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Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies XIV

Issue on
English and Irish Women Writers
of the Long Eighteenth Century

Edited by

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Institute of English Studies
Department of English Literatures and Cultures
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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Mihály Zichy (1971-2025), who used to be manager of MacMaestro Kft which printed several earlier issues of the journal. He was loving husband of Zsuzsa Csikai, our dear colleague and book reviews editor for FOCUS. He died during the time we were finishing work on this issue.

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Introduction

FOCUS 2024: English and Irish Women Writers of the Long Eighteenth Century

The present collection of essays comprises a selection of papers stemming from a conference the Department of English Literatures and Cultures of the University of Pécs, in association with the Irish Studies Research Centre at the University of Pécs and the English Studies Work Group of the Regional Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Pécs, hosted to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Margaret Cavendish's birth in 2023 and the 300th anniversary of Frances Sheridan's birth in 2024. Thus, the theme of this issue is the work of female authors in England and Ireland during the period 1660-1837, commonly referred to as the long eighteenth century.

Given the scarcity of published women writers in the era, Cavendish's literary output was truly incredible both in terms of quantity and versatility. She made her first appearance in print with a collection of poetic pieces and essays (*Poems and Fancies*, 1653), produced an autobiography (*A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life*, 1656), epistles (*CCXI Sociable Letters*, 1664), philosophical treatises (*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, 1666), not to mention her work as a prolific experimental playwright with two printed collections of plays (*Plays*, 1662; *Plays, Never Before Printed*, 1668), which were never put on stage in her lifetime. Her most famous work is *The Blazing World* (1666), a unique generic hybrid containing elements of romance, utopia, and drama. Recent scholarship recognises Cavendish's achievement from many perspectives: some see her as a biographical and literary exile, some focus on her hidden literary debts and her unique techniques of mixing genres, while others are more interested in her self-representation techniques and her role as a public female intellectual involved in the philosophical debates of her time. Her influence goes beyond the world of academia, as testified by contemporary adaptations of some of her plays (like *The Unnatural Tragedy*, staged in 2020 in Vienna, or the frequent stagings/readings of *The Convent of Pleasure*), literary works explicitly modelled on her persona (like Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World*, published in 2014), or even popular histories (like John Healey's *The Blazing World. A New History of Revolutionary England*, published in 2023).

In the present issue, one extensive article, a shorter essay, and a review are devoted to Cavendish. By offering insightful analogies between the authoress and the heroine of the studied work, Bence Kvéder's substantial study of Cavendish's "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (published in *Natures Pictures* in 1656) employs the widely spread biographical method. He studies the early manifestation of ideas and topics that became the staple of the "mainstream" works published in the 1660s, most notably *The Blazing World,* with the respective themes of travel, marriage, military conflicts, and colonisation. Kvéder also theorises about the aspect of virtue in the work, lending an ethical dimension to his reading, and he offers an interesting take on the

conundrum of the seemingly conventional ending (marriage). The background for the paper by Alexandra Barta is the first (partial) Hungarian translation of Cavendish's most popular work, *The Blazing World*. Published in 2023, the translation covers the "romancical" beginning of the text, and Barta's essay documents a few of the challenges of translating the work. Her observations, however, offer more than a simple translator's diary: they provide interesting insights about the text for anyone interested in the unconventional fictional-geographical background of Cavendish's utopia, and her heavy reliance on the contemporary maritime lexicon. The insider perspective of the translator is a meaningful departure point for a potential later study of the Hungarian rendering of the text from the perspective of translation studies. Signalling the enduring interest in Cavendish in Hungary, the Reviews section contains a book review by one of our PhD students working on the author's texts, Dorina Gyenis, who gives a balanced treatment of the most recent Cavendish biography by Francesca Peacock.

Another group of essays is devoted to the also rather versatile work of Frances Sheridan (1724-1766), who was born in Dublin as the child of an Anglo-Irish Protestant family. She married actor and theatre director Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788) and in 1758 the couple moved to London permanently. Her literary career began with the writing of novels, the first of which was *Eugenia and Adelaide* (published only in 1791). In London she was introduced to Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) and showed him her manuscript. Richardson encouraged her to pursue the writing of fiction. The influence of Richardson's *Pamela* can be seen in her most successful novel, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) which, like its model, is also written in diary form. Sheridan scholarship is more vibrant in this century than ever before. The continuation of her novel, *Conclusion of the Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, was published by Broadview Press in 2013. Later she turned to the genre of drama and had two of her plays premiered in Drury Lane Theatre by David Garrick's Company: *The Discovery* (1763) and *The Dupe* (1764). A third piece, *A Trip to Bath* (1765) did not make it to the stage at that time but English playwright Elizabeth Kuti (1969) adapted and re-titled it as *The Whisperers* in 1999; thus refashioned, the drama went into production by Rough Magic Theatre Company in Ireland. Frances and Thomas Sheridan's son, Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), who later became a widely acclaimed playwright, wrote his first works drawing inspiration from his mother's literary achievement.

Clíona Ó Gallchoir's essay offers a fresh evaluation of Frances Sheridan as a female writer through her daughter's work *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion.* She explores the link between Elizabeth Sheridan's novel and Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, examining women's roles in social progress and reform. She argues that while *Sidney Bidulph* offers a critical perspective on eighteenth-century England's self-image as a "polite nation," challenging the notion that this supposed politeness empowered women to positively influence society. In contrast, *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, published during the height of Ireland's Patriot movement, associates its celebration of Irish nationhood with women's active participation as citizens. Mária Kurdi's essay examines Elizabeth Kuti's comedy *The Whisperers* (1998) as a unique adaptation of Frances Sheridan's unfinished play *A Trip to Bath* (1765),

completing the fragment in the spirit of the original. This essay explores how *A Trip to Bath* demonstrates eighteenth-century comedic traditions and how *The Whisperers* reworks the play to create a distinctive piece of collaborative theater. By continuing Sheridan's exploration of social and emotional complexity, Mária Kurdi argues, Kuti preserves the hallmarks of the best English comedies of the period. The analysis also addresses themes of dual authorship, adaptation strategies, and the textual and dramaturgical coherence of the resulting work.

Other papers in the issue address some female literary contemporaries of Cavendish and Sheridan. The theme of intergenerational female relationships appears in Roslyn Joy Irving's essay on *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), which she exposes as a case study to show how Ann Radcliffe portrays these kinds of relationships as well as critiques the limits of sensibility and conduct literature. The paper explores Radcliffe's dual stance on female sensibility, both as a source of poor judgment and a tool for navigating relationships, as exemplified by Madame La Motte. It is through the character of Madame La Luc that the role of conduct literature is shown; she is an idealized role model. The essay demonstrates how the mother-daughter dynamics provide young women with patterns to redefine their behaviour. Importantly, this study contributes to research on Radcliffe's politically engaged writing and the Female Gothic. Filip Krajník's essay compares Aphra Behn's largely forgotten novella *The History of the Nun* (1688) with its more successful theatrical adaptation by Thomas Southerne, *The Fatal Marriage* (1694). Compared to its original, Southerne's version introduces a comic subplot which was for a long time faulted by critics of the theatrical piece. In his meticulous analysis of the sources and the dramaturgical techniques harnessed by Southerne, however, Krajník convincingly demonstrates that what was seen as an incompatible mixture by many is actually a very carefully executed combination of several sources and theatrical practices pursued by Behn herself, and results in a work with much more unity than critics would previously have assumed.

Boróka Andl-Beck's paper undertakes a detailed examination of lower-class female poet Ann Yearsley's (1753–1806) "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" from the perspective of intersectionality. The essay argues that Yearsley's authorial position as a female author and someone from the working class provided a unique sensitivity towards the oppressed slaves, whose liberation she urges in the poem by appealing to human compassion. This connection and its resulting more empathic attitude are interestingly juxtaposed with not only contemporary (David Hume, Adam Smith) but also modern (Judith Butler) theorists of fellow-feeling. Ljubica Matek offers a fresh reading of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" (1724) as an early feminist work, highlighting its critique of gender-based double standards in sexuality and freedom. By subverting the conventions of the heroic epistle, traditionally the lament of an abandoned woman, Matek argues that Montagu creates a layered commentary on the failed marriage of the Yonges and a broader societal critique. Her essay argues that, contextualized within Montagu's life and her *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the poem affirms Montagu's role as a progressive voice advocating for women's rights in the early eighteenth century. Bálint Gárdos's essay examines Helen Maria Williams's *Letters Written in France* (1790), focusing on her account of Madame Brulart's medallion made from

a Bastille stone, symbolizing liberty. By alternating between grand historical events and intimate personal narratives, Gárdos points out that Williams's work exemplifies how sentimental, novelistic history intertwines with individual lives. Building on Mark Salber Phillips's concept of "sentimental history" from *Society and Sentiment* (2000), this essay explores how the classical rhetorical model of "exemplary history" persists in modern narratives, seeking to connect personal stories with larger historical events in an open-ended yet meaningful way.

Apart from Dorina Gyenis's above mentioned review, five other books are introduced in the Reviews section of *FOCUS* 2024. Among them, Andrew C. Rouse writes about Dick Holdstock's work, *Again With One Voice: British Songs of Political Reform, 1768-1868,* which is a valuable compilation of political ballads representing an important segment of British culture, contemporaneous with most of the themes and authors discussed in the Essays section. Özlem Demirel's review of *Neo-Victorian Things: Re-Imagining Nineteenth-Century Material Cultures in Literature and Film* takes the reader to works in the present, exploring their respective views and artistic treatments of the past. In his critical piece, Taha Al-Sarhan brings to the reader's attention an edited volume, *J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy*, which is a substantial contribution to books about an English author's reception outside the Anglophone world. Adding also to the Reviews part, two authors introduce noteworthy theoretical works: Arthur Muhia writes about an indispensable sourcebook for researchers, *The Routledge Companion to Intersectionalities* edited by Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto, while Dávid Papp discusses the merits of Kyle Parry's *A Theory of Assembly: From Museums to Memes.*

As editors of this issue, we are grateful to the contributors for their well researched and convincingly argued papers or thoughtfully written reviews . At the same time, we would like to express our special thanks to and acknowledge the invaluable work of our external referees: Kerstin Anja-Münderlein, Éva Antal, Patrick Gill, Ema Jelínková, Krisztina Kaló, Anna Paluchowska-Messing, Miklós Péti, and Lívia Szélpál. Also, we gratefully acknowledge the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland through its Cultural Grant-in-Aid, for which we successfully applied to the Embassy of Ireland in Budapest, and the support the University of Pécs provided for continuing the journal. Last but certainly not least, we owe thanks to John Thomas Voelker for his very helpful language editing of the texts, and to Lázár Vértesi for kindly undertaking the work of typesetting.

The Editors
Gabriella Hartvig, Csaba Maczelka
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Essays

Women, Society and Nation in Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* and Elizabeth Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*

Clíona Ó Gallchoir

Abstract

The recent attribution to Elizabeth Sheridan Le Fanu of several novels published anonymously between 1780 and 1803 has significantly altered perceptions of the author, offering the potential to reconsider the relationship between her work and that of her mother, the celebrated novelist and dramatist Frances Sheridan. In this article, I explore the shared concerns with women's role in social progress and improvement that link Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* and Elizabeth Sheridan's *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*. I argue specifically that *Sidney Bidulph* should be recognized as offering a sceptical appraisal of eighteenth-century England's self-conception as a "polite nation" and the associated claims that this quality of politeness afforded English women the ability to influence their society for the better. *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, in contrast, published at the height of the Patriot movement in Ireland, links its celebration of Ireland's nationhood to women's active contribution as citizens. The article situates its discussion in the context of the need for greater attention to female literary traditions in Ireland, in which the literary canon has been overwhelmingly constructed in terms of a line of male succession.

Keywords: female literary tradition, politeness, Ireland, Patriot movement

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Written in 1824, Alicia Le Fanu's *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Frances Sheridan* asserts Frances Sheridan's importance and her worthiness for inclusion within the company of literary greats at the same time as it betrays the author's sense that its subject is already in the process of being forgotten. Sheridan, Le Fanu writes, "certainly deserves some memorial, fuller and more distinct, than those brief and erroneous biographical notices, which alone have as yet appeared before the public" (Le Fanu 2). Le Fanu points to the endorsement of Sheridan's most illustrious contemporaries as evidence of her literary stature, noting that she was "distinguished by the approbation of Richardson, as a novel-writer, and of Garrick, as a dramatist, the

two most flattering distinctions that time could boast attended her career" (216). She is however forced to acknowledge that although *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) "continued for a succession of years to be read and admired by all persons of true taste,""[i]n England, [. . .] it has at length been in some measure superseded by more modern favourites" (112). If Le Fanu's qualifying phrase "in England" is meant to suggest that Sheridan's works remained popular and admired in Ireland, it cannot be said that this partiality endured beyond the nineteenth century. Although there is some evidence in recent publications that Sheridan is making her way back into the eighteenth-century Irish canon (see Oliver, "Frances Sheridan"; Prendergast; Brown 331-34), she has been effectively invisible from the perspective of eighteenth-century Irish studies for decades. She also remains stubbornly marginal in research on eighteenth-century literature in general. Sheridan's masterpiece, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, is routinely acclaimed as an exceptionally accomplished contribution to sentimental fiction, but it has been discussed by only a handful of critics in the recent decades: in fact, the database *Literature Online* lists only thirty critical sources in total on Sheridan's works since 1990 ("Sheridan, Frances").

If critical interest in Frances Sheridan has been more muted than her impressive career would seem to warrant, new research perspectives have however been created by the attention of researchers to the wider Sheridan family, especially the increasing interest in the literary output of her daughters, Elizabeth ("Betsy") Sheridan Le Fanu and Alicia Sheridan Le Fanu, and her granddaughter, Alicia Le Fanu. In the case of Elizabeth Sheridan Le Fanu, this research activity has resulted in three new attributions of authorship: Aileen Douglas and Ian Campbell Ross have attributed to her two anonymously-published novels of the early 1780s, *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* (1781) and *Emeline; or, The Fairy Ring* (1780); while Anna M. Fitzer has claimed that *Lucy Osmond*, published anonymously in 1803 but attributed variously to Alicia Sheridan Le Fanu and to Alicia Le Fanu, was also written by Elizabeth Sheridan Le Fanu ("Forgotten Daughters"; "Introduction"xiii). Not only do these attributions potentially transform our views of Elizabeth Sheridan as a writer, they also create a significant line of female succession within the Sheridan-Le Fanu family, dominated to date by generations of male writers, from Dr. Thomas Sheridan, the poet and biographer of Swift, to his son Thomas, the actor, playwright and theatre manager and husband of Frances Sheridan, to their son, the acclaimed dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and also including J. Sheridan Le Fanu, the great-grandnephew of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

R. B. Sheridan is the most celebrated figure in this family network and also a typical figure in terms of eighteenth-century Irish writers, in that his life and career testify to the social, cultural and political interconnectedness of Britain and Ireland in this period. He lived for most of his life in England, represented an English constituency in the House of Commons and wrote and produced works for the theater that enjoyed enormous success and acclaim from the metropolitan London audience—resulting until recently in the routine categorization of his works as classics of "English" literature. These views of Sheridan's work have however been significantly revised, with Fintan O'Toole's biography, *A Traitor's Kiss*, being one of the earliest examples of a "corrective" critical intervention in which both life and work are systematically

contextualized in relation to Sheridan's Irish origins, including suggestive but unproven links to Denis Sheridan (Donnchadha Ó Sioradáin), a seventeenth-century Irish-speaking convert to Protestantism who assisted William Bedell in the translation of the Bible and the Anglican liturgy from English to Irish (2-8). O'Toole thus deploys patrilineal inheritance to link Sheridan to Ireland's Gaelic history and culture and also to assert his place in the Irish literary canon, specifically as the literary successor to Jonathan Swift. O'Toole gives an account of the attempts of Thomas Sheridan to create a public monument to Swift in Dublin, a move prompted by patriotic pride in the greatest Irish writer of the era and also in recognition of his family's connections to Swift, who was his father's close friend and his own godfather. Although the planned statue never materialized, O'Toole posits that Thomas Sheridan nonetheless succeeded in furthering Swift's legacy: through his son, whose "work as a playwright and a politician would become the monument to Swift that his father never managed to build" (16). *A Traitor's Kiss* is of course far from unusual in its invocation of male succession in the service of the literary canon. It is however a particularly striking example of how these structures have operated in an Irish context, in which the recognition of women's literary and cultural production has been further marginalized through an insistent focus on the alignment of literary expression with the imagined nation (Ingman and Ó Gallchoir 3).

Given the dominance of these male-oriented structures and narratives in Irish canon formation, the women of the Sheridan Le Fanu family offer an unusual example of a specifically female line of literary succession within eighteenth-century Irish writing, as has been suggested in Anne Fitzer's discussion of Frances Sheridan, Elizabeth Sheridan Le Fanu and Alicia Le Fanu ("Forgotten Daughters"), and by Aileen Douglas and Ian Campbell Ross's positioning of *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* as a response to *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*. Emphasizing the contrasts between the two texts, Douglas and Ross describe *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* as "a transformation" of the "matrilineal literary inheritance" that Elizabeth Sheridan received from Frances Sheridan (23). They suggest specifically that in the *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, Elizabeth Sheridan rewrites the narrative of female tragedy that Frances Sheridan had wrought to such compulsively readable heights by creating a heroine who successfully asserts her autonomy and determines the course of her own life. *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* is moreover highly unusual in its overt espousal of a Patriot political position: its alignment of female autonomy with the cause of Irish national self-determination therefore presents a further striking contrast with *Sidney Bidulph*, which with its English characters and settings has usually been discussed in the context of the English sentimental novel. In this article I will argue however that the two novels are linked by a shared engagement with ideas about gender and social change in the period: specifically with ideas about women's influence on the improvement of society. Not only does this focus link the two novels in terms of commonalities rather than contrasts, it also offers a new perspective on the discourse of nation and national identity in *Sidney Bidulph*.

The persistently marginal status of *Sidney Bidulph* within the field of eighteenth-century fiction can in part be explained by the novel's resistance to interpretation along neat ideological lines. As Doody observes, the tragedy in the novel arises

from "ambivalent causes" (332). Although it is often summarized as "the typical sentimental [novel] of female virtue in distress" (Todd 166), the heroine's suffering is not, as one might expect, caused by the actions of a male villain, but as Todd points out, by sentimentalism itself, by Sidney's own "beliefs in delicacy and honour which cause pain but for which there is yet no decent alternative" (166). For Douglas and Ross, "the issue at the heart of *Memoirs of Sidney Biddulph*" is "the proper extent of filial duty," which, they argue further, in *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* "is recast into the heroine's striking insistence on her personal autonomy" (24). Any reader of *Sidney Bidulph* can attest that Sidney's sense of the moral duty of obedience is impossible to overlook. Very early in the narrative for example she says that "I have been accustomed from my infancy to pay an implicit obedience to the best of mothers; the conforming to this never yet cost me an uneasy minute, and I am sure never will" (28). This is in sharp contrast with Louisa Maunsell, the heroine of *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion,* who describes her friend Emily Rochfort with evident impatience as "a perfect pattern of obedience" (90) and identifies an expectation of "unlimited obedience from his children" (48) as a key character flaw in the case of the Count de Roussillon, one of the overbearing parents whose "obstinacy" (48) threatens the happiness of their children. This reading of *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* as a rewriting of *Sidney Bidulph* is persuasive given just how disastrous Sidney's obedience to her mother proves to be. She firstly conforms to her mother's insistence that she break off her engagement to Orlando Faulkland when it comes to light that Faulkland has seduced a genteel young woman and apparently abandoned her to face the resulting pregnancy alone; she then submits to her mother's request that she accept an offer of marriage from a Mr. Arnold, a man who is apparently a very good match but for whom she feels no personal inclination. These decisions ultimately result in tragedy for the wholly blameless Sidney and also for Faulkland, whose character, it is belatedly realized, has been unjustly blackened.

As Doody, Todd and others have pointed out, however, Sidney's tragedy cannot be attributed solely to parental tyranny. Sidney's obedience is not a matter of mere outward conformity: she is acutely aware that moral behaviour requires a congruence of inner feeling and outward action. Thus, she engages in exhaustive examinations of her mind and her heart in order to identify what virtue and duty require. In both of her critical decisions, not to marry Faulkland and subsequently to marry Mr. Arnold, Sidney not only acts in obedience to her mother, she also demonstrates her awareness of the need for women to exhibit both delicacy and emotional sincerity as well as truthfulness. As she makes clear in her account of her decision to accept Arnold's offer of marriage, internal self-scrutiny weighs more heavily with her than simply performing obedience:

> I have been searching my heart, my dear Cecilia, to try if there remained a lurking particle of my former flame unextinguished; a flame I call it, as we are allowed the metaphor, but it never rose to *that*; it was but a single ray, a gentle glow that just warmed my breast without scorching [. . .] This was a very necessary scrutiny before I would even entertain a thought of Mr Arnold; and believe me, had I found it otherwise than I say, I would rather have hazarded my mother's

> displeasure by owning the truth to her, than injure any man, by giving him my hand with an estranged heart. (86)

It is this sincerity that makes Sidney's story so compelling and disturbing: she commits wholeheartedly to achieving the impossible balance between emotional truth and emotional control that the culture demanded from women and it leads to tragedy, ruin, and death.

In addition to the self-inflicted nature of much of Sidney's suffering, a further complication lies in the fact that Lady Bidulph, the mother to whom Sidney demonstrates such devoted obedience, sees herself explicitly as a champion and protector of the female sex. Her response to the revelation about Faulkland's affair with Miss Burchell is informed by her own experience of having been engaged to a man who broke his vows to a woman to whom he had been engaged and who was subsequently tormented by guilt to the extent that he left his betrothed at the altar, suffered a total mental breakdown and was confined in an asylum for the rest of his life. Lady Bidulph says explicitly to Sidney that this traumatic experience "has given me a sort of horror at the very thoughts of an union between you and Mr Faulkland" (49). Lady Bidulph's response is however not limited to her judgments of Faulkland, as Sidney goes on to explain:

> You may recollect, my dear, that my mother, tho' strictly nice in every particular, has a sort of partiality to her own sex, and where there is the least room for it, throws the whole of the blame upon the *man's* side; who, from her own early prepossessions, she is always inclined to think are deceivers of women. (50)

Lady Bidulph casts Miss Burchell in the role of a female victim of male desire and entitlement, but as is gradually revealed, her "partiality to her own sex" leads her to be duped by a woman who is, in George Bidulph's words, a "sly rake in petticoats" (387). Her poor judgment also facilitates the schemes of Miss Burchell's aunt, the conniving Mrs Gerrarde, who not only destroys Sidney's engagement by entrapping Faulkland, but also subsequently seduces her gullible husband, Mr. Arnold.

The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph is in fact populated by an array of female characters who range from misguided to evil. Although Sheridan's novel is often seen in terms of its relationship to the work of Samuel Richardson, to whom it is dedicated, it contrasts starkly with Richardson's novels in that the heroine's antagonists are not rakish and licentious men such as *Pamela*'s Mr. B and *Clarissa*'s Lovelace, but members of her own sex. Sidney's happiness and safety are repeatedly threatened and destroyed by women, to the extent that Barbara Benedict has identified a series of what she calls "gender traitors" (249) in the novel, chief among them the villainous Mrs. Gerrarde. Mrs. Gerrarde is first described to the reader as a widow and neighbour of the Arnolds at Mr. Arnold's estate in South-Park in Kent. Sidney uses the words "charmed" and "charming" repeatedly to describe Mrs. Gerrarde, as well as describing her appearance, manner, and her home using the words "elegant," "neat," "agreeable," all words that signify genteel femininity. It is however soon revealed that this apparently charming and genteel woman is in fact a rapacious schemer who is

not content with seducing another woman's husband and extracting money and gifts from him but also uses her knowledge of the broken engagement between Sidney and Faulkland to convince Mr. Arnold of Sidney's infidelity, causing him to cast her out of his house. After the revelation that Mrs. Gerrarde has been carrying on an affair with Mr. Arnold for months, and that she engineered matters to throw suspicion on Sidney and Faulkland, Sidney is aghast to find out that this Mrs. Gerrarde is in fact the aunt under whose highly questionable guardianship Faulkland first met Miss Burchell. Little wonder that the horror-struck Sidney describes Mrs. Gerrarde at this point as "my evil genius" (148). While Mrs. Gerrarde is stripped of her genteel façade in the middle of the novel, the final unmasking of the supposedly innocent female victim, Miss Burchell, is delayed until the novel's denouement. Sidney's misery is complete when she realizes that, influenced both by her mother and her own strict moral code, she has persuaded Faulkland to marry a woman who is in many ways a misogynistic stereotype, constitutionally incapable of remaining sexually faithful.

The violent and tragic outcome of the Faulkland marriage appears to vindicate George Bidulph's angry accusation when he first learned of it: "I warned you in time against this woman, but my advice has always been despised. [. . .] I believe you will hardly be able to answer it to yourself, if you find that you have condemned one of the noblest fellows in the world to the arms of a prostitute" (328). But if George as it turns out is "right" about Miss Burchell, this does not mean that he is positioned on the side of "right." The novel does not endorse him as a moral authority, instead portraying him as deeply flawed: his certainty about Miss Burchell's loose morals is for example based on the fact that he himself entered into a sexual relationship with her while she was a guest in his mother's house. In order to try to make sense of this moral confusion, Benedict suggests that one of the underlying causes for the tragic chain of events in *Sidney Bidulph* is that the novel "pits the world of women against the world of men. [. . .] it depicts a chasm between female and male mores and morals, conduct codes, definitions of virtue, honour, and honesty" (235). This "chasm" is portrayed very starkly in the language George uses to describe Faulkland's involvement with Miss Burchell and the almost incredulous derision with which he treats the objections of both Sidney and his mother. Whereas the women feel that the wrong that has been done to Miss Burchell is so great that it can only be remedied by an offer of marriage, both George and Faulkland feel that honour requires merely the practical support and compensation which Faulkland has already supplied. George makes it uncomfortably clear that polite society rests on the tacit and usually unspoken acceptance of these kinds of arrangements as normal for men of the gentry and aristocracy. When for example Lady Bidulph says of George that: "I was ashamed to find, that he, after knowing an incident of this kind, had so little regard to the honour of his sister, as to promote a marriage between her and such a rake" she reports him as answering that "if I kept you unmarried till I found such a man as I should not call a rake, you were likely to live and die a maid" (45). George also addresses Sidney directly saying, "A pretty figure you'll make in the world, when you give it for a reason that you refused such a man, after every thing was concluded upon, because truly you found that he had had an intrigue! Why, Sidney, you'll be so laugh'd at!" (51-52). Benedict argues that this gendered division of worlds was

a central feature of eighteenth-century culture and society and that by crafting a narrative in which this division of values and behaviour leads to tragedy for even the most virtuous, Sheridan's novel is engaging in a critique of gendered codes of behaviour and morality (259-60). What Benedict does not acknowledge, however, is there was a broad consensus that *reducing* the gulf between the world of women and the world of men was seen in this period as an essential indicator of social improvement and progress and was central to what many historians regard as the key to understanding the eighteenth century—the quality of politeness.

"Politeness" in an eighteenth-century context was used to describe an ideal of behaviour in which, in Lawrence Klein's words, "moderation, mutual tolerance, and the overriding importance of social comity" were key values (874). As a social and cultural ideal, politeness extended far beyond manners or decorum, being seen instead as a social formation that was aligned with the new age of economic expansion in which Britain was emerging as a global power. The centrality of politeness to the British national self-image thus called for a new understanding of masculinity in which traits such as agreeableness and refinement were incorporated into new definitions of manliness. Philip Carter describes for example how the polite skill of conversational adeptness, "the need to temper the style of one's delivery or prevent oneself from interrupting others," was framed in terms of traditionally manly qualities of "rationality and self-control" (*Men* 73). In addition to producing new understandings of masculinity and manliness, politeness also gave enhanced status to women in terms of their contribution to social and cultural refinement. As Karen Harvey points out, many writers in this period stressed that "a key component of politeness was mixing with women. Polite conversation could depend on women's presence: they softened the language of men, facilitating smooth social interaction" (301-02). I argue therefore that the gulf between the world of men and the world of women that is depicted in *Sidney Bidulph* must be read not as reflective of the gender norms of the period, as Benedict proposes, but as a critique of a central tenet of eighteenth-century society. As Carter reminds us, the polite behaviours of the eighteenth-century gentleman were not seen merely as outward show, but as "a positive indication of the superiority, moral and physical, of modern modes of social interaction" ("Polite Persons"335). *Sidney Bidulph*, however, depicts a world in which "politeness" is nothing more than a façade of refinement, in which women's influence is either misdirected or ineffective, and in which the ideal of the "polite gentleman" through which the English nation supposedly defines itself is a myth.

From the outset, the novel references the ideals of politeness and polite masculinity, only to find them hollow. The action of the novel begins with the return of Sidney's brother George from a tour in Europe, and his mother's invitation to him to stay at her house in London. This prompts Sidney to anticipate with pleasure the opportunity to experience the mixed-gender sociability that was one of the defining features of polite society. She says: "There is no pleasure in society, without a proper mixture of well-bred sensible people of both sexes, and I have hitherto been chiefly confined to those of my own" (13). George's possession of polite character is however immediately cast in doubt by references to the potential of his lifestyle to disrupt rather than enhance their household. His mother's invitation is conditional on his agreement "not [to]

encroach upon my rules by unreasonable hours, or [by] receiving visits from such as I may not approve of for the acquaintance of your sister" (13). Sidney fears that he might decline the invitation because she knows that some of his friends would in fact not meet her mother's standards. In spite of the fact that both mother and sister are aware of that George's social circle includes people who could potentially compromise his sister's reputation, Lady Bidulph's motivation in inviting him to live with them is so that he may act as a chaperone for Sidney for social events, enabling her to stay at home if she chooses. He is even referred to here as a "proper protector" (16) which suggests that ideas of what is proper and improper depend very much on appearances rather than substance. The undercurrent of sexual impropriety is also made manifest in Lady Bidulph's care to ensure that her son's manservants will be given rooms "as remote from those of our servants as the house will admit" because "she knows our own domestics to be orderly and regular, but she cannot answer for what other people's may be" (16). The arrival of George in the previously all-female household thus *should* facilitate the type of polite social gatherings that demonstrate the superior refinement of eighteenth-century English society, as well as ensuring that Sidney has proper male protection, but this requires the suppression of knowledge about the fact that in other contexts, interaction between the sexes involves danger to women, whether in the form of reputational damage or male sexual misconduct, which is here projected onto servants and the lower class.

Even within his own family circle and when nominally following his mother's rules, George fails to live up to the ideal of polite masculinity. He is described at the outset as "void of any of those refined sentiments, which constitute what is called *delicacy*" (11). His lack of delicacy means that when Sidney first meets Faulkland, instead of the encounter being conducted according to modern norms of polite social interaction, she is oppressed by the realization that this is really a form of inspection:

> My brother endeavoured to draw me out, as he said afterwards. The intention was kind, but poor Sir George is not delicate enough in those matters; I should have done better if he had let me alone. I thought of the conversations we had so often had about Mr Faulkland, and could not help considering myself like a piece of goods that was to be shewn to the best advantage to the purchaser. (19-20)

In spite of George's crassness, Faulkland does propose to Sidney, but when the engagement is called off, George's lack of delicacy and politeness mean that his attempts to negotiate between Faulkland and the women in his family come to nothing. Given the contemporary focus on how conversation with women "softened" men's language, it is notable that George's language and manner of expression are highlighted not only as being coarse, but as contributing to his mother's implacable hostility to Faulkland. We have already seen an example of this when George dismisses his mother's objections to what he calls Faulkland's "intrigue" with Miss Burchell. In addition, the letter he writes to Sidney in which he tries to put Faulkland's case is written in such a way that Sidney cannot show it to her mother, as she explains to Cecilia: "You see this is Sir George himself, my dear, a mixture of petulancy and indelicacy. [. . .]. You find how impossible for me it is to shew such a letter to my

mother: by his strange unguarded manner of writing, which he does not consider, he defeats his own purposes" (91-92). One could say then that not only is Sir George very far removed from the ideal of the polite gentleman, but also that one of the chief reasons for this deficiency is that he is contemptuous of the idea of female influence on male behaviour.

The argument for reading the novel as a sceptical dismantling of the concept of polite masculinity and particularly its status as the defining characteristic of eighteenth-century English society acquires further dimensions when we come to look at the character of Faulkland. In contrast to many critics who focus on Faulkland's impetuosity as an indicator of masculine energy and action, Kathleen Oliver highlights his "display of excessive emotion; [. . .] his passivity and helplessness, [. . .] his silence and being silenced; [. . .] his foreignness; and even [. . .] his one time lapse of sexual control" ("Frances Sheridan's Faulkland" 685) to argue that he is depicted as feminized and emasculated. In stark contrast to George, who disdains women's concerns and influence, one could argue that Faulkland is *excessively* influenced by women, the decisive instance being his submission to Sidney's plea for him to marry Miss Burchell and the misery that results from this. Although this is, in Sidney's view, the morally correct course for him to take, he does so having failed to conquer his desire for her. His deference to her influence on him is not accompanied by mastery of himself, rendering him insufficiently manly according to the delicate balancing act that was involved in the ideal of polite masculinity. As both Oliver and Prendergast have pointed out, there are grounds to see Faulkland not just as "foreign," but more specifically as marked in terms of Irishness: he is certainly at the very least in possession of an Irish estate and, his temperament, particularly his fatal inability to control his temper, includes character traits seen in the period as stereotypically Irish (Oliver,"Frances Sheridan"195-96; Prendergast 195-96). Oliver argues further that Sidney, "whose name and actions associate her with Sir Philip Sidney, the embodiment of English virtue" ("Frances Sheridan" 195-96), represents the ideal of English character and that "the doomed nature" of Faulkland and Sidney's love affair "suggests the tensions between the English and the Irish in the eighteenth century" ("Frances Sheridan" 196). Framing the novel as a kind of national allegory is however of limited value, not only because it overlooks the boorish George, who bears the name of the three successive kings who had reigned over Britain since 1714. This type of reading establishes a binary logic that is inadequate as means of addressing the identity and self-perception of writers such as Frances Sheridan, who, as Rebecca Barr has suggested, are better understood "through reference to their place of birth *and* their migratory mobility" ("Forum Introduction" 334).

