stages of the Enlightenment movement focused almost exclusively on men, it developed into a way of thinking that encompassed all people's equality. The ideas of universal happiness and equality led to powerful and intellectual women of the time expressing their desires for women's rights. Female writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Berry chose to address issues that they felt needed particular attention from a feminine point of view. They put pen to paper and set out to insure that women were included in these new freedoms. Women decided that they,

³⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Introduction" in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia Spencer et al. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984): 1-29.

too, were entitled to adventure, leisurely excursions, independence, education, and involvement in the arts. Moreover, women gained a newfound respect for their role as mothers and wives.

The success of the Age of Enlightenment can also be attributed to “enlightened” rulers of a number of countries and kingdoms of Europe. The Enlightenment writers and philosophers had a tremendous impact on monarchs such as Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, Stanislaus Poniatowski of Poland, and Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, among others. These sovereigns all sought to utilize Enlightenment ideals to reform their governments and continue to hold their position of supreme power. With the increasing popularity of the Enlightenment and rationality, some rulers were attempting to distance themselves from the idea of divine right and move toward legitimizing their rule through rational means of “social contract” or “covenant.” Early Enlightenment writer Thomas Hobbes established the foundation for what would become “social contract” theory in *Leviathan*:

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend [the citizens] from invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another... is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of man... to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things that concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, everyone to his will, and their judgments to his judgment.³¹

³¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 114. Hobbes created *Leviathan* in reaction to the earlier English Civil War and 30 Years War.

It is this theory that would inspire Rousseau's own *Social Contract* wherein he espouses a similar need for an absolute sovereign: "Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole."³² Rulers took this Enlightenment idea of the need for a sovereign to legitimize their current position. However, others interpreted these works, as Rousseau intended, as calls for a more democratic basis of sovereign legitimacy. This ultimately led to conflict between the classes.

The rapid spread of Enlightenment ideals can also be attributed to technological advances allowing for faster and easier travel. Leisurely trips to other countries had taken on an increased role in the lives of young aristocratic men during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These trips, referred to as the Grand Tour, became an integral part of young men's journeys into adulthood by broadening the youths' horizons and opening their minds to new experiences. Furthermore, many of these young men would seek out Enlightenment philosophers in an effort to meet and discuss ideas with them. Eventually, women also sought the enlightening effects of making the Grand Tour. According to Brian Dolan in *Ladies of the Grand Tour*:

Travel and the knowledge collected along the way gave currency to the metaphor of 'the path to enlightenment'. By the end of the eighteenth century, the term was taken much more literally, and directed many women in their quests for improvement to the Continent. Letters and journals recorded their responses to life abroad, and in turn their

³² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*. Book 1. 6. The Social Compact.

discoveries about themselves. Travel writing, which included letters written home, presented a rare opportunity for Georgian women to articulate views on the world around them and their responses to it.³³

The exposure to new places and foreign ideals provided women with a renewed sense of curiosity and entitlement towards self-betterment. This included financial independence, as a few women published their writings for use as travel guides and for other ladies seeking adventure. These guides detailed how travel could enhance women's status in sophisticated circles by helping them gain an appreciation of classical literature and languages and making them more "marketable" as wives upon their return. In addition to increasing women's desirability, travel had the added benefit of helping women realize the value of education. "Travel helped women to develop views on the opportunities and right to education."³⁴

The ideas surrounding women's education before the Enlightenment were conceived entirely by men, particularly men of the church. It was a popular practice among upper class families to send their daughters to convents, where they received their education, but what they learned within these establishments had little to do with scholarly learning and instead focused on religious dogma. Critics of the monastic educational system included Voltaire, Diderot, and *L'Encyclopédie*, among a majority of Enlightened thinkers who considered the instruction provided to these girls to be

³³ Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

irrelevant, outdated, and inefficient. They also agreed that the church was trying to keep its firm grip on its members by creating over-zealous, ignorant women, without appreciation for reason or thought.³⁵

According to Samia Spencer the pedagogical authorities of the time, including Fénélon, author of *L'Education des filles* and Mme de Maintenon, the owner and operator of the Maison Royal de Saint Louis à Saint Cyr:

rejected the role of woman as idle social being and proposed a new identity – that of virtuous wife, devoted mother, and knowledgeable homemaker who spreads happiness to those around her. They emphasized the importance of moral virtues and strength – qualities that they believed did not come naturally to women.³⁶

The alternative to monastic teaching methods required mothers to teach their daughters from home, in the domestic arts and other practical skills that were needed to keep a home functioning smoothly and to make its members happy. For many Enlightened thinkers this manner of education was preferred since it offered some degree of logical and useful knowledge, as opposed to a limited religious education. However, Rousseau, who agreed that a religious education was not ideal, also opposed mothers teaching their children from home because children needed to be free of their mother's influence.³⁷ What was a certainty, as expressed by Montesquieu by means of

³⁵ Samia Spencer, "Women and Education," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia Spencer et al (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984): 89.

³⁶ Ibid., 84.

³⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation* (Paris, Garnier, 1961): 457.

his *Lettres persanes*, was that “beauty gave women a source of natural ascendancy, that their talents have been repressed by lack of education, and that men exercised over women a tyrannical power established by force.”³⁸

It was not until the later years of the Enlightenment that women such as Mary Berry and Mary Wollstonecraft, began to express their interest in their education and to insist upon improving educational standards for all women. Berry, appalled at the deplorable state of women’s education, wrote to a friend: “Considering the education given to women and the subsequent almost necessary idleness of both mind and body, I am only astonished that they are not more ignorant, weaker, and more perverse than they are.”³⁹ And in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written in 1794, in response to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand’s new plan for national education in France, which completely excluded women, she dismissed writings that “rendered women [as] objects of pity.”⁴⁰ The excluded writings comprised Rousseau’s *Emile* and Dr. James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women*, which encouraged women to be meek, timid, and complacent.⁴¹ It is because of women such as Berry and Wollstonecraft, among other, that women were beginning to be able to seek higher aims in education. Not only was there a sharp increase in literacy among women, but they

³⁸ Pauline Kra, “Montesquieu and Women,” in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia Spencer et al (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984): 273. See also *Lettres Persians* by Montesquieu, letter 38 for full text.

³⁹ Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001): 18-19.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁴¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Chapter 5. And Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 60-62. There is also written evidence, in the form of personal letters, that Kauffman was a close friend of Dr. James Fordyce.

were also able to pursue studies in such masculine dominated fields such as math, physics, and algebra.⁴² The Enlightenment gave women the right to an equal education and the power to decide what would make them happiest in their lives.

Near the end of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment ideals were changing the way aristocratic families saw marriage. Previously, marriages were arranged by parents in order to attain better social status, money, and power. According to Cisse Fairchilds, “it is not surprising, then, that seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century noblewomen found little emotional fulfillment in marriage.”⁴³ However, when the radical idea of marrying for love and pursuing individual happiness in accordance with Enlightenment ideals finally reached the upper classes, domestic tranquility increased. These ideas led to the development of the nuclear family as well as, (presumably) happier relationships.⁴⁴ Even marriages that were still arranged during the Age of the Enlightenment saw an improvement in the treatment of women. There was, for instance, a drastic drop in domestic violence and increasing public displays of affection. The overall happiness between couples also led to the idealization of motherhood and marital fidelity.⁴⁵

In previous centuries, having children was often an arduous and life-threatening experience, not only for the child, but the mother as well. There was also a significant chance that if the child survived the birthing process, he or she would not make it to adulthood. In addition to the dangers of motherhood, the upper classes were

⁴² Spencer, “Women and Education,” 93.

⁴³ Cisse Fairchilds, “Women and Family,” in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia Spencer et al (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984): 98.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97-98.

⁴⁵ Fairchilds, “Women and Family,” 100.

apprehensive regarding the unseemly tasks involved in child rearing. Cisse Fairchilds described the negative feelings regarding these tasks and how fashionable society dealt with it:

Until the late eighteenth century, it had been considered vulgar for aristocratic mothers to take too great an interest in the dirty and smelly tasks of child rearing. Immediately after birth, babies were handed over to wet nurses, who often starved and neglected them. When they returned home, they passed into the hands of other hired servants..."⁴⁶

Due to advances in the medical field, the process of giving birth was a less excruciating process. People were having fewer children and the average family size decreased from nine members. Doctors were more frequently found in birthing rooms, instead of midwives, which led to women being better medicated to and a decrease in death during labor.⁴⁷ These factors all contributed to women birthing fewer children, less often, which made children more precious. Also because of better diets and a decrease in famines and plagues, children had much greater chances of living to adulthood so mothers were able to bond with their offspring. According to Cisse Fairchilds, "Noblewomen, like almost everyone else in the eighteenth century viewed maternity as the most fulfilling experience a woman could have."⁴⁸

These enlightened ideals regarding women are what saturated the thought processes and intellectual currency of Angelica Kauffman's time. It is only because of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁷ For a concise understanding of child rearing see David Hunt, *Parents and Children in History* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 100-132.

⁴⁸ Fairchilds, "Women and Family," 100.

the Enlightenment's presence that Kauffman was able to fully pursue the life and career that she chose as well as create paintings that celebrate women who personify Enlightenment ideals.

CHAPTER 3: KAUFFMAN'S PAINTINGS OF CORNELIA: THE IDEAL MOTHER

Angelica Kauffman created three versions of *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*, for three different patrons during the eighteenth century. Each version was paired with companion paintings and tailored to the specific needs of her patrons. The first version was made for George Bowles in 1785, the second, was created for Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, also in 1785, and the third and final version was created for Prince Stanislaus Poniatowski, nephew of the King of Poland in 1788. Kauffman's paintings of Cornelia differ from contemporary depictions of the subject because of the maternal connotations that Kauffman was able to project into the work as opposed to the fraternal aspects that dominated versions painted by men. It is this distinction that has allowed her renderings to emerge as the most iconic representations of the subject. Cornelia has long been considered the ideal mother because of her unwavering devotion to her children above all else. However, Kauffman's treatment of the subject in terms of its strong maternal qualities was only possible because of Enlightenment ideals regarding motherhood as women's most rewarding and fulfilling role in society. In addition, the closeness of mothers and their children and a mother's devotion to their education also stemmed from progressive Enlightenment ideas. It is through Kauffman's utilization of such themes that her paintings solidified the character of Cornelia in the social consciousness of society as an Enlightenment figure.

The story of Cornelia is recorded in a number of classical texts, including Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*. The daughter of a well-to-do Roman family, Cornelia was married to Tiberius Gracchus Major, a prominent Roman citizen. While there was a significant gap in the couple's ages, it is generally accepted that they

were happy together and had a total of 12 children, although only three made it past childhood. Cornelia's main goal in her life was to raise her sons and to educate them so as to ensure their success in life and to make them upstanding citizens and rulers of Rome. She succeeded at this endeavor, which is evident by the popularity of her sons as government officials and reformers. The anecdote most frequently cited regarding Cornelia concerns the tale of a fellow noble woman who paid a visit to the widowed Cornelia and attempted to flaunt her superiority by displaying her extravagant jewels and treasures. Cornelia, exhibiting her exemplary maternal nature, turned and pointed to her children and told the woman that they were her most precious treasures.⁴⁹

Kauffman's first painting of *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi* (Figure 4) was commissioned in 1785 by George Bowles, an important patron of contemporary art, while both the artist and patron were staying in Naples as guests of the Royal family. The canvas was created as part of a group of three paintings, which included *Vergil Writing his own Epitaph at Brundisium* (Figure 5) and *Pliny the Younger, with his Mother at Misaenum* (Figure 6) – all subjects which depicted famous events and characters associated with Naples.⁵⁰ The group of three canvases was shown at the British Royal Academy in 1786 and then became part of Bowles's private collection.

The central painting of the group, *Cornelia*, features a classically inspired porch, with a shallow foreground, complete with massive columns, overlooking a mountain range reminiscent of a Neapolitan setting. The woman visitor is depicted to the far right

⁴⁹Plutarch, *Lives of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*, trans. Hubert Ashton (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1885)

⁵⁰Wendy Wassyng Roworth, "Kauffman and the art of Painting in England," *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London, Reaktion Books, 1993): 91.



Figure 4: Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, 1785, oil on canvas, 101 x 127 cm, Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

of the composition, dressed in red, and seated on plush furnishings. She holds up an intricate gold necklace and looks up to Cornelia, indicating that she also should show her fine jewels. Cornelia is standing in the middle of the pyramidal composition, dressed in a white and brown garment with a tan shawl and matching hair wrap. She gazes at the woman and gestures to the left of the composition to her two sons, who are approaching the main scene. Kauffman's rendering of Cornelia's sons, Tiberius and Gaius, according to her biographer Giovanni Gherardo De Rossi, was a testament to

Kauffman's keen attention to detail and her ardent research in textual evidence. Her modeling of the boy's figures was designed to foretell their adult personalities.⁵¹

Between Cornelia and the woman visitor stands Cornelia's daughter, Sempronia, a figure who was not mentioned in the original text of the story. The decision to include her is generally accepted as an effort to show the naïveté of a child and her dependence on her mother to help her develop into a morally upstanding woman and to lead her in the right philosophical direction.⁵² Sempronia's delicate pink dress, a combination of her mother's dress and the visitor's, reveals the influences that the older women have on her; she is captivated by the bright, sparkling baubles that the woman in red presents, but still grasps her mother's hand, indicating that she will be led to the virtuous path.

The two companion pieces for the first *Cornelia* canvas, *Virgil* (Figure 5) and *Pliny the Younger* (Figure 6), also depict scenes pertaining to the history of the Neapolitan area and both stories come from classical sources. The literary reference for the event depicted in the *Pliny* painting comes from a letter that Pliny sent to Tacitus, which described the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. The backgrounds for both compositions are similar in style to *Cornelia's*. The composition of the *Pliny* painting shows the main figure to the far right, writing, while a man gestures to the left of the painting where there is an archway that reveals the eruption taking place, while other people try to escape. Seated next to Pliny is his mother, dressed in a vibrantly colored, matronly outfit of the classical era. She lifts her veil while she gazes back over her

⁵¹ De Rossi, *Vita*, 2-3, 112-114.

⁵² Roworth states this in both *Kauffman and the art of Painting in England* and in *Ancient Matrons and Modern Patrons*, as does Strobel in *Royal "Matronage."*



Figure 5: Angelica Kauffman, *Virgil Writing his own Epitaph at Brundisium*, 1785, oil on canvas, 99 x 126 cm, Peter Walsh Collection.



Figure 6: Angelica Kauffman, *Pliny the Younger, with his Mother at Miscenum*, 1785, oil on canvas, 103 x 127.5, Princeton University Art Museum.

shoulder at the scene of destruction. Unlike the other two paintings, *Vergil's* background does not show any landscape or window to the outside. In the middle, dressed in white, is the figure of Vergil, reclining and writing, surrounded by a group of followers who are mourning his impending passing. The male figures within the three paintings all exemplify the androgynous quality for which Kauffman was known.

This original *Cornelia* painting (Figure 4) and its companions exemplify Kauffman's interest in engaging Enlightenment ideals. The characters of *Virgil* (Figure 5) and *Pliny* (Figure 6), as created by Kauffman, represent idealized notions regarding education. These figures are known for their contributions to society through their commitment to the intellectual well-being of posterity. Both figures are shown diligently working to the final moment in an effort to better serve society through their writing and philosophical pursuits. This emphasis on the importance of education indicates an influence of Enlightenment ideals. Moreover, the figure of *Cornelia* also evokes to Enlightenment ideals regarding education as well as motherhood. Through *Cornelia's* exhaustive efforts to properly raise and educate her children, she exemplifies an Enlightenment attitude of mothers taking care of their children themselves, instead of sending them off to nursemaids.