In Sheridan's case, it is clear that she identified as Irish whilst also expressing a strong sense of affiliation to England. In a letter to Richardson written from Dublin, she wrote: "I long to see you— I long to return to England. I call it returning; that expression, I think, gives me an idea of a sort of home, and such I must consider it, endeared as it is to me by the friendship of some who hold the warmest place in my breast" (Richardson 163). In these letters, Sheridan also claims her identity as Irish, such as when she describes the public efforts to assist those suffering with food scarcity during a particularly severe winter: "I must say, for the honour of my country,

and Dublin in particular, there now seems to be the most diffusive spirit of charity exerting itself that ever was known" (Richardson 154). For Sheridan and others like her, this apparently flexible sense of belonging in both Britain and Ireland was not without its complications, given that the relationship between the two countries was invariably constructed in terms of Ireland's inferiority and its dependence on Britain. Sheridan's awareness of this imbalance is evident in the way in which her description of poverty and suffering, "such distress [. . .] as is scarce credible," is followed immediately by the need to assert "the honour of my country" and to claim that the people's manifestation of civic virtues is evidence of an increasingly civilized society ("the most diffusive spite of charity . . . that was ever known"). Sheridan's first-hand knowledge of England and English society and her experience of it as "a sort of home" enables her to write novels and plays set in England that are for most readers indistinguishable from the work of other writers who did not share her hybrid identity. At the same time, Sheridan could not fail to be aware of the position of dominance and superiority that Britain occupied in relation to Ireland and of how vigorously this dominance had been contested in the eighteenth century.

As we know, the Sheridan family were closely connected to Jonathan Swift, who earned the title of "Hibernian Patriot" on the basis of his fierce opposition to British policy on Ireland expressed in a series of influential essays and pamphlets, most notably *The Drapier's Letters* (1724-25). In common with many of his contemporaries, Swift's response to the political and economic subordination of Ireland was coloured by "the presumption of a naturalized relation between maleness and power" (Barr, et al. 6). The relative powerlessness of Irish elites therefore frequently involved anxious assertions of masculinity or denunciations of the pernicious influence of women, such as when Swift fulminated against the importation of foreign fabrics such as silk and lace, asserting that: "It is to gratify the vanity and pride, and luxury of the women, and of the young fops who admire them, that we owe this insupportable grievance of bringing in the instruments of our ruin" (168). *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, in contrast, can be read as a female reflection on the role played by gender in eighteenth-century constructions of society and nation. Sheridan subverts British claims to superiority not by attempting to construct an Irish masculinity that is allied with power—her Faulkland may win the reader's sympathy but is self-evidently flawed and complicit in his own tragedy. Instead, she exposes the concept of politeness, and its supposed centrality to British claims to social refinement, as an empty fiction. The novel is therefore not simply a compelling and psychologically acute exploration of an individual character's suffering, or indeed a commentary on the moral double bind in which women found themselves trapped in this period; it is also a sceptical commentary on contemporary discourse about the higher status that women in Britain supposedly enjoyed in the context of social improvement and progress.

Elizabeth Sheridan's *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* was written and published twenty years after *Sidney Bidulph*, in a dramatically altered political context in which Frances Sheridan's pessimistic assessment of women's influence on society is replaced by a confident assertion as to the vital role played by women in political and social reform. Opening with a description of the Volunteer Assembly that took place in Dublin in 1779, the novel positions itself clearly in support of the Irish Patriots,

whose campaigns for free trade and legislative independence for the Irish parliament were reaching their climax at the time of its publication. This emergent sense of national identity is abundantly evident in *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*, which is set very specifically in Ireland and which expresses resentment and hostility towards England's treatment of Ireland, reflecting the heightened political atmosphere of the time. Louisa writes that:

> If we do not watch her [England] with unremitting attention, she will, by some artifice, at the first convenient opportunity, contrive to render every thing she grants of no effect, for they are a selfish, illiberal people, and look with a jealous eye on every advantage enjoyed by their fellow subjects. [. . .] The uniform conduct of the English towards this kingdom, as well as towards America, justifies my opinion of them. (85)

Catriona Kennedy has pointed out that these campaigns for legislative and political independence "were explicitly framed in terms of the assertion of Irish masculinity" such as "the martial display of the Volunteers in the 1770s and 1780s" that is so prominently featured in the opening pages of *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion*. Louisa is certainly warmly enthusiastic about these displays, writing that "I was wonderfully delighted to see our men of the first rank and property, as well as our most eminent citizens, voluntarily arming in defence of [Liberty and their country]" (32). However, the novel is equally emphatic about the fact that men cannot necessarily be relied on to make good decisions, and are frequently in need of women's advice, guidance, and influence, in matters both private and public.

Louisa is firmly of the opinion that "the generality of young women have more solid sense than the young men" (38) and the character of Charles Skeffington, Eliza's would-be fiancé, offers a case study in terms of a reversal of gender stereotypes. Charles is depicted as being emotionally unstable and plagued by irrational sexual jealousy, a problem that is treated with practical detachment by both Louisa and Eliza. Eliza is conscious of how Charles's jealousy could make them both miserable and says: "I flatter myself my conduct will cure him of that unhappy propensity; but I will be very sure it has before I think of being united to him" (35). Louisa's verdict on the issue not only makes clear that Charles requires strong female management, but also asserts an authority based on female friendship that undermines the idea of marriage as women's destiny: "I have a high esteem for Charles, but love you still better, and cannot consent to your being his wife till we are quite sure he has recovered his rationality" (63). Such is the confidence in women's character and intellect that the novel expresses, that it is not surprising that the importance of their influence on society and nation is equally emphatically expressed. Eliza writes to Louisa that she is "as public-spirited as any Roman Matron, in the most virtuous ages of the commonwealth" (36) and insists that women can have a decisive and positive role in encouraging civic virtue and patriotism in men:

> I am satisfied, if women were taught disinterested love for their country, there would be more patriots among men than there are at present, for several obvious

> reasons; particularly that, as there are few of them that don't wish to recommend themselves to our favour, they would be very cautious how they acted in their public capacity, if they knew our contempt would be the consequence of their apostacy. (36)

As Padhraig Higgins has discussed, the heightened political consciousness of this period in Ireland created the conditions for a new understanding of women's contribution to society, with "the rhetoric of patriotism repeatedly evok[ing] a dynamic sense of interrelation between women and men in the project of renewing public virtue" (180). The profound differences in tone between *Sidney Bidulph*, with its blameless but suffering heroine, and *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* and its superbly confident young women, can therefore be traced not to differences in their views of female character, but fundamentally to the changes taking place in Ireland in the 1770s and 1780s.

These changes were however contingent and whatever gains were made were far from permanent. This much is signalled by the fact that the women's ideas about their capacity to determine the course of their own lives and to influence the development of their society is shared in a correspondence that is explicitly labelled as private and, in Louisa's words, "ENTRE NOUS" (38). Her opinion that women have more sense than men, she realizes, would not be welcomed if broadcast more widely: "should it be known I thought so, the whole Male Sex would be up in arms against me at once, because good sense is one of the things they believe they have an exclusive patent for" (38). The use of the phrase "exclusive patent" here is an obvious reference to the Patriot campaigns for "Free Trade" that had gathered such momentum in the 1770s, and indicates that although the young women are enthusiastic supporters of the Patriot movement, Louisa is aware that men in their circle do not necessarily support changes to women's status. Dramatic changes had reshaped the Irish political landscape in the twenty years that separated the publication of the two novels, but the belief in women's intellectual inferiority and their lack of civic status remained persistent.

Reading *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* and *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* as an instance of women's cultural transmission highlights both texts' common concerns with contemporary discussions on gender and on women's role in society. Frances Sheridan, I argue, was aware of the importance of the ideal of polite masculinity to Britain's claims of cultural superiority and of the unstable or uncertain status of Irish masculinity as defined in relation to this cultural ideal; the novel's scepticism as to whether this ideal existed in reality however undermines those claims of superior refinement and lifts the lid on the ways in which constructions of gender played their part in a hierarchical ordering of societies and cultures in which Ireland was subordinated to England. *The Triumph of Prudence over Passion* offers a specifically female perspective on Patriot politics, claiming that it reveals the hitherto unexplored potential and capacity of women to contribute to social and political reform. Viewed together they make a strong case for much greater critical attention to the contribution of women writers in Ireland to the interrogation of ideas about gender and society in the long eighteenth century.

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Writing Intergenerational Female Relationships: Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791)

Roslyn Joy Irving

Abstract

This article uses *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) as a case study on the ways Radcliffe writes intergenerational female relationships and engages with the limitations of sensibility and "good" conduct. It will demonstrate how Radcliffe both criticises and endorses female sensibility, as an action which leads to poor judgement and as a tool to manage relationships, as seen in the case of Madame La Motte. It will also address Radcliffe's framing of the doctrines of conduct literature, which produce an admirable role model in the form of Madame La Luc, who is subsequently written out of the text. Finally, it makes a case for intergenerational exchange where the process of a mother-daughter education gives the young women in the novel patterns of behaviours to reshape. This article contributes to the growing volume of research on Radcliffe's politically engaged writing and the Female Gothic.

Keywords: Ann Radcliffe, Gothic fiction, Female Gothic, conduct literature, intergenerational relationships

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Introduction[1]

Ann Radcliffe is credited with establishing the Female Gothic tradition, a fitting topic for this special issue on women writers of the long eighteenth century. Like her contemporaries across literary genres—Fanny Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen, to name a few—Radcliffe uses her fiction to explore the female experience, socio-political and economic rights. This resonates with her own context in the 1790s rather than that of her early-modern "Gothic" settings (Hoeveler 65; Johnson 76; Miles 78; Stabler 5-6). Ruth Anolik suggests that the Gothic employs "literalization" to make "visible" the legal limitations (primogeniture and couverture) women were

1 This article is the outcome of several of papers presented at the BSECS Postgraduate Online Seminar Series, *Crones, Crime, and the Gothic* conference at Falmouth University, and *English and Irish Women Writers of the Eighteenth-Century* conference at the University of Pécs. As elements of my doctoral research informed this article, I would like to thank my supervisors Thomas Duggett and Paul Baines, and my examiners Angela Wright and Simon Marsden, as well as Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University for providing a scholarship for me to undertake a PhD.

confined by in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Anolik 40; see also Clery, *Women's Gothic* 83; Davison 87; and Stabler 15). This article will address what Radcliffe's mother-figures in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) make visible through their interactions with the heroine, Adeline.

Radcliffe's mother figures have been the subject of scholarly discourse for over two decades.[2] Much of this body of research has focused on maternal absence and haunting (Zlosnik and Horner 186; Anolik 25; Miles 106). For example, psychoanalytical and historical analysis has been applied to the position of Louisa Mazzini in *A Sicilian Romance* (1790): a spectral prisoner, who is kept in the passageways beneath her property as her husband commits bigamy and tries to force their daughter, Julia, into a loveless marriage to the Duke de Luovo. Alison Milbank reads the mother-daughter reunion at the end of the novel as "a testing out of what it might mean to acknowledge the mother, and to establish social networks built upon this Utopian project" (xxiv). In Radcliffe's fiction the mother-child dynamic is essential, as Carol Davison asserts:

> the mother embodies and emblematizes the past in the Female Gothic and, more specifically, the daughter's past. This association is logical, given her biological role as the site of the daughter's origins, but it also incorporates the idea of the mother's legacy to the daughter in terms of certain culturally defined roles and behaviours. (Davison 95)

However, to characterise Julia in *A Sicilian Romance* as motherless until the point of her reunion with Louisa, is untrue. She receives her education alongside her sister, Emilia, in the family home, under the guiding hand of Madame de Menon (Radcliffe, *Sicilian* 6-8; see also Stabler 6, 15), the "mother substitute" (Hoeveler 62). This article focuses on the role of the so-called mother substitute in *The Romance of the Forest*—a text which provides alternative case studies in Radcliffe's construction of womanhood compared to her earlier novel.

In *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), both Madame La Motte and Madame La Luc educate Adeline, and become responsible for her well-being over the course of the novel. Eva König has stated that Radcliffe's third novel centres on Adeline's journey "to find an acceptable father" and "an acceptable representative of the Law-of-the-Father" (189). In this process she also encounters two different matriarchal figures both of whom she must learn from and respond to. To borrow Anolik's term, these mother-figures "literalize" (40) conflicting standards for female behaviour in the eighteenth century. This article begins by establishing Radcliffe's Female Gothic and its educational function. The second section addresses the role of sensibility in Madame La Motte's behaviours and her relative success by the conclusion of the narrative. In contrast, the final section discusses the "ideal" yet limited counterpoint to sensibility configured through Madame La Luc.

2 At the *Year of Gothic Women Conference*, Angela Wright discussed Radcliffe's "family romances" with reference to biographical details of the author's upbringing, proving it to be an evolving strand of research in studies on Radcliffe (Wright, "Family Romance").

The Female Gothic and Educational Texts

To address the complexity of Radcliffe's engagement with motherhood, it is first necessary to define the framework of the Female Gothic. Robert Miles considers it a "narrative matrix" in which accessing Radcliffe's subversive message requires "the modern critic [. . .] to read against the grain of Radcliffe's apparent intentions" (18). In other words, her challenge to patriarchal institutions is often masked by the structure of the narrative. In *Gothic Feminism* Dianne Long Hoeveler argues that:

> The female gothic heroine is most decidedly a daughter whose task concerns a rewriting of the mythically heroic: she must redeem her good but missing mother, kill her evil and false father and stepmother, and reinstitute a new world with an appropriately and professionally bourgeois hero-husband. *A Sicilian Romance* is the first version of this tale. (62)

As Hoeveler indicates, *A Sicilian Romance* establishes a very particular frame which is cemented by Radcliffe's subsequent publications. In *The Romance of the Forest* for instance, Adeline journeys across France, resisting the perils of manipulative allies and a reprehensible Marquis, later revealed to be her uncle. She finally settles in Savoy with her husband Theodore. Rather than focusing on Adeline's narrative arc, which has been well-addressed in existing scholarship, this article discusses intergenerational female exchange: the strained nurturing and educational dynamic between Madame La Motte and Madame La Luc, and their daughters Adeline, and to a lesser extent Clara La Luc.[3]

Much has been written about the "abject," missing mother in the Gothic (Davison 94), but less attention has been directed towards the objectionable ones.[4] Such figures are by no means villains, but not completely vulnerable or always interested in the needs of the heroine(s), especially if it compromises their sense of order. This article reconsiders two maternal figures in *The Romance of the Forest* who offer ironic depictions of, and resistance to, traditional ideals of eighteenth-century femininity. Madame La Motte and Madame La Luc never meet, which seems to me a deliberate effort to frame differing educational strategies on Radcliffe's part. These women also

3 Clara and Madame La Luc only appear in the third volume and play no role in Adeline's relationship with Madame La Motte. However, much of the educational schemas Madame La Luc seems to advocate for are described through a brief history of the La Luc household, and her frustrations in raising Clara: "[Madame was] displeased that her niece neglected her domestic duties, and wished to reprove her" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 249).

4 The idea of abjection was proposed by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, in which she explores the contested position of women. The author argues that "What we designate as 'feminine,' far from being a primeval essence, will be seen as an 'other' without a name, which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity" (Kristeva 58). In establishing the Female Gothic, Radcliffe puts the feminine 'other' at the core of her narratives (Clery, "Politics of the Gothic Heroine" 70-71). Yet there remain peripheries, increasingly "abject" forms of womanhood itself. As Wright, and Zlosnik and Horner have pointed out, older women might be taken as the "other" to the young heroine (Wright, "Heroines in flight" 22; Zlosnik and Horner 186).

represent the familiar eighteenth-century debate around reason and sensibility. In fact, Nelson C. Smith argues that Radcliffe intends to caution against excessive sensibility in her novels (Smith 583). Citing an episode in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) in which St. Aubert's dying wish is that his daughter regulates her reactive personality (Radcliffe, *Udolpho* 79), Smith contends that:

> Mrs. Radcliffe's criticisms of this luxuriating in emotion do not possess the humor or the genius of Fielding or Miss Austen; but they nevertheless are clear, direct, and perhaps even more interesting. For she takes the typical heroine of sentimental novels and, using the techniques of the Gothic novel, reveals how such a state of mind brings about many of the terrors which the heroine faces. The cure for such an attitude, Mrs. Radcliffe makes clear, lies in a return to common sense. (580)

However, Smith's conclusions are limited by focusing on the heroines' experiences in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* (1798). The idea that Radcliffe completely condemns sensibility and emotional reactivity is unconvincing when reading the ambivalent words of wisdom and humorous interludes associated with matriarchal figures in *The Romance of the Forest*. Madame La Motte is a case study in thinking through feeling and using emotional cues to get her own way. Meanwhile, Madame La Luc is so rational and dutiful, she becomes ridiculous. Thus, these women do not configure a "return to common sense" (Smith 580).

Madame La Motte's Reactive Sensibility

Madame La Motte appears in the first chapter of *The Romance of the Forest* mourning her departure from Paris because of her husband's criminality. The La Motte couple rescue Adeline on their journey from Paris, and Madame's interest in the young woman's story and protection is motivated by her physiognomic assessment of the heroine's face. Madame La Motte finds herself fascinated by Adeline's "melancholy grace" and the "penetrating sweetness in her blue eyes, which indicated an intelligent and amiable mind" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 9). Within a few short hours of their first meeting, Madame establishes an intimate connection which will lead her to sit at Adeline's bedside as the heroine suffers through a fever (Radcliffe, *Romance* 11-13). Her early interactions with Adeline are inherently maternal:

> She was a sensible and highly accomplished woman, and it became her chief delight to form the rising graces of Adeline, who had, as has been already shown, a sweetness of disposition, which made her quick to repay instruction with improvement, and indulgence with love. (Radcliffe, *Romance* 34)

Madame La Motte was raised as socialite in Paris, which explains why she would be well-placed to "form the rising graces" of the heroine, and Adeline finds herself under the wing of an "indulgen[t]" teacher. However, living in (a) ruin with her ward,

two servants and her criminal husband, Madame appears to be missing the realities of her socio-economic position, as she continues to act as if she retains her elite status. She teaches an aristocratic form of household management perhaps because her knowledge is limited by her own experience and upbringing. By that same token, she genuinely enjoys Adeline's company whose "affectionate attentions [. . .] console her for the want of other society" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 29).

The matriarch befits Alan Richardson's definition of "emotional responsiveness," as she is a reactive figure capable of "controlling nurturance," "frivolity," and "luxuriousness" (169). She is particularly sensitive to the fashions and social power of other figures in the novel. This makes her a poor judge of character, as "the noble deportment" and "splendour" of the villain's person (Radcliffe, *Romance* 88) convince Madame of his value, far more than his ethical standing. Radcliffe's ambivalent treatment of sensibility, however, is striking. Madame's initial generosity and charity towards Adeline, is the product of impulse, as is her good impression of the Marquis de Montalt, the latter proves to be erroneous. Although she can discern the depth of Adeline's goodness from her melancholic features, this is coincidental, as she is vulnerable to a façade of nobility.

While Madame is prone to misinterpretation, she is strategic in her management of friendships and in her willingness to end them when they no longer serve her purpose. In a fraught episode in which Madame believes Adeline to be having an affair with Monsieur La Motte, she asserts that: "[a] friend is only estimable when our conduct deserves one; the friendship that survives the merit of its object, is a disgrace, instead of an honour, to both parties" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 78). Madame finds the idea of her husband's and Adeline's infidelity unspeakable, "[h]er jealousy of Adeline, however, she could not communicate," and she becomes increasingly "tormented" by her own imagination (Radcliffe, *Romance* 71). Angela Wright notes that this interaction leads Madame to "neglect" her "surrogate daughter" (*The Import of Terror* 100), and through the heroine's dutiful response (calmly continuing to serve the household), Radcliffe reflects on the limitations of Rousseauvian philosophies on "self-love" (Wright, *The Import of Terror* 101). Hoeveler considers the tension between Madame La Motte and Adeline a competition where "[t]he husband and wife can view a child only as an interloper, an unwanted third party in the eternal dyad that we know as marriage in the patriarchy" (75). A stung Adeline is in fact not guilty of an affair, but she has nonetheless received an important warning on the limitations of friendship. In defense of her marriage, Madame's "controlled and controlling nurturance" (Richardson 169) comes to the fore and her friendship, maternal and educational impulses are conditional. Even after learning that she was mistaken, Madame will choose to ignore the mistreatments she inflicted and eventually sit in silence while her husband betrays Adeline in exchange for legal protection (Radcliffe, *Romance* 211).

Just as Madame La Motte betrays Adeline, she also rebuilds their friendship in the interests of protecting her household. In the third volume of the novel, Monsieur La Motte is prosecuted and requires Adeline to stand as a witness in his trial. Madame, in collaboration with her son, persuades the heroine to do so. After Adeline has been driven out of their home and confidence, it seems incredible that she would

once again support the La Mottes. While in part motivated by the chance to protect Theodore and incriminate the Marquis during the trial, Adeline is also moved by Madame's effort to repair their bond:

> She [Adeline] was immediately visited at the hotel by Madame La Motte: the meeting was affecting on both sides. A sense of her past conduct excited in the latter an embarrassment which the delicacy and goodness of Adeline would willingly have spared her; but the pardon solicited was given with so much sincerity, that Madame gradually became composed and re-assured. (Radcliffe, *Romance* 338)

After Adeline arrives in Paris to give testimony, Madame La Motte "immediately" jumps into action. Radcliffe's employment of the verb "excited" implies Madame's reactive nature. There is a sense of reciprocity and resemblance between the two women. However, Madame's reactions can be read as performative, as her apologetic demeanour and visible "embarrassment" quickly shift to "composure" once she has resumed control of the wilfully credulous heroine. "[E]motional responsiveness" (Richardson 169), in other words sensibility, is used to reassert a mother-daughter dynamic, as shortly hereafter, Madame offers Adeline a place in her lodgings (Radcliffe, *Romance* 339). Once returned to Paris, Madame La Motte proves politically astute, recognises her role as her husband's ambassador, and manages her friendships accordingly.

Despite Adeline's presence in the trial, La Motte is sentenced to death and Madame is seen "at the Chatelet with her husband, suffering all the distress which the sentence pronounced against him might be supposed to inflict" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 345). Madame La Motte ensures that her companions are attentive to her "sorrowful heart" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 346). However, her excessive emotions are momentarily soothed by a very different revelation from the proceedings: Adeline is an heiress. On learning this, she displays a "momentary gleam of satisfaction" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 346), perhaps signalling a shrewd awareness that her friendship with "Adeline de Montalt" could promote her interests despite her husband's criminal conviction. While this scene may encourage a discussion of the political power associated with a hereditary title, more significantly in this discussion, it exposes the ways Madame's sensibility tracks with changing political dynamics—from "embarrassment" to composure, despair to satisfaction. Madame La Motte's sensibility is a point of humour, and a redeeming quality which allows her to make, break, and rebuild friendships. It is also a political strategy to succeed in a patriarchal society. By the close of the novel, Madame's emotional manipulations have realised a great deal of success. Sensibility may render her mistaken in some moments, but influential in others. Her future will be in England, funded by Adeline (a "noble" "benefactress") and accompanied by her husband, whose "sentence was softened from death to banishment" at the heroine's request (Radcliffe, *Romance* 353-54). Madame La Motte refuses to be the victim of a patriarchal system and uses sensibility to sure up her socio-economic position. This is dramatized through her interactions with Adeline.

Madame La Luc and Female Conduct

As indicated in the discussion above, there is a tension in Gothic texts between their surreal storylines and their educational impetus (Richardson 203-04). In fact, the conduct and education of young women was widely discussed in the late eighteenth century. As Harriet Guest points out, Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft's approaches to education unexpectedly overlap as both writers questioned "unqualified sensibility" (Guest 285). They pointed to the problematics of raising women who "are enthralled by novels, fascinated by manners, superficial appearances, surface ornamentation, distracted by isolated incidents and random, occasional events" (Guest 285). Such a description might befit some of Madame La Motte's behaviours but is strongly resisted by her counterpart in the third volume of the novel, Madame La Luc. Dorice Williams Elliot suggests that conduct literature established philanthropy as a domestic duty (183). A similar concern is embedded in *The Romance of the Forest* through Madame La Luc's role in her community and the ways she corrects her niece Clara, whom she fears is governed by emotional impulses instead of charitable duties and her obligations as a daughter.

Madame La Luc considers Clara's physiognomic impulse inherently "romantic" and a futile measure of moral worth: "Shall I never persuade you to give up that romantic notion of judging people by their faces" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 256). In contrast to Clara's visceral reaction to Adeline's unconscious face, which "prejudices" her in the heroine's "favour," Madame La Luc will collect information on the young woman's "history" prior to moving or treating her (Radcliffe, *Romance* 256-57). Rebecca Addicks-Salerno has argued that Madame La Luc becomes a model of female empiricism and science in the novel (74-75). However, this misses some of the humour in Radcliffe's writing and overlooks the fact that Madame's exacting rationalism is at times overbearing and increasingly ridiculous. Davison suggests that mother figures in the Gothic often work alongside patriarchal schemas, to "police" (94-95) the heroine. The idea of control is something which comes through most overtly Madame La Luc's strictures. Unlike Madame La Motte, whose actions are often guided by whim, Madame La Luc is rigid and prescriptive. Like her brother, a pastor in Savoy, Madame La Luc offers a reference to Rousseau's *Émile*. However, she seems to reinforce the educational doctrines recommended in "Sophie," which states that a young woman ought never to experience being "free from restraint" (Rousseau 270; see also Irving 16-17).

While Madame La Luc proves to be a dutiful role-model, she is not described as attractive, in contrast to the women of sensibility in the novel. Madame La Luc is an "elderly lady" who nursed Adeline through a fever "with an air of tender interest" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 243-44). This is quite unlike the "lovely" heroine (Radcliffe, *Romance* 103), "gentle" and "sweet" Clara (Radcliffe, *Romance* 246), or "beautiful and elegant" Madame La Motte (Radcliffe, *Romance* 2).[5] As the local healer Madame

5 Employing a Freudian lens, Elisabeth Bronfen reads for Adeline's "hysterical symptoms" (172-74) and responses to changing family dynamics, or frameworks of the family romance. The heroine is emotionally engaged and reactive, and therefore a configuration of sensibility.

La Luc's position is conflicted, integral yet outside (Addicks-Salerno 74-76): "From this room the whole village was liberally supplied with physical comfort; for it was the pride of Madame to believe herself skilful in relieving the disorders of her neighbours" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 248). While trusted by her neighbours, the efficacy of Madame's treatments appears the result of self-recommendation. Supporting the parishioners of Leloncourt is a point of "pride" for Madame La Luc, who will be called upon to treat Adeline, Clara, Monsieur Verneuil, and Arnaud La Luc over the course of the third volume of the novel. Problematically, she is delighted to be presented with an ailment: it was "difficult to determine whether she felt most concern for the sufferings of her guest or pleasure at the opportunity thus offered of displaying her physical skill" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 268). Thus, the matriarch's vanity is fuelled by her reputation (Johnson 89).

When it comes to parenting Adeline and Clara (both younger, unmarried women), her behavioural and medical treatment plans are inflexible. For example, she asserts that Adeline must "submit, therefore, to every thing that may conduce [. . . her recovery], and consent to be kept as quiet as possible" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 244). While Madame La Luc is decisive and generous—striving for her patient's comfort without reward while cautioning resistance. She imposes the role of female patient onto the heroine, who must "submit" and "be kept as quiet as possible." Any protest would likely go unvoiced and unheard. Addick-Salerno's contends that this is a request for "consent," that places "these two women in a patient/caregiver relationship" (73). Adeline's so-called consent is a "silent" nod of the head, less an agreement, than a willingness not to test the boundaries of the friendship. This interaction stands in stark contrast to Madame La Luc's treatment of Monsieur Verneuil's arm which is injured when he chivalrously saves Clara.

> It was now swelled and somewhat inflamed, and this might in some degree be attributed to the effect of Madame La Luc's balsam, whose restorative qualities had for once failed. The whole family sympathised with his sufferings, and Madame, at the request of M. Verneuil, abandoned her balsam, and substituted an emollient fomentation. (Radcliffe, *Romance* 271)

Monsieur Verneuil has the facility to complain about and change his treatment, admittedly after the balsam seems to have caused adverse effects. Radcliffe's novel therefore offers an ambivalent frame for Madame La Luc's scientific prowess and relative empowerment. Like Madame La Motte, she asserts herself over younger women. This is achieved by chastising and challenging unwanted behaviours, while establishing her authority through (literal) prescription. On the other hand, she finds that she must accommodate the requests of male figures such as Monsieur Verneuil.

While Madame La Luc makes every effort to maintain her family's reputation, she falls into the background of the novel by its close. Like Madame de Menon discussed at the opening of this article, she is brought to Arnaud La Luc's chateau as a substitute mother figure. However, she can never quite replace her late sister-in-law (Radcliffe, *Romance* 274) and her position is further diminished by Adeline's connection to the La Luc household, as she will eventually marry the heir, Theodore Peyrou/La Luc. After their marriage, Adeline will become "Madame La Luc" effectively assuming her

aunt-in-law's title. At the close of the novel, overlooking Lake Geneva and "contemning [sic] the splendour of false happiness, [. . .] here, in the very bosom of felicity, lived Theodore and Adeline La Luc" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 363). Madame La Luc remains as she arrived: "a maiden sister, a sensible, worthy woman" (Radcliffe, *Romance* 246). However, she has little presence in the concluding chapter of the novel, merely waiting to greet her brother and the newly married Theodore and Adeline, at the gate of the chateau. Arguably, Madame La Luc's lack of sensibility dooms her to be virtually written out of the text.

Conclusion

Joan B. Landes suggests, during the French Revolution "women seem to straddle a desire to restore the old system of moral justice and an impulse to assert women's rights within the new system of legal representation" (107). Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* articulates this conflict between moral traditions and changing legal rights. Superficially, Radcliffe appears to reinforce patriarchal frameworks especially given the rigid educational schema for young women advocated by Madame La Luc. However, she treats this dynamic as admirable and laughable by turns, so that interactions with the matriarch are less an endorsement of well-reasoned decision making than a light-hearted challenge to prescription. This is only reinforced by the novel's conclusion, as adherence to the limitations of eighteenth-century domesticity leads to Madame La Luc's erasure. In contrast, Madame La Motte is both astute and self-interested across each volume of the text. Her status as a model of reactive sensibility, and what it might realize in terms of socio-economic power, proves that women who regulate their behaviours and reactions might be more respectable, but they are not necessarily more successful. Madame La Motte becomes what Emma Clery might term a "clandestine participant" in the male space ("Politics of the Gothic Heroine" 75). As a socialite Madame La Motte is "[f]orcibly absented from the scene of production" and as a wife, she is a "casualty" (Clery, "Politics of the Gothic Heroine" 75) of her husband's mistakes, but she becomes instrumental in their resolution through female alliance as a "mother substitute" (Hoeveler 62). In other words, Madame La Motte's friendship, or rather mother-daughter bond with Adeline, creates an opportunity for her to become influential in socio-economic terms. Through intergenerational female exchange in the novel, Radcliffe critiques and nuances the position of women and the management of their behaviours. The role of the mother is more complex in *The Romance of the Forest* than *A Sicilian Romance*, especially as the subplot exposes the value of sensibility in forwarding women's position within the patriarchal structures of the text.

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From Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1765)[1] to Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1999): Questions of Genre, Adaptation Strategies and Authorship

Mária Kurdi

Abstract

The English-Hungarian Elizabeth Kuti's (1969-) comedy, *The Whisperers* (1998) is based on the Anglo-Irish Frances Sheridan's (1724-1766) unfinished third play, *A Trip to Bath* (1765). In fact, the later work is a special adaptation of the earlier one, the result of an intertextual conversation between the two writers, with Kuti completing Sheridan's fragment in the spirit of the original. This essay examines how *A Trip to Bath* fits in with the contemporary comic genre on the stage and the ways and modes in which *The Whisperers* recasts it to produce a unique piece of collaborative theater. Kuti's addition continues and energizes the reflection of the social and emotional variedness in the co-authored work, a feature which characterizes the best of eighteenth-century English comedy. The argument of the essay also concerns itself with issues of dual authorship, adaptation strategies, and both textual and dramaturgical coherence in the newly produced work.

Keywords: Frances Sheridan, eighteenth-century English comedy, Elizabeth Kuti, adaptation, dual authorship

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In a May 1999 issue of the magazine *Variety*, Karen Ficker's review of the premiere of Elizabeth Kuti's *The Whisperers* (1998) begins as follows: the play "is a delightful conversation across the centuries between two female playwrights, one launching her career by doing loving service to another who was sadly under-appreciated in her own time." The participants of the literary conversation are the Anglo-Irish Frances Sheridan (1724-1766) and the English-Hungarian Elizabeth Kuti (1969-), whose

1 I first heard about Frances Sheridan from the late Professor Christopher Murray of University College Dublin, who gave a lecture on eighteenth-century drama in our department as a visiting scholar back in the 1990s. We published the lecture in the pioneering issue of *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies* in 1998. Sadly, he died of terminal illness at 83 not long ago, while I was working on the draft of this article. Therefore my paper is dedicated to him, an excellent, widely known and highly valued expert of English and Irish theater and also a kind, appreciative and generous colleague, who was always ready to give advice and support emerging scholars.

respective private journeys took them in opposing directions. Frances Sheridan's also Irish-born husband, Thomas Sheridan, a theater manager and playwright, decided to leave Ireland for London, which offered Irish writers better opportunities than colonial Dublin at that time. Having joined her husband, it was in London that Frances Sheridan earned her first and lasting success with the epistolary novel *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), influenced and encouraged by and dedicated to the renowned contemporary giant of English fiction, Samuel Richardson. A couple of years later, Sheridan turned to the stage and the fruits of this new direction were two full length comedies, *The Discovery* (1763) and *The Dupe* (1764), as well as the unfinished *A Trip to Bath* (1765), of which only three acts have survived. However, as Gabriella Hartvig notes, "Sheridan's other works remained advertised through *Sidney Bidulph.* This shows that Sheridan must have remained fairly known in the eighteenth century; but she could never exceed the success of *Sidney Bidulph* with her later works" (60).