Inspired by the *Cornelia* (Figure 4) painting that Kauffman made for George Bowles, Queen Maria Carolina of Naples commissioned a second painting depicting *Cornelia* (Figure 7). It was supposed to be a gift to her sister Maria Christina, Archduchess of Sachsen-Teschen, wife of the governor of the Austrian Netherlands (modern day Belgium). Again, Kauffman chose to create a pendent piece to pair with



Figure 7: Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as Her Treasures*, 1785, oil on canvas, 101 x 127 cm.

this version of *Cornelia*, exploring another classical subject, *Julia, Wife of Pompey* (Figure 8). The two canvases were created in 1785, after Kauffman had returned to Rome from her visit in Naples.⁵³ Compositionally, this second painting is almost identical to the original *Cornelia* (Figure 4), except that in this case the scene has been flipped, so the boys enter from the right hand side, and the women are positioned on the left. Some of the colors of the figures' garments have been altered. Cornelia, instead of

⁵³ Wendy Wassyng Roworth, "Ancient Matrons and Modern Patrons: Angelica Kauffman as a Classical History Painter," *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003): 200-202.

being in a white dress, is now portrayed in a brown dress and the older of her sons, Tiberius, is now shown in orange.

The pendant for this second version of *Cornelia* was *Julia, Wife of Pompey, Faints at the Sight of His Bloodstained Shirt* (Figure 7). It was a unique composition for the time: the only other contemporary image of Julia is a sketch by Kauffman herself, from ten years prior. Julia, the only daughter of Julius Caesar, was wed to Pompey, a Roman general and member of Caesar's triumvirate. The two fell deeply in love, although Pompey was much older than Julia. The painting depicts the moment where Julia was shown her husband's bloodied shirt and told that he had been killed. She faints and suffers a miscarriage at this sight. Unfortunately, she died the following year, in childbirth, and without her presence, the relationship between her husband and father deteriorated and developed into civil war.

In her article "Royal 'Matronage' of Women Artists in the Late 18th Century," Heidi Strobel makes the connection between the patron, Queen Maria Carolina, and the subject matter, by stating that, "Like Cornelia, Julia was a virtuous woman whose identity as wife and mother was interwoven with her duty to the Roman state."⁵⁴ By associating the Queen with these subjects, Kauffman was able to emphasize the power and independence that Maria Carolina wielded. She was a responsible mother to her natural children, and a dedicated mother of the state. Furthermore, Cornelia was connected to the Neapolitan area since she was rumored to have lived there herself. By invoking her image, the Queen was able to connect herself to her citizens.

⁵⁴ Heidi A. Strobel, "Royal 'Matronage' of Women Artists in the late 18th Century," *Woman's Art Journal* 26, No. 2 (Autumn, 2005 – Winter, 2006): 5.



Figure 8: Angelica Kauffman, *Julia, Wife of Pompey, Faints at the Sight of His Bloodstained Shirt*, 1785, oil on canvas, 99.5 x 127.5, Kunstsammlungen, Schlossmuseum, Weimar.

According to Herman Mildenburger, the selection of these classical heroines for the subject of these two paintings shows the level of in-depth research Kauffman put into creating works tailored specifically to her patrons.⁵⁵ Both Cornelia and Julia are the link between two prominent families and there is an emphasis on their ability to raise children. This selection fit perfectly for these Habsburg sisters, who were associated with a vast familial dynasty – one that included Marie Antoinette, who was also their

⁵⁵ Roworth, *Ancient Matrons*, 200-202. More information regarding this subject can be found in Herman Mildenburger, "Cornelia und Julia Las Vorbilder: Zur ikonographischen Deutung der Pendants von Angelika Kauffmann," in *Angelika Kauffmann, Julia die Gattin des Pompeius, fällt in Ohnmacht, Cornelia, die Mutter der Gracchen*. Patrimonia 90 (Weimar: Kulturstiftung, 1996): 19-26.

sister – across Europe through their own marriages. Thus, the selection of these two ancient heroines shows the interest that the Queen and Kauffman shared in strong female figures, who personified loyalty to their family and country, which in turn correlated to Enlightenment ideals.

The third and final version of a *Cornelia* (Figure 9), painted by Kaufman, is the version she made for Prince Stanislaus Poniatowski, Nephew of the King of Poland in 1788.⁵⁶ This painting has only recently been published and studied by Wendy Wassying Roworth. It was created with a pendant painting of *Brutus Condemning his Sons to Death for Treason* (Figure 10), which has been lost as the original, but a sketch by Kauffman survives. The story of Brutus is a tragic one. In an effort to protect the republic in its delicate early stages, Brutus decreed that anyone caught attempting to reinstate the monarchy would be put to death. Unfortunately, his wife's family had ties to the monarchy and his sons attempted to help reinstate the royal family. Therefore, Brutus was left with no choice but to execute his own sons.

The two paintings show a contrast between a father who sacrifices his children for the good of the state versus a mother who raises her sons to become major social reformers and champions of the people. Poniatowski himself was a revolutionary and enlightened thinker, as well as a reformer of political, educational and agricultural ideals,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 202-206.