Coming from Ireland, yet Sheridan considered London her real home (see Hogan and Beasley 19). Conversely, more than two centuries later, the English-born Kuti spent productive years in Dublin, about which she says: "Ireland gave me so much, so many blessings, in the eleven years I lived there" in the 1990s, enjoying "the chance to become an actor and a playwright in the Irish theatre" ("Strangeness" 142). As an actress she played, for instance, the title role of Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* in 1998 and, besides, was studying eighteenth-century Irish women's drama for her PhD dissertation at Trinity College. During this period she came to know Sheridan's unfinished play, *A Trip to Bath*, which she read with great enthusiasm, and ventured to publish an essay about the playwright's career and the drama itself. In the closing part of this work Kuti says that until quite recently Frances Sheridan had been overshadowed by her son, the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and adds: "Such female dramatists as Frances Sheridan deserve to be written back into theatrical history and the repertoire—before another of our connections with the past is 'illiterated' from our memories" (128). She herself certainly did write Sheridan back into theatrical history by completing *A Trip to Bath* to achieve a play of five acts renamed *The Whisperers* (1998). Later Kuti felt inspired to conceive her own plays, two of which are set in Ireland: *Treehouses* (2000) and *The Sugar Wife* (2006)—the latter was revived as part of The Gregory Project at the Abbey Theatre in the spring of 2024 to commemorate the foundation of the Abbey in 1904 and the ardent and efficient work for the theater of one of its first directors, Lady Augusta Gregory.

By genre, *A Trip to Bath* qualifies as a comedy. Comedy in the eighteenth century showed many differences from its Restoration antecedent, a historically branded form of the comedy of manners, which was flourishing on the stage in the final decades of the seventeenth century, embracing themes of profane behavior, promiscuity and rejection of Puritan morality in the upper circles of the society. Restoration comedy included stock characters such as the hedonistic libertine or rake, women whose sole interest is to find a husband with a lot of money, older, hypocritical figures, for instance, fathers who want to enforce their patriarchal rights at whatever cost, aging coquettish women, country boors, etc. The unfolding changes of the genre in the new century were due to several factors, mainly to the strengthening of the bourgeois and mercantile classes, who disapproved of the immorality and cynicism of those

born into the aristocracy as shown on the Restoration stage, and demanded a theater of characters' improvement instead. A playwright of Irish extraction writing for the London stage, George Farquhar is often regarded as a transitional author "between Restoration and eighteenth-century dramatic trends, whose plays show a didactic edge when compared with many comedies from the preceding decades" (Goring 80).

In *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830* Lisa A. Freeman quotes from Horace Walpole's "Thoughts on Comedy" (1775), in which the latter claims that the new playwrights of the period left behind "the acerbic wit and libertine cynicism" of the Restoration period and responded to the needs of their "expanding audience" of middle-class people by assuming a more genteel tone. The quotation from Walpole continues: "comedy thus cast its eyes not on vices of the aristocratic classes, which dominated the Restoration stage, but rather upon the manners, follies and concerns of the middling classes whose influence and power were in the ascendancy in late eighteenth-century England" (73-74). Taking a somewhat different path, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre (1737-1832)* Misty G. Anderson claims that Restoration drama influenced Georgian drama, which became "both haunted and animated by its characters and questions" (348) while challenging Restoration playwrights' "assumptions about class, gender, and power" (353). New comedies written in the satirical tradition "downplayed the transactional function of marriage" and "nourished a compensatory narrative of choice, domestic affection, and the substitution of love for lust" as well as celebrating "bourgeois values such as individual merit, domestic affection, and the personal nobility of merchant figures" (Anderson 349-50). Anderson also stresses that "Georgian comedy embraced sentiment as one possible strategy for comedy, differing "most pointedly from earlier comic genres [was] in dramatically reversing the alienation effect of Restoration comedies and demanding emotional involvement with vulnerable suffering characters" (352, 354). In representing social changes, there was a shift towards engaging with "a broader range of class and relative power positions" and the concept of being "gentle" tended to have its basis more in behavior than in bloodline (Anderson 354, 357). Characteristically, the figure of the libertine known from Restoration comedy tended to be tamed and even re-created to embrace a "new function as a self-renouncing figure who already knows better but lacks the will to change" (Anderson 364). The present essay examines the dynamics of the above properties in *A Trip to Bath*, and the ways and modes in which *The Whisperers* recasts and builds on them, to revive the values of a past dramatic tradition in Sheridan's work, and mobilize the potentials of the present for producing a unique piece of collaborative theatre. I argue that this kind of dialogue across centuries can be very fruitful and productive.

Frances Sheridan's first play, *The Discovery* (1763) loosely followed the pattern of sentimental comedy with some original twists, and brought her immediate success. The legendary theater maker, David Garrick acted in it (together with Frances' husband) and was full of praise, calling the work "one of the best comedies he ever read" (qtd. in Brunström 27), which he revived in the Drury Lane Theatre later too. In his book about Irish theater, Christopher Morash underscores that still in the same year "[. . .] the two rival Dublin theatres, Smock Alley and Crow Street, both mounted productions [of *The Discovery*] at the same time, each playing to half-full

houses" (51). What certainly added to the success of the play was that Sheridan constructed multiple plot-lines and innovatively complicated the conventional happy ending. As Conrad Brunström sums up its unique merits, "*The Discovery* is a distinctively hybrid form of entertainment, a play that confounds expectations of comedy and tragedy. While structurally the drama concludes with a melodramatic discovery that facilitates a traditional nuptial denouement, this is a play that, along the way, concerns itself with some of the most corrosively chilling aspects of the human character" (29). Therefore, calling it a conventional sentimental comedy would belittle the playwright's sophisticated handling of both the genre and the themes addressed. Encouraged by her success in the theater, Sheridan wrote another play, *The Dupe* (1764), which, however, proved a failure mainly because of its tiresome verbosity unhappily counterbalancing the apparent strength of some of the characterizations (especially that of Mrs. Friendly, whose role is unforgettably comic) and the tightness of the plot (Hogan and Beasley 25). As if wishing to take her innovations to the extreme, here Sheridan treats love in such an unsentimental way that she alienated the contemporary audience which "did not react well to what was perceived as coarseness in the play's satiric humour" (Ó Gallchoir 49). Moreover, no substantial dramaturgical device was employed in *The Dupe* to save the stage production from having a very short run of (the then compulsory) three nights and from becoming registered as a flop.[2] True, together with the few other Irish-born women playwrights of the period, Sheridan suffered double marginalization: on the one hand, due to "the gendered nature of the theatre as a public space" in which their presence was "only partly tolerated," while their career also reflected the often looked down on position of those from Dublin "in relation to the dominance of London theatre" on the other (see Ó Gallchoir 50).

By 1764 the playwright's husband, who often embarked on new projects without the matching financial basis, heaped up a serious amount of debt and found it better to leave for France with his family. It was there that Sheridan began to write a new play named *A Trip to Bath*, also known as *A Journey to Bath* (Hogan and Beasley 25). She gained some experience of the place in the title during a family visit to Bath earlier, where she became familiar with its mixed-class social life. The play was offered to Drury Lane but Garrick rejected it by enumerating his objections in writing. Sheridan refuted all those objections, for her "heavy accusations," in a response which defends the play, cogently arguing that it fits the contemporary dramatic style adequately:

> I do not think it absolutely necessary to interest the passions in a comedy: in a tragedy it is indispensable; but if the Comic Muse can excite curiosity enough to keep up the attention of the audience, she has, in my mind, acquitted herself of her duty and I think this seems to be the general style of some of our most entertaining comedies; and the one in question, I should hope, is not entirely

2 A recent video production of *The Dupe* attempts to highlight the merits of the play. It is available now on the internet, accompanied by a discussion of theater experts about it, thanks to the ambitious efforts of the "Lost Ladies of Theatre" project. Plays by other "lost ladies" revived in the project range from Margaret Cavendish to Gertrude Stein.

> void of this merit; as the fate of an unworthy project against two innocent young people, artfully carried on, on one side, by a designing pair, and ridiculously supported, on the other, by an absurd pair, is not decided till the very last scene. (qtd. in Hogan and Beasley 26)

In her bold reply to Garrick, Sheridan considers keeping up the attention of the audience as an important requirement which *A Trip to Bath* does fulfill and implies that it is well worthy of being staged. Whether the text she sent to Garrick was a complete five-act play or not, cannot be decided because Sheridan died not long afterwards. The surviving manuscript was published as a fragment only in 1902. It comprises three acts without the usual conclusion to the main plot, although in the above quoted passage the author refers to "the very last scene" where the fate of the joint immoral projects is decided. A possible but not verifiable explanation for this contradiction can be that Sheridan herself destroyed acts four and five, planning to rewrite and improve them, which she, however, was not able to accomplish in the remaining weeks or months of her short life.

Sheridan's refusal of Garrick's objections, in fact, provides information on the main plotline as comprising two middle-aged protagonists' vicious manipulations of two young innocents in *A Trip to Bath*. Critics' claim that Restoration drama influenced eighteenth-century plays to an extent is proven by Sheridan's work; however, while drawing on this heritage, she also modified it through various shifts, complications and additions, achieving a comedy which is more satirical than sentimental. The idea of a basic social stratification of the Restoration comedy can be traced in Sheridan's construction of characters too, but she is more intent on representing social changes with a shift toward engaging with "a broader range of class and relative power positions" (Anderson 354). In *A Trip to Bath* there are basically three distinct social groups: the aristocrats (Lady Filmot, Lady Bell Aircastle, Lord Stewkly), people who did not inherit but earned a title (Sir Jonathan and his brother, Sir Jeremy) and those from the city who make money by holding a job or are related to trade (Mrs. Surface, Mrs. Tryfort, Stapleton, Champignion). This arrangement, reinforced by Sheridan's choice of speaking names for her characters similar to or even more expressive than the ones occurring in Restoration comedies, results in a nuanced complexity, reflecting the massive changes and transformations that took place in English society throughout the early and middle decades of the eighteenth century.

Members of the first social group, characters of "illustrious birth" as worded by Lady Bell Aircastle (Sheridan-Kuti 26),[3] appear in the unpleasant situation of having inherited an aristocratic name and title without the wealth their ancestors once enjoyed. Impoverished gentry as they are, they eagerly try to marry someone for money from the middle classes who possess enough financial means now. Lady Bell is the most hypocritical of the three; while obviously a fortune-hunter, building up castles of air, she expresses contempt for those who have jobs to earn money and looks down on those belonging to the common lot in her eyes. "Oh insufferable! And have I been

3 I use the unpublished manuscript of Kuti's *The Whisperers or, A Trip to Bath*, which incorporates the three acts Sheridan originally wrote.

acquainted with a fellow that deals in sugar!" (26), she breaks out referring to the merchant Champignion but once she has heard about his (questionable) noble birth, she is more than willing to accept him as a suitor and would-be husband. The name Champignion conjures up a man as unthinking and thriving as a mushroom, who cherishes a strong wish to be connected to the aristocracy by courting and hoping to win Lady Bell. His desire to climb higher on the already shaking social ladder at any cost, confirms the view that many eighteenth-century comedies elucidated how the middle classes were eager to acquire the external forms of "aristocratic refinement," in the interest of enhancing their social status (Freeman 75).

The designing pair in the play, Lady Filmot and Lord Stewkly, had been lovers before, but early in Act one, start pursuing their plans to marry Edward and Lucy respectively, middle-class youngsters who expect to inherit a fortune from their elders. Lady Filmot and Lord Stewkly represent the seductive "middle-aged coquette" and the unscrupulous "rake" characters which roles appear in many a Restoration comedy. Their ruthless lies, hypocritical pretensions, and duplicity endanger the young people's planned engagement in Bath on the upcoming twenty-first birthday of the boy. However, unique to Sheridan's comedy, the coquettish Lady Filmot's character displays greater complexity than her Restoration forebears; it is suggested that she became the victim of calculating parental authority at quite a young age:

> LADY FILMOT: I protest I *liked* you vastly; but for *love*, oh lud! A woman, who at sixteen, consented to a marriage of interest is not very likely at almost double that age, to be a slave to softer passions.
>
> LORD STEWKLY: That match might have convinced me that your heart was never capable of tenderness: So fine a woman, with your understanding and education, to sacrifice herself in the bloom of youth for money!
>
> LADY FILMOT: Nay, the sacrifice was not voluntary neither; I was only passive on the occasion and suffered myself to be persuaded by a Mother, to marry a man for whom I did not care a pinch of snuff, because he was heir to a rich old miser. (5)

Significantly, Lord Stewkly is incapable of imagining that the situation of women differs from his in the patriarchal society in which many families chose to sacrifice their daughters on the altar of a financially promising marriage to a rich suitor. His design is to involve Lucy Tryfort, heir to her grandfather's wealth as the next kin instead of her presumably deceased uncle, in such a marriage with the more than active help of her widowed mother, Mrs. Tryfort. Lady Filmot is no better in her cunning behavior to entrap Edward, sole heir to a well-to-do tradesman father, but Sheridan endows her at least with the implied excuse that when a young dependent she had been wounded by the same social system and its double standards.

According to the character portrayal throughout, Sheridan saw members of the middle class quite varied and holding diverse views on class positions and barriers. Edward's father, Sir Jonathan Bull does not question Edward's original choice to marry Lucy, which Jonathan's elder brother, Sir Jeremy Bull whole-heartedly detests. Moreover, the latter strongly approves of the tactics Lady Filmot employs to convert

the boy into her beau and enthuses over the prospective match between them: he hopes his nephew may get into parliament and make a career in politics, by means of the title to be gained through marriage. From the start, the brothers have arguments with clashing opinions and expectations regarding Edward's life:

> SIR JEREMY: Edward is the only representative of the family and it is fit that the name should be retrieved with some degree of splendor; but instead of that, you want irretrievably to mix the blood with the puddle of City.
> SIR JONATHAN: Don't abuse the City, brother, I don't know what we should do without it.
> SIR JEREMY: Trade, Sir Jonathan, has abased your ideas.
> SIR JONATHAN: I don't understand such fine-spun notions, not I.
> SIR JEREMY: I know you don't, and for that reason have often suspected your legitimacy. (9)

His pair in title-hunting is Mrs. Tryfort, who is striving to have her daughter married to Lord Stewkly, evidently with an eye for the title going with the name. Reinforcing the thematic link between the two title-hunter characters, Sir Jeremy and Mrs. Tryfort, whom Sheridan probably meant by her designation an "absurd pair" in her above quoted defense of the play, the mother's reaction to her daughter's disregard for her high-flying social ambitions is similar to Sir Jeremy's suspicion of his brother's legitimacy because of his different attitude. Mrs. Tryfort calls the also middle-class Edward "a little insignificant mechanic" in spite of the fact that formerly she accepted him as Lucy's husband-to-be. When the girl frankly claims that she likes the boy much better than Lord Stewkly, the affronted mother remonstrates: "I declare you are so inarticulate in your notions, that I believe you are a changeling" (30). In this wording Sheridan probably relies on her own knowledge of Irish folklore, in which the "changeling" has had a conspicuous presence and fulfilled the role of unexplainable human transformations for centuries.

The Bull brothers are also distinguished by their language use: Sir Jeremy prefers speaking in high-brow riddles while Sir Jonathan, Edward's father, avoids sophistication, justifying Hogan and Beasley who conclude that Sir Jeremy is a "long winded" egotist, while Sir Jonathan "is a sweet, straightforward, credulous man whose conversation is garrulously friendly" (28). Conspicuously, language has an intensely comic function in the characterization of Mrs. Tryfort. In her essay Kuti pays ample attention to the ways in which Sheridan might have influenced her son's playwriting. Importantly, she notes that Mrs. Tryfort's language blunders in *A Trip to Bath* anticipate Mrs. Malaprop's highly comic and ridiculous verbal mistakes in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*. Kuti dwells on the kinship:

> A concern with literacy and the uses of language is common to both plays, but there is an element of realism, even poignancy, in Mrs. Tryfort, absent from the more whimsical Mrs. Malaprop. One reason for this realism is that a central theme of *A Trip to Bath* is the shifting power balance between new mercantile money and old aristocratic blood and lineage; Mrs. Tryfort's effortful and

> hypercorrect language is an expression of this bourgeoisie aspiration towards higher things, whereas Mrs. Malaprop's schizophrenically creative language does not have a similarly realistic motivation. (121)

Mrs. Tryfort's *avant la lettre* malapropisms occur in her conversation especially when she strives to impress and urge the nobility to think of her as their ilk. About Lord Stewkly, the man she wishes to be her son-in-law instead of Edward, she says: "To be sure he is one of the best bred, most polite, good humoured charming men living! And takes as much pains to teach my Lucy and make her illiterate as if he were actually her master" (18). She also takes every opportunity to flatter Lord Stewkly, although tends to discredit her eulogies by the same kind of wrong uses: "Ha ha ha, I am generally prodigious lucky indeed, my lord; but this evening I contribute it entirely to your lordship's skill" (37). Anyhow, the artful Lord does not like her less because of her faulty language, she being such a good accomplice in achieving success with his ambition to gain Lucy or, rather, the supposedly abundant heritage she can expect to have soon.

In Sheridan it is a further difference from the Restoration comedy that she draws contrasts between some of the middle-class characters also in terms of their social attitudes and communication with others. While Sir Jonathan and Edward speak their mind, Mrs. Surface, owner of the guesthouse in which the plot is set, uses a lot of asides to make vicious comments on her guests while she incarnates politeness itself to their face. No doubt, her views are based on superficial experiences and she makes no effort to look beyond what she sees on the surface. The expression of servility to him as a paying guest and that of annoyance by Stapleton's remarks almost in the same breath, clearly betrays her hypocrisy: "Good morning to you, good Sir, and a pleasant walk to you, dear Sir – A peevish Cur, but I had rather have him than an empty room" (4). Among the characters Stapleton is a rather mysterious one who does not take part in the social life of Bath, yet appears to be a sharp-eyed observer of shifts in the relationships and notices the intrigues and selfish games of the aristocrats, those of Lady Filmot in particular. He is also a character whose opinion and attitudes demonstrate personal development. At first he thinks of the benignly garrulous Sir Jonathan as a mere source of information: "The man seems to be thrown in my way on purpose: I'll cultivate his acquaintance. The communicativeness of his temper will be a means to gratify my curiosity" (8). As a keen observer of other people's ambition-driven movements and altering connections, later he even warns the naively incredulous Sir Jonathan, almost like a friend would do, that Lady Filmot has menacing designs on his son: "Sir, she said enough to him to have alarmed a parent" (27).

Showing the characters in disguise and initiating or taking part in games as well as the setting up of masquerades are often applied staples of comedy both in the Restoration era and the eighteenth century. For instance, in Act four, Scene one of George Etherege's *The Man of Mode or, Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676), male characters appear in masks, which enable them to speak and act freely. A later Restoration comedy, *Love for Love* (1695) by Richard Congreve, shows parallels with *A Trip to Bath* in that the young couple Valentine and Angelica pretend to be mad and to

marry someone else respectively, in order to test the honesty and constancy of the other's love. Sheridan complicates the device of pretensions by having Lady Filmot and Lord Stewkly persuade Edward and Lucy to enter into playing games with them, which is doubly self-serving on their part: the ex-lovers Lady and Lord want to make each other jealous while attempting to alienate the young people from each other, with the ultimate aim to lure them into accepting their plans for marriage. Characteristically, their dishonest tactics are thoroughly gendered. The Lord asks Lucy to be an accomplice in his practical joke of "making love to another woman" (22) right before the Lady's face, which the girl is willing to do if it is "not in Earnest" (23)—using a phrase that anticipates Oscar Wilde, the devoted admirer of Restoration- and eighteenth-century drama. Lady Filmot manages to charm the youth, Edward with her ingeniously employed language of coquetry: "Insinuating creature! I shall be almost afraid to trust myself with you – But come, you shall go home with me, and I'll transform you into a beau in a trice" (29). Obviously, she wants to arouse the boy, yet her sexually charged language barely verges on the shameless outspokenness in, for instance, *Love for Love.*

The third and last act in Sheridan's surviving play concludes with the meeting and unfolding conversation of the two main aristocratic fortune-hunters, Lady Filmot and Lord Stewkly, about how they have fared with their respective projects of courting the young people up to that point. However, more becomes revealed, especially about the woman's innermost feelings. The ambiguities woven through the characters' talk in the Restoration comedy, for instance in *The Man of Mode* between Mrs. Loveit and Dorimant, find their nuanced echo in Sheridan's last scene. The Lord seems to believe that their adventures targeting the two youngsters follow the same pattern and leading to the same desired effect without reflecting on it, but Lady Filmot responds to the man in ambiguous sentences which hover between surface and depth, semblance and truth. However, repeating his former insensitivity to the woman's painful memories of her early marriage, Lord Stewkly is not able to decode and understand her real meaning:

> LADY FILMOT: . . . Do you know that we are to meet at Lyncoln Spa tomorrow morning? I proposed the assignation; he [Edward] bowed, and said he wouldn't fail, for the tender creature really begins to pity me.
> LORD STEWKLY: Ha haha! How could you bring him to do that with so utter an insensibility on your side astonishes me!
> LADY FILMOT: Take it for granted, a woman never plays the coquet well with a man she really loves. I acknowledge myself one, intended so by Nature; who the better to enable me to act my part, never incommoded me with those troublesome companions called tender feelings: women who have those sometimes affect our character; but it never sits easy on them. (45)

Lord Stewkly makes no comment whatsoever on this, which indicates his myopia and egoism; his cynical reply focuses solely on his own progress toward gaining Lucy. When they separate, the Lady says goodbye in a way that exacerbates the enigmatic nature of her communication with him: "Adieu, cruel indifferent!" (46). The wording

might imply that she still feels emotionally attached to Lord Stewkly, her former lover, and seems to be hurt by his inconsiderate bluntness.

A dedicated researcher of Irish women's drama, Kuti decided to add two acts and make Sheridan's text complete under a new title, *The Whisperers*. The title is certainly appropriate as several of the characters Sheridan started to draw and Kuti finished, often whisper to one another to keep something in secret. Most poignantly does so Lady Filmot to display her intimacy with Edward, thus intending to take revenge on Lord Stewkly whose flirtation with Lucy is much to her dislike. Besides, the many instances of speaking behind another's back and the often rudely impolite asides also contribute to the satirical representation of this Bath mini-society as one which largely fails on honesty and trustfulness. In 1999, the thus reborn drama, *The Whisperers* went into production by Rough Magic Theatre Company under the direction of Lynne Parker, and had a successful run in Dublin and many other Irish towns. It travelled to the Edinburgh Festival as well, and a few years later enjoyed a revival in New York as part of a "series of mainstage productions and workshop performances presented during the month of March and titled "Shadowed Voices: Female Playwrights of Ireland Heard!" (Anon).

The Whisperers fits in with the general characteristics of the rather loose term, "adaptation." Scholars largely agree that there are many forms of adaptation, which they view as a transhistorical and transmedial strategy and phenomenon. Julie Sanders's study *Adaptation and Appropriation*, for example, begins with the possible definitions of the terms in the title relying on the theoretical positions of some other scholars of the subject, including Julia Kristeva, Linda Hutcheon, and J. Hillis Miller. The critic states that "[t]he vocabulary of the adaptation is rather labile" and, to highlight only those terms which may be relevant to the generic state of *The Whisperers*, "continuation," "supplement," "addition," and "reworking" feature in Sanders's lengthy list (3). Each of these needs and evokes a complex methodology of critically addressing the literary work to which it gives a new life. The strategy of completing a text might carry a certain ideological force and purport to achieve an intervention into form. In a theoretically grounded essay, Sara Soncini approaches *The Whisperers* as a unique case of intertextuality, which presents "a critique of, at one and the same time, the post-Romantic paradigm of originality and individual authorship, and the postmodern predicament of authorless (inter)textuality" (141).

Mapping the genesis of *The Whisperers*, a crucial question touches on the principles Kuti established for herself while working on this special form of adaptation, which involves moving the original into a new cultural and historical context. About her methodological approach and strategies to complete Sheridan's drama for the contemporary Irish and British stage, in an interview she said:

> I set myself some ground rules – I wasn't going to create any new characters, but I was going to use the eleven people she created to tell the rest of the story. I used Acts one to three as my source material – i.e. all the clues you need to know how the story finishes and how the plot works out are all there in the first three acts – I think this would be true of any 18th century play. So I just kept to what she had written and tried to be faithful to it. (Kurdi 12)

About the issue whether twentieth-century viewpoints should be apparent in the text, Kuti adds in the same interview that "in the end I felt that I wanted, more or less, to reconstruct the last two acts in the spirit and voice of Sheridan's original" (Kurdi 12). Not investing it with meanings that would deviate from what Sheridan's original suggested, Kuti presented a co-authored and not a revised play, which she succeeded in making coherent on the levels of both thought and organization. Soncini regards Kuti as a postmodern author who "playfully casts herself as a plagiarist, mixing her voice with that of her collaborator, and deliberately blurring the contours of authorial identities" (150). In my view, plagiarism can hardly be a relevant term here, given Kuti's exact positioning of the finished play.

Reviewing the first production of *The Whisperers*, Karen Ficker claims: "While Kuti creates seamless links in the plot and character between the two halves of the play and it all ends up where one feels Sheridan was heading, Kuti's half moves more briskly, her jokes have more zing, and she handles the resolution of the plots with a deep appreciation of our contemporary need for psychological depth and believability." Apart from this much deserved praise, the author finds that Stapleton's significance in the resolution of Edward, Lucy, and Lady Filmot's plotline has not been hinted at sooner. This point of Ficker's can certainly be debated. In fact, the arrangement that Stapleton is the character who first appears on stage in Act one and remains an enigmatic, strangely melancholic presence throughout, calls attention to him in Sheridan's fragment. Even the experienced and often too inquisitive Mrs. Surface does not know where to place him, therefore she simply detests the man for his peculiar behavior and labels him a "whimsical captious fellow" (34).

It is a conventional staple of drama that if an enigma features in the plot, it should be resolved before the end, and Kuti rightly sensed that the clues Sheridan provided by Stapleton's keen awareness of the movements of Lady Filmot, Lucy, and Edward, are to be followed when knotting the dramatic plotlines to a climax in *The Whisperers.* In Act five, during the masquerade, the prospective organization of which was hinted at by Sheridan's manuscript, Stapleton unmasks himself as Richard Tryfort, uncle of Lucy, who was thought to have died in the Far East. A private scene in the same act between him and Lady Filmot informs the audience that Stapleton/Tryfort is her runaway husband, which explains his keen interest in the Lady's movements from early on, as portrayed by Sheridan. The man made a fortune in the colonies and now hardly needs the wealth that could be his since his father died without leaving a will behind. Importantly, Stapleton/Tryfort allows Lucy to have the inheritance and leaves England for good. The obvious ethical dimension of his act shows how noble-minded a middle-class person can be and thus morally superior to the vicious Lord and Lady, in line with the changing class structure and related identity issues of eighteenth-century England. His adopted name, Stapleton, has more than one meaning as a common noun and here it expresses not only the character's essentialness to the play as already suggested by the original, but Kuti's addition reveals his capacity to (re)join the two hesitant lovers, Edward and Lucy.

Kuti's text also contains Wildean elements, of course not unconsciously anticipating Wilde's drawing on Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy as Sheridan did, but as a playful imitation of Gwendolyn's style in talking to her lover Jack/Earnest.

When in Act five of *The Whisperers* Edward finally turns his back on Lady Filmot and expresses his love for Lucy and intention to share his life with her, the girl reacts: "What a long time you have been about it Edward"! (83). Another motif, which Wilde borrowed from Restoration comedy, is the prospect of multiple weddings at the end of a comedy. Apart from the Lucy-Edward couple in *The Whisperers*, Lady Bell also says yes to Champignion's wish to marry her. In Sheridan's fragment Champignion seems to be a gullible copy of Lord Stewkly. They are reminiscent of the gallant/fop pairing in Restoration drama, although in a twisted form. This kind of character pairing is discussed by Gămini Salgădo, referring to Dorimant and Sir Fopling Flutter in *The Man of Mode or, Sir Fopling Flutter* as representing such a pair. The critic claims that in the drama Sir Fopling Flutter is "a slightly distorted mirror-image of the hero, Dorimant" and invites laughter because he is unsuccessful in his efforts to be like the hero (16-17). Sheridan's Lord Stewkly is an anti-hero, who cunningly offers his assistance to the wealthy Champignion to acquire a (fake) knighthood for a nice sum of money. Kuti takes this cue and in *The Whisperers* Lord Stewkly rooks Champignion and manages to get a high fee for the red ribbon (a cheap thing bought in the town by Mrs. Surface) from him, which he, the Lord, pockets without feeling any scruple. The act makes a ridiculous fop of Champignion, and the immorality of the anti-hero Lord Stewkly is all the more highlighted while the middle-class Stapleton/Tryfort proves to be the real gallant of the play.

An episode which at first sight seems to be out of key with Sheridan's original occurs in the last scene of *The Whisperers*: an agitated Champignion complains to Lord Stewkly about having lost his fortune when his merchant ships carrying goods got wrecked, for which he blames "[t]hose barbarous dogs of sailors" (80) and not himself for risking such an outcome without having an insurance coverage. No direct or indirect information is provided regarding the truth of the disaster, moreover, the financial consequences for Champignion are not suggested either. The unexpectedly introduced story of the shipwreck functions as a postmodern game of the contemporary author, leaving the reader/audience to their own resources as to interpreting this blind spot in the denouement of the completed play. One might conclude that Champignion's prospective union of interest with Lady Bell (the woman yet ignorant of the loss of the cargo), will be that of a penniless fortune hunter with a ridiculous affectation of being high class and an unthinking, doubly cheated title hunter turned out of his finances, soon leading to mutual disappointment and likely to ruin their marriage. The contrast with the Lucy-Edward couple's future based on love is, indeed, striking.

Mic Moroney's fundamentally positive review of the first production of *The Whisperers* in *The Guardian* states that "Obviously, the final act is rather different from the ending that Sheridan would have intended to write. The completed play would probably have dwelt more extensively on Lady Filmot's rise and fall. Yet, although Kuti misses the understated social sting of the original sections, she manages a complex and very entertaining pastiche." It is perhaps Moroney, who misses the social implications of the understated references to gender inequalities in Sheridan's drama, which Kuti herself did recognize. Aware of the crucial importance of the dialogue between Lady Filmot and Lord Stewkly which closes Sheridan's third act, Kuti's dramaturgical choice to orchestrate another dialogue of the same two at the very end

of the whole play, rings in tune with what the eighteenth-century author suggested. While Sheridan's work shows more than just a discussion but also hints at how Lady Filmot feels about the role she is playing, in Kuti's addition the failed manipulators start navigating closer to each other again, presumably motivated by the fact that Stapleton/Tryfort, the Lady's disappeared husband provides some annuity for her before he leaves England forever. Lord Stewkly hopes to become a reformed man in the possibly renewable relationship and Lady Filmot proposes drinking with him "To love and tender feelings!" yet quickly adds: "And the day we are rich enough to afford them" (88). The ambiguity which appears in the dialogue posited by Sheridan has its continuation in Kuti: the honest feelings they have seen in Lucy and Edward, as well as in Stapleton/Tryfort's generosity might be an influence on the potential change of their attitudes, although they also remain absolutely conscious of and influenced by the connection between love, marriage and money. The "social sting" of the original that Moroney misses from the two acts written by Kuti is conveyed by the whole five-act drama because even the conjugal bliss of Lucy and Edward is secured by the fortunately available financial means in the long run.

Kuti's completion of the original text to breathe new life into *The Whisperers* can be credited with strengthening the representation of some (certainly not all) middle class characters as sympathetic and morally superior to the aristocratic ones. The genuine love of Lucy and Edward triumphs over the greedy and soulless calculations of those characters who have no fears to manipulate and even ruin others, in spite of their "illustrious birth." By its devices and dramaturgical choices *The Whisperers* re-animates the social and emotional variedness of the best of eighteenth-century comedy, along with its embedded social critique. The smoothly handled dual authorship and the well-chosen strategies of adaptation jointly contribute to the coherence of subject matter and style in the renewed five-act play, justifying both Frances Sheridan's merits and Kuti's achievement in writing her eighteenth-century forebear back into the history of Irish drama.

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Madame Brulart's Bastille-bijoux: History and Private Lives in Women's Writings around the French Revolution

Bálint Gárdos

Abstract

In her *Letters Written in France* (1790) poet, novelist, translator and Britain's unofficial foreign correspondent Helen Maria Williams records the case of a certain Madame Brulart, "who wears at her breast a medallion made of a stone of the Bastille polished. In the middle of the medallion, *Liberté* was written in diamonds; above was marked, in diamonds, the planet that shone on the 14th of July; and below was seen the moon, of the size she appeared that memorable night." Alternating between grand scenes of public events and emotionally charged narratives of individual lives, one could see such a tiny observation as emblematic of broader patterns in the *Letters* and probably even beyond that. In his foundational 2000 monograph *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* Mark Salber Phillips convincingly describes such cases as instances of "sentimental," often novelistic history entering private, individual lives. This paper proposes to look at a few similar instances with an aim of complementing Phillips's study by showing how the classical, rhetorical model of "exemplary history" survives, even if much altered, in these modern narratives. Although no longer only an educated response of a statesman to the acts of an earlier statesman, the more open-ended modern variety still often wishes to understand individual lives as echoes of larger, public historical events.

Keywords: Helen Maria Williams, French revolution, women's writing, György Lukács, historical writing

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This essay concerns the interpretation of the French Revolution offered by British women authors when those events were either still unfolding or in their immediate aftermath. It presents the argument that an ancient tradition of historical writing, often called exemplary history and strongly associated with Plutarchan biography, helped these women articulate their comments on current events at a time when the public involvement of women was heavily discouraged.

Our narrative begins in June 1790, when celebrated poet and translator Helen Maria Williams arrived in France, just in time for the enormous celebrations

organised to mark the one-year anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Some of the most enjoyable sections of the first volume of her *Letters Written in France*, her prose account of the neighbouring country's transformations to her fellow-citizens, consist of energetic descriptions of the glorious jubilation, the visible, palpable, electrifying proof, as far as the author was concerned, of the success of the revolution.[1] One memorable example from this text reads as follows:

> I may tell you of pavilions, of triumphal arches, of altars on which incense was burnt, of two hundred thousand men walking in procession; but how am I to give you an adequate idea of the behaviour of the spectators? How am I to paint the impetuous feelings of that immense, that exulting multitude? Half a million of people assembled at a spectacle, which furnished every image that can elevate the mind of man; which connected the enthusiasm of moral sentiment with the solemn pomp of religious ceremonies; which addressed itself at once to the imagination, the understanding, and the heart!
> The Champ de Mars was formed into an immense amphitheatre, round which were erected forty rows of seats, raised one above another with earth, on which wooden forms were placed. Twenty days labour, animated by the enthusiasm of the people, accomplished what seemed to require the toil of years. Already in the Champ de Mars the distinctions of rank were forgotten; and, inspired by the same spirit, the highest and lowest orders of citizens gloried in taking up the spade, and assisting the persons employed in a work on which the common welfare of the state depended. (64-65)

Besides these grand scenes, Williams also had a very good eye for the small detail. A remarkable example is the passage on her meeting an aristocratic woman who, having fully accepted the arguments against hereditary nobility, renounced her former name along with her title and has assumed the name of Madame Brulart. The detail that directs the attention to her is that she

> wears at her breast a medallion made of a stone of the Bastille polished. In the middle of the medallion, *Liberté* was written in diamonds; above was marked, in diamonds, the planet that shone on the 14th of July; and below was seen the moon, of the size she appeared that memorable night. The medallion was set in a branch of laurel, composed of emeralds, and tied at the top with the national cockade, formed of brilliant stones of the three national colours. (79)

The episode may be easily dismissed as an instance of consumerism and the conspicuous display of wealth, but it can also raise significant questions as to the relative importance of what is big and what is small in history. The Bastille as a sight of memory, understood as public commemoration, and the Bastille as bijoux. Maybe we should not judge Madame Brulart very harshly for her novel accessory, since she

1 On Williams's presentation of the French revolution, and its reception, see e.g. Kennedy, Favret, and Keane.

has been asked to transform, just like the Place de la Bastille, just like the French nation at large, and she did do so rather more successfully than many of the others.