Figure 9: Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to Her Children as Her Treasures*, 1788, oil on canvas, 110 x 152 cm, Private Collection.

who believed in equal rights for all classes of society. He was also involved in promoting the arts and was personally responsible for commissioning many paintings during his lifetime.⁵⁷

This version of *Cornelia* (Figure 9) is vastly different from the two previously discussed versions. The boys' facial features look similar to the previous versions, but there is a greater height difference between the two, in order to make one appear older. Cornelia is still placed in the middle of the painting, but she is instead dressed in a fine golden dress, with both her arms outstretched toward her sons as she turns back to look to her visitor. The woman visitor is still dressed in red, but admires the children

⁵⁷ Roworth, *Ancient Matrons*, 202.



Figure 10: Angelica Kauffman, *Brutus Condemning his Sons to Death for Treason*, 1788, pen and black ink with grey wash, heightened with opaque white on gray laid paper, mounted on wove paper, 26.3 x 31.9, National Gallery of Canada.

instead of the jewels, and looks surprised at Cornelia's rejection of material objects. Cornelia's pose reflects Brutus's pose resulting in these two compositions mirroring each other.

The major difference in this version of *Cornelia* concerns the younger daughter Sempronia. She is now counted among the "children" group, as Cornelia points to the three of them, instead of just the two boys. This choice indicates that Kauffman wanted to draw attention to the female adolescent. Sempronia is now clad in white, holding a basket of needlework which stands symbolically for her skill in the domestic arts, and shows that she is a mature, moral and respectful woman in training. According to

Roworth, Kauffman confirmed the intention to include Sempronia among Cornelia's treasures in her personal *Memorandum of Paintings*. Roworth notes that in the earlier descriptions of the work Kauffman uses the phrase "her boys" but for this version she uses "her children" to indicate the children.⁵⁸ The decision to include the figure of Sempronia as a part of Cornelia's "treasures" also shows Ponitowski's "enlightened views and individual obligations to family."⁵⁹ In reality, Sempronia grew up and married an ally of her brothers and was just as virtuous and good as her brothers were.

Each version of the three *Cornelia* paintings made by Kauffman was meticulously researched and tailored to fit the needs of its particular patron. However, when looking at each version, along with their respective companion pieces, an overwhelming sense of unity emerges. All of the paintings allude to the idea of parents' duty to their children. Through Kauffman's paintings the character of Cornelia comes to represent Enlightenment ideals regarding a mother's duty in the education and improvement of her children so as to raise productive members of society.

⁵⁸Carlo Knight, *La 'Memoria delle pitture' di Angelia Kauffman* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1998): 79. For an English translation see Manners, p. 138.

⁵⁹ Roworth, *Ancient Matrons*, 202-206.

CHAPTER 4: KAUFFMAN'S PENELOPE PAINTINGS: THE IDEAL WIFE

While not a particularly popular subject in eighteenth-century art, the character of Penelope, wife of Odysseus, appears a number of times as the protagonist of many of Kauffman's paintings. When examined in context with Enlightenment ideals and as a compliment to Kauffman's *Cornelia* paintings the figure of Penelope exhibits similar qualities. Penelope has long been considered to be a pristine example of a dutiful and loyal wife, having waited faithfully for twenty years for her husband's return from the Trojan War. The ideals that her character exemplifies – loyalty, independence, and marital harmony - all correspond to Enlightenment beliefs regarding women's social status. By highlighting the devotion that Penelope exhibits to her husband, Odysseus, Kauffman illustrates the character's compliance to progressive ideals regarding women's role and involvement in marriage.

In Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, Penelope is depicted as the dutiful and faithful wife of the hero, Odysseus, who waits for him during his twenty-year absence during the Trojan War. She is best known for the clever schemes she executes in order to delay her numerous suitors while her husband is away, specifically by weaving a funeral shroud for her aging father-in-law, Laertes. Only when she had completed it, so she claimed, would she choose a new husband. By weaving the shroud during the day and then taking it apart at night, she was able to keep her suitors at bay for as long as possible.⁶⁰ Once her deception was discovered and her suitors insisted she choose a new husband, instead of giving in to their demands, she issued a challenge. She

⁶⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. S. H. Butcher and A. Lang, ed. Charles W. Elliot (Connecticut: Harvard Classics, 1989)

promised to wed the man who was able to string her husband's bow and successfully shoot an arrow from it. She did this knowing that the only man who would be able to do so was Odysseus, thus establishing a dramatic setting for him to reveal himself.

In his *History of Ancient Art*, Johan Joachim Winckelmann placed particular emphasis on Penelope by comparing her to the figure of the art historian. He considers both to be "abandoned women" who are constantly looking to a lost love for salvation.⁶¹ Angela Rosenthal cites this comparison and makes it the focus of her analysis of Kauffman's *Penelope* paintings. She does so, primarily, by citing Roland Barthes, who also believes that art historians are similar to abandoned women.⁶² Knowing that Kauffman met and befriended Winckelmann, this interpretation of Penelope's character indicates the effect his analysis had on Kauffman. By illustrating Penelope isolated and alone, Kauffman creates visual representations of Winckelmann's beliefs. Moreover, the selection of Penelope by Kauffman, a woman who exists in a male driven world, may indicate that Kauffman chose to depict Penelope so often because she thought of her as a kindred spirit.

The earliest example of a Penelope painting by Kauffman is *Penelope at her Loom* (Figure 11), created in 1764. At the time of the canvas's creation, it was not common practice to create a history painting with a woman as the main subject, unless she was depicted as erotic, abandoned, suicidal, or a victim of some sort of tragedy. However, Kauffman chose to portray Penelope as the "ideal embodiment of devotion"

⁶¹ Whitney Davis, "Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History," *The Art of Art History*, ed. Donald Preziosi, 1994 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998): 35-44.