Williams also refers to the fate of some of the other surviving ruins of the Bastille. Apparently, "[t]he person employed to remove the ruins of the Bastille, has framed of the stones eighty-three complete models of this building, which, with a true patriotic spirit, he has presented to the eighty-three departments of the kingdom, by way of hint to his countrymen to take care of their liberties in future" (77). The juxtaposition of the two scenes might suggest that both ways of preserving the past might be equally authentic: the public warning and the private keepsake. Moreover, the description of the medallion is framed by a discussion of women's contribution to the revolution.

> The women have certainly had a considerable share in the French revolution: for, whatever the imperious lords of the creation may fancy, the most important events which take place in this world depend a little on our influence; and we often act in human affairs like those secret springs in mechanism, by which, though invisible, great movements are regulated. (79)

One might also say that from this perspective the promise of the French revolution is that the gendered demarcations between the private and the public become fuzzy and "secret springs" may indeed lead to "most important events."[2]

The broader structures of the 1790 *Letters Written in France* also show the complex inter-relatedness of the public and the private, since after extensive descriptions of major sights and events, Letters XVI to XXII zoom in on a near-tragic love story. Reminiscent of a gothic epistolary romance, the story of the du Fossés has everything from a love between socially ill-matched partners to an oppressive and vindictive father to suffering and loss, until the revolution eventually removes the father's unjust powers and the young family are finally reunited.[3] To readers of canonical romantic literature, the story itself will be immediately familiar, since it shares its sources with the Julia and Vaudracour episode in Book IX of William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (the 1805 text). The conclusions of the two narratives could not be more different, however. In terms of the autobiographical account, Wordsworth's story stands where an account of his relationship with Anette Valon might be expected,[4] effacing the personal by a narrative that seems to exemplify a domestic tragedy unsalvageable by political change. In Wordsworth's narrative Julia is forced to give up the child and enter a convent, the baby dies as a result of the father's incompetence and Vaudracour goes mad ("Nor could / . . . public hope, / Or personal memory . . . / Rouze him" [Book IX, lines 931-34]).[5]

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2 From the literature on women and the public sphere in the context of the French revolution, see especially, Outram 124-64 and Landes 93-200.

3 The classic interpretation probably remains Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender* 71-74.

4 In the words of the editors of the Norton Critical Edition, "[w]ithin the context of his autobiography, *Vaudracourt and Julia* stands in lieu of his relationship with Anette Valon" (340, fn. 2). "*Vaudracourt and Julia* was published as a separate poem in 1820, and excluded from *The Prelude* in 1832" (341, fn. 4).

5 Cited from the Norton *Prelude* (356).

In contrast, the optimistic Williams goes out of her way to connect the "public" and the "personal," emphasizing that the events happened to a close friend of hers; that domestic tyranny and large-scale oppression are apt metaphors of each other; and she expresses satisfaction that her fictitious correspondent shares her view that this story provides "a good excuse for loving the revolution" (140).

Nothing shows more clearly the provocative power of this crossing of the boundaries between the private and the political than its almost immediate conservative rejection, articulated for the first time in great detail in Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits, Addressed to Miss H. M. Williams, With particular reference to her Letters from France* (1793).

> In the busy haunts of men alone can mankind be studied to advantage. And how shall a woman avail herself of this resource? What opportunities can be afforded her of discriminating between the apparent virtues but real vices of the human heart? [. . .] And from whence shall she derive the authority which shall compel human nature to appear what it is, not what it would be? [. . .] The study, my dear madam, which I place in the climax of unfitness, is that of politics; and so strongly does it appear to me barred against the admission of females, that I am astonished that they ever ventured to approach it. To constitute a sound judgement in the interests of states and kingdoms, I should think it necessary that a boy (for I have no idea of a girl now) after having been carefully instructed at home, should be sent to run the gauntlope of a public school, where he would learn mankind in miniature. [. . .] Leaving school, he is sent to a university, where he acquires the theory of politics from the historians and legislators of antiquity [. . .] he travels, lives in those places where he has the best prospect of society, gets as near the springs and wheels of government as he can [. . .]. Through how much of all this discipline can a woman go? You will grant it a path impenetrable to her [. . .] I do not ask women to have no opinion on the subject; but, for decorum's sake, do not encourage them to a tilting match with their acquaintance, on a point to them incomprehensible: let them enjoy in peace the traditionary creed of their forefathers; let them change it for any they think carries more Authority with it; but let it be in silence. (18-24)[6]

This was the political, gender-based argument for debarring women from the public sphere and specifically for rebuking Williams's assumption of the right, even authority to interpret the ongoing transformations in France. However, even among those sympathetic to the revolutionary cause, not everyone accepted Williams's approach to discussing the events in France. In 1794, Mary Wollstonecraft, who had visited Williams's salon during her stay in Paris in 1792, published a pamphlet with the progressive publisher Joseph Johnson entitled *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has produced in Europe*. While the work itself was composed in France and clearly reflects the author's recent personal experience, the argument promotes a strongly impersonal, philosophical

6 For context, see Blakemore.

view based on pure rationality. In the preface, Wollstonecraft freely admits that the revolution has unleashed much that is clearly undesirable, but, to her mind, that only serves to accentuate the necessity of looking past such epiphenomena and understanding the essential meaning of historical change.

> The rapid changes, the violent, the base, and nefarious assassinations, which have clouded the vivid prospect that began to spread a ray of joy and gladness over the gloomy horizon of oppression, cannot fail to chill the sympathizing bosom, and palsy intellectual vigour. To sketch these vicissitudes is a task so arduous and melancholy, that, with a heart trembling to the touches of nature, it becomes necessary to guard against the erroneous inferences of sensibility; and reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion. (Todd-Butler 6:6)

The critique of sentiment and the rhetoric of sensibility had been central to the attack on Burke in Wollstonecraft's 1790 *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* and also to the construction of femininity that her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* exposes to the light of reason.[7] In the historical work, this emphasis seems central to the methodology of historical exposition as well.

> The perfection attained by the ancients, it is true, has ever afforded the imagination of the poetical historian a theme to deck with the choicest flowers of rhetoric; though the cool investigation of facts seems clearly to prove, that the civilization of the world, hitherto, has consisted rather in cultivating the taste, than in exercising the understanding. (Todd-Butler 6:15)

The ancients, Wollstonecraft argues, had great poetry and great art, but were barbarians in most other ways. Modernity has brought "improving reason and experience in moral philosophy, to clear away the rubbish, and exhibit the first principles of social order" (Todd-Butler 6:15-16). Modern history should clearly be written in light of those improvements. Critical literature on Wollstonecraft's historical work seems to agree that we should not take her claims to exclusively writing abstract, impersonal, philosophical history at face value. At different points, her own personal experience clearly colours the objectivity of her account and her characterisation of different historical actors has been shown to reflect the influence of different novelistic conventions (see Bour). However, the difference in emphasis is clearly discernible between the two presentations of the revolution. Mary Sponberg offers the following lucid comparison:

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7 In the latter work, she states, for example, that "I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt" (Todd-Butler 5:75). See further, Péter 36-59.

> Williams's *Letters from France* merged the genres of romance and travel writing with family history and letter writing, creating a new historical form that was in keeping with her ideal of the revolution as a force for the feminisation of culture. [. . .] They were presented in language and structure similar to the novel of sentiment. [. . .] [S]he disguised her historical account of the French Revolution in another feminine form, the epistle. Letter writing was considered an appropriate feminine genre as letters were informal, spontaneous, private and domestic. Like family history, letter writing bridged the public and private [. . .]. (94)

Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, "wished her text to be less immediate and personal than Helen Maria Williams's 'feminine' *Letters from France*, but not dry and empirical like masculine accounts of the revolution she had read. The gendered nature of the genre boundaries she sought to transcend created tensions within the text. She wanted the text to appear 'philosophical' in the sense that it should be 'detached, historical and analytical,' yet this conflicted with her desire that the text reflect her personal experience of the revolution" (97–98).

The Romantic period, it has been argued, saw the formation of a separate feminist tradition of historiography (Kucich).[8] Scholarship has directed readers' attention to women historians such as Lucy Aikin, whose works offer personal, even anecdotal accounts of famous figures from British history. The claim is that "the form of history that Aikin tells is a particularly feminist one, as she considers private feeling and social interactions as shaping forces in history" (Levy).

The argument of the next section of my paper is that Romantic novels by women, whose narratives inevitably become contributions to the ongoing interpretative debates on the significance of the revolution in France similarly experiment with making personal, biographical narratives central to the examination of the historical process. While experiments in different versions of "philosophical history" abounded in the eighteenth century, we can also observe an interesting survival (maybe even renaissance) of more ancient forms of historical narrative, ones based exactly in passion, sentiment, and rhetoric. These narratives have had a significant impact on the emerging form of the historical novel, especially in the hands of the women novelists of the end of the eighteenth century who took it upon themselves to provide fictionalised, narrative interpretations of the French revolution.

The old, rhetorical, pre-Enlightenment model is usually referred to as the exemplary view of history.[9] With roots in classical, especially Latin thought, history in the exemplary tradition is seen as a category of rhetoric: a collection of commonplaces that a well-prepared orator can marshal to motivate statesmen and navigate them towards the accepted forms of behaviour enshrined in exemplary moments from a shared past. For modern British audiences this approach to history came to be associated with a single name, that of Plutarch—widely accessible even to readers without much classical erudition through the so-called Dryden-translation (1683–86).

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8 For the broader context of women's contribution to the writing of history, see Looser.

9 For literature on the subject, see e.g. Witschi-Bernz; G. H. Nadel; Koselleck 27-28. Hampton 1-30. Grafton 1-61.

Dryden's preface to that publication states that the purpose of history is "setting before us what we ought to shun or to pursue by the examples of the most famous men" and it serves "the regulation of [. . .] private manners, and the management of public affairs" (2:2; 2:4). He neatly summarises the two most salient qualities of Plutarch's writing. 1) Biography is the most morally efficacious historical form because "the examples of virtue are of more vigour when they are [. . .] contracted into individuals"; and 2) we get closer to our subject than is customary: "we are led into the private lodgings of the hero" (2:7; 2:9). Probably a range of eighteenth-century biographies owe something to such an understanding of the Greek writer, but none of them have been more famous or influential than Boswell's 1791 *Life of Johnson.* Boswell offers an appeal to the "authority" of Plutarch, "prince of biographers," as a way to vindicate its use of familiar conversation[10] and ends on a quotation from Dr. Johnson himself, who was also deeply interested in Plutarch and in biography, on the principles of the genre. "The business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue . . ." (Boswell 24).

Plutarchan biography is distinguished, therefore, by its ability to navigate the public/private divide: it includes personal anecdotes, but never exclusively for entertainment: the stories are meant to serve as examples that anyone in public life might aspire to following.[11] Examples of the survival of this model into the late eighteenth century and even beyond include the anonymously published *The British Plutarch; Or Biographical Entertainer: Being a Select Collection of the Lives at Large of the Most Eminent Men, Natives of Great Britain and Ireland; from the Reign of Henry VIII. to George II. Both Inclusive. Whether distinguished as Statesmen, Warriors, Poets, Patriots, Divines, Philosophers* (1762) as well as Lewis Goldsmith Stewarton's *The Revolutionary Plutarch: Exhibiting the Most Distinguished Characters, Literary, Military, and Political, in the Recent Annals of the French Republic* (2nd ed. 1804) and *The Female Revolutionary Plutarch: Containing Biographical, Historical, and Revolutionary Sketches, Characters, and Anecdotes* (1803).[12] The first was an educational publication, marketed mostly at children, while in the latter two the exemplary meaning of the lives is extracted in accordance with the strongly anti-revolutionary political stance of its author, coupled with pungent misogyny in the case of the last collection. *The Female*

10 He quotes Plutarch's "Life of Alexander" to the effect that "'Nor is it always in the most distinguished achievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distinguish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges, or the most important battles" (Boswell 23–24).

11 Plutarch is, of course, also among the first books the Creature studies after learning to read in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. "Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages . . . I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the greatest ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice, as far as I understood the signification of those terms" (ch. VII).

12 For the success of Plutarchan biography in the eighteenth century and long beyond, see I. B. Nadel, esp. 15-19 and Mossman.

Revolutionary Plutarch is also symptomatic of the perceived necessity to contain the potential meanings of the lives and achievements of a multitude of women thrown into a station of prominence during the revolutionary years.

Stewarton's desire to use his narratives to serve an anti-revolutionary agenda is obvious already from the title-page, where (in block capitals) he dedicates his work "To the Revered Memory of Marie Antoinette Josephe Jeanne, Archduchess of Austria, Queen of France and Navarre; Daughter, Sister, and Aunt of Emperors and Kings; A Lamented Victim of the Inhospitable Rage and Ferocious Character of Revolutionary Frenchmen. Legitimate Sovereigns and Loyal Subjects, Her Murder is Still Unrevenged!!!"

Stewarton's account is full of all manner of details to hammer home the horrors of the revolution, not shying away from lurid particulars such as the description of "French anthropophagi" feasting on "the flesh of a roasted aristocrat" (1: 165). His rejection of the revolution (both of its principles and its practices) is absolute: "The French revolutionary system is and will always remain the same, whether the French revolutionary rulers style themselves citizens, sans-culottes, or emperors and kings. To crush grandeur, to ruin wealth, to exalt meanness and to enrich poverty, were the principles and the objects of the French revolutionists of 1805, as well as of those of 1789" (2: 103).

The didactic aspect of the Plutarchan tradition is here employed to attack changes to what he sees as the right norms of female behaviour and to protect the ones he accepts. Madame Recamier is praised for keeping out of politics ("according to the duty of her sex, she never meddled with political or revolutionary transactions" [1: 162]). Marie Antoinette is an example of elevated female perfection ("The beauty of her person, the known attachment of the king, the endearing kindnesses which youth and prosperity prompted, the public heard with delight; and they appeared to add to the consequence of every Frenchman" [2: 7]). The life of Madame de Staël is offered as a lesson against the "mania" of philosophy in a woman. Her mother's educational decisions apparently deformed her daughter's character ("She could explain an enigma and compose an epigram, before she knew how to put on a gown, or how to pin a handkerchief. She could explain the movements of the constellations, but she was ignorant of the manner of roasting a fowl . . ." [1: 174]) and her tale is especially cautionary as regards female intellectuals as wives ("Without any just principle of duty, of honour, or as a philosopher, above them, she frequently unites infidelity with dissimulation, and oppression with both. [. . .] Disgusting in her person, filthy in her dress, the grey-haired female *savan*, when advancing in life, generally adds jealousy to her other defects and vices" [1: 181]). However unpleasant a writer, Stewarton is an instructive example of the contention over the representation of women in the public eye: the choice and the characterisation of the canon of emblematic individuals in whom change (or stagnation) is embodied.

I argue that not only historical narratives but also certain novels by British women authors written during or very shortly after the revolutionary events in France can also be read in light of the Plurarchan tradition. Also, I believe that an awareness of this tradition enables a broader definition of the concept of the historical novel as well. Doubtlessly, the most influential theory of the historical novel has been that

of György Lukács (written 1936-37, English translation 1962), who directed a lot of attention to the genre by identifying an "instinctive" historicism in it. This historicism supposedly enabled its writers to present (instead of an Enlightenment view of ever-same human nature, where history can only be a colourful backdrop) human life as fundamentally historical in every aspect, with human subjectivity being constantly shaped and reshaped by history's impersonal powers. "This key interest in historicised character, in giving the reader insight into the mind of a member of a past society, is for Lukács the political importance of the historical novel, as it induces historical empathy and a sense of process" (de Groot 27). This sense of process is first born as a result of the collective trauma of the Napoleonic wars, according to Lukács, and its first literary master is Sir Walter Scott. While the importance of Lukács's contribution remains unquestioned, he has been criticised for working with an exclusively male canon (Wallace 8-15) and for showing almost no interest in anything preceding Scott.[13] From the perspective of the present paper, his somewhat ahistorical decision to attribute a proto-Hegelian historicism to Scott can also be questioned.

For Lukács, what he calls Walter Scott's understanding of "historical characterisation" is of seminal importance. It should be noted, however, that the origins of such a technique date from before the Napoleonic wars and many of the first authors to experiment with it were women. Perhaps the latter fact should not be that surprising, since the connection that the historical novel enables between the private and the political, the domestic and the national or international must have been felt even more acutely by women. In Lukács's words,

> for Scott the historical characterization of time and place, the historical 'here and now' is something much deeper. For him it means that certain crises in the personal destinies of a number of human beings coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis. It is precisely for this reason that his manner of portraying the historical crisis is never abstract, the split of the nation into warring parties always runs through the centre of the closest human relationships. Parents and children, lover and beloved, old friends etc. confront one another as opponents, or the inevitability of this confrontation carries the collision deep into their personal lives. (41)

While Lukács's description strikes me as very convincing, the earlier overview of the exemplary tradition suggests that it is perfectly possible to reach such an insight without a Hegelian history of philosophy and following traditions that were conveniently available to the writers concerned. Therefore, in what remains I wish to offer sketches of certain pre-Scott historical novels. My aim is not to offer comprehensive interpretations, merely to indicate how "historical characterisation" can be understood in the framework of exemplary history.

The first novel that needs to be mentioned is very directly linked to Williams's *Letters*. As Stuart Curran documents in detail, Charlotte Smith was a reader of

13 For an overview that traces the historical novel's sources back to the seventeenth century and presents Scott as at least as much of a synthetizer of existing traditions as an innovator, see Maxwell.

Williams's works, used specifically the *Letters* as inspiration both in terms of the generic choice of her only epistolary novel and a number of its motifs (6: xvii). She also follows Williams in using the French revolution, in the words of Eleanor Ty, to "draw a disconcerting parallel between political and domestic tyranny" (138). In her 1792 *Desmond* Smith constructs a parallel between the suffocatingly oppressive marriage that Geraldine, its unmistakably autobiographical central character, pines away under and the political oppressions the revolution was supposed to set to rights. The novel's ending is a happy one, but it is noteworthy how qualified Smith's optimism already is. The revolution is far from over and there is no telling what direction events will take, and although after the death of her husband Geraldine has the opportunity to marry a man who truly loves and respects her, she is still thought of as property, and Desmond's last effusion about his future wife reads as almost laughably possessive. "Geraldine will bear my name – will be the directress of my family – will be my friend – my mistress – my wife!" (335). No amount of romance or revolution seems to change the fact that Geraldine's life is confined within patriarchal households. Placing her life-story at the very heart of a novel about revolutionary change, however, showing how it exemplifies the cross-roads between private and public wrongs, makes it very central indeed and very much a part of history.[14]

With the passage of the years, it became overwhelmingly obvious that the promotion of women's rights was not among the priorities of the revolutionaries. By the time the 1801 volume of her *Letters* was published, even the ever-sanguine Williams declared that "the women of France have nothing at present to do with the Constitution but to obey it" (Williams, *Sketches* 2: 60).[15] While maintaining that women "participate" in "some" of the "advantages" brought by the revolution "at second hand" (Williams, *Sketches* 2: 50), she reviews at length (like Wollstonecraft did earlier) women's inadequate education, the limitations on activities permitted to them, the legal and political inequities of a married woman's position, etc. As the ultimate argument against the different ways of marginalising women, she paints a passionate image of women who assumed public roles, stood as equals by men in the revolution and gave their lives for its causes.

> Have we not seen the daughter, led in the bloom of beauty to the scaffold with her parents, seeming to forget that she had herself the sacrifice of life to make, and only occupied in sustaining their sinking spirits?—Have we not seen the wife refusing to survive her husband, provoke also the fatal sentence, which it was her choice to share, and mingle her blood with his under the axe of the

14 *Desmond* is also an excellent example of why we make a mistake when disregarding Scott's precedents. Katie Trumpener discusses in detail how lesser-known "national tales" by (especially Irish) women writers as well as in the traditions established by the gothic romances of Ann Radcliffe, which clearly had a strong influence on Charlotte Smith as well, created a tradition of novelistic reflection on historical transformation significantly before Scott's *Waverley*. She reflects on the irony of Scott's emphasising Waverley's "uncontaminated" name in the preface to his novel when both Smith's radical novel and its anti-revolutionary redaction by Jane West (*The Loyalists: An Historical Novel* [1812]) had a character bearing that name (see 137–42).

15 For context, see Franklin.

> executioner?—What Roman virtue was displayed by Charlotte Corday!—more than Roman fortitude dignified the last moments of Madame Roland! Since that period, new Revolutions have left new memorials of female virtue. . . . (Williams, *Sketches* 2: 66)

Execution-scenes, unfortunately, provide the best opportunities for commemorating female heroism. The two most outstanding examples are those of the above-mentioned Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland.

> . . . it is difficult to conceive the kind of heroism which she [Corday] displayed in the way to execution. The women who were called furies of the guillotine, and who had assembled to insult her on leaving the prison, were awed into silence by her demeanour, while some of the spectators uncovered their heads before her, and others gave loud tokens of applause. There was such an air of chastened exultation thrown over her countenance, that she inspired sentiments of love rather than sensations of pity. She ascended the scaffold with undaunted firmness, and, knowing that she had only to die, was resolved to die with dignity. (Williams, *Sketches* 2: 68)
>
> When she mounted the scaffold, and was tied to the fatal plank, she lifted up her eyes to the statue of Liberty, near which the guillotine was placed, and exclaimed, "Ah Liberté, comme on t'ajouée!" The next moment she perished. But her name will be recorded in the annals of history, as one of those illustrious women whose superior attainments seem fitted to exalt her sex in the scale of being. (Williams, *Sketches* 2: 101-02)

While it is probably not true that the aim of the novels here discussed is to offer such "more than Roman" "memorials of female virtue," it can be argued that they participate in a vital discussion on whose experience is seen as representative and worthy of memorialisation, whose story is seen as rising to the level of history and whose remain merely instances of private (mis)fortunes.[16]

The Banished Man, Charlotte Smith's lesser-known second novel to deal directly with the French Revolution as a subject was published in 1794 and poignantly reflects both the changed historical realities and the author's deep disappointment with the transformed events. The novel could easily be written off as Smith's caving to pressures both political and personal (from revolutionary terror in France to oppressive measures at home, not to mention her own extremely precarious financial situation). Indeed, the politics of the novel seem radically different to those of *Desmond*, since instead of a justified revolution, we see Jacobin mobs, described as "anarchists and murderers" (Smith, *The Banished Man* 2: 209). However, as Judith Davis Miller explains, the book's sympathy for French aristocrats was not at all deferential to public temperaments, given the increasing hostility towards the French emigrants in England. "Smith challenges contemporary patriotic sympathies by writing a novel

16 See Adriana Craciun's reading of Williams's letters in light of an "uneasy rivalry with Robespierre for the role of true representative of the French Revolution" in her *British Women Writers* (100).

whose thesis is essentially a plea against narrow national prejudice and in behalf of principles that transcend national boundaries" (Miller 347). Many of its characters are formerly powerful aristocrats who have become deprived of their titles and property and have reason to fear for their lives. This is history written from the margins, with a focus on those debarred from a real impact on state affairs for the moment. However, while representing figures who have either been expelled from public life or (in the case of—especially English—women) who were never really accepted there, Smith finds a way to politicise private life and make it exemplary towards a hoped-for peaceful, reunited, cosmopolitan Europe. This becomes clear when, at the end of the novel, she makes an "Anglican Englishwoman marry a Catholic Frenchman, and a Protestant Scots-Englishman marry a Catholic Polish woman" (Mellor, "Embodied Cosmopolitanism" 293), to finally settle down in a small inter-cultural, inter-faith, and inter-language cosmopolite community in Verona.

The third relevant novel in this context is Mary Robinson's 1799 *The Natural Daughter*. The title already is an indication not just of the plot that turns around the fate of a girl whose biological father is only revealed at the very end, but also of the quality of what counts as natural in the context of the raging Jacobin phase of the revolution. We follow the fate of two sisters, whose characters seem to correspond to Mary Wollstonecraft's idea of sentimentalism as detrimental to the character of women (Julia), and the more controlled, more rational, more independent alternative (Martha). While most of the events take place on British soil, there are repeated episodes connected to revolutionary France. The attention is constantly on how the different female characters suffer from Jacobin reign in an immediate, bodily sense. Julia becomes the lover of Robespierre, while Martha falls into his prison, only to be liberated when he is killed. Earlier, Martha befriends a woman who very narrowly escaped being raped by Marat and was only saved after Marat was murdered. As Adriana Craciun explains, the novel is also part of a larger symbolic struggle to divest Robespierre from his almost consolidated role as the emblematic embodiment of the revolution, to regain those 1789 principles that still seemed worth fighting for (Craciun, *British Women Writers* 117). Therefore, the gothic suffering of these female characters is strongly politicised: even in the absence of public involvement, it is women's wrongs that give meaning to historical transformation.

Finally, the last novel I will mention focuses on Marat's murderer. Her name is Charlotte Corday, although in Helen Craik's 1800 *Adelaide de Narbonne* she receives an aristocratic "de" before her name. Of all the novels here discussed this one presents the reader with the most complex political stance, since its titular heroine experiences rather harsh mistreatment both from her royalist father and her republican second husband. Neither party seems to embrace women's rights or even consider their suffering when it comes to armed struggle. However, the novel presents very strong narratives of women's camaraderie. The lady-in-distress's champion is not a knight in shining armour but de Corday herself, and it turns out that de Narbonne's secret mission is to hide and harbour a certain Victorine, Marie Antoinette's fictional niece, and consequently, the potential future queen of France. Once again, the private and the political are very closely aligned; female friendships might lead to political restoration, and they definitely lead to republican tyrannicide.

The argument has been raised in critical literature that Craik depoliticises de Corday's action by making its motivation a revenge for a friend, rather than (as the historical Corday stated) for Marat's attack on the principles of the republic. Stephanie Russo has argued that "By focusing on the everyday life, thoughts and feelings of a woman like Charlotte Corday, Craik invites her readers to engage sympathetically with one of the most notorious and most militant women of the age" (Russo 111). However, she also asserts that "[i]n the process of 'normalizing' Corday, Craik effectively strips Corday's actions of any political significance, instead locating her motives in private vengeance and domestic entanglements" (Russo 111). One might also want to challenge her further claim that this tendency (besides Craik's putative political stance) can be ascribed to the fact that the novel as a genre is conventionally associated with the domestic (Russo 112).

The aim of the above argument has been to cast doubt on such sharp dichotomies. The relevance of the long tradition of the exemplary view of historical thinking and specifically of the model provided by Plutarchan biography is that it enables us to see discussions of private life not necessarily as turning away from public engagement but rather as continuous with it. The novels interpreted above all demonstrate that it would be wrong to see fiction (even in its domestic varieties) as automatically distanced from political realities. On the contrary, what we can observe is that the first British masters of the historical novel used women's personal experience as the focal points of their interpretation of the French Revolution.

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Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband"—a Feminist Poem

Ljubica Matek

Abstract

Although it is anachronistic to speak of feminism in the early eighteenth-century, the paper reads Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's 1724 heroic epistle "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" as a feminist poem. It stands as an expression of her progressive views on women and a testimony to the deep-rootedness of gender-based double standards, particularly when it comes to sexuality and sexual freedom. The paper will show how Montagu breaks the conventions of the form of heroic epistle, which is typically a passionate lament of an abandoned woman directed to her lover, to construct multi-layered meanings. It is both a poem about the failed marriage of the Yonges and a public appeal to reject social and cultural double standards that subjugate women. The poem is read in the context of Montagu's life and her letters from Turkey in order to affirm Montagu's position as one of the key progressive, feminist voices of her time.

Keywords: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, feminism, protofeminism, heroic epistle

**

Introduction

It may seem a fruitless endeavour to write about an author about whom "the definitive study" (Foreman) had already been published by Isobel Grundy in 1999, yet the enlightening quality of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's literary work and social engagement invites continuous reading and scrutiny in order to transcend the boundaries of the dedicated field of eighteenth-century study, and communicate the significance of her work to a wider, both scholarly and general, audience. Known for writing various forms of verse, such as satires, verse epistles and mock epics, she also wrote letters and essays, and translated works from Latin and French into English. Significantly, "critics have long called Montagu's poetry 'masculine'" (Barash) due to its quality and thematic boldness. Prolific in her writing, she was equally active in her social, cultural, and political life, which makes it even more shocking that the knowledge of her contributions to literature and to cultural and social progress remains, for the most part, reserved for dedicated scholars:

> She was the introducer of the practise of inoculation, a staunch advocate of feminism, a friend of the wits (Addison, Steele, and Arbuthnot, among them), a patroness of young writers (Fielding and Edward Young), and, of course, one of the greatest of the English letter-writers of the century that could boast of Chesterfield, Walpole, Gray, and Cowper. (Halsband, Introduction ix)

Indeed, in the Introduction to the first collection of her periodical *The Nonsense of Common-Sense 1737- 1738*,[1] Robert Halsband identifies Montagu as "[o]ne of the most glittering figures of the Augustan Age in England" (ix), although her prominence nowadays hardly matches the significance of her contributions. In fact, her position in the literary canon reflects the typical treatment and evaluation of women writers and their contributions to life and literature. For instance, even W. Moy Thomas, Montagu's "most recent (1861) and most careful editor" (Halsband, Introduction x), prior to Halsband's own twentieth-century contribution, dismissed the possibility of the existence of Montagu's periodical, doubting that she wrote more essays than one or that, if she did, any of them survived (x). In reality, much of her writing was destroyed either by herself (Grundy, *Lady Mary Montagu* xix), her friend Maria Skerret, "who burned a trunkful of Montagu's writings" (Grundy, *Lady Mary Montagu* xx), or her daughter, Lady Bute, who "destroyed the voluminous life-long journal of Lady Mary" (Heffernan and O'Quinn 19), all of which to avoid possible tarnish to her or her family's reputation. As Heffernan and O'Quinn attest, "[r]eputation was a complicated challenge for a woman of her status: it posed problems for her career as a writer because publicity was often seen as a breach of feminine decorum" (18). To be bold and publicly visible meant to be "masculine;" femininity demanded humility and anonymity, even erasure from the historical and public records.

So, a new reading seems to be due, and particularly now in the twenty-first-century context of gender. The present, namely, seems disjointed in its claims of advancement, fairness, and equal opportunity, and its reality which, even in Western societies, is still marked by gender-based social expectations, unequal pay, inaccessibility of health care, and, most of all, violence.[2] Such a constellation of attitudes toward women makes it both relevant and necessary to persist in discussing feminist issues as well as to uncover the important work of (proto)feminists. To highlight her role as a vital

1 In the periodical, Montagu tackles topics that were not considered to be feminine, namely politics (for instance, she discusses the position of both the lower classes and women) and economy: "Each issue contains an unsigned essay on the recto side of the folio halfsheet, with the balance made up of domestic and foreign news items, vital statistics, and stock and bankruptcy reports" (Halsband, Introduction x).

2 The currently ongoing wars (Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine) may be taken as proofs of the lack of human enlightenment and of moral and spiritual advancement and tolerance in a general sense. More pertinent to the particular context of the paper, an attestation of today's specifically gender-based lack of tolerance, acceptance, and egalitarianism can be found both in fiction and in nonfictional reporting as numerous texts testify to the inferior position of women both in the conceptualization of gender roles and in practice. For more details, see: Davis, Solnit, Valenti or Bates, to mention just a few. Being concerned with Montagu, the paper does not tackle the hotly debated issue of transgender identities and prejudice, although such debates also confirm the paper's claim of the prominence of gender-based concerns in current public and academic discourse.

character in both women's and feminist literary tradition,[3] this paper reads Montagu's 1724 heroic epistle "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband"[4] as a compressed expression of her progressive views on women and a testimony to the deep-rootedness of gender-based double standards, particularly when it comes to sexuality and sexual freedom. Significantly, "[t]his poem remained unpublished until the later twentieth century, omitted until then by all editors of Montagu" (Grundy, "Six Town Eclogues" 190). So, despite its thematic innovativeness and significance, the long-time exclusion of Montagu's "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" from the body of her published work sadly reflects both the tragic fate of the general erasure of her (and other women's) writings from the canon and the bleak future of the form of heroic epistle, extinguished by the appearance of the novel.

Relying on some of the tenets of biographical and feminist criticism, the paper will show how the poem refracts its meaning from being a poem about a failed marriage of the Yonges to being a public appeal to reject social and cultural double standards and change partial laws that apply to women. In this, the poem affirms Montagu's position as one of the key feminist voices of her time and stands as a testimony of a long-standing practice of discounting both female writing and female rights.

Heroic Epistles: Stories of Love in Verse

As Carolyn J. Kates has established in her 1991 doctoral thesis, the first survey-study of the English heroic epistle, the form has been overlooked both by literary critics and scholars, and "the term is not included in the majority of handbooks to literature" (1).[5] In a 2007 study, Bill Overton still mentions "its neglect by the academy" arguing that "it is a mistake to undervalue the form" (66). Gillian Beer identifies Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of fifteen epistolary poems, as the genre's "generative text" (127) since the followers adopt both its form and theme. Written in elegiac couplets[6] and in the first-person point of view, the poems typically represent an expression of grief by heroic women "jilted by insensitive and uncaring lovers.

3 Scholarly convention would dictate that Montagu be referred to as a protofeminist, due to the fact that the term "feminist" is anachronistic in discussions of the eighteenth century, as feminism appears only later as an organized attitude, movement and/or scholarly approach. Still, the paper argues that her life and work should be regarded as feminist, since, by definition, feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of women and men, as this is what she advocates for.

4 As per Grundy, the original title of the poem includes the year and veils the family name: "Epistle from Mrs. Y–to her Husband. 1724" ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 418). In subsequent publications, however, the name is typically revealed and the year omitted, which is the form used in this article too.

5 Kates's dissertation serves as the main source, as later, more contemporary, publications available at the time of writing largely repeat Kates's findings, sometimes (as with Overton [2007]) even without referencing her research. The author makes no ill assumptions but notices the striking (though possibly coincidental) similarity to historical instances of ignoring the work of women writers.

6 The Roman (Latin) elegiac couplet consists of a verse written in dactylic hexameter followed by a verse in dactylic pentameter, whereas "most English poets compose their epistles in heroic couplets, the meter considered by scholars to be the English equivalent of Ovid's verse" (Kates 2).

The majority of heroines write their love-letters in order to persuade their lovers to return, although several are paired as dialogues and initiated by men for the purposes of seduction" (Kates 2). In this, the heroic epistle performs the traditional notion of men as active and dominant, and women as left to struggle and beg for the man's attention and love. It also promotes the idea of (great) love as suffering, and female suffering as both noble and expected.

In England, the genre is received thanks to multiple translations that occurred between 1567 and 1800 and that, according to Kates, served as "a source of inspiration for new and original heroic epistles" (87), starting with George Turbervile's translation *The Heroycall Epistles* (1567), the first full translation of *Heroides* into English, and leading to Dryden and company's *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), which remained "the most popular" (Kates 47), although it was not the most recent one.[7] Indeed, the translations inspired multiple English poets to write their own heroic epistles, particularly in the late seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, as they beautifully corresponded to the literary fashion of the age marked by letter-writing and satire. On the one hand, certain poets satirize the genre, preserving its conventions, but corresponding to the contemporary literary trends of witty ridicule, as was the case with Matthew Stevenson's *The Wits Paraphras'd* (1680) and Alexander Radcliffe's *Ovid Travestie* (1889). On the other hand, as Trickett contends, the convention of poetic letter-writing specifically contributed to the popularity of the *Heroides* in the Augustan period in England (200), and to the proliferation of its imitators.

Moreover, the fashionable society of the time was in particular occupied by and interested in amorous intrigues,[8] and the topic of love, like the mode of satire, matched both the poets' and the readers' tastes well. In fact, the heroic epistle from Ovid onwards is specifically marked by love as its "most significant element . . . In whatever its form – betrayal, seduction, abandonment, homoeroticism, divorce – love is the factor which motivates a man or woman to write his or her epistle" (Kates 347). Although most heroic epistles rely on expressions of love between classical characters, English poets also introduce new types of characters in the heroic epistle: Drayton's 1597 *Englands Heroicall Epistles* imagine "love-letters written between famous British historical personages" (Kates 4); Pope turns to medieval sources with "Eloisa to Abelard" (1717).[9] John Donne's heroical epistle "Sapho to Philaenis" (1597) is noteworthy as "the first explicitly lesbian love elegy in English" (Holstun

7 Kates offers a comprehensive overview and discussion of all English translations of *Heroides* in the period (47-95).

8 This is famously evidenced by Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712, 1714), but other works attest to the fact too: for instance, Giles Jacob's parody *The Rape of the Smock* (1717), or Samuel Johnson's *A Compleat Introduction to the Art of Writing Letters* (1758), where in the comical Letter XIII Monsieur de Colletier jokingly describes the power of amorous impulses induced by "that son of a Whore Cupid" (163).

9 Interestingly, Montagu was convinced that Pope copied line 122 of "Eloisa to Abelard": "Still drink delicious poison from thy eye," from her poem "Tuesday," in which she writes: "Drinking Delicious Poison from her Face" (line 61), and, when he sent her the manuscript of the poem to read, she annotated the line with the word "mine" (Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary* 76; Grundy, *The Verse of Lady Mary* 354; Barash).

838),[10] and likely inspired Lady Winchilsea's homoerotic "Epistle from Alexander to Hephaestion in His Sickness" (1713) (Kates 267). In discussing the form, Beer suggests that (sexual) love somehow irreparably breaks the woman's self because of which heroic epistle "could never . . . be called entirely a feminist form of literature" (129). Significantly, she makes this claim in a paper that does not discuss Montagu's heroic epistles but Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard," which is a much more conventional example. Contrary to most authors, in her heroic epistles, Montagu is primarily concerned with contemporary characters. Moreover, she is a rare female voice to write letters that are, convention-wise, supposed to be written from the female perspective; most heroic epistles feature a female lyrical speaker written by a male author. This likely explains why her heroic epistles differ from most others, and why she offers a radically different idea of marriage and love than the one imagined, sanctioned, and promoted for centuries by male writers.

Indeed, Ovid's heroic epistles, according to Henry A. Kelly, commend legitimate marriage and love, and Ovid establishes himself as "the teacher of good morals in these epistles, and the extirpator of evil" (99). Consequently, the perspective on what is "legitimate marriage" and what is "love" is first determined by a man, and then repeated and affirmed over centuries by other men. For many, *Heroides* are, "the most glowing love stories ever told" (Cather 81), which implies that great love stories are based on suffering, waiting, desertion, and, generally, some form of self-immolation of, usually, the female partner. Even more so, being most typically written from a female perspective, heroic epistles ostensibly represent the female experience with relation to unhappy love affairs, which normalizes the idea that it is the female partner who should endure suffering and that the male is the one who causes it. Indeed, as McMillan explains, "Ovid's *Heroides* tells the stories of women suffering in love from the women's point of view. Some are traditionally good (Penelope), some bad (Helen); but Ovid's treatment of them is sympathetic" (11). So, regardless of the woman's character and virtue, she must suffer and Ovid feels for her. But the possibility to imagine and represent a man suffering for love in quite the same way—supplicating, crying—seems to be out of the question. Because of this, Montagu's "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" represents a welcome departure from the romanticization of suffering and a more realistic representation of the things that actually plague women in relation to men: double standards.[11]

Finally, the focus on character, the character's emotions, and psychological state explains both the genre's century-long allure and its ultimate demise. Namely, its popularity coincides with the proliferation of epistolary fiction "between the

10 Holstun does not even identify the poem as a heroic epistle, which confirms Kates's claims about the neglect of the genre (1), even though in his edition of Donne's poetry, Sir Herbert Grierson placed the poem after the elegies identifying it as an "Heroical Epistle" (see: Grierson lxiii, 91; Smith 452).

11 Indeed, as contemporary feminist thinkers suggest, this is still an issue. In her 2022 *Fix the System, Not the Women*, Bates argues that women are expected to do things "as a matter of course" (39), whereas men are praised if they do them. Women are also constantly *blamed* for being the *victims* of violence or injustice. For instance, whereas men can wear whatever they want, women should dress demurely so as not to provoke unwanted attention, whereby female bodies are constantly sexualized (23), and represented as so tempting that men, although ostensibly strong and rational, *cannot* resist them.

Restoration and 1740" (Kates 365), and "the years 1740-1800, when the English epistolary novel was in its heyday" (Day 2). As the poets "developed the genre further, complicating the standard Ovidian situation with politics, religion, and societal pressures" (Kates 366), they inadvertently enabled its own demise, that is, as Kates explains, the absorption of heroic epistles "by the larger and similar genre, the novel" (367; see also Beer 125). Paradoxically, the innovative poets, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who treats the failed love story as backdrop upon which she elaborates on social and legal injustices, contribute to the disappearance rather than survival of the genre. As Trickett explains:

> The mingling of psychological realism and convention was a vital concern of poetry from the Renaissance to the Romantic period and only began to lose its urgency as a topic of criticism and a preoccupation of practising poets when a new genre for treating human situations and emotions emerged – the prose fiction, the novel which gradually in the eighteenth century superseded the traditional character interests of poetry and drama. (200)

Montagu and Heroic Epistles

At the age of twelve, the precocious Montagu writes an original heroic epistle in imitation of the *Heroides*, "Julia to Ovid" (1701-02),[12] which testifies to her familiarity with Ovid's works and the form itself (Grundy, "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 420). Namely, written from Julia's point of view "in Ovidian rhetoric" (Kates 277), the epistle describes her suffering for being separated from the beloved Ovid. More importantly, it represents an early expression of both Montagu's intellectual brilliance and her vanguardism as the poem is "the first heroic epistle composed in the eighteenth century" (Kates 276), making Montagu's contribution to the genre momentous even before she publishes her innovative and "feminist heroic epistles" (276). As Kates surmises, Montagu's avant-garde writing seems unsurprising in light of the fact that, as her letters demonstrate, "she is unlike most women of her time" (314). Indeed, by the standards of her time, "scholarly aspirations and learning were often outside the scope of normative femininity" (Heffernan and O'Quinn 18), so she could not receive formal education and should not have been familiar with the classics. Yet, thanks to her keen mind, she was able to make the most of home-schooling at her father's library, where she taught herself Latin—a process she refers to as "stealing the Latin language" (Grundy, "Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 420), demonstrating that such knowledge was not meant for women and had to be acquired by stealth. In fact, the artificial schism between intellect and gender enforced by social conventions that a woman had to endure if she wanted to be a

12 Her heroic epistle tackles the alleged affair between the poet Ovid and Emperor Augustus's daughter Julia, which was frequently listed as a potential reason for his banishment from Rome in 8 A.D. The true reason for Ovid's exile is still unknown, even if Ovid himself claimed that it is "too well known to all" (*Tristia*, 4.10.99). For more details on his exile see: Thibault, or Goold.

writer is the focal point of Isobel Grundy's 1999 study of Montagu's life and writing; she represents Montagu's life and work as a continuous negotiation between the roles of a lady and a woman writer.

Providentially, Montagu was inspired and supported by her progressive "personal friend" (420), Mary Astell, who argued for women's education, advocating for it not only as a necessity in a woman's life but "as an alternative to marriage" (Blanchard 351), and making study a life-choice and purpose for women—a radical thought at the time. Of course, Montagu was not afraid of being different; she wanted both education, which she acquired herself, and marriage, but on her own terms. Her courtship with Edward Wortley Montagu was hindered by her father's financial demands, which caused Lady Mary to refer to herself (and other women) as "slaves" sold by their "masters" (Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary* 16), which will remain a constant metaphor in the works of subsequent feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Hays's *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), Mary Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), or John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Her father arranged for her to be married to the Honourable Clotworthy Skeffington, whose marriage contract was financially satisfactory (Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary* 23), but, rejecting the possibility to "marry a man she could not love" (24) and thus defying her father, she eloped with Wortley Montagu and married him in secret (27).

Her blithe attitude to social customs translated in the 1720s to her poetry as she modified the conventions of the heroic epistle by giving voice to lovers of ordinary status,[13] rather than aristocratic or mythological characters, and by introducing new, contemporary topics. To be sure, "[w]hat makes her heroic epistles unique from any that had been written previously is that, unlike Turbervile, Wither, and Browne, who compose domestic heroic epistles between fictional lovers, and Drayton and Pope, who base their epistles on history, Lady Mary finds her material in contemporary events" (Kates 314). Motivated by gossip, news, and ongoing social debates, she writes exhilarating epistles that also contain her point of view to these current issues, which represents another breach of decorum: women were not supposed to publicly comment on civic or legal matters. In particular, Montagu is concerned with the society's treatment of women, having realized very early on that men and women are not judged by the same standards.[14] Her progressive views on marriage and criticism of patriarchy in England will be further shown on the example of "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband," a poem thought to be so outrageous at the time that it remained unpublished until Isobel Grundy shared it with the public for the first time in 1972.

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13 As Kates establishes, George Wither's heroic epistle "Elegiacall Epistle of Fidelia to her Inconstant Friend" (1615) is written from the point of view of an ordinary woman to her unidentified lover, and as she yearns for him, she also protests against arranged marriage and the position of women at the time, but this was not repeated for over a century, that is, until Montagu's epistles of the 1720s (7).

14 Joseph Spence notes an anecdote between Montagu and Alexander Pope that reveals both her strong sense of authorship and her realization of the way the society evaluates women's writing. Namely, she had refused to allow Pope to edit one of her poems, saying: "No, Pope, no touching, for then whatever is good for any thing will pass for yours, and the rest for mine" (233).

"Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband. 1724"

As Grundy elaborates, the Yonges were Montagu's contemporaries, and their marriage an unhappy one. A notorious adulterer, or a "gallant schemer," as he was then referred to both in the society and in the newspapers ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 423), Mr. Yonge left his wife to pursue other women, providing her with a Deed of Separation. Yet, when his de facto abandoned wife found a lover of her own, Mr. Yonge demanded financial compensation from him in a court procedure, paradoxically turning their marital issues into a public scandal, and his own adulterous self into the victim of his wife's adultery. In addition to claiming damages from the man, Mr. Yonge also demanded divorce and financial compensation from his wife, turning this private affair into a spectacular political and legal issue: "Both Houses of Parliament proceeded to deliberate 'An Act to dissolve the Marriage of *William Yonge* Esquire with *Mary Heathcote*'; and to enable him to marry again; and for other purposes therein mentioned'" ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 423). The severity of the public reactions judging the wife for her offenses, substantiated by the Court's and Parliament's actions that enabled the husband to both divorce his wife and make considerable financial gain in the process, provoked a response from Montagu, phrased in the form of a heroic epistle but effectively serving as a public complaint by the wronged wife:

> Think not this paper comes with vain pretense
> To move your pity, or to mourn th' offense.
> Too well I know that hard obdurate heart;
> No softening mercy there will take my part,
> Nor can a woman's arguments prevail,
> When even your patron's wise example fails.
> But this last privilege I still retain;
> Th' oppressed and injured always may complain. (lines 1-8)

Viewing herself as the injured party, the lyrical speaker frames their particular instance of marital infidelity as a general one: a case study of the marital customs and laws that tend to be unjust only toward the wife. In this, Montagu breaks the form's conventions. Although the abandoned woman passionately argues her case, she neither wants the lover's return nor expresses regret for her adultery or the end of the marriage. Rather, she advocates for women and their position in the society; complaining about the fact that women's pleas are never heard or accepted as serious, she exposes women as the society's oppressed.

The fact that the topic was a burning eighteenth-century issue is confirmed by numerous books that were published at the time and tackled issues such as the choice of the marriage partner, dowry, sexuality, and the wife's role in marriage. Grundy asserts that many of these titles were owned by Montagu and functioned as her

"polemical sources" ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 418-20).[15] In her 1721 heroic epistle titled "Epistle from Arthur G[ra]y to Mrs M[urra]y," Montagu also elaborates on a contemporary event—an unsuccessful attempt of rape that scandalized the society. According to Overton, the footman accused of the attempt was first sentenced to death and then pardoned by the alleged intercession of the family of the supposed victim (156; Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley* 227-28), which prompted Montagu to describe him as an Ovidian lover, "a man hopelessly and passionately in love with the woman he attempted to violate""(Kates 315). Her satirical approach to the incident, along with the man's acquittal, suggests that there was much more to it than was reported to the public. It also illustrates how Montagu "uses the heroic epistle to express her feelings about adultery, marriage, and the hypocrisy of society"" (Kates 253), which often used sex and sexual impulses to shame and vilify women: "Masculine desire was celebrated; so too was female or ladylike purity" (Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley* 227). The fictional Mrs Yonge deplores the double standards and says:

> Too, too severely laws of honour bind
> The weak submissive sex of womankind.
> If sighs have gained or force compelled our hand,
> Deceived by art, or urged by stern command,
> Whatever motive binds the fatal tie,
> The judging world expects our constancy. (lines 9-14)
> ...
> Our sex's weakness you expose and blame
> (Of every prattling fop the common theme),
> Yet from this weakness you suppose is due
> Sublimer virtue than your Cato knew.
> Had heaven designed us trials so severe,
> It would have formed our tempers then to bear. (lines 32-37)

The allegedly weak and submissive women were, inexplicably, expected to remain strong and constant in the face of temptation. The paradox baffled many protofeminist thinkers and writers, who then logically argued either that women should not be judged for their natural weakness or, if they are equally strong and moral as men, that their position in the society should reflect their capabilities. This line of argumentation gained more traction following the French Revolution, which put human rights in the foreground and rejected the unjust hereditary traditions. Mary Wollstonecraft spoke of "the tyranny of man" (84) that effectively keeps women "always in a state

15 The works referred to testify to the ubiquity of marriage as a literary theme: William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), John Sheffield's "Elegy to the Duchess of R—" (1723), Margaret Cavendish's *The Inventory of Judgments Commonwealth* (1655), and works by Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Lady Winchilsea, Lady Chudleigh and Mary Astell.

of childhood" (85) first by denying women education and equal rights and then by constantly chastising them for behaving foolishly.[16]

Speaking through the voice of Mrs. Yonge, Montagu wonders in her epistle about the origins of such injustice, scrutinizing from a biological or physiological point of view the idea that women's and men's bodies function according to different principles:

> From whence is this unjust distinction grown?
> Are we not formed with passions like your own?
> Nature with equal fire our souls endued,
> Our minds as haughty, and as warm our blood;
> O'er the wide world your pleasures you pursue,
> The change is justified by something new;
> But we must sigh in silence—and be true. (lines 25-31)

Whereas Mr. Yonge's adventurous (adulterous) behaviour is socially acceptable, and even expected, Mrs. Yonge is expected to ignore her passions and endure any and all of her husband's faults. Considering "this regard for the reputation of chastity [that] is prized by women, [and] is despised by men," Wollstonecraft asserts in her *A Vindication* that "the two extremes are equally destructive to morality" (219). In this respect, Montagu precedes most protofeminist and all feminist writers and thinkers, including Wollstonecraft, Robinson, Hays, and John Stuart Mill. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill exposes the very same troubling inconsistencies in the education and treatment of men and women by arguing unambiguously:

> [t]hat the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (3)

Relying on reason and common sense, Mill argues that the society as a whole suffers from female subordination because the preclusion of women's education also precludes the potential positive social and cultural contributions by a half of its citizens. According to Wollstonecraft, ignorant women are "foolish and vicious" (281), which results in unnecessary intrigues that waste time and energy. Montagu also satirizes women's vanity and foolishness, for example in "A Satyr," but she only does it as "a gambit . . . crediting them with a capacity to reform" (Sherman 1). Indeed, she writes essays and poems that explicitly advocate for women's education and unbiased marriage arrangements.

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16 Her work was quickly followed by Mary Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), where she equally criticizes the double standards (45, 78). As Gary Kelly explains, Mary Hays was also personally affected by Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* which contributed to her own feminist identity and politics, as well as her works (80-125).

This is not surprising since Montagu felt from an early age the consequences of gendered politics and policies acutely, first in being denied a proper formal education, which was not deemed suitable for ladies, and later in having difficulties publishing her works: "Frequently at court and well-known for her literary production among her friends and family (the novel writer Henry Fielding was a cousin) and among other writers of the time like Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, only her gender and her position in society prevented her from becoming a published author" (Long par. 11). Writing under pseudonyms, publishing anonymously or under a man's patronage was, for the most part, a female writer's reality. For instance, in a scathing poem—as most of his are—John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester comments on the predicament of being a woman writer: "Cursed if you fail, and scorned though you succeed! / Thus, like an errant woman as I am, / No sooner well convinced writing's a shame, / That whore is scarce a more reproachful name / Than poetess–" ("A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country" lines 23-27). The struggle between reputation and professional success was quite intimate to Montagu, who, after years of friendship and professional cooperation with Alexander Pope, lived to see him cruelly and publicly attack her chastity (Thomas 21-22; Heffernan and O'Quinn 18; see also Grundy 1999; Rogers 2023).

According to Lewis Melville, this type of professional discrimination "seems to have been more marked in English society than elsewhere in Europe" (192). Melville refers to a letter by Montagu, written in Italy for a friend of hers and recounting one of the many social visits paid by Cardinal Guerini to Montagu. The Cardinal, who was enthusiastic about her writing, "requested her published works for the library in a college he was founding and even sent his chaplain to collect them. The chaplain was unable to believe that such a collection did not exist and seemed to think that Lady Montagu was snubbing the Cardinal by not donating the books" (Melville 192). So, her view, explicitly stated in her letters from Turkey, that the position of women in England is far inferior than in other countries, is based on actual experience. Thus, in the "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" the degree of injustice suffered by the wife is related through Mrs. Yonge's invocation of heaven in the hope that it provides more justice than the society guided by partial laws (lines 15-18), designed specifically to subjugate women.

Significantly, whereas Wollstonecraft and Mill use the rhetoric of slavery in their reference to the position of women—Wollstonecraft suggests that a woman is made into "a coquetish slave" (91) and Mill speaks of the enslavement of minds (18, 21)—for Montagu, women sometimes seem to be treated *worse* than slaves: "Defrauded servants are from service free; / A wounded slave regains his liberty. / For wives ill used no remedy remains, / To daily racks condemned, and to eternal chains" (lines 20-24). It is not surprising then that Montagu, who lived in Turkey for several years thanks to her husband's ambassadorship, expresses both her enthusiasm in relation to how women are treated there and her disdain for male writers who attempt to describe female experience although they have no real access to it.

Contradicting the typical Western views of the Orient based on ignorance and prejudice, Montagu "adopted an intelligent, measured, and critical stance as she negotiated sexual and national boundaries" in that she fostered "contact with the

'other' . . . studying Islam, Turkish, and Arabic, and engaging with the people she met on her sojourn" (Heffernan and O'Quinn 34). For instance, in her letter written from Turkey to her sister, the Countess of Mar, dated 1 April 1717, Montagu first expresses her admiration for the fashion and looks of Turkish women, and then criticizes "either the exemplary discretion or extreme stupidity of all the writers that have given accounts of them. 'Tis very easy to see they have more liberty than we have" (*The Letters* 298-99). By ironically referring to the "discretion" of male travel writers, Montagu implies that they wished to conceal from the English public the degree of freedom awarded to Turkish women, spreading negative views and feeding prejudice against the Muslim. More significantly, she questions the legitimacy of men speaking on behalf of women as well as the authority of a male voice in speaking about the female experience.

Similarly, in a letter to Mrs Thistlethwayte dated the same day, 1 April 1717, she also criticizes male travel writers by suggesting that they are "very fond of speaking of what they don't know" (*The Letters* 312); namely, men (Turkish or foreign) are not allowed to enter the women's quarters and "[t]hey can only speak of the outside" (313), so their conclusions about female life are both uninformed and subjective. In fact, Montagu challenges the accuracy of their reports on life in a Muslim country in general by asserting that they even report falsely on obvious things such as architecture: "I suppose you have read, in most of our accounts of Turkey that their houses are the most miserable pieces of building in the world. I can speak very learnedly on that subject, having been in so many of them; and I assure you 'tis no such thing" (311). Montagu's astute observations precede Edward Said's *Orientalism* by two and a half centuries, but she is fully aware that the Western representation of Orient as inferior is imagined, conceived in such a way as to simultaneously construct the West (England) as superior. Although she inevitably participates in orientalist discourse because she cannot be exempt from the discursive power of the West, she also exposes it as artificial and harmful. In fact, if, as Said argues, the Orient and the Occident support and reflect each other (5) in creating a specific picture or idea of the world, Montagu certainly views the Orient as the more advanced half, representing the Western cultural hegemony as a misogynist invention. Her unambiguous statements about the Western male writers writing about things they know nothing about prove the claim that literary, cultural, and political representations of the Orient stand as a "highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient" (Said 21), that being an ostensibly uncivilized place inhabited by brutes.

Rejecting such prejudicial notions and, by extension, viewing the West's attitudes about the East similar in principle to the male attitude about and treatment of women, Montagu exposes Turkish legal and cultural practices as far more progressive. She praises the Turkish custom of covering women, as she views "the veils worn by women as liberating from the male gaze" (Marsden), and as a means of erasing class distinctions: "this disguises them, [so] that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave. 'Tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her; and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street" (Montagu, *The Letters* 299). She also dispels the myths of their sexual repression or subjugation by suggesting that Turkish women can freely choose lovers as they wish: "[t]his perpetual

masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery" (*The Letters* 299). The punishment for sexual transgression that supposedly awaits Christian ladies in the afterlife is "never preached to the Turkish damsels" (*The Letters* 299). In the "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband," Montagu speaks of the same things through the voice of the wronged wife, who exposes the injustice of the fact that adultery is seen as regular and acceptable for husbands, but as the highest moral and social mistake of a wife, for which she is publicly vilified:

> To custom (though unjust) so much is due;
> I hide my frailty from the public view.
> My conscience clear, yet sensible of shame,
> My life I hazard, to preserve my fame.
> And I prefer this low inglorious state
> To vile dependence on the thing I hate–
> But you pursue me to this last retreat.
> Dragged into light, my tender crime is shown
> And every circumstance of fondness known.
> Beneath the shelter of the law you stand,
> And urge my ruin with a cruel hand,
> While to my fault thus rigidly severe,
> Tamely submissive to the man you fear. (lines 46-58)

In addition to the social scorn, the wife faces financial consequences of her adultery as she loses not only her reputation and husband but also her livelihood and her home. Indeed, the financial aspect of the Yonge affair turned out to be particularly unfavourable for the wife. Contrary both to the English legal practice and the prevailing Western beliefs, the Turkish law provides for women in similar situations much more generously, preventing women from feeling resentment for their husbands: "those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands, which they take with them upon a divorce, with an addition which he is obliged to give them" (Montagu, *The Letters* 299). Furthermore, the gender-biased rules that determine English inheritance laws are quite different in Turkey, where women have the right to own and inherit property, and even to make certain decisions in that regard:

> the Grand Signior himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or women's apartment), which remains unsearched entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, whom the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses. (Montagu, *The Letters* 300)

These distinctions between her home country and Turkey unsurprisingly contributed to Montagu's perception of Turkey as "free of the sexual and patriarchal constraints imposed upon English women. Not only did spaces such as the female hammam exist but women had significantly more rights" (Marsden).

Evidently, the level of respect for women that Montagu witnessed in Turkey is diametrically opposed to what Mrs. Yonge experiences in England. She is first abandoned by the husband who pursued numerous affairs, and after she does the same, he demands compensation along with the divorce. The brunt of humiliation is borne by her alone, as she begs for him not to leave her destitute:

> And I have borne (oh what have I not borne!)
> The pang of jealousy, the insults of scorn.
> Wearied at length, I from your sight remove,
> And place my future hopes in secret love.
> In the gay bloom of glowing youth retired,
> I quit the woman's joy to be admired,
> With that small pension your hard heart allows,
> Renounce your fortune, and release your vows. (lines 38-45)

Yet, Montagu refuses to solely paint a humbling picture of the wife, and continues to expose the husband as the main culprit for the scandal. She highlights the hypocrisy of the society and the partiality of the law by making it clear that, as any reasonable person understands, the wife is the wronged party:

> This wretched outcast, this abandoned wife,
> Has yet this joy to sweeten shameful life:
> By your mean conduct, infamously loose,
> You are at once my accuser and excuse.
> Let me be damned by the censorious prude
> (Stupidly dull, or spiritually lewd),
> My hapless case will surely pity find
> From every just and reasonable mind.
> When to the final sentence I submit,
> The lips condemn me, but their souls acquit. (lines 59-68)

The irony of the situation is expressed in the lines where the wife liberates the husband from the shackles of marriage: "No more my husband, to your pleasures go, / The sweets of your recovered freedom know" (lines 69-70). Her release of her husband functions like a reversed echo of Montagu's conclusion about the position of women in Turkey: "Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women, as the only free people in the empire" (*The Letters* 299-300). The epistle ends, as Grundy notes, with a rapidly delivered series of verbs that insinuate the man's ambition, corruption as well as his close ties with politics and powers that be ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 426) that helped him win the claim in court. His lack of emotion and business-like approach to marriage illustrate the concept of marriage at the time: it is an arranged affair in which the woman is merely an instrument for the man's

self-actualization. Indeed, if the marriage fails to provide adequate heirs, a substitute "bride"[17] will be provided for:

> Go: court the brittle friendship of the great,
> Smile at his board, or at his levee wait;
> And when dismissed, to madam's toilet fly,
> More than her chambermaids, or glasses, lie,
> Tell her how young she looks, how heavenly fair,
> Admire the lilies and the roses there.
> Your high ambition may be gratified,
> Some cousin of her own be made your bride,
> And you the father of a glorious race
> Endowed with Ch——l's strength and Low——r's face. (lines 71-80)

The closing lines, although specific to Mrs Yonge's experiences, suggest that in a patriarchal society all marriages reduce women to a beautiful, nameless, breeding body, whereas they extoll men as the actual fathers of a nation, the supreme active agents in the Aristotelian sense,[18] regardless of their moral or other flaws.

Conclusion

With her assertive approach to her own education and the brave undertaking of a profession that was still for the most part considered to be reserved for men, Montagu destabilizes the existing gender boundaries. Both in her life and work she is consistent in demanding and speaking for the equality of women and men. Although she adopts the pathos of Ovidian epistles, and speaks from the position of the abandoned lover, she enriches the "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband" with satirical overtones and harsh social criticism. Whereas heroic epistles typically treat materials from mythology and ancient literature, Montagu tackles a contemporary subject of marital infidelity and divorce in order to address problems that transcend the notion of "a lover's parting" by far.

Importantly, Montagu uses the story of the Yonges as a frame through which she laments the position of women in a society plagued by hypocrisy and misogyny. Although she has notable predecessors in Astell, Cavendish, and several other female writers, this does not undermine the significance of her feminist ideas. Quite the contrary, her life

17 Isobel Grundy detects the source for the bride reference in John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester's poem "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country," in which the friends provide the groom with his own cousin as a bride to prevent the improvement of the family line through incestuous breeding ("Ovid and Eighteenth-Century Divorce" 426), which is an ironical comment on the detrimental effects of outdated social practices.

18 Aristotle found women to be passive and mere receptacles ("material") for developing foetuses, whereas men were seen as active and life-giving (111-13), and therefore fit to command, to instigate things: "the male is separate from the female, since it is something better and more divine in that it is the principle of movement for generated things, while the female serves as their matter" (133).

and work(s) provide a logical transition from the eighteenth-century satirical tradition to the humanist and individualist ideals of Mary Wollstonecraft, of one of the first feminist allies, John Stuart Mill, and, ultimately, of many contemporary feminist writers.

No less significantly, as "the first English woman to write about her travels in Ottoman lands" (Heffernan and O'Quinn 11), Montagu relies on her experience of living in a different culture to expose the harmful Eurocentric prejudices of the Christian West against the Muslim East. By representing Turkish customs and traditions as more advanced and more appreciative of the female gender, she rejects both the notions of the Oriental Other and of the Feminine Other, introducing more progressive discourse into the eighteenth-century upper-class society. In this, Montagu remains an important cultural and literary figure whose "idiosyncratic, open-minded, proto-feminist responses to Islamic civilization are more fascinating today than ever" (Grundy qtd. in "Comments").

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“Must our wants / Find their supply in murder?”: Intersectional Social Conscience in Ann Yearsley’s “A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade”

Boróka Andl-Beck

Abstract

For Ann Yearsley, issues like the abolition of the slave trade and the improvement of the working and living conditions of the English labouring classes were significant not only in her everyday life but also in her literary output. In the late eighteenth century, female writers had little chance to enter the public and literary discourse, but their voices were becoming gradually more audible, and the public literary and political platforms more accessible. Authors like Hannah More and Anna Laetitia Barbauld were at the forefront of the fight against slavery, but their backgrounds did not necessarily preordain their abolitionist positions—it was Yearsley whose social strata was the closest to the people whose liberation she advocated for. Rejecting the notion that the distance between Great Britain and its colonies where the slaves suffer most could be ignored by English authors and politicians due to geographical distance, Yearsley made a point that centuries later began to interest the likes of Judith Butler, who considered whether humans could ethically relate to human suffering at a distance. I would argue that Yearsley’s solidarity extended beyond the border of Britain and the continent of Europe precisely because she had experienced that proximity guarantees neither help nor compassion. Her general interest in politics, her radical, Protestant stance against exploitative practices, and her position as a woman intertwine and inform the rhetorical and poetical gestures present in her work “A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade” (1788).

Keywords: Early Romanticism, Ann Yearsley, intersectionality, slave trade, fellow-feeling

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Introduction

In the late 1700s, women born into the labouring class were not expected to take up an interest in reading and writing, much less in fine poetry or political debates. However, as she was growing up, Ann Yearsley (née Cromarti, 1753–1806) came into contact with Scripture, and from then on, her fate as a sentimentalist-moralist poet

was sealed. This article aims to examine Yearsley's abolitionist poem "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" (1788) through the lens of intersectional[1] identity and sympathy, while emphasising the unique position of the poetess as well as the rapidly changing attitudes of the society she inhabited.

Researchers like Moira Ferguson and Donna Landry view her as a resistance figure in literature and cultured society, while Mary Waldron claims Yearsley's aspirations took her far from her labouring-class roots (McDowell 259-60), thus providing a perfect example for social mobility in the eighteenth century. On the other end of the spectrum, upon close-reading Yearsley's poems, David Fairer argues that the idea of Ann Yearsley "the Bristol milkwoman" could divert us from considering her as a complex, philosophically inclined poet (19). I would argue that we do not have to choose between these two types of readings; instead, we should consider Yearsley's work along the same lines we would study her higher-class male contemporaries. Without considering her socio-cultural and historical context, the significance of Yearsley's poems might fade, just as William Wordsworth's (1770–1850) work could appear less colourful were we not to emphasise the unique, context-derived elements in his writing. Therefore, in this paper I endeavour to present the intersectional position of the Bristol poetess through one of her great poems, "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade," while contrasting it with "To Indifference" (1787) and "Addressed to Sensibility" (1787), two more contemplative poems on the workings of sympathy. Both poems showcase an original perspective on the conundrums and contemporary understandings of fellow-feeling, especially concerning the sufferings of others and how we may or may not relate to them.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism on the evolution of moral philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often overlooks the female poets and authors active in these centuries, and the few to whom attention is paid—like Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) or Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825)—are often known for their roles in female suffrage rather than their literary achievements. This is especially puzzling when it comes to a lower-class woman, for her work may hold clues to how this social stratum might have experienced life in the heart of the ever-growing British Empire. Ann Yearsley lived her whole life in Bristol, the second largest slaving port in the nation after Liverpool, where the Dissenter population was twice the national average, and advocacy for the abolition of the slave trade was a significant part of political discourse. Hence, Yearsley had the opportunity to witness both the act and the arguments around it, while also being closer to the social stratum of these slaves, being a poor, working woman herself. At the intersection of life as a woman in eighteenth-century England and a person of the labouring class, as well as a Bristolian who could read and write, she was uniquely situated to join the lively discussion on the slave trade. Her addition to the increasing number of female poets addressing the issue

1 Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a term used to convey the multiple factors which determine one's social position, i.e., if they are discriminated against or privileged based on their religious, racial, ethnic, sexual, class, etc. identity. Originally created as a new feminist framework to address the black female experience, intersectional analysis provides scholars with a multi- rather than a single-axis view of social experience and position (Cooper 385).

is markedly different to the writing of her peers in its anti-capitalist stance, religious radicalism and graphic descriptions of brutality, but most importantly, it contains arguments that seek to appeal to the sympathetic disposition of her contemporaries and fellow Bristolians. Yearsley calls on readers and decision-makers to turn feeling into action: according to her opening words, she does not seek to cause "Anguish . . . which powerless Compassion ever gives," pointing out that it is the rich and powerful who have the luxury to change course.