⁶² Angela Rosenthal, "Angelica's Odyssey: Kauffman's Paintings of Penelope and the Weaving of Narrative," *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003): 212-216.



Figure 11: Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope at Her Loom*, 1764, oil on canvas, 169 x 118 cm, Brighton Museum and Art Gallery.

and Roworth comments, “Penelope is the ideal married woman and mother: patient and faithful, gifted by Athena herself with a talent for womanly handicraft and a clever crafty mind.”⁶³ *Penelope at her Loom* (Figure 11) is not only Kauffman’s first single figure

⁶³Wendy Wassyng Roworth, “Kauffman and the art of Painting in England - Early Life and Training,” *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England*, ed. Wendy Wassyng Roworth (London: Reaktion Books, 1992): 37.

history painting, it is the first contemporary depiction of this subject matter, as well as the first time the artist signed one of her paintings with her name “Angelica Kauffman.”⁶⁴

The canvas features Penelope seated at her loom in the middle of the composition, resting her head on her hand, gazing upward with a forlorn expression. She is dressed in an intricately patterned gold dress and a rich blue cloak that swirls across her lap and down to her feet. Odysseus’s dog lies at her feet, his paws resting on his master’s bow – a prominent item featured at the end of the story – which serves as a reminder of Odysseus’s presence and Penelope’s loyalty and chastity to her husband. The bow is positioned so that it points to the artist’s signature at the bottom left of the painting.⁶⁵ While Penelope is depicted in a melancholy mood, she can still be viewed positively because of her strong, virtuous personality and her will to stay faithful to her husband.⁶⁶ The background is styled similarly to Kauffman’s other neoclassical paintings. It shows a simple yet elegant classical interior, which offers a glimpse of an exterior setting behind the central figure.

A comparable composition, *Penelope Weeping Over the Bow of Odysseus* (Figure 12), from 1779, also features the main subjects of the previous painting: Penelope and her husband’s bow. Kauffman chose to depict her subject in an elegant gold-trimmed dress, with a light blue shawl, and seated on a plush red chair. Her head is in her hand, again, as she leans over on the rail of the chair, expressing her obvious

⁶⁴ Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica’s Odyssey*, 211.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 216-220.

⁶⁶ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 36-37.



Figure 12: Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope Weeping Over the Bow of Odysseus*, 1779, oil on copper, 26 x 20 cm, Private Collection.

morose feelings regarding her current predicament. In addition to the bow, the hoops that she uses in her challenge to her suitors are also lying at her feet, which anticipate of the climax of her story.

When compared with one another these two compositions seem to describe Kauffman's attempt to show consecutive scenes in the story. It is easy to see the movement and thought process of Penelope. Sitting at her loom and thinking of her

husband, she begins to despair. How she can stall her eager suitors, who are putting so much pressure on her to choose a new husband? How will she remain a loyal wife to Odysseus, who has been absent for so long? Keeping these thoughts in mind, it is easy to see the narrative unfold: She looks down to her canine companion, who is guarding her husband's bow. She reaches down and picks it up as she moves to the adjacent room and sits on her red couch, still pondering her situation. Then as all hope seems to elude her and she places her head in her hand again, she looks to the ground and notices the hoops: her salvation.

Through her use of intellect and cunning, Penelope is able to orchestrate an unattainable goal for her suitors, which allows her to remain faithful to her husband. Her devotion to her husband indicates the love and concern she has for Odysseus. By exhibiting an unyielding desire to not choose another husband, Penelope portrays the idea of a happy, devoted wife, who respects and honors her husband. Furthermore, Penelope's willingness to remain detached from a man illustrates the increasing independence and self sufficiency of women. This Enlightenment idea is one which Kauffman uses Penelope to express multiple times throughout her work.

Kauffman's second painting in the iconographic set depicts *Penelope Taking Down the Bow of Odysseus* (Figure 13). It was created as part of a group of four canvases at the request of John Parker, first Lord of Boringdon, the Earl of Morley in



Figure 13: Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope Taking Down the Bow of Odysseus*, 1768, oil on canvas, 127 x 101.5, National Trust, Saltram.

1768.⁶⁷ The pendant paintings of this *Penelope* are *Venus Showing Aeneas and Achates the Way to Carthage* (Figure 14), *Hector Taking Leave of Andromache* (Figure 15), and *Achilles Discovered by Ulysses Amongst the Attendants of Deidamia* (Figure 16). Three of these paintings, excluding *Achilles*, were shown together in a private exhibition held in honor of Christian VII of Denmark and then all were shown the following year at an exhibition for the British Royal Academy. The four were designed to be hung in the Grand Saloon at Saltram Park in Devon as sets of two, pairing *Penelope* with *Venus*, and *Hector* with *Achilles*.

⁶⁷ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 200. According to the list of works found at the end of this book, Mrs. Parker noted that her husband ordered these to be created in a letter she sent to her brother.



Figure 14: Angelica Kauffman, *Venus Showing Aeneas and Achates the Way to Carthage*, 1768, Oil on Canvas, 127 x 101.5 cm, National Trust, Saltram.