Her poem "To Indifference" might be more contemplative in nature, but its moral framework is very similar. In this article, the contrast between the two poems shall be examined to juxtapose Yearsley's general argument for sympathy and her conviction that one cannot shy away from exposing oneself to one's own woes or the plight of others. The wish for habitual indifference voiced in the poem is in earnest: Yearsley seeks a more peaceful state where she may "seal / The lids of mental sight" (52-53) so that she does not have to face pain and sorrow. "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" argues similarly, albeit from a more political point of view in which she contrasts religious and moral beliefs with economic gain. The most forceful lines in terms of rhetoric address the absurdity of the day's conundrum in two rather provocative questions posed to the British socio-economic system: "Hath our public good / Fell rapine for its basis? Must our wants / Find their supply in murder?" (Yearsley, *A Poem* 26).

This paper attempts to present "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" with Yearsley's views on sensibility and sympathy in mind, and for this, the moral philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must be considered. The likes of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) and David Hume (1711–1776) were wrestling with the same moral conundrums just a few decades before Yearsley published her poems, and thus their theories cannot go unnoticed in our discussion. Turning to thinkers more contemporary to us, Emmanuel Levinas' thoughts on peace and proximity, as well as Judith Butler's arguments about fellow-feeling and the precarity of life will help us reflect upon Yearsley's compelling storytelling abilities as an intersectional poet, a literate woman of the labouring classes. However, before we can consider the moral contemplations offered by Yearsley, the social and economic context of her poetry shall be examined.

An Intersectional Poet and the British Economic System

The eighteenth century saw multiple female figures rise to positions of relative power: Hannah More (1745–1833), whose protégée is the subject of this article, was a highly influential Bluestocking whose Evangelical outlook and educationalist acumen impacted her writing and many other aspiring female writers, too. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a radical thinker chastised by many of her peers, possessed such argumentative skill that her *Epistle to William Wilberforce* (1791) is remarked for its moral courage and forceful language. Mary Robinson (1757–1800), not so much as a writer but as a socialite, provided fodder for royal enthusiasts with her allegedly scandalous affair with the Prince of Wales, but used her fame for advancing her

literary career and with it the causes close to her including the abolition of the slave trade. Still, among these women, Yearsley, the least influential and little known poet gave the audience the most openly anti-capitalist work (and thus the most compelling argument based on the contrast of religious and economic beliefs), to address the issue of slavery. Therefore, before proceeding with Yearsley's take on the British economic system, this paper briefly examines the historical context and the growing restlessness around slavery, and considers her personal experience in society through how she was perceived and how her religious radicalism powered her writing.

By the end of the 1700s, Britain was second only to Portugal (and Brazil) in the number of slaves transported from Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas. Between 1662 and 1807, an estimated 3,415,000 people (Dresser) had to suffer the calamities of a journey under British coercion on the waves of the Atlantic Ocean and the subsequent violence on the plantations. Many newspapers informed the public regularly about shipwrecks as well as any development on the plantations, including fickle uprisings and curious incidents. The *Norfolk Chronicle*, for example, communicated the following news in 1778:

> A letter [. . .] mentions the following melancholy affair: A ship in the slave trade [. . .] with 360 slaves [. . .] by some misfortune was driven on the rocks in the Bay, and beat to pieces; the slaves were under the hatches, which were fastened down, and all had perished except 17 white and about 12 slaves. ("Thursday's Post.")

A sympathetic (if condescending) tone toward slaves can be detected in some articles detailing debates in Parliament and the general political discourse around the issue too. Already in 1765, a decision in Parliament had passed that limited the "inhumanities be[i]ng practised," for they were "highly disgraceful to the reputation of the Kingdom" ("Monday's and Tuesday's Posts"), an argument that Yearsley wove into her religious reasonings two decades later. Approaching the 1780s, newspapers began to assume a more judgmental stance concerning the British slave trade, a fact that might signal the gradual shift in popular opinion and the impact of the trend of sensibility on British citizens. In 1771, the *Manchester Mercury* stated that, due to difficulties in the trade, "some very extraordinary event cannot be far distant in favour of a wretched race of individuals, whose complexions have, for centuries, exposed them to all the severities and indignities of servitude, that alone terminates with their lives" ("Saturday's and Sunday's Posts"), meaning a potential revolt in the colonies and eventual freedom for the enslaved. Yearsley herself calls for a kind of rebellion in her poem on abolition, stressing the huge gap between the exploiters and the enslaved; thus, her poem can be seen as a radical but in some ways unsurprising call for fundamental change (Ferguson 58).

It is easy to see how such reporting might have affected the literate population negatively: news that detailed the peril slaves had to suffer at the hands of the British government impacted the population, especially as sentimental literature and conduct books were very influential by the end of the 1700s. According to Carey, British citizens, due to their country growing more prosperous and stable, simply had more time to

contemplate the feelings of others and more means to help relieve their pain. As slavery was a "major branch of the national trade [that] was engaged in systematic torture and violence," citizens, having grown more sentimental in their outlook, felt disdain and shame for the fact that they profited off the empire's maltreatment of African men and women (Carey 20). Newfound prosperity also enabled for a greater distance between the lower and the upper classes, as those who felt sympathy lived far from those who were suffering. According to Butler (38), empathy for those close to us in terms of "common epistemological and cultural grounds" leads to a blindness towards the suffering of others, especially when their pain is inflected by bodies related to us, for one must turn to indifference to live their life without sorrow and guilt. In the case of Ann Yearsley, her social and geographical proximity (as a labouring-class woman in Bristol) to the enslaved provided her with a deeper understanding of their pain. Butler argues that proximity always has an impact on our ability to mourn our fellow humans—educational, cultural, linguistic, and geographical closeness determines a certain "we" that is necessarily different to what other groups identify as "we." She, however, asks a poignant question: "at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable?" (Butler 38). To Yearsley, human lives are all unified under the Christian God, and she is deeply offended by her countrymen because they go against the most basic tenets of Christianity by trading in "human cargo."

To turn to a sharper critique of the hypocrisy of a Christian state built on economic exploitation and dehumanisation, R. H. Tawney's (1880–1962) thoughts must be enumerated. According to Tawney, "Religion had not yet learned to console itself for the practical difficulty of applying its moral principles, by clasping the comfortable formula that for the transactions of economic life no moral principles exist" (188). This formulation may not be aligned with Yearsley's views, for throughout his book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* Tawney finds not only correlation but causation between Christianity and the pitfalls of capitalism, while Yearsley does not criticise Christian doctrines, and even takes the position of a kind of Christian missionary in the African colonies. Among the enslaved, she sees poor souls who could be saved from heathenism by missionary work, and she is disappointed about her nation exchanging moral victory for financial gain. Her concern is that Britain's religious and charitable efforts will appear insincere when contrasted with their trade practices, thus rendering the very notion of Christianity not only foreign and hypocritical but also harmful in the eyes of the colonised. Yearsley's religious ideals, then, cannot be reconciled with the ironically barbaric economic activity of the British Empire. It seems that when it comes to economic progress, no moral principles exist, every process is shaped by the kind of cynical realpolitik that so many abolitionists abhor, and influential Dissenters preach against. In her abolitionist poem, Yearsley attempts to call readers' attention to a social crisis by providing us with sentimental yet graphic depictions of violence against body and soul. For her, religion—or rather, a Christian faith based on a universal belief in humanity—should be the foundation for all national and imperial considerations, for progress achieved through the destruction of others is in fact regressive and morally reprehensible.

Yearsley also came across money-related hypocrisy in wealthy intellectual circles during her time as the protégée of Hannah More. More was an influential Evangelical

educationalist who took a liking to Yearsley because of her talent for poetry that she found contradictory to her social station as a milkmaid. In Moira Ferguson's words, "with borrowed books, a sharp eye, and the Bristol world for inspiration, Yearsley infused her poetry with powerful feelings, a quest for justice, and an evolving ideological perspective" (47), although the latter characteristic of her poetry would bring her eventual demise, at least in More's eyes. The root of their quarrel was in the great social and cultural distance between the two women, as More perceived a lack of gratitude in Yearsley's conduct when the latter asked for money after her first volume of poetry was published with help from More. It must also be noted here that "even 'liberality' and 'charity' may be seen as calculated acts of class appeasement" (Thompson 150); thus, it is not surprising that the likes of More expected self-subordinating gratitude from a lower-class person in exchange for their good-natured condescension. More's view of Yearsley changed considerably when she detected a kind of base hostility in her wish to profit from her own poems, as this suggested a rebellious nature that conservative thinkers such as More could not abide. The threat of the lower classes' barbarity echoes in More's letters to the famous Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800):

> Nothing wou'd appease her fury but having the money to spend, and which she expected in a fit of vulgar resentment, I shou'd give her, but my sense of duty will not allow it. Her other charges against me are that I have spoilt her verses by my corrections, and that she will write another book directly to show I was of no use to her, that I have ruined her reputation by the Preface which is full of falsehoods, that it was the height of insult and barbarity to tell that she was poor and a Milkwoman. (Qtd. in Ferguson 50)

A labouring-class woman demanding money from a figure of such high social standing was frowned upon by even those who otherwise would have supported her, with her efforts seen as an overt attack on social and political order. Writing in an earlier letter, More argued that "taking her out of her station" would inevitably lead to a decline in the quality of Yearsley's output and make her "detestable" (More qtd. in Ferguson 47). Simply put, as soon as the myth of the natural, instinctual genius lays claim to what they judge to be their fair share of rights and capital, the upper classes must deny them attention and support; having lost sight of their "place," labouring-class people aspire to something that they cannot and should not be able to achieve. In other words, the charming milkwoman remains interesting (and useful) only if she climbs the ladder in a pace approved by her social superiors. Still, Yearsley's fall from grace let her lead with a different attitude in her later volumes: a tone of happy resignation can be detected in a provocative unpublished poem, "To Stella" (addressed to the intellectual star More from Lactilla, the milkmaid). Here, Yearsley reflects upon the class divide between the two poets, warning More that her hypocrisy will be revealed unless she refrains from insulting her. In a less furious turn, however, Yearsley proudly accepts the basic truth of More's arguments, namely that they do not belong in the same space: she reclaims her "rightful place down in the metaphorical 'vale'" (Ferguson 77). This showcases a certain labouring-class pride that may provide some insight when it comes to Yearsley's advocacy for the abolitionist cause.

Finally, the story of Yearsley's resistance teaches a more universal lesson to the likes of More and Montagu: even in their excitement for untrained talent, they should not lose sight of the inherent barbarity of the lower classes; in other words, the social and political boundaries must stay intact, and support must always appear condescending so as not to suggest equality in power or genius. The inherent threat of a Yearsley-like figure must be recognised, for her ascent can be read as an allegory for social change in general. According to Richard Brown, the transformation of Britain from a pre-industrial to an industrial society and the gradual evolution of a dominant urban society "led to existing forms of association and institutions being brought into question," resulting in a defence mechanism on the part of the elite. Their "resistance to logical change, the defence of the indefensible" was naturally a part of this mechanism as the wealthy and powerful sought to keep their status (Brown 3). Thus, although More was an advocate for the abolition of the slave trade, her perspective was fundamentally different to Yearsley's: she did not want to disturb the status quo due to the benefits she received within the existing social order. As such, any minor rebellion against her station had to be contained, and the "labour and practised craft" of the more fortunate classes of Britain could never be likened to the "untutored genius" (McDowell 259) of a labouring-class person.

The Shared Human Condition

Having enumerated some of the factors from Yearsley's biography which may help us understand the moral stance seen in "A Poem on the Abolition of the Slave Trade," it is now important to note that the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moral philosophers influenced the Zeitgeist which Yearsley had to navigate. We know from More's letters that Yearsley had read Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Ferguson 47) before they met, but most of Yearsley's reading history—like other aspects of her life after the late 1780s—is unknown to us. Thus, this section endeavours to connect the dots between her poetic output and contemporary writings about sympathy that she may have come across, focusing on Yearsley's "To Indifference," "Addressed to Sensibility," and "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade."

First, the influence of *Paradise Lost* on Yearsley's thinking must be considered, as it is a work that deals with the issue of relatedness and sympathy through the concept of consolation. Leila Watkins (416) emphasises that after the Fall, Adam and Eve do not possess the "automatic, magnetic sympathies with the natural world;" however, they have a newfound ability of "building such ties with each other," a development that may have influenced how Yearsley saw the human potential for fellow-feeling. As the two fallen humans console one another after what initially seems their complete demise, they engage with each other and their environment consciously and actively, providing future society with a blueprint for what moral philosophers of the 1700s will call sympathy. Social relatedness, then, is a basic condition of fellow-feeling: a common problem or cause for happiness must connect individuals for sympathy to arise.

It is not Yearsley's argument, however, that such a cause must be identified in the present, for her cries for sympathy for the slaves are anchored in her religious

outlook on society. She marks as our basic common denominator the shared condition of living under God, and thus she appeals to "social love," urging her audience and decisionmakers to "make a fellow-creature's woe / His own by heart-felt sympathy" (*A Poem* 30). She stands against "remorseless Christian[s]" (18) as a remorseful Christian herself, one who cannot turn to indifference due to her fundamental belief in a condition which binds us together. This shared condition is twofold: the implications of the Fall all humans inherited, and our being God's creatures in general, meaning that "whatever is in creatures proceeds from God" (Goclenius, qtd. in Mercer 124). This is why the imprisonment and enslavement of our fellow humans should—according to Yearsley—appear so abhorrent to those who follow Christian morality.

In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler argues in a similar, albeit not religious fashion. Human vulnerability—which, if we follow Christian doctrine, is a consequence of our being excluded from Paradise—, is something that we all have in common: "our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" makes a "tenuous we of us all" (Butler 20). Our grief as well as our ability to love cements the notion that there are no different races within humankind—the only way we may not be included in society, then, is if we are dehumanised by our fellow humans, i.e., if our very humanity is taken away from us through violence, degradation, and wilful ignorance. Following such dehumanisation, slaves become, to follow Butler's terminology, ungrievable. Two centuries earlier, in much the same manner as her fellow early Romantic poetess Mary Robinson (see: "The Negro Girl," 1800), Yearsley uses the enslaved Luco's story in her efforts to argue for sympathy for all slaves:

> By nature fierce; while Luco sought the beach,
> And plung'd beneath the wave; but near him lay
> A planter's barge, whose seamen grasp'd his hair
> Dragging to life a wretch who wish'd to die. (*A Poem* 19)

This element of the narrative is particularly powerful because of the clear dehumanisation Luco must endure: the slave traders refuse him the basic human right to self-inflicted death, and even before the narrative begins, his right to self-determination is taken away as he is unjustly sentenced to life-long, unpaid hard labour. The human condition binding us together does not escape Robinson either. Her poem utilises some of the scientific and political arguments popular in intellectual circles of the 1700s with several allusions to racialist theory, which Peter Kitson (12) summarises the following way: "those theories of human difference which indicate a biological element to racial difference, empirically determined." Robinson, like Yearsley, albeit in a more sentimentalist fashion, calls on the British to feel for their fellow humans by refuting the importance of racialist arguments: "Whate'er their tints may be, their / Souls are still the same" ("The Negro Girl" line 54). This points to the fact that while racialist theories and economic greed were the leading factors of British trade policy, several female poets and intellectuals recognised the shared human condition of vulnerability and argued for its significance.

On a slightly different note, it is French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas who contemplates the meaning of the religious doctrine "thou shalt not kill" in relation to empathy in a similar fashion as Yearsley. He argues that "[i]n ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other" (Levinas qtd. in Butler 132), and still, Christian nations systematically erase people's right to a free and safe life. Levinas examines this conundrum from the perspective of religious beliefs, and much like Yearsley, he argues that Europe turned its back on such principles in its pursuit of prosperity. In his influential essay *Peace and Proximity*, Levinas discusses the paradoxical nature of European historiography and the hypocrisy of a European identity built upon the pillars of peace and freedom. Here, he claims that "this history [of Europe] does not recognize itself in its millennia of fratricidal, political, and bloody struggles, of imperialism, of human hatred and exploitation." Interestingly, albeit great historic and political shifts separate them from each other, Yearsley and Levinas both construct their cases around the basic tenets of European (British) identity and religious ethical principles, with Yearsley going so far as to accuse slave traders of robbing God of worshippers (*A Poem* 22). Levinas, of course, references world events that the poetess could not have predicted: the Napoleonic Wars, the Victorian age, the First World War, the Holocaust, and Stalin's regime stand between the two thinkers. Their focus is, nevertheless, very similar: prosperity built upon murder cannot be construed as triumphant in our historiographies. The potential impact of religion-based arguments such as Yearsley's may be summarised with some help from Spinoza: prophets' words "'echo in the hearts of men'" (Spinoza qtd. in Juffé 155), they "communicate an ethical message, a practical rule of life, precepts one follows for 'motives of an affective order" (Juffé 155). Thus, such ethical principles, when employed in abolitionist arguments, may influence readers and decisionmakers on the level of their Christian identity and make them recognise their hypocritical behaviour.

Turning away from the overtly religious aspects of this poem, we may gain further insight into Yearsley's ethical stance by looking at the ethical aspects of two other poems, *To Indifference* and *Addressed to Sensibility*. Both works consider the concept of indifference and how it might help the speaker lead a more peaceful life, arguing that sensibility is a harmful habit that brings about constant unhappiness as well as dishonest affectations (McDowell 262). In the latter, Yearsley concludes that personal experience with sensibility is necessary for fellow-feeling: "Does Education give the transport keen, / Or swell your vaunted grief? No, Nature feels / Most poignant, undefended" (78–80). As a 'natural poetic genius' who did not receive the type of education that Hannah More, Elizabeth Montagu, Anna Barbauld, or even Mary Robinson did, Yearsley is understandably drawn to the idea of natural feeling. The poem begins with the speaker's lament that the pain she witnesses affects her so deeply that she herself feels wounded:

> For, oh, my bosom bleeds, while griefs like thine
> Increase the recent pang. Pensive I rove,
> More wounded than the hart, whose side yet holds
> The deadly arrow ("Addressed to Sensibility" 3)

Such fellow-feeling, which we for the purposes of this article define according to David Hume and Adam Smith's (1723–1790) frameworks (i.e., "any occasion when one person feels as another does, because the other feels that way" [Sayre-McCord 212]), is also articulated in "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade". However, "Addressed to Sensibility" discusses sympathy as a universal feeling rather than one related to a specific issue. Towards the end of the relatively short poem, Yearsley, in agreement with Hume and Smith (Sayre-McCord 211), shifts her tone in her request to feel not only others' woes but also their joy. "To Indifference" takes a different road in addressing sensibility, asking "What's the vain boast / Of Sensibility but to be wretched? (51)" and begging for indifference to obliterate her sympathy towards others' suffering. She laments that sensibility succeeds only in enhancing the feeling of wretchedness, an argument that may be linked to her words of address at the beginning of "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade". There, she speaks of "powerless Compassion," alluding to the fact that although she is powerless, those addressed in the poem are not. The realisation that fellow-feeling does not necessarily produce action is a vital aspect of Yearsley's view on sympathy, and it could be read as a rebuttal of the abolitionist writings of the likes of More, who construct a melancholy narrative around the enslaved but do not call for action as directly as Barbauld or Yearsley (see More's *Slavery: A Poem*).

Yearsley's contemplation of sensibility is mostly aligned with the general discourse on the subject in the late eighteenth century. In an article about late-1700s authors Jane Austen (1775–1817) and Ann Radcliffe's (1764–1823) discussions of sensibility, Ashly Bennett quotes the title of a 1796 *Monthly Magazine* article: "Ought Sensibility to be cherished or repressed?" (377). In the article, whose resemblance to then-popular conduct books must also be noted, the author concludes that one should feel ashamed of "sensibility's 'ridiculous' excesses and the 'contrary extreme of affected insensibility,' a 'freezing air of indifference' constituting 'a rude and vulgar kind of stoicism'" (Bennett 378). Simply put, the author advises individuals (presumably female readers in particular) to abstain from any extreme feelings in a way that does not produce indifference, a sort of middle ground both in terms of feeling and morality. The same conundrum can be found at the core of Yearsley's "To Indifference," a poem that relates the mental struggle of a person who is naturally oriented towards fellow-feeling. This poem does not reflect upon contemporary social or political issues at all, but it is precisely what is needed to complement the ideas of the more activist-minded "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade". It provides us with clues to the reasons behind Yearsley's advocacy for sympathy as well as her conscious consideration of sensibility's flaws; indifference is tempting for Yearsley, for in it she sees a more peaceful mode of existence:

> Of Pain, or Joy,
> She gives too large a share; but thou, more kind,
> Wrapp'st up the heart from both, and bidd'st it rest
> In ever-wish'd-for ease. By all the pow'rs
> Which move within the mind for diff'rent ends,
> I'd rather lose myself with thee and share

> Thine happy indolence, for one short hour,
> Than live of Sensibility the tool
> For endless ages. ("To Indifference" 51–52)

However, she clearly finds this solution unsatisfactory: in both poems discussed above, Yearsley concludes that sensibility, however tiresome and disturbing, is crucial to a well-rounded social experience. Indifference, then, results in a dull, if in some respects blissful life, one that is devoid of fellow-feeling and thus not natural to her and perhaps not appropriate for a poet.

The most significant discussion of fellow-feeling in the decades before Yearsley contemplated the issue comes from David Hume and one of his contemporary critics, the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713). While there are countless aspects in which the two thinkers differ, both present the reader with theoretical frameworks for sympathy that are built around the notion of social relatedness. Due to the limitations of this article, only this aspect of Hume and Shaftesbury's respective moral theories is in focus here; as a literary example, I would argue that Yearsley's poems complement the work of these moral philosophers in a way that sheds light on the significance of social relatedness in the abolitionist discourse. According to both Hume and Adam Smith, "our capacity to make moral judgments plays a vital role in strengthening and supporting the bonds of community that sympathy makes possible" (Sayre-McCord 210), and Yearsley is urging her fellow Brits to do just that. The sort of fellow-feeling explained in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) is conditioned upon a certain relatability between individuals within a society, meaning that relatability is in fact necessary for sympathy. If we add to Hume's theory Shaftesbury's argument that our human experience is incomplete if we do not participate in a sympathetic relationship within a community, it is obvious that both philosophers emphasise the importance of community. Yearsley sees the enslaved Africans torn from their natural community in which they can relate to their fellow humans and thrown onto the margins of a community that will inevitably hurt, coerce, and dehumanise them. Slavers, then, rob not only God of worshippers, but also African men and women of the human experience of belonging. Even more, if we consider philosophers of universal sympathy in the seventeenth century from the perspective of abolition, we may argue that humanity itself is robbed of unity when individuals are dehumanised; for thinkers like Van Helmont and Gangloff, universal unity is only achieved if all agents can feel for and relate to the other agents (Mercer 123).

To complement Hume and Shaftesbury's arguments, we must turn to Francis Hutcheson's theory of sentiment. In his classification of senses in the 1742 *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (22), Hutcheson identifies five senses, including three which have an affective (i.e., it is consequential to others) aspect: a public sense (which may be interpreted as fellow-feeling), a moral sense, and a sense of honour. Hutcheson also lists an external sense where he locates our ability to identify others' feelings and feel their pain and joy, i.e., sympathy. The senses are imagined as both active and reactive, generating positive and negative will on the one hand and reflecting upon outside influence on the other.

However, Affection (less intense) and Passion (more intense)—as Hutcheson terms the two culprits for action—operate based on reflection and are therefore rational (31). This, again, aligns with what Yearsley is aiming to do in the poems examined above: by contemplating the very feelings of indifference and sympathy, she argues for a heightened sense of awareness when considering the feelings of others and concludes in a rational manner with the inevitability of fellow-feeling and a warning against extreme sensibility.

According to Hutcheson, moral judgments rest upon rational approval or disapproval which we arrive at through reflective evaluation; however, the basis for this process is not reason, as that is only a means to consider affections which constitute the true culprit of moral judgment. Interestingly, Hutcheson also makes a point of limiting the society within which sympathy may arise, using a Hume-like argument for relatability, but making it dependent on the objects of sympathy being "sensitive or rational Beings":

> A painful Sensation dictates nothing of itself; it must be therefore some Reflection or Instinct, distinct from the Pain, which suggests the Remedy. Our Benevolence and Compassion presuppose indeed some Knowledge of other sensitive Beings, and of what is good or evil to them: But they do not arise from any previous Opinion, that "the Good of others tends to the Good of the Agent." They are Determinations of our Nature, previous to our Choice from Interest, which excite us to Action, as soon as we know other sensitive or rational Beings, and have any Apprehension of their Happiness or Misery. (91)

Throughout his *Essay*, Hutcheson discusses the concept of the moral sense as a natural human trait, and Yearsley's status as a natural (rather than learned) poetic genius grants her discourse on sympathy a certain authenticity that is unrivalled by other abolitionist poetesses. Because of her self-aware approach to the observation of others' suffering, Yearsley's account of her experience with sympathy does not take on a voyeur-like position; in fact, she overtly rejects the pitiful gaze as unnecessary and superficial. In her "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade," Luco's plight is not seen from a sentimental point of view. Instead, Yearsley seeks to confront her audience with a harsh reality: like she writes in her address, she hopes to make readers feel as she does, urging them to act upon feelings of sympathy that may arise as they read of slaves' woes. Thus, the poem gives space for rational consideration within the religious framework accepted as the basis of everyday eighteenth-century moral judgment, but it also provides us with a narrative that helps us immerse ourselves in the other's feelings. Yearsley's narrative position makes the reader feel that they share Luco's tale by being implicated in his suffering and the poem depicts British power as an overwhelmingly negative element of the narrative. The natural reaction is affection, and the rational consideration of this feeling can lead to nothing but abolitionist action.

Finally, Yearsley's argument against the slave trade is made even more powerful when we recognise that a new sort of community is built through Yearsley's narrative. Sympathy appears when there is social relatability present—the reality of a position for

slavery and the slave trade looks insensitive and inhumane as soon as the reader can immerse themselves in the narrative.[2] A new 'we' is constructed by Yearsley, and with the narrative existence of unity between the enslaved and the British reader, one may be compelled to bring this new 'we' into reality. The arguably politicised grief that citizens are thus made to feel for the enslaved allows for a new sense of political community. To end with Butler's words: with grief, "the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" are brought to the fore with the recognition that this 'we' "is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation" (Butler 22–23).

Conclusion

This article attempted to examine Ann Yearsley's "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" through both a historical-political and ethical lens. The biographical details of Yearsley's life provide historical context for her resilient literary attitudes, but it is her progressive contemplation of fellow-feeling that would rightfully captivate scholars of politics, philosophy and poetry alike. As one immerses oneself in her ethical considerations, Yearsley's output raises a few questions worth considering for the future study of eighteenth-century female writers as well as social relations and sympathy in general.

Having alluded to some of the most important theories of sympathy by seventeenth-century thinkers in this article, the overarching question for future research relates to the limits of fellow-feeling and social relatability. Who belongs in the society within which fellow-feeling is possible, and on what grounds are certain groups excluded from sympathy? Naturally, special rules apply to Africans enslaved and coerced by the British—they could never really belong in a society where they do not have access to even the most basic means and ideas of life, such as earning money for themselves and freedom to spend it on what they like. They are, both socially and geographically, in a different space, quite separate from the society which debates the abolition of their systematic coercion and trade. But how do we see quasi-marginal figures such as Yearsley in this equation? What sort of space does she occupy?

Ann Yearsley's position as an intersectional poet, a woman of the labouring class living in Bristol, is rather unique in the 1700s; still, she does not make shockwaves with her writing and, soon after the Bluestocking support evaporates, she is quickly forgotten by her contemporaries. As seen in the critical opinions quoted in this article, interest in her work started to increase in the 1980s and since then many other British female poets came to the fore of academic research. Among these authoresses, Yearsley's self-aware argument for belonging and remaining in the "metaphorical 'vale'" (Ferguson 77) could be instructive in further considerations of class representation in the literary canon, especially because we rarely see such open, confrontative style in the 1700s.

2 For further reading on the power of sympathetic imagination see Nussbaum.

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The Unity of Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage: or, The Innocent Adultery:* A Reconsideration[1]

Filip Krajník

Abstract

The present study discusses Thomas Southerne's tragicomedy *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), based on Aphra Behn's earlier novella *The History of the Nun* (1688). Modern criticism has tended chiefly to point out the simplification of Behn's main heroine in Southerne's play, as well as Southerne's introduction of the comical subplot that appears to be irrelevant to the main tragic story. The present essay defends the structure of Southerne's piece, observing both ideological and artistic themes that permeate both plots and create a dramatic unity in Southerne's work. The essay further argues that, in order to achieve this, Southerne's play is informed not only by Behn's prose text, but also by a number of tropes from Behn's dramatic *oeuvre*, as well as by Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Shakespeare's great tragedies, which both enjoyed considerable popularity when *The Fatal Marriage* was originally staged.

Keywords: Thomas Southerne, *The Fatal Marriage*, Aphra Behn, *The History of the Nun*, *Decameron,* Shakespeare, adaptation

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Celebrating, Reading and Adapting Aphra Behn

In 2024, the City of Canterbury, together with several local academic and charitable organisations, organised "Canterbury's Aphra Behn," a year-long celebration of the city's famous native, Behn (1640–1689), to bring her greater recognition not only among scholars and students of literature and theatre, but also among popular audiences, as well as citizens of and visitors to Canterbury. The festival included a public reading of Behn's lesser-known comedy *A City-Heiress* (1682), a production of another comedy of hers *The Amorous Prince* (the first since its premiere in 1671), an exhibition on Behn's times, life and work in the city museum, an academic conference held by the Aphra Behn (Europe) Society, and several other events, both formal and informal. As a kind of culmination of the celebrations of England's first professional

1 This study is dedicated to Kateřina. "I've lost my self, and never wou'd be found, / But in these Arms."

female writer, Canterbury decided to unveil a bronze 5' 10" statue of Behn by the sculptor Christine Charlesworth in the city centre, not far from the memorials of the other two great literary figures connected with Canterbury, Geoffrey Chaucer and Christopher Marlowe.

One of the leitmotifs of the events was, naturally, Aphra Behn's sex and a discussion of the extent to which a woman of her times could fashion, control and maintain her reputation. Even the generally accepted story of Behn's dying in poverty in 1689 seems to be a male re-imagination of Behn's life and (allegedly unsuccessful) career; and let us not forget that her canon and literary legacy were posthumously shaped chiefly by her male fellow writers and publishers. Aphra Behn's name as a canonical author was only revived in the early twentieth century by the novelist and journalist Vita Sackville-West's 1927 biography of Behn and, perhaps more famously, by a mention in Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay *A Room of One's Own*, in which Woolf argued that "[a]ll women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds" (49). The renaissance of modern Aphra Behn studies was inspired by authors such as the poet and playwright Maureen Duffy, whose 1977 volume *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn 1640–89* stimulated new research that continues until the present day in the form of (besides other endeavours) *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn*, an ongoing project under the general editorship of Elaine Hobby, Claire Bowditch, Gillian Wright and Mel Evans.[2] As emphasized in one of the public lectures during the festival, the aforementioned statue of Aphra Behn is a great feminist gesture by itself, being an extremely rare case of a statue of a non-royal woman under thirty in the UK.[3]

In this context, it is somewhat paradoxical—but at the same time hardly surprising—that the male-controlled image of Aphra Behn still largely influences critical and cultural discourses surrounding the author, whether intentionally or not. When, for the occasion of "Canterbury's Aphra Behn," the Canterbury Commemoration Society issued a leaflet introducing the author to general audiences, it characterised Behn as (contrary to the view mentioned above) "spectacularly successful in her day" as a writer, who by her works "proved extraordinarily skilful in an unusually broad range of genres" (Canterbury Commemoration Society). As a visual illustration to one of Behn's greatest literary achievements, the novella *Oroonoko* (1688),[4] the leaflet

2 One can hardly blame Zdeněk Stříbrný, author of the celebrated volume *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe*, working in socialist Czechoslovakia of the 1980s and drawing from earlier critical traditions, for simply dismissing Aphra Behn's dramatic works as "průměrné, neženský obhroublé komedie a tragikomedie ze života vyšší společnosti [mediocre, unwomanly indecent comedies and tragicomedies on the life of upper-class society]," while only praising her novella *Oroonoko* for its "pokrokové hodnoty [progressive values]" (*Dějiny anglické literatury* 1: 274). Countries of the former Eastern Bloc are still waiting for their own boom of Aphra Behn studies that would surpass the somewhat isolated English departments at universities and reach local living theatre and reading cultures.

3 Although Aphra Behn died at the age of forty-nine, Christine Charlesworth depicted her as a seventeen- to eighteen-year-old girl, which was roughly the age when Behn left Canterbury for London.

4 Charlesworth's statue of Aphra Behn is, anachronistically, holding a copy of *Oroonoko* in her right hand. (The novella was, in fact, written and published shortly before Behn's death.) The importance of the work for Aphra Behn studies can be illustrated by the excitement of the scholarly community

reproduced a late early-modern print of a scene from the story—which, however, was made not from Behn's original prose, but rather from its same-titled 1695 stage adaptation by the Restoration dramatist and Behn's professional admirer Thomas Southerne (1660–1746).[5]

Indeed, in the epistle dedicatory of the printed edition of his *Oroonoko*, Southerne emphasized that "[s]he [Behn] had a great Command of the Stage;" on the other hand, he wondered why such a competent dramatist "would bury her Favourite Hero in a *Novel*, when she might have reviv'd him in the *Scene*," clearly seeing the stage representation as a more natural and even superior form to the then-still emerging genre of prose fiction (2: 102). Southerne's words soon proved to be apposite. While Behn's "novel" was reprinted several times throughout the eighteenth century in the collections of her prose works,[6] it appears that its dramatic adaptation had quickly become the go-to version of the story for both theatregoing and reading audiences of the time. After its successful premiere in late 1695 at Drury Lane, Southerne's *Oroonoko* became "one of the most frequently performed works in the eighteenth-century theatre," being a repertory staple of the theatre up until 1744 "with a customary three to five performances every year" (Southerne 2: 91). Then, after a six-year hiatus, the play was revived by the Drury Lane Theatre in 1751 with eleven performances that season. The first printed edition of the play seems to have appeared within a few weeks of its opening night (dated 1696 on its title page, but probably published already in December 1695), with three more editions appearing by the end of the century. By Southerne's death in 1746, at least thirteen subsequent editions of his *Oroonoko* circulated, with the publication flow continuing for the rest of the century. Furthermore, in the years 1759–60, three theatrical adaptations of Southerne's *Oroonoko* were printed, two of which had also enjoyed successful stage runs.[7] It could easily be argued that, by popularising Aphra Behn's story just at the time when the notion of Behn's literary canon began to form, Southerne effectively overshadowed the original author for decades, if not centuries to come.

The present study will focus on another case of a popular stage adaptation of Behn's prose fiction that almost entirely replaced its source in the minds of theatregoers and readers for the whole of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its author was, again, Thomas Southerne, who, a year before his adaptation of *Oroonoko*, took Behn's novella *The History of the Nun; or, The Fair Vow-Breaker* (printed 1689) and turned it into a tragicomedy titled *The Fatal Marriage: or, Innocent Adultery* (premiered in

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when, completely unexpectedly, an undocumented, nearly perfect copy of the first edition of *Oroonoko* surfaced during the Aphra Behn conference in Canterbury in July 2024 (see Thorpe).

5 For a reproduction of the picture, originally published in Volume 6 of *The New English Theatre* (1776) and showing the actor John Horatio Savigny as Oroonoko stabbing the actress Anne Miller as Imoinda, see, for instance, Highfill et al. 220.

6 *All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn* was first printed in 1696 (without the initial *All* in the title, which was only added in the subsequent editions), having enjoyed its ninth edition (either in a single volume or divided into two) by 1751.

7 One was published anonymously, the other two were made by the writer and book editor John Hawkesworth and the actor, poet and playwright Francis Gentleman, respectively. For a recent discussion of the four dramatic versions of *Oroonoko* from the perspective of their racial and marriage politics, see Dominique 27–69.

February or March 1694 at Drury Lane,[8] first printed later the same year). Unlike with *Oroonoko*, whose literary and stage lives co-existed throughout the eighteenth century and whose story always remained associated with Aphra Behn as its original author, the source novella for *The Fatal Marriage* did not make it into the Behn canon until the twentieth century and its single Restoration edition soon disappeared into oblivion. Although three prose adaptations (or rather re-tellings) of Behn's story appeared in print in the 1720s and 1730s,[9] none of them mentioned *The History of the Nun* as their direct source or Behn as its author; Southerne, on the other hand, received highest praise for his piece by contemporaneous critics, including John Dryden (1631–1700) (Southerne 2: 6), and his play remained staged in its original form or, later, in David Garrick's (1717–1779) revision *Isabella: or, the Fatal Marriage* (1757), well into the nineteenth century (Southerne 2: 7).[10] Furthermore, a reference to the act of *reading* the play in Henry Fielding's (1707–1754) novel *Tom Jones* (1749) suggests that Southerne's dramatic adaptation soon assumed the role of a literary text, replacing Behn's original prose as a piece for more intimate enjoyment as well.[11]

Besides the names of the original author and the adaptor, and the similar reception histories, what Southerne's *Oroonoko* and *The Fatal Marriage* have also in common is the rather atypical genre and structure of the pieces. As Robert D. Hume has pointed out, Southerne's dramatic works do not easily fall into neat categories and, generically speaking, they are "disconcertingly unusual" (290)—a fact that may have contributed to Southerne's critical neglect in the past. *Oroonoko* and *The Fatal Marriage* are both examples of split-plot tragicomedies, meaning that their main tragic plotlines, based on Behn's narratives (*Oroonoko* and *The History of the Nun*, respectively), are supplied by smutty, light-hearted comedic sub-plots that rarely overlap with the main story-strands. In Southerne's *Oroonoko*, the comedic portion with Widow Lackit might have been vaguely inspired by Behn's final play, *The Widow Ranter* (1689); the sources and inspirations for the sub-plot following Fernando and his family in *The Fatal Marriage*

8 The opening took place before the split of the United Company, so, unlike with *Oroonoko* that was staged in 1695 by the surviving company's lesser actors, for *The Fatal Marriage*, Southerne could rely on the best and most experienced London players, including Thomas Betterton for the role of Villeroy and Elizabeth Barry for Isabella.

9 For detailed analyses of the eighteenth-century adaptations of *The History of the Nun* (including Southerne's play) against Behn's model, focusing on the delineation of the main heroine(s), see Pearson and Hultquist.

10 While the epistle dedicatory in the printed editions of *The Fatal Marriage* mentions that Southerne "took the Hint of the tragical part of this Play, from a Novel of Mrs. *Behn*'s, called *The Fair Vow-Breaker*" (Southerne 2: 10), the title page of the first printed edition of Garrick's *Isabella* only mentions that the play was "Alter'd from SOUTHERN" (Garrick 2) and neither does the "Advertisement" prefixed to Garrick's play mention Behn's novella or her name, but states only vaguely that the plot "has been always esteemed extremely natural and interesting" (3). When, in 1909, Paul Hamelius attempted to identify the source of the main plot of Southerne's play, he failed to find a corresponding work by Aphra Behn mentioned by Southerne in his epistle, maintaining that "not one of Mrs Behn's tales corresponds with Southerne's description in his *Dedication*, or with the subject of his tragedy" (353). The rare 1689 edition of *The History of the Nun* as the source for Southerne's piece (and, consequently, as another entry in Behn's canon) was only re-discovered several years later by Montague Summers (see Summers).

11 For a commentary on the literary history of *The Fatal Marriage* in the eighteenth century, see Pearson 240.

will be discussed below in more detail. In the epistle dedicatory to *The Fatal Marriage*, Southerne in a rather self-deprecating way admits that he supplied the comedic part of his play "*not from my own Opinion, but the present Humour of the Town*" (2: 10). When, some sixty years later, David Garrick revised the play into the already mentioned *Isabella: or, The Fatal Marriage*, he decided to remove the comedic sub-plot entirely (just as Hawkesworth, Gentleman and the anonymous adapter did with the sub-plot of Southerne's *Oroonoko* a couple of years later), deeming it "not only as indelicate but as immoral" and maintaining that "the mixed drama of the last age called Tragi-Comedy has been generally condemned by the critics, and perhaps not without reason" (3).

Indeed, contemporaneous criticism praised Garrick for his choice, denouncing "this absurdity of tacking together two different plots, the one comic, the other tragic" and adding that "[t]his comic plot of this play [Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*] [...] is as unskilfully as dissolutely managed: the alterer has done a real service to the public in disincumbering this tragedy from all that lumber" (*The Theatrical Review* 60–61). Writing a century and a half later, Paul Hamelius considered the comedic portion of Southerne's play as merely "an unsavoury comic underplot, which [...] is cumbersome for the progress of the main action" (352). Montague Summers, editor of the 1915 collection of Behn's works, on the other hand, claimed that though the sub-plot had been "almost universally decried," it was still, in his opinion, "first-rate comedy" showing that Southerne's comedic talents "were certainly of a very high order" (155). Only Jacqueline Pearson, writing in 1993, recognised that in the two plots of the dramatic piece "Behn's single heroine is split apart" into two very different images of femininity: one represented by the innocent Isabella (in the tragic plot) and the other by the witty and subversive Victoria (in the comic sub-plot) (236–37), thus ascribing a clear dramaturgical purpose to the play's structure.

The present study will argue that the relationship between the two plots of Southerne's play is deeper and even more complex than that and, contrary to the playwright's apologetic words from the epistle dedicatory to the printed version of *The Fatal Marriage*, the two strands of the story offer two alternative outlooks on, and solutions to, female oppression by societal structures, which Southerne made the central theme of his play; indeed, the analysis will maintain that these two treatments of this issue were meant to complement each other to create a seamless, yet ambiguous whole that was rather insensitively simplified after Southerne's death by Garrick in the name of neo-classical taste.

Boccaccio, Behn and Shakespeare: Thematic and Structural Unities of Southerne's Adaptation

Since Behn's novella is not generally known outside Aphra Behn studies, a short summary of its story will be useful here. The father of the titular nun, Count Henrick de Vallary, hands over his infant child Isabella to the care of her aunt, the abbess of an Augustinian convent. Growing up, Isabella becomes famous for her virtue and devotion, but also for her wit and beauty, for which she is pursued by many young men, whom she rejects. She ultimately falls in love with Henault, brother of a fellow nun and son

of a wealthy noble named Van Henault. After much inner struggle, Isabella eventually agrees to flee the convent and marry him. Van Henault disinherits his son and refuses to forgive him unless he goes to the war against the Turks—a decision that makes Isabella so distressed that she miscarries. Henault reportedly dies in a battle and, after three years of mourning, Isabella agrees to marry one of her former suitors named Villenoys, with whom she lives happily for five years. One night when Villenoys is away hunting, Isabella is visited by a mysterious man, who turns out to be Henault. He had survived the wars and spent the past seven years in slavery, from which he ultimately managed to escape. Not loving her first husband any longer—"for love, like reputation, once fled, never returns more" (Behn 181)—and in agony that she would lose her second husband and comfortable life-style, Isabella smothers Henault in his sleep. Upon Villenoys' return, Isabella convinces her husband that Henault returned and died of a broken heart once he learned about the second marriage. To save his and his wife's reputation, Villenoys decides to throw the body in the river in a sack. Isabella, however, is afraid that her husband would despise and reproach her, and sews the sack to Villenoys' coat, resulting in her second husband's falling into the river together with the first one and drowning. Isabella's guilt is discovered and the "fair vow-breaker" is brought to justice. Before her public execution, she "made a speech of half an hour long, so eloquent, so admirable a warning to the vow-breakers," and, upon her death, she "was generally lamented and honourably buried" (Behn 190).

Southerne's treatment of the Behn material (especially in terms of its main heroine) has been repeatedly commented on, most substantially by Pearson and Hultquist. As Southerne himself admitted in the epistle dedicatory, his main interest was "*the Question, how far such a distress was to be carried, upon the misfortune of a Womans having innocently two Husbands, at the same time*" (2: 10). Behn's narrative, stretching from Isabella's birth up to her death at the age of twenty-seven, is limited to her second wedding and the events that immediately precede and follow it (Biron, Southerne's parallel to Henault, returns from captivity only a day, not years, after the ceremony), not giving Isabella any space to develop emotionally or struggle with her possible desires. The motif of the violations of sacred vows that, according to Behn, "receive the most severe and notorious revenges of God" (140), is sidelined and the play ultimately "emphasizes male tyranny rather than female guilt" (Pearson 236). While, in Hultquist's words, Behn's Isabella is "both pious and aggressive," her re-imagination by Southerne is "loving, devoted, suffering, and not prone to the kind of dissembling that define [sic] Behn's heroine" (492). In the finale of Southerne's play, Isabella does not murder either of her husbands that both meet in her house; instead, she loses her sanity and kills herself, bringing to mind another famous virtuous and passive Restoration heroine—Belvidera from Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682).[12] Isabella's first husband, Biron, is murdered by a group of ruffians hired by

12 In this context, an anecdote is noteworthy that was written down by Theophilus Cibber in "The Life of Mr. Thomas Southern" as part of *The Lives of the Poets of Great-Britain and Ireland*: "The night on which his Innocent Adultery was first acted, which is perhaps the most moving play in any language; a gentleman took occasion to ask Mr. Dryden, what was his opinion of Southern's genius? to which that great poet replied, 'That he thought him such another poet as Otway'" (329).

his younger brother, Carlos, while her second husband, Villeroy, "must live, grow Gray with lingring Grief, / To dye at last in telling this sad Tale" (2: 83 = 5.4.310–11).

The comical plot that complements the main story strand follows the feats of Fernando, an old stereotypical husband, who is pathologically jealous of his much younger and beautiful wife, Julia. Fernando has furthermore disinherited his libertine son, Fabian, and refuses to give his leave to his daughter, Victoria, to marry her love, Frederick. While Fabian pretends to have joined a convent to regain his father's favour and trust, Victoria elopes with Frederick at night in a man's clothes. At the wedding of Isabella and Villeroy (who is Fernando's relative), Fabian drugs his father and brings him to the monastery to be "cured" of his follies by being made to believe that he has died and found himself in purgatory, where he is beaten for his sins by devils (in fact monks). After some time, Fernando re-appears from a tomb with his family waiting for him, maintaining that they were fasting and praying for his release out of purgatory the whole time. Wholly reformed, Fernando renounces his former suspicions about the fidelity of his wife (who has, indeed, remained faithful to her husband, although she had a suitor, the treacherous Carlos from the main plot-line), settles half of his estate upon Fabian and bequeaths the other half to him when he dies, and gives blessing to Victoria and Frederick.

While critics usually name an episode from John Fletcher's (1579–1625) Jacobean comedy *The Night Walker* (c. 1611, revised by James Shirley [1596–1666] in 1633) as the immediate source of Southerne's sub-plot (Hamelius 356; Summers 154; Southerne 2: 7), Southerne's treatment of the purgatorial episode is in many details closer to a tale from Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (novella 3.8), where the name of the tricked husband is "Ferando" (in Fletcher, the parallel character is Justice Algripe), who is (unlike in Fletcher) indeed locked down and punished in a nearby abbey (Boccaccio 1: fols 103^{r}–107^{v}). The possibility of Southerne using Boccaccio as a direct source rather than some later rendition of the story is important here: firstly, tales and individual episodes or motifs from *The Decameron* were frequently employed by Restoration dramatists, including Aphra Behn (Wright 244–60, 318–30)—Southerne's familiarity with it would, therefore, have been no exception; secondly, another story from *The Decameron* (novella 4.8; 1: fols 167^{r}–170^{r}) obviously served as a (direct or indirect) source for *The History of the Nun*[13]—surprisingly, the ending of Boccacio's story being closer to *The Fatal Marriage* than to Behn's novella, indicating that Southerne might have found some inspiration in *Decameron* 4.8 even when composing the tragic plot of his play.[14] Linking two stories that go back to the

13 If Aphra Behn and Thomas Southerne indeed consulted *The Decameron*, it was probably the 1620 translation, attributed to John Florio (1552–1625), that had enjoyed its fifth edition by 1684 (alternatively, they could have come by the Italian original or one of the French translations that were available at the time). In 1702, a new English rendition, attributed to John Savage (1673–1747), was published in two volumes as *Il Decamerone: One Hundred Ingenious Novels* (3.8 is marked there as "Novel XXVII" and 4.8 as "Novel XXXVII").

14 In *Decameron* 4.8, Ieronimo, a former suitor and love of Silvestra, returns after two years of absence abroad to find Silvestra married. At night, he visits her in her house and, seeing that Silvestra no longer loves him, he dies of broken heart in her room. Silvestra's husband (unnamed here) removes the body, believing in his wife's innocence. When Ieronimo's corpse is found the next day and is brought to the

same ultimate source into one dramatic piece could thus seem more logical from the Restoration playwright's perspective than later dramatists and critics would have been willing to admit.[15] During Southerne's life, after all, the play seems to have been exceptionally well received. According to an anonymous letter from 22 March 1694, the *Fatal Marriage* was then "generally admired for one of the greatest ornaments of the stage, and the most entertaining play has appeared upon it these 7 years" (qtd. in Malone 141), suggesting that, in the eyes of late-Restoration audiences, the comic and tragic plots well complemented each other.

What is, however, more important than Southerne's sources per se is the way in which he treated them to convey a particular message. In both of his plots, Southerne emphasizes the issue of female suffering under patriarchal (here chiefly paternal) oppression. While, in Pearson's words, Behn in her novella "allows women the dignity of free will and of full moral parity with men" (236), the virtue of Southerne's heroine rests in her innocence (hence the play's subtitle) and passive suffering at the hands of others, which she is unable to end or escape by herself. The character of Henault's "cruel father" from Behn's novella (171), who refuses to give pardon to his son for eloping with Isabella and marrying her against his will, is expanded into Count Baldwin, whose stony-heartedness towards Isabella, who finds herself without any means of living, becomes the main source of her misery and, ultimately, the reason for her unintentional bigamy. Like his model from *The History of the Nun*, Count Baldwin, too, is dubbed "a cruel Father" (2: 27 = 1.3.196), "The Tyrant" (2: 29 = 1.3.264), "my old Tyrant Father" (2: 33 = 2.2.11) or one of the "wretched Fathers" who are "blind as fortune all" (2: 65 = 4.3.110). While Behn's Van Henault insists on his son's joining the French army to fight the Turks—news which "possessed her [Isabella] with so entire a grief that she miscarried" (173)—Southerne's Count Baldwin wants to deprive Isabella of her child (that is born and survives in *The Fatal Marriage*, further stressing the ideal femininity of the dramatic heroine) in an even crueller way: he is willing to "save him from the wrongs / That fall upon the Poor" (2: 29 = 1.3.257–58) only if Isabella gives up her son and agrees never to see him again. When she, horrified at the thought, refuses, the angry Count Baldwin sends her away, refusing any support for the two and telling her to "have your Child, and feed him with your Prayer" (2: 29 = 1.3.269). It is her desperate situation that makes Isabella agree to the second wedding, although she declares that she cannot give Villeroy her heart as she has remained emotionally faithful to her first husband (2: 38 = 2.3.119–22).

An even more obvious expansion upon the original novella is in this respect the character of Carlos, Biron's younger brother. To illustrate the cruelty of Van Henault, Behn mentions in passing that once he learned "that young Henault was fled with the

church to receive burial, Silvestra recalls her former love for him at seeing his face again in the church and expires over his body. Silvestra's grief-stricken husband survives and tells his wife's tale to the townspeople.

15 Both Boccaccio's novellas had, of course, enjoyed multiple iterations (including dramatic adaptations) across Europe even before Behn and Southerne (see Jones 19 and 22–23) that could in some manner have contributed to the final form of both Behn and Southerne's works. A clear, straightforward line between a single source and its adaptation is a rather naïve and simplistic concept, especially in the realm of theatre.

so-famed Isabella, a nun [. . .] he immediately settled his estate on his younger son" (170). While the figure of the unnamed brother in Behn's novella has no further significance for the story, his later dramatic iteration becomes one of the key vehicles of the development of the tragic plot. As it transpires, Carlos was aware the whole time that his older brother had survived the wars and had lived in captivity, but to secure his father's favour and the family inheritance for himself, he decided to keep this information from his father and help to wed his brother's wife "to root her out of our Family" (2: 20 = 1.1.189). When Biron unexpectedly returns, Carlos hires a group of rogues to murder him. Once his intrigues are revealed, however, Carlos on the one hand owns up to his guild but, on the other, emphasises that it was Count Baldwin's unfatherly treatment, similar to the Count's treatment of Isabella, that led him to his crimes:

> [Carlos.] *Biron* stood
> Between me, and your favour; while he liv'd,
> I had not that; hardly was thought a Son;
> And not at all a-kin to your Estate.
> I could not bear a younger Brothers lot,
> To live depending, upon curtesie.
> Had you provided for me like a Father,
> I had been still a Brother.
> (Southerne 2: 81 = 5.4.216–23)

In this last moving scene, Count Baldwin indeed admits that "I never lov'd thee, as I shou'd have done; / It was my Sin, and I am punish'd for't" (2: 81 = 5.4.224–25). This realisation, however, comes too late and the tragedy cannot be undone. It is interesting that, when Garrick was working on his adaptation of Southerne's play in the 1750s, he made Carlos even more ruthless and scheming, while showing the Count in a more favourable light "because he objected to the artificial change in characterization [*i.e.*, from a tyrannous father to a penitent man] which occurs in Southerne's V, iv" (Garrick 395). Nevertheless, as Hultquist points out, both Southerne and Garrick "make the patriarchs exceptionally evil" (492); and in both plays, it is ultimately the patriarch, Count Baldwin, who alone admits to his guilt for the deaths of Biron and Isabella, and unconditionally accepts their orphaned son as his own:

> [*Count Baldwin.*] My Flinty Heart,
> That Barren Rock, on which thy Father starv'd,
> Opens its springs of Nourishment to thee:
> [. . .]
> O had I pardon'd my poor *Birons* fault!
> His first, his only fault, this had not been.
> (Southerne 2: 83 = 5.4.316–21; cf. Garrick 58 = 5.3.354–59)

Needless to say, there is no parallel situation to this in *The History of the Nun*, where the responsibility for the tragic events falls solely on Isabella herself and neither Van Henault nor his younger son plays any direct role in them.

The theme of fatherly guilt for the children's misery is the leitmotif of the comic plot of *The Fatal Marriage* as well, perhaps even more markedly than in the tragic portion of the play. Even in the opening line, Fernando's son, Fabian, complains to Frederick about "Such an unlucky Accident! such a Misfortune!" (2: 15 = 1.1.1), referring to his father's decision to disinherit him, while also foreshadowing Isabella's first exchange with Villeroy two scenes later, in which she laments about her "Misfortunes" and calls herself "A Bankrupt every way" (2: 22 = 1.3.1–6). Fernando, who, just like Count Baldwin, is the sole cause of his family's distress, is sarcastically dubbed by his son "My liberal, conscientious, loving, well-dispos'd Father" (2: 15 = 1.1.10), while his wife informs him at one point that she "can live no longer under your Tyrannical Government" (2: 21 = 1.2.23). Carlos, who plays a fundamental part in the tragic plot, is a minor character in the comic one, a friend and confidant of Frederick's, who assists his companion in his scheme to marry Victoria and punish Fernando; as with Villeroy's wedding in the tragic plot, however, Carlos has his own ulterior motives to help his friend: when the business with Isabella is over and Fernando removed, he plans to "come in for a snack of *Fernando*'s Family," meaning to seduce his beautiful wife (2: 31 = 2.1.44).[16]

The main difference between the comic and the tragic plots is that, while in the tragic one, the cruel father reforms too late, his comedic parallel manages to come to his senses soon enough to allow for a happy resolution. While the male characters, their conduct and motives in the comic plot recognisably mirror their tragic counterparts, what distinguishes the two situations most is their respective female casts. Especially Victoria, Fernando's daughter, represents a different kind of femininity than Southerne's Isabella: she is bold, active, rebellious, ready to dissemble, and her man's clothes, in which she repeatedly appears on the stage, emphasize her "masculine" traits—not so much different from those of Behn's original Isabella. Pearson's observation that these subversive feminine qualities "are confined to the inverted world of comedy" (236–37) by Southerne is only partly true. The stock situation when a daughter is forced by a patriarchal authority to marry against her will (Fernando himself designs to "marry my Daughter very shortly to a Friend of my own that will deserve her"—2: 17 = 1.1.91–92) only to end up with her true love was a staple of Aphra Behn's comedies, for instance *The Forced Marriage* (1670; Erminia, in love with Philander), *The Amorous Prince* (1671; Laura, in love with Curtius), *The Dutch Lover* (1673; Euphemia, in love with Alonzo), *The Town Fop* (1676; here it is the male character of Bellmour, who is forced by his guardian to marry Diana, while in love with Celinda, whom her parents want to marry to the titular fop Sir Timothy Tawdrey), *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679; Marcella, in love with Sir Henry Fillamour, and Cornelia, bound for the convent), and *The Lucky Chance* (1686; Leticia, in love with Belmour).[17]

The closest "relative" to Victoria in this respect is, however, Hellena from *The Rover* (1677), another famous vow-breaker, who, although bound to become a nun, stands

16 Indeed, in *Decameron* 3.8, Ferando's wife is unfaithful to her husband during his absence with the local abbot, with whom she even conceives a son.

17 I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Elaine Hobby, who brought some of these works to my attention.

against paternal (and fraternal) authority and, together with her sister Florinda, joins the Naples carnival to find herself a husband—whose fidelity she also later tests dressed as a man (like Victoria tests Frederick in Act 2, Scene 5, when she pretends to be her own lover). It appears that for Behn herself the character of a young, witty, defiant woman naturally fitted the comic mode more than the tragic one (Behn authored a single tragedy, *Abdelazer*, that premiered a year before *The Rover* and did not contain any true romantic plot). Where, however, we can see a glimpse of Southerne's Isabella is in Angellica Bianca, the wronged courtesan who, in the final scene of *The Rover*, draws a pistol against her former lover Willmore, but is ultimately unable to shoot him. In a vaguely similar situation, Southerne's Isabella, at a point of utmost distress, draws a dagger against the sleeping Biron, whose unexpected arrival has turned her into a bigamist; ultimately, however, she fails to commit the crime. What both the tragic heroines share (the blank-verse-speaking Angellica Bianca indeed becomes a tragic heroine in many respects towards the end of *The Rover*) is the inability to translate their emotions into action—something that their comic counterparts have no issue with. While diverting in a way from the complexity of Behn's heroine, it appears that Southerne, in the delineation of his female characters, found further inspiration in Behn's dramatic oeuvre to juxtapose two dramatic treatments of a single theme—one with a happy resolution, the other ending up in a disaster. To achieve this, Southerne appears to have worked with distinctly "Behn-esque" themes and material in a more complex way than previous critics have assumed.

Besides systematically drawing from Boccaccio and Behn, Southerne also employs a number of Shakespearean echoes that are clearly discernible in both parts of *The Fatal Marriage*, further contributing to the dramatic unity of the play. Indeed, without going into much detail, Southerne's editors Robert Jordan and Harold Love have noted that

> in its [*The Fatal Marriage*'s] renunciation of the exotic trappings of the heroic play, the studied simplicity and colloquial ease of its language, and its centring of the dramatic interest on the sufferings of a sympathetic and vulnerable individual, Southerne, with help from Otway and Banks, is recapturing most of what was still assimilable by a dramatist of his time from Shakespeare. (Southerne 2: 8)

Borrowings from, or allusions to, Shakespeare are apparent, especially in the final act of the play. The aforementioned scene when Isabella approaches her husband, who is sleeping on a couch in her house, is clearly reminiscent of Othello standing over sleeping Desdemona with murderous intentions. In particular, since Isabella in Behn's novella *does* smother Henault in his sleep, the original audiences probably expected Southerne's Isabella to adopt Othello's action; Isabella's words "Pleasure grows again / With looking on him – Let me look my last – / But is a look enough for parting Love! / Sure I may take a Kiss – where am I going!" (2: 71 = 5.2.11–14) are clearly meant to be reminiscent of Othello's "O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword! Once more, once more: / Be thus when thou art dead and I will kill thee

/ And love thee after. Once more, and that's the last" (*Othello* 5.2.16–19).[18] Isabella's remark at the beginning of the same soliloquy that "I never shall sleep more" (2: 71 = 5.2.2) furthermore reminds the audience of "Macbeth shall sleep no more!" which Macbeth hears upon stabbing King Duncan in his sleep (*Macbeth* 2.2.42). The distinct Macbethian echo is soon strengthened by "A knocking at the Gate" (2: 72 = 5.2.43) that Isabella hears before Biron wakes up—a reference to the knocking at the castle gate in Act 2, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*, just after the murder of Duncan.

The whole situation with Carlos, who mischievously wants to usurp his father's favour and estate at the expense of his older brother, is reminiscent of Edmund the bastard's machinations against his legitimate brother, Edgar, in *King Lear*. Carlos's remark in the last act that "Younger Brothers are / But lawful Bastards of another Name" (2: 72 = 5.3.3–4) is just a clear pronouncement of this motivic affiliation. In this context, Count Baldwin's desperate cry in the final scene "Grant me, sweet Heaven, thy patience, to go through / The torment of my cure" (2: 81 = 249–50) even deepens the association between Southerne's play and Shakespeare's story of a foolish patriarch, who recognises his only true child too late (see Lear's "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" – *King Lear* 2.2.463). Isabella's madness and suicide might, on the one hand, recall the unhappy fate of Otway's Belvidera mentioned above; in a scene replete with Shakespearean allusions, however, the link with Ophelia seems even more pertinent—especially if this reference links *The Fatal Marriage* to the last missing of Shakespeare's four great tragedies (*Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*) that are all intertextually present in Southerne's play. At the very end, the devastated Villeroy, over Isabella's dead body, thus assumes the role of Shakespeare's Horatio at the end of *Hamlet*, announcing that, since "Self-Murder is deny'd me [. . .] I must live, grow Gray with lingring Grief, / To dye at last in telling this sad Tale" (2: 83 = 308–11).

Whether dramaturgically effective or not, the Shakespearean references in the tragic plot of *The Fatal Marriage* testify to Southerne's high ambitions for his piece. In the mid-1690s, Shakespeare already had an elevated cultural status following his "re-discovery" during the Exclusion Crisis (1678–82; see Biagiotti); indeed, in the last couple of decades of the seventeenth century, the highest number of printed editions of Shakespeare's works had appeared since the Interregnum and his plays were prominent both on the public stages and at court (see Depledge 150–70). Including Shakespearean tropes and references at the time when *The Fatal Marriage* was first staged was thus not necessarily just a bow to an ancient classic, but an effective employment of the then-fashionable dramaturgy that enjoyed general popularity—not dissimilar, in this respect, to Aphra Behn's dramaturgy at the time.

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18 It is perhaps relevant to note here that in the "Cupid and Psyche" episode of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, which was the inspiration for the bedroom scene in *Othello*, it is the woman, Psyche, who, with a razor in her hand, approaches the sleeping victim, the male Cupid (see Carver 432–33). The strong tradition of this image explains why a number of classic depictions of the parallel scene from Shakespeare have Othello holding a dagger, although he smothers Desdemona rather than stabbing her to death. Unlike Othello, Southerne's Isabella indeed draws a dagger, but her crime is prevented by Biron's waking up (just as the oil from Psyche's lamp wakes Cupid, who manages to escape).

The traces of Shakespeare in the comic plot of *The Fatal Marriage* are more subtle, but still visible. Even the basic premise of the plot—a daughter running away from her father to marry her true love—comes back to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Hermia's tyrannical father, Egeus, threatens to have his daughter executed (or sent to a nunnery, making Hermina another would-be nun) if she does not marry the man according to his choice. Victoria seems to come from the same lineage as Shakespeare's Hermia, Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet* or Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice*, who escapes her father's house at night with her beloved Lorenzo (a man whom Jessica's father, Shylock the Jew, despises and whom he would surely not approve of as a suitable husband for his daughter) in a boy's clothes to disappear in the crowd of masks. Southerne's play even has its own version of the window scene from Act 2, Scene 6 of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Victoria is supposed to climb down the ladder from the window in Fernando's house to join Frederick waiting for her below. Furthermore, the subsequent scene of Southerne's play, in which Victoria appears in front of Frederick in a man's clothes and tests his love for her by pretending to be her own secret lover, resembles the ending of Act 4, Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Portia, dressed as a male lawyer, demands a ring from her husband, Bassanio, which was in fact a gift from her that Bassanio promised never to part with. In both cases, the scenes follow the Renaissance convention of a cross-dressed female character not being recognised, even by their husbands or lovers.

While the later stage history of *The Fatal Marriage* showed that both of the plots of the play could very well exist independently and enjoy considerable success,[19] the conscious employment of the same sources and tropes in both of the story-strands shows that Southerne understood them as two parts of a whole, informing one another, rather than two separate stories. When, in the final scene of *The Fatal Marriage*, all the principal characters from the tragic plot gather on the stage to witness the catastrophe, among the characters present is, surprisingly, Frederick from the comedic plot. For the play's finale, his presence is not necessary, and he pronounces only a handful of short lines that could easily be ascribed to another character. His presence, however, is crucial thematically. While patriarchal tyranny, represented chiefly by Count Baldwin and by the unscrupulous Carlos, was not defeated in the tragic portion of the play, the oppressed characters from the comic part were able to set themselves free from it. The presence of Frederick on the stage reminds the audience of the light-hearted sub-plot that was abandoned almost two acts earlier and, further, indicates that both the comedy and the tragedy of the play present two possible outlooks on the same situation, offering two different solutions to it that lead to two different outcomes. The comic sub-plot thus becomes a kind of reversed *mise*

19 The comic sub-plot of *The Fatal Marriage* was adapted into a short farce already in 1716 by Benjamin Griffin, a Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre actor, who had previously played Fernando in *The Fatal Marriage*. In his piece, Griffin reprised the same role, which he expanded and renamed Don Lopez (see Krajník). Coincidentally, the comic sub-plot of Southerne's second adaptation of an Aphra Behn story, *Oroonoko*, which was also removed from the eighteenth-century adaptations of the play, appeared as a stand-alone piece as well, titled *The Sexes Mis-match'd* (printed 1742), combining the Southerne material with scenes from John Fletcher's Jacobean comedy *Monsieur Thomas* (see Southerne 2: 96–97).

en abyme, an image within an image pointing to the idea that the tragedy of the main plot could and, perhaps, should have been prevented.

Concluding Remarks

Contrary to the later opinion that Thomas Southerne, in his dramatic re-imagination of Aphra Behn's novella *The History of the Nun*, combined two incongruous and unrelated plots that did not do justice to Behn's original, the present article argued that the playwright, in fact, carefully designed his play to offer multiple perspectives on the issue of patriarchal oppression—a theme central to the Behn canon—that are confronted by means of the split-plot structure of the play. From the very beginning, Southerne parallels the same themes and characters in both plots, effectively employing the same sources in them—including the works of Behn, Boccaccio and Shakespeare, which were popular among audiences and fashionable at the time—to achieve their unity. Unlike Garrick's 1757 revision of Southerne's play, which closely follows the neo-classical decorum of genre by abandoning the comic plot entirely, Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* offers a more complex and more ambiguous image of patriarchal oppression and the female response to it. It would, therefore, be unfair to criticise Southerne for making his Isabella a more straightforward and passive character than her namesake from Behn's novella. The complexity of Southerne's message does not rest in a single figure of the story; rather, it is conveyed through multiple plots and dramatic characters that, at the end of the day, do not offer a single easy solution.

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The Sister of Telemachus: The Main Character of Margaret Cavendish's "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" as the Embodiment of Progress and Conventions

Bence Gábor Kvéder

Abstract

Margaret Cavendish's (1623–1673) "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (1656) is one of the English writer's early prose works. However, the text already displays a kind of formal experimentation and playfulness, as well as many of the extraordinary and subversive ideas the Duchess' mature literary voice of the 1660s is characterized by. Accordingly, it deals with topics such as travelling, marriage, military conflicts, colonization, as well as the concept of virtue and the risks of virtuous behaviour. The protagonist of the story is often analyzed as an early manifestation or prototype of the active, resourceful, travelling female individual: Travellia's wit, determination, oratory and argumentation skills indeed seem to predict the lasting success of Cavendish's later heroines, and even the full potential of their writer's creative powers. In my paper, I intend to take a look at how the main character's progressive and, to a certain extent, even masculine traits and deeds are juxtaposed with her ultimate decision to adhere to the cultural conventions of femininity by getting married, focusing mainly on the various ways in which this kind of shift and the ensuing double perspective of the heroine might influence the reading and overall evaluation of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity."