Kauffman's *Penelope Taking Down the Bow of Odysseus* (Figure 13) is the first instance of this subject in the history of painting.⁶⁸ Penelope is shown in the center of the composition, dressed in an elegantly rendered gold and brown gown and robe. Her hair falls in delicate curls down her back as she looks up and reaches for the bow to take it down from its place of honor. This pose will be used again in a similar fashion by Kauffman in *Penelope Invoking Minerva's Aid for the Safe Return of Telemachus* (Figure 18) created in 1774.⁶⁹ Kneeling in the foreground of the composition is an attendant,

⁶⁸ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 45.

⁶⁹ Angela Rosenthal, *Angelica's Odyssey*, 221.



Figure 15: Angelica Kauffman, *Hector Taking Leave of Andromache*, 1768, oil on canvas, 134.5 x 178 cm, National Trust, Saltram.



Figure 16: Angelica Kauffman, *Achilles Discovered by Ulysses Amongst the Attendants of Deidamia*, 1769, oil on canvas, 134.5 x 178, National Trust, Saltram.

dressed in a green dress with a red sash draped across her legs, who busies herself by tending to a lyre. Near the handmaid are the hoops, through which Penelope will challenge her suitors to fire an arrow. The background is simple and is composed of columns and drapery.

This depiction of Penelope differs from the previous two. Instead of showing the subject as forlorn, this version illustrates a confident and assertive individual. Penelope assuredly reaches up to the bow, knowing that she has created a challenge with such a high degree of difficulty, in which none but her husband would be able to succeed.⁷⁰ By creating such an impossible challenge she further enforces the idea that she would prefer to be left unmarried, thus illustrating the Enlightenment notion of feminine independence. She allows her suitors to believe that they hold the power over their own victory, but in reality it is merely a cleverly crafted illusion.

The companion pieces in the Saltram group also exhibit Enlightenment ideals. Specifically, three of the four canvases, excluding *Achilles*, depict protagonists who are forced to leave their women behind due to war. The compositions all illustrate the effects of war and love on the sexes.⁷¹ However, by revisiting the theme of abandoned women during war, Kauffman further connects Penelope to herself and illustrates Winckelmann's association of Penelope to art historians.

⁷⁰ There is some debate as to whether or not Penelope was aware that her husband had indeed returned and was aiding his return by issuing such a challenge or if it was a fortuitous happenstance.

⁷¹ Roworth, *Kauffman and the art of Painting*, 45-48.

Moreover, in accordance with Enlightenment thought, the women in this group are not depicted as swooning, emotional creatures. They are composed and exhibit control over their own overwhelming emotions just as the men portrayed in other neoclassical paintings. The men, also following the ideals set by Winckelmann, are more stoic and stern, but exhibit Kauffman's signature androgynous appearance. Their appearance was harshly judged by critic Bernsdorff at the paintings' exhibition at the Royal Academy, who remarked:

Her composition is full of grace, and the figures have the quiet dignity of the Greek models. Her women are most womanly, modest and loving, and she conveys with much art the proper relation between the sexes, the dependence of the weaker on the stronger, which appeals *very much to her masculine critics*. It must be owned, however, that a little of this feebleness characterizes her male personages. They are shy creatures; some of them look like girls in men's clothes, and it would be impossible for her to pourtray a villain.⁷²

The scene *Penelope Awakened by Euryclea with the News of Odysseus's Return* (Figure 17), made in 1773, shows Penelope sleeping on a plush red couch her head resting on her hand, in a finely decorated room with deep green drapery to the right of the background and a sculpture of Minerva to the left, which appears to be watching over Penelope as she rests. Penelope is dressed in a pure white dress that glows in the firelight. Her hair is pulled back by a golden sash, which drapes down her back and flows to the front of and hangs off of the couch. The brightness of her garments and the choice of gold and white affirm the idea that Penelope has transcended into a higher realm. She is so devoted and true to her husband that she

⁷² Gerard, *Angelica Kauffman*, 120.



Figure 17: Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope Awakened by Euryclea with the News of Odysseus's Return*, 1773, oil on canvas, 75 x 109.9 cm, Vorarlberg State Museum, Bregenz.

appears ethereal. The elderly Euryclea stands to the left of the composition and leans over Penelope as she reaches out to her shoulder to wake her up with the news of her husband's return.

A previously mentioned painting by Kauffman, *Penelope Invoking Minerva's Aid for the Safe Return of Telemachus* (Figure 18) was created in 1774. Although the main focus of this composition and this scene is generally considered to be Telemachus, Kauffman removes him from the composition entirely and instead focuses on the worried mother, Penelope. She is depicted in an elegant and finely embroidered white and gold garment with a green sash and string of pearls woven in her hair, which is



Figure 18: Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope Invoking Minerva's Aid for the Safe Return of Telemachus*, 1774, oil on canvas, 150 x 126.5 cm, National Trust, Stourhead.

pulled back in a low knot. She is standing at the base of a terracotta sculpture of Minerva, her arms outstretched and she looks up with a pleading expression on her face. Her desperation is palpable. She is surrounded by handmaidens and assistants, who are bringing various plates, vases and cloth as offerings for the goddess in return for her aid.

By illustrating the perspective of women in this painting, Kauffman offers a glimpse into their world and their undertakings. Penelope's concern and devotion for her son is evident in her attempt to sway the gods to return him safely. Before the

Enlightenment, a woman's world was especially isolated and this composition alludes to the activities in which women would participate, behind closed doors, in order to rectify the mistakes made by men.⁷³

The statue of Minerva depicted within the background of these two compositions suggests an emphasis on education. This Enlightenment ideal can be applied to these paintings through Minerva. Through her role as the goddess of wisdom, she is often associated with intellectual pursuits. Therefore, her presence as a guardian of Penelope, as well as Odysseus, indicates the importance that their family places on intelligence and education. Moreover, Minerva was purported to have bestowed upon Penelope with her exceptional skill in the domestic arts, which were considered extremely important for mothers to pass on to their children.

The influence of Enlightenment ideals on Kauffman is evident through her numerous compositions depicting Penelope, Wife of Odysseus. In the context of Enlightenment beliefs, the figure of Penelope lends itself to interpretation as an example of women's loyalty, independence, and marital harmony. As she waits for her husband, she stays true to him, and uses all of her cunning to remain loyal under dire circumstances. By engineering methods to maintain her devotion, she demonstrates that she is not only clever, but insistent that she is capable of living a life independent from a husband. Finally, it is her exceptional skill in the domestic arts that indicates the

⁷³ Rosenthal, *Angelica's Odyssey*, 221-222.

elevated level of education she has achieved and which she was able to pass on to her son. By embodying all of these traits in a single character, Kauffman is able to show an exemplar of the Enlightened wife.

CONCLUSION

Kauffman was able to exhibit progressive Enlightenment ideals pertaining to women in her art and her life. As a financially independent female painter, she created scenes illustrating women who were respected and respectful partners, doting mothers, and advocates of education. The influences on her work can be directly connected to Enlightenment ideals through her associations with Winckelmann, Goethe, and other important Enlightenment thinkers.⁷⁴ Through her correspondence and lifelong association with these philosophers she was at the forefront of Enlightenment knowledge. By showing these ideals in her paintings, specifically Cornelia and Penelope, she contributed to the proliferation of Enlightened depictions of women. These Enlightenment ideals informed the following century's moral code, including society's views regarding women.

Kauffman's esteemed reputation in Britain allowed her art to have an effect on the development of Victorian ideals. The moral code of the Victorian era can be linked back to the ideals of the Enlightenment. While the Enlightenment sought to promote equality, independence, education, and happiness for all people, the morals of the Victorian era were a reaction against these progressive notions, specifically, with regard to women and religion. Where the Enlightenment urged independence and equality for women, Victorian moral codes emphasized their domesticity and subjugation. These ideals directly influenced the development of what is known as the Cult of True

⁷⁴ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 56-77. For a more involved explanation of her relationship with Goethe see chapter 6 in Manners. Kauffman and Goethe exchanged letters with one another frequently.

Womanhood – a moral set that further encouraged women to be more domestic, submissive, pious, and pure.⁷⁵ The collective psyche of popular periodicals of the time converged by regarding women's place in society as the home.⁷⁶ In this manner the cult promoted women's power in the home which was lost through Victorian ideals, which had been gained from the Enlightenment.

Kauffman's depictions of strong leaders in the home, specifically her Cornelia and Penelope paintings, exist as the melding point of the two ideal sets. The characters of these women can be interpreted as educated, independent, and equal by the Enlightened viewer, while simultaneously being seen as docile, pious, and domestic by Victorian standards. This unique location along the spectrum of philosophies allowed Kauffman's paintings to impact both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This impact not only applies to her art work, but her very existence as well.

The image of Kauffman herself was transformed by Victorian ideals. While she personally – or at least her husband – took the time later in life to compile a memorandum of her later works, there is much speculation with regard to her early years.⁷⁷ This obscurity allowed for dramatization and embellishment to this period of her life. Due to her popular appeal in nineteenth-century Britain, she was depicted as

⁷⁵ Welter, Barbara, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" in *American Quarterly* 18, no 2. (Summer 1966): 151-155.

⁷⁶ For specific examples see, *The Young Lady's Book*; *Ladies' Companion: A Monthly Magazine*; *Lecture on Some of the Distinctive Characteristics of the Female; Woman, In her Social and Domestic Character*; *The Lady's Book of Flowers and Poetry*; *Girlhood and Womanhood: or Sketches of My Schoolmates*; *The Mother's Book*; *Whisper to a Bride*; *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book*; *Ladies' Repository*; as well as a number of other pieces of literature from the nineteenth century. Also see Welter's article regarding the Cult for a more in depth analysis of ideals.

⁷⁷ Manners, *Angelica Kauffman*, 141 -174.

the protagonist in the novel, *Miss Angel*, written by Anne Thackeray.⁷⁸ Even more modern descriptions of her life exhibit dramatized episodes from her youth.⁷⁹ These exaggerated depictions of her personal life and the numerous affairs she was rumored to have had, led to her character being scrutinized severely by nineteenth-century audiences.

Angelica Kauffman's influence on both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies regarding women can be interpreted through her depictions of *Cornelia* and *Penelope*. She was able to create figures in her art that could at once be viewed as independent and submissive, educated but pious, equal and domestic. In this way, Kauffman was able to affect society's image of these characters.

⁷⁸ Anne Thackeray, *Miss Angel*, (London, 1875).

⁷⁹ Manners, Angelica Kauffman. There are several notations in this work that indicate that Kauffman was frequently the topic of gossip during her time.

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