Keywords: Margaret Cavendish, female protagonist, travel, power, gender roles, subversion

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Originally published and functioning as the Eighth Book of Margaret Cavendish's *Natures Pictures* (1656), "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" is one of the English writer's early prose works. Labelled as a "tale or discourse" by the author herself ("Chastity" 47), the text already displays a kind of formal experimentation and playfulness, as well as many of the progressive ideas the Duchess' mature literary voice of the 1660s is characterised by. Accordingly, it deals with topics as broad and complicated as, for example, the act (and perils) of travelling, the institution of marriage, the issues brought about by military conflicts, the concept of virtue and the risks of virtuous behaviour, as well as the theory and practice of colonization.

In other words, although less popular or widely discussed than its ideological and spiritual successor, "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" presents several of the literary idiosyncrasies that tend to underlie the scholarly debates surrounding *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666) too.

While numerous convincing parallels between the two works—such as an eloquent female protagonist, the importance of travel and spoken words, as well as the combination of facts and fictitious "fancies"—seem to show that "Cavendish's *Blazing World* [. . .] is clearly foreshadowed in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity'" (Sarasohn 96), the latter (i.e., the earlier) text may be much more than just a prototype of and introduction to its better-known alter ego. The pioneering work achieved by the earlier piece might be captured and summarized through an element that—or rather *who*—happens to be the personification of the above-mentioned themes, namely the central character. Although critical comments and essays concentrating specifically on "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" appear to have been few and far between since its original publication,[1] the protagonist of the story is often analyzed as an early manifestation or prototype of the active, resourceful, travelling female individual. The young woman's wit, determination, oratory and argumentation skills, accompanied by a somewhat bellicose and combative nature, seem to predict the lasting success of Cavendish's later heroines, and even the full potential of their writer's creative powers. However, arguably just as complex and controversial as her creator, Travellia's[2] significance and multifaceted figure are also susceptible to criticism, aimed specifically at her seemingly paradoxical behaviour and the rather surprising or, to some readers, even shocking conclusion of her journey.

In this paper, I intend to take a look at how the main character's progressive and, to an extent, even masculine traits and deeds are juxtaposed with her ultimate decision to adhere to the cultural conventions of femininity by getting married, focusing on the various ways in which this kind of shift and the ensuing double perspective of the heroine might influence the reading and overall evaluation of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity." In the analysis, I will focus on a selection of the motifs, themes, and mostly gender-based principles whose effective subversion appears in the story, potentially re-interpreting pre-Restoration English-language literature, publishing, and culture as the proper context for both the work and its author.

By citing the text as a "romance novella" (xi), one of Cavendish's "notable experiments in short fiction" (xii), and also a representative of her "romance narratives" (xii) in her Introduction to the compilation titled *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (1992), Kate Lilley's words singlehandedly reflect the ambiguous, multifaceted nature of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" in the same critical summary.

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1 For instance, despite its connections to utopian literature, "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" is not mentioned in Oddvar Holmesland's otherwise comprehensive and detailed monograph, *Utopian Negotiation: Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish* (2013).

2 As we will see, the critics whose works I cite later in the essay use the two versions of the protagonist's (most frequently applied) name—i.e., "Travelia" and "Travellia"—interchangeably. For consistency, in my own text I will stick to the form presented in Lilley's Introduction and her edition of Cavendish's original, spelt with a double "l" (see Lilley xx–xxiii and "Chastity" 62 and on), while I will retain the other version in all of the quotations where the name is spelt with a single "l."

Furthermore, Lilley also adds a supplementary yet relevant layer to the interpretation of the plot and its protagonist. Establishing an organic connection between the texts and their author, she states that, both in "The Contract" (the other representative of the titular "Other Writings") and in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," "[c]learly Margaret Cavendish was rewriting the narrative of her own history as romance" (xvii; also qtd. in Hackett 189). Such a conspicuously autobiographical profile would certainly fit the adventurous half century the real-life Cavendish was given on Earth. In her doctoral thesis, Rebecca Dorman also highlights the suspicious potential an autobiographical approach may have in this case by observing that "[t]he first line of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' [. . .] echoes Margaret's situation in fairy-tale fashion" (11). The actual events that can be mentioned as milestones in Cavendish's life (such as her marriage, exile, and return) needed little polishing or colouring in order to meet the typical standards of an almost unbelievable yet exciting fairy tale, in which both fortune and misfortune had equally important roles to play. Reflecting on the idea of a shared background, Douglas Grant remarks that "Margaret's heroines are always short of at least one parent" (154). Since it is a biographical fact that "[h]er father died when she was two" (Lilley ix), Cavendish seems to have had a good reason to deprive her own characters "of at least one parent" in her writings. Furthermore, by identifying "the Lady Affectionata" (i.e., the later Travellia) as a "well-bred orphan" (154), Grant succeeds in capturing the double nature of the author's own life story, too: "born [. . .] to a rich family" (ix), her exposure to *culture* in the traditional sense was pretty much guaranteed, while, as "the youngest of eight children" (Lilley ix), she must have taken advantage of the second-hand knowledge acquired from her siblings as well. Unfortunately, the similarities do not stop here, as they are not limited to the intellectual horn of plenty both Cavendish and Travellia evidently received gifts from. When, because of the raging Civil War, the writer had to leave England and follow her queen "into Parisian exile" (Lilley ix), she was eventually left not only without her parents but also without the protective embrace of her country, not unlike a certain native of the "Kingdom of Riches" stranded in the "Kingdom of Sensuality." Based on how alien both Cavendish and her character must have felt among people with strange, uncomfortable habits, their respective (yet still eerily similar) situations might indeed be described as "tale[s] of 'virtue in distress'" (Pohl 60). Consequently, such a scenario may be expanded to the notoriously elusive genre of *romance* as a potential source for "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," but strictly through the—virtually identical—lenses of Cavendish and Travellia.

Reflecting on the protagonists of Cavendish's writings, Helen Hackett notes that the author's "heroines have a spirit of enterprise which means that even when they find themselves in romance situations where convention dictates that they should suffer nobly, they may be more inclined to take action" (191). Hackett considers the main character in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" an outstanding example of this tendency, citing the verbally elegant yet physically determined mode in which Affectionata shoots the Prince (191; see also "Chastity" 53). Episodes like this provide ample evidence that Cavendish indeed "awarded power to women even when they might have been powerless" (Sarasohn 79). The very concept of power might be one of the ingredients that connect two conventional and previously aggressively

separated categories (i.e., the powerful/dominant and the powerless/subjected), whose almost complete subversion Cavendish seems to have considered her sacred duty—and actually started with the ironic title of her work.

At first glance, the very title of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" appears to completely deprive the text following it of even the slightest amount of power, rendering its heroine vulnerable on her own. The head of the phrase, "chastity," refers to one of the most conventional feminine principles, standing for the plethora of expectations regarding the virtuous nature of a young lady. The other two main elements, "assaulted" and "pursued," are given in the grammatically passive voice, underlining another historically feminine principle: *passivity*. Considering the fact that from early on in the story Travellia consistently goes against both physical and mental passivity, her subversive role quickly becomes an antithesis of the primary or assumed meaning of the title itself—or at least a part of it. By making her heroine defy the potential implications of such a title, the author indeed "challenges [. . .] early modern ideologies which suggested that silence, obedience and chastity were the primary virtues of women" (Walters, *Science* 195; see also Walters, "Gender" 239).[3] Furthermore, Cavendish also seems to be concerned with the subversion of conventionally male or masculine principles in the same narrative.

Although they are used in their past participle forms, the two verbs in the title of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" still contain and evoke their respective infinitive sources and, along with them, the activities they are associated with. Thus, the word "assault" might be reminiscent of the reason why the protagonist must leave her homeland at the beginning of the plot, the series of events she must engage in near the end, as well as the climactic moment that eventually, and in a somewhat paradoxical manner, brings the story to its happy conclusion: battles, military conflicts, i.e., *war*. Similarly, the term "pursue" is regularly linked to (fast) movement: being chased usually results in the emergence of a sudden urge to get away and, practically, *travel* a certain distance: yet another element that is present in the text from the very start. These two concepts, suggested through an otherwise passive voice yet permeating the entirety of the text, are closely connected to *active* behaviour, conventionally described as a masculine principle. War and travel, along with the wider spectrum of politics[4] and the discourse of colonization,[5] allude to experiences a lady like Miseria should never be exposed to in the first place—but a heroine like Travellia does not feel restricted or constrained by such nominal limitations. The literary devices enabling Cavendish to establish and manipulate the connection between the two sets of gender-

3 The idea of distinguishing between the two established sets of such sex- or gender-based attributes is prominently utilised at the start of Emma L. E. Rees' closer analysis of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" as well: in her argumentation, the merits of chastity and "feminine virtue" as opposed to (or rather combined with) the traditionally masculine value of "epic heroism and morality" are discussed (*Gender* 105–06).

4 For a detailed analysis of the overtly political aspects of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," see Walters, *Science* 154 and 195–247, esp. 198–213.

5 For Travellia's adventures and discoveries, as well as her personal status and political role as the conqueror/colonizer of the people populating the imaginary far-away land, see Iyengar 657–60 and Sarasohn 95–97.

based principles are cleverly used as pivotal tools of storytelling, which might lead to a re-evaluation of not only gender norms but also the aforementioned notion of *power*.

Analyzing the issue of power, and also the lack thereof, stemming from feminine virtue, Kathryn Schwarz notes that "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" "presents a *hero* whose chastity could hardly be less of a deception or more of an act" (277; emphasis mine). If Cavendish truly aimed to portray and personify chastity as an attribute based on deceitful masks and performance, that feature of the text might be considered both a problematic and a problem-solving treatment of femininity. In other words, if virtue can (or must) be both concealed and acted out, then Travellia is also given the opportunity to manipulate her identity in such ways. Consequently, as Emma L. E. Rees points out, "Cavendish's tale, ostensibly about a woman as victim of assault and pursuit, becomes a text about a woman with *agency* who preserves her chastity through her own initiative" ("Yarn" 177; also in Rees, *Gender* 114; emphasis mine). That intentional elimination of powerlessness can only be the outcome of the heroine actively (yet only temporarily) hiding certain aspects of her traditionally feminine nature, while performing a type of unprecedented half-female role at the same time. Due to her adventurous and resourceful personality, she eventually becomes "the embodiment of heroic chastity" (Dorman 43). At first glance, such a status might seem to be an oxymoron, since, based on some established norms that still prevailed in the seventeenth century, the concept of *chastity* ought to be separated and stay far removed from even the most tentative step in the direction of heroic behaviour. However, as Marina Leslie explains, "'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' resolves the perceived contradiction of the heroic woman by making chastity an active rather than passive virtue" (188). The event that truly triggers the process of virtue being activated is Travellia's success in escaping rape and, in fact, letting her chastity protect itself against the potential aggressor.

Addressing the idea of chastity functioning as a shield or armour in physical and figurative terms alike, Schwarz suggests the existence of "a poetics of bodily articulation, in which chastity defends its propositions with its own weapons and gestures and limbs" (272). The double nature thus created for and by chastity is also alluded to in the title of her article: "Chastity, Militant and Married." Travellia experiences both forms at different points in the narrative, but it is undoubtedly the former, i.e., active protection, that leads her arc towards the latter manifestation of chastity, i.e., personal happiness and fulfilment, in this particular cause-effect relationship. By elaborating on the concept and practice of active self-defence as both an individual and a political necessity against rape (*Science* 35 and 195),[6] Elizabeth "Lisa" Walters also supports the idea that chastity can indeed take the form of what Schwarz calls the firm and effective physical "strategies of resistance" (272). Since Travellia's virtue is put to the test almost immediately after the start of the plot, the conception of these "strategies" proves to be a rather urgent issue. Accordingly, the modes of escape applied or at least contemplated by her turn out to be just as versatile as her communicative and oratory skills displayed later in the story.

6 For a more detailed analysis of the act of self-defence as a crucial aspect of public and gender politics in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," see Walters, "Gender" 214–18.

Travellia's attempts to escape the threats her presence in the Kingdom of Sensuality poses to her virtue represent the two extremes of an imaginary scale: one is the least favourable option to choose, while the other is a radically positive, as well as (especially for a lady in the seventeenth century) progressive decision to make, which turns out to have further benefits for her, not only as an actively travelling woman but also as an adventurous hero, along the way. Initially, seeing no other chance to save herself from the Prince, "Travelia plans to kill herself rather than be raped" (Boyle, "Fame" 276).[7] Since, as the narrator explains, "[d]ishonour she hated, and death she feared" (51), the protagonist has to make up her mind and choose from this limited selection of events. Eventually she decides that her suffering can only be ended by "resolving to die; for in death, said she, there is no pain" ("Chastity" 51). Although, after she tricks a maidservant into providing her with a pistol, she ends up using the weapon against the Prince, instead of herself, her actual dedication to the act of suicide is emphasized later on.

Desperately trying to take advantage of any available mode of escaping her ensuing dire situation, the time she spends in custody is used by her to get "a subtle poison" ("Chastity" 57). Despite erroneously referring to her as "Deletia" (which is the main character's name in "The Contract"), James Fitzmaurice is right to point out that the protagonist "finds poison to attempt suicide as a means of avoiding rape" (90) for a second time. When, after a feast, the Prince is about to attack her again, she actually uses "the antidote of all evil" (59–60) on herself, but she is saved by the Prince's aunt, who gives "her something to make her vomit up the poison" ("Chastity" 60). After these failed suicide attempts, scarred by the experience of being "weakly revived to life again" ("Chastity" 60), Travellia makes the conscious choice that not only gives some newfound momentum to the plot but also pushes her narrative in a direction of adventure and, thus, activity. Identifying the means through which she succeeds in doing so, Sarasohn notes that, not unlike the titular heroine of "The She-Anchoret" (also published in Natures Pictures), the young lady manages to end up at the steering wheel of her own story "through the exercise of wit and intelligence" (79): two human merits that regularly prove to be indispensable both in literary endeavours and during geographical travels.[8]

While her journey leading Travellia from her native Kingdom of Riches to the Kingdom of Sensuality means nothing but loss and suffering to her, the voyage she embarks on after escaping from captivity, although not necessarily easier or less harrowing as a sea-faring adventure, provides her with a different concept of travel—along with all the benefits of that experience. Karen R. Lawrence summarises this procedure on two levels of storytelling here, highlighting both Travellia's fictitious movement and Cavendish's authorial endeavour at the same time, when she observes that "[t]his exilic voyage, with its romance wanderings through space, engenders for

7 For a detailed analysis of the connection (and opposition) of religion to suicide in early modern English literature, see Fitzmaurice 87–91.

8 Based on similar shared features, Brandie R. Siegfried draws the same analogy between "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" and *The Blazing World* when she refers to them as two works "where female protagonists are seen as prey yet exercise agency and independence of mind despite their difficult circumstances" (356).

its protagonist and its author alike both mastery and surprise, imaginative projection and response to contingency" (33). Indeed, as the actual masters of their eerily similar yet separate journeys, both women are rightfully expected to stay alert, resourceful, prepared to take action, and ready to use their intellect or "imagination" whenever necessary.

The first overt sign of Travellia gaining the kind of agency she has previously, and out of utter despair, experimented with by shooting the Prince and drinking the poison is provided when she evaluates her situation after sneaking onto the ship leaving the Kingdom of Sensuality. Being informed by the captain that they are discoverers of uncharted lands, the young lady, for the first time in the story, is completely content with the premise of an adventure and concludes to join the crew by confirming that "I being young, travel [. . .] may better my knowledge; and I shall not neglect any service I am able to do" ("Chastity" 61). Even though it is not a physical but rather a verbal action to take and perform, that conscious declaration is the core of her determination and the primary element of the ensuing series of her successes. Reaffirming the ubiquity of agency from this moment on and also pointing towards the climax of the plot, Nicole Pohl remarks that Travellia's "voyage of self-discovery and self-empowerment culminates in the heroine's intervention as a commander of the Queen's army in the Land of Amity" (60). Underlining the fact that the protagonist discovers not only far-away lands but also herself as a person, as well as subverts the system of *power* for both, Pohl suggests that the end of Travellia's journey, on both a physical and a more self-centred level, is her becoming a leader of troops and also of her own. [9]

As a person in charge of themselves and later also of others, the protagonist of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" undergoes a character development whose positive effects extend to her self-esteem, oratory and communication skills, as well as her overall sense of responsibility and belonging. Furthermore, on a more official or practical level, as Lawrence points out, "Travelia [. . .] displays a craftiness that is not only an aspect of romance inventiveness—the traveler as Hermes the trickster—but also a more distinctly modern improvisational ability that allows her to respond to circumstances on the road and to capitalize on what fortune throws her way" (34). In short, to borrow the author's own phrasing, she is not "protected from violence and scandal" but rather protects herself from what, and especially whom, she encounters on her journey, "in a wandering life" of hers ("Chastity" 47). The ensuing shift from a young damsel in distress to a skilful and formidable fighter-traveller is further accentuated by the transformation whose contextual significance is captured by Hero Chalmers when she notes that "the figure of the martial heroic woman allows Cavendish to reject a biologically deterministic notion of gendered identity which

9 Analyzing seventeenth-century property rights in England, Walters reminds the reader that during her first (near-fatal) conversation with the Prince, Travellia, "who is owned by no man, asserts that her body and chastity are her own" ("Gender" 237; see also "Chastity" 52). Subsequently, the protagonist declares herself to be a sovereign woman on the two relevant (and interconnected) levels of ownership in this particular case: on the one hand, there is no superior person she would have to be accountable to, whereas, on the other hand, she does possess and claim unquestioned ownership of certain rights, which are, by nature, inalienable.

emerges as an externally imposed construct" (44). This kind of rejection of norms materialises in an act that opens up a whole new dimension of Travellia's agency: cross-dressing.

Emphasizing the pervasive and decisive role it plays in the narrative, Hackett observes that "[c]ross-dressing is a significant element [. . .] in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' [. . .]. Like previous romance heroines dressed as men, Affectionata, calling her/himself Travellia, inconveniently inspires the love of a woman, is revealed to her beloved on the battlefield and is obliged to defend the propriety of her disguise" (186).[10] Functioning as a crucial vehicle for the majority of the plot, cross-dressing is indeed the source of some serious misunderstandings and also certain surprisingly pleasant reunions.[11] However, the fact that, on the one hand, the Queen of Amity undeniably does take quite "a liking to him [i.e., Travellia]" (86), while, on the other hand, the Prince only sees "a resemblance of his mistress appearing in the face of the youth [i.e., again, Travellia]" (81), might imply that the protagonist has multiple good reasons to keep up appearances and continue her performance in order to stay alive, exploit the circumstances, and defend herself in a way as efficient as possible. As Deborah Boyle deduces, "Travelia is only able to preserve her chastity by disguising herself as a boy, so no one even knows her true identity" ("Fame" 277). What is more, not only is she protecting one of her conventionally feminine principles by wearing clothes associated with men but that way she also enables herself to actively participate in a series of events generally symbolising and often even preserved for masculinity: war.

Highlighting the eventual role of a disguised Travellia as a crucial factor, Catie Gill remarks that "'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' goes further than the previous war writing because it is the first extended prose narrative written by Cavendish that follows a soldier" (260).[12] While the protagonist does not start her journey as a full-fledged warrior, it is indeed her rite of passage that ultimately makes her a distinguished individual both inside and outside her narrative. However, according to Boyle, that reputation might pose a different kind of threat to the balance of her established identity, since "[w]hen she is ultimately famous and honored, it is for her success as a general, not for her chastity" ("Fame" 277). Such a one-sided public image of *him* could easily eliminate the hard-fought complexity Travellia would presumably want or

10 For a detailed analysis of the sexual-political importance and symbolism of cross-dressing in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," see Leslie 189–94.

11 Cross-dressing as an essential plot device had been an established feature of English literature long before Cavendish's time. For example, works written in the late sixteenth century, such as Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, also rely on the somewhat risqué and often smile-inducing shenanigans caused by either a young man dressed as a lady or a young, adventurous woman disguised as (and, as such, mistaken for) a man. The extent to which Cavendish may have been influenced by early English romances and comedies utilising the element and formula of cross-dressing might be a topic for further academic research and discussion. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer of my paper for highlighting these literary connections and suggesting this potential interpretive path.

12 The practice of "war writing" went on to occupy even more room in Cavendish's writings, underlying the plot of *Bell in Campo*, a play first printed in 1662. For this addition to the analysis I am grateful to Csaba Maczelka.

consider suitable for *her*self. Her goal is evidently not to be looked at as the opposite side of the coin but rather to be acknowledged for the same sort of multi-faceted individuality that her creator must have wished to be famous and remembered for, mainly in the eyes of those who became familiar with her not necessarily in person but through her achievements as an intellectual and a literary general wielding her own arms.

Focusing on the outside perspective of the troops led by Travellia during the climactic battle episode near the end, Boyle observes that the protagonist's "skills as a general are honored *before* her feminine identity is revealed" ("Fame" 278; emphasis mine). Although it is true that all of her heroic deeds are carried out while she is thought by everyone, without exception, to be a man, what happens *after* the above-mentioned revelation is also a crucial aspect of Travellia's conditions as a military and political official, as well as an individual: a general of personal value and a person of general value. Her lasting impact and exceptional reputation are immediately confirmed, since the soldiers listening to her confessional speech react with a single sentence: "Heaven bless you, of what sex soever you be" ("Chastity" 115). Such a response regarding the irrelevance of their hero's biologically determined identity should convincingly prove that a valiant person's sex is marginal compared to the name they establish for themselves. However, Boyle cites the ultimate conclusion of the plot as an issue that could still make that statement problematic when she notes that "once the other characters know she [i.e., Travellia] is a woman, she immediately marries, thus fulfilling the traditional expectations of women" ("Fame" 278; later paraphrased in Boyle, "Gender" 521 and 529). The same sentiment is echoed by Pohl, who also concludes that, "[i]n the end, the heroine gives in and marries the Prince—the generic conventions of romance are fulfilled but clash strangely with [the] rest of the text" (60). This particular "clash" between "traditional expectations" and "generic conventions" on the one hand, and Travellia's celebrated personal merits as a successful leader on the other, is resolved by an event that some critics are reluctant to interpret as an actual resolution: the highly conventional institution of *marriage*.

According to Pohl, "the tale *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* has its paradoxical finale in marriage and the subsequent silencing of the heroine" (60). Considering what a notable victory her now outstanding figure is associated with, the concept of abrupt "silencing" may be considered a somewhat harsh verdict regarding the conclusion of Travellia's story. As for the literal meaning of the term, as it is connected to one's actual voice, the main character is a remarkably eloquent person and she remains an active and talkative figure throughout and perhaps even after the story. If a more figurative connotation of "silencing" is concerned, the claim that Travellia will have no other choice but to accept a subject position as a married woman might be refuted by the idea that the other half or party of this alliance is a male individual she is not likely to be inferior to in the long run. In other words, a potentially compelling counter-argument to the idea of "silencing" seems to be provided by the ensuing establishment of the unique power structure consisting of Travellia and the Prince as "Viceregency" and "Viceroy in the Kingdom of Amity" ("Chastity" 116), respectively.

Supporting the concept of *active chastity*, as well as the various manifestations thereof, Leslie points out that "the initially powerless Travellia gains a power more

effective than firearms by assuming a masculine identity, but, in the end, power is not located in her external masculine armor—through which she can be and is wounded—but in her unassailable chastity in which her rhetorical, military, and political strengths reside" (195). Thus, the lasting rewards and benefits of Travellia protecting her virtuous standing, or rather those of her virtue defending itself from all the threats it is exposed to, prevent the protagonist from losing a type of power that surpasses the physical reality of a warrior's armour(y) and, thus, war. Furthermore, adding the theme of travel to the discourse of chaste agency through the character of the mythical Ulysses' wife, Rees observes that "Travellia employs her intellectual resources in order to preserve her chastity, but significantly unlike Penelope, marriage does not mean powerlessness, as Travellia resists coming home to the loom" ("Yarn" 178; also in Rees, *Gender* 115). Not only does this conclusion present a counter-argument to Pohl's idea of eventual "silencing" (an aspect made even more intriguing by the fact that the two essays concerned were published in the same collection of scholarly papers) but it also sheds light on the underlying principles of Travellia's ultimate complexity as both traveller as fighter and woman as (soon-to-be) wife.

The idea that "the fluid relations between gender and genre" are exploited in "all of Cavendish's writing" (Lilley xi) might be exemplified by the roles Travellia as the central character of a romance-like narrative takes and succeeds in playing throughout the plot: reader, intellectual, polemicist, public speaker, traveller, military commander, as well as, and at this point most importantly, man and woman. Comparing "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" to another one of the author's works and also identifying the core issue originating from their versatility, Chalmers notes that "[t]he gender fluidity [. . .] is reinforced by the fact that Cavendish refers to her heroine, like Lady Orphant in *Loves Adventures*, as 'he' while they are in their masculine disguises" (44). It is indeed a relevant observation that, along with (or rather as a result of) the change of her names (i.e., Miseria, Affectionata, and Travellia), the protagonist's own personal pronouns also undergo certain conspicuous alterations. That phenomenon, an instance of "pronominal ambiguity" (Iyengar 657), becomes particularly significant once the name "Travellia" is confirmed as her chosen tag of identity ("Chastity" 62). From that point on, words (and their inherent dichotomies) like "he" and "she" or "his" and "her" start and then keep fluctuating almost until the very end of the plot.[13]

By embarking on a journey from young maid through skilful soldier to married woman and making it back without losing either her virtue or the core of her identity (or even her life to begin with), Travellia is indeed the only character in the text who "can transcend the constraints of gender because of her rank and superior knowledge" (Iyengar 658).[14] When she arrives to the end of her voyage, she does not erase or abandon any of her previously acquired roles and principles. Despite essentially marginalizing or, to a certain extent, reducing the sides of her that guided her through

13 For more detailed analyses of how and to what degree the changeability of Travellia's pronouns affects the reading and interpretation of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," see Iyengar 657, Lilley xxii–xxiii, and Schwarz 280.

14 Walters extends the list of the concepts whose boundaries Travellia successfully and spectacularly transgresses, noting that "[t]he protagonist exists in a liminal, fluid state where her identity is not determined by gender, kinship structures, nation, rank, and subjecthood" ("Gender" 235).

the perilous voyage, Miseria, Affectionata, and, especially, Travellia, bringing along their manifold expertise regarding the various fields the protagonist excels in, stay with the Princess even after her adventures are over.[15] Consequently, the "narrative uncloseting" (Lilley xxii) of an exceptionally multi-faceted individual is conducted throughout the plot. An expressive summary of this process is presented by Leslie when she notes that "Travellia represents not an inversion of 'proper' gender roles so much as a hermaphroditic combination of female and male, defensive and aggressive, vulnerable and powerful" (192; also qtd. in Schwarz 280). The skilful juxtaposition of these attributes leads to the emergence of a concept and device Cavendish herself seems to have been especially fascinated by hybridity. Not only is "the subversive potential of generic and intellectual hybridization" (Lilley xiv) capable of overwriting any dichotomy of sex- and gender-based principles in the text but it also provides a level of reading that makes the activity of travelling even more relevant than before.

Evoking the mythical epic story of the forefather of all tormented—or, in other words, oftentimes assaulted and pursued—travellers and his wife as a woman of limitless patience, endurance, and, at this point most importantly, virtue, Rees extends the human merits represented by Ulysses and Penelope, respectively, to the protagonist of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity"—all at once. When she remarks that "Travellia is at once Ulysses and Penelope, active and chaste" (*Gender* 114),[16] Rees provides a compelling argument for the idea that the main character happens to be just as much of a hybrid as Cavendish's texts themselves. Moreover, since she "is at once Penelope, in her fierce preservation of her chastity, and, simultaneously, Ulysses, in her own eventual homecoming and concomitant assertion of rule" (Rees, "Yarn" 177), Travellia is also considered the Homeric hero(ine) of her own epic journey at the same time: an interpretation already reflected by the mere title of Chapter 4 in Rees' *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, namely "Travellia's travails: Homeric motifs in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*."[17] The only important aspect, or "topos," as Rees refers to it (*Gender* 114), that can function as the source of some major dissimilarities between Homer's characters and Travellia would be the literal form of the above-mentioned act of *homecoming*.

Whereas Ulysses does eventually return to Ithaca, Travellia seems to be destined never to go back to the war-torn Kingdom of Riches. Shedding light on an immense

15 Emphasizing the idea that Travellia's identities represented by her various names are truly her own, Walters observes that "these names derive from her individual emotions and activities rather than from other typical early modern markers of identity such as blood line, marital status, or kingdom" ("Gender" 235).

16 In her essay titled "A Well-Spun Yarn: Margaret Cavendish and Homer's Penelope," Rees introduces the text by summarising the same interpretive aspect in the following way: "In *Natures Pictures*, another of Cavendish's exilic works of the 1650s, [. . .] the protagonist's defence of her chastity in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' entails a [. . .] permanent self-determination, a fact which is legitimised by the author's construction of her heroine as not only part-Penelope, but, significantly, part-Ulysses too" ("Yarn" 177).

17 In the fourth chapter of her monograph, Rees provides a comprehensive analysis of three important Homeric topoi of the epic, namely shipwreck, storytelling/mendacity, and homecoming, examining the various ways in which they are utilised in *The Odyssey* and "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (see *Gender* 104–33, esp. 113–14).

silver lining in the seemingly unpleasant scenario of the latter, Rees reminds her readers that "Cavendish's failure to stage a traditional homecoming for her heroine signifies her reluctance to have her subsumed back into an orthodox domestic setting where her considerable powers would have to be given up" ("Yarn" 177; also in Rees, *Gender* 114). Indeed, it is the Kingdom of Amity whose natives she is hailed and celebrated by: it is only in this country that she can stay the distinguished hybrid that she is. Therefore, by becoming a leader who is new to the people inhabiting a country that is new to her, the protagonist is enabled to reach and enjoy her new-found status and, in turn, the happy ending of her journey, without having her previous achievements undermined and the benefits thereof eliminated.

Rees emphasizes her conclusion regarding Travellia's Homeric hybridity by reiterating that "[b]y not returning to her native land of the Kingdom of Riches, the heroine [. . .] does not have to yield the Ulysses part of herself and become all Penelope. Cavendish instead stages a bold compromise, settling her heroine in *a new position*" ("Yarn" 177; also, with slight alterations, in Rees, *Gender* 114; emphasis mine). However, since the author herself did return to her homeland right after the Stuart Restoration in 1660, this could be a point from where a form of divergence would be noticed in the respective fates of the two women. That aspect of the contextual-historical facts surrounding the work might render a potential autobiographical reading of the piece somewhat problematic, but the changes characterising Cavendish's real-life career during the 1650s might provide enough proof that a strong connection between author and main character may still be maintained even after the apparent break brought about by the concept and act of homecoming. Although Cavendish herself returned to the old country of England, there were some alterations to take into consideration upon arrival on those shores. Regardless of the aftermath of the Civil War and the Protectorate, England was essentially the same place as before: neither a whimsical world of fantasy nor some exotic far-away terrain. It was rather the returning traveller who had changed a lot since her departure: in exile, during the decade prior to the Restoration, Margaret Cavendish had turned *herself* into an established, actively publishing author (see Lilley x), courageously rejecting the anonymity of a woman of letters and incessantly venturing into the fanciful yet perilous universe of her own writerly mind: indeed "a new position" not unlike Travellia's.

Establishing an author-character connection that draws various parallels between Cavendish and Travellia in a sense broader than the boundaries set by and surrounding the figure of the rebellious, self-made traveller, Lilley notes that in her romances, Cavendish was "focusing her main attention and admiration on the advantageous production of *woman* as spectacle" (xvii; emphasis mine). However, based on the fact that in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" the resolution of conflict takes the form of marriage (or, to be more precise, that of a double marriage) between equals, the finale is rather about a royal *couple* as spectacle. If anything, the end of the story is reminiscent, from a more personal point of view, of those the Restoration escorted back to their homeland, namely Margaret and William Cavendish.[18] At the same time, on the level

18 Drawing a strong and convincing parallel between the Prince in "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" and the author's real-life husband, Lilley mentions that "William Cavendish was just such a dissolute and

of politics, it can also remind one of what the Glorious Revolution managed to give to England over thirty years after the publication of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity:" a better-organized system of constitutional, as well as consensual, power and the then-future co-monarchs, Mary II and William III of late Stuart England—the type of power couple Cavendish herself would have probably been very proud of.

Underlining what Travellia gains and keeps, instead of focusing on what she loses, by revealing her sex and eventually getting married, Chalmers draws attention to the fact that, "[a]lthough she ultimately dons women's clothes once more in order to marry a prince, their union is triggered by her military victory over him which allows her to negotiate an amicable nuptial settlement whereby she retains political power over the kingdom even though he has marital control" (44). The suggested and presumably successful power structure within this "nuptial settlement" is summarised through the protagonist's recommendation that "he [i.e., the Prince] should govern her [i.e., Travellia], and she [i.e., the Princess] would govern the kingdom" ("Chastity" 116). Considering what they did to each other and have been through by that point, it is understandable that both parties seem to accept the conditions as elements of a particularly fair deal without any issue. However, if one insists on finding the superior half in a relationship based on equality, one might take heed of Rees' conclusion, namely that "her [i.e., Travellia's] husband's government of her is purely nominal, since she possesses the real power, which resides in the support she enjoys from the populace and militia" ("Yarn" 178; also in Rees, *Gender* 115). In other words, *power* in the (by this time deconstructed) conventional sense of the term would be given to and kept by the lady here. Thus, Cavendish's "extraordinarily ambivalent position with respect to the discourses of power" (Lilley xv) undeniably shines through the epilogue of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity." Again, as the amalgam of Ulysses and Penelope, i.e., an imaginary yet ideal sister for Telemachus, Travellia, "[l]ike Ulysses, [. . .] seizes power; like Penelope, she remains chaste. However, she is significantly unlike Penelope, in that her version of the homecoming does not necessitate a relinquishment of autonomy" (Rees, *Gender* 122; see also Rees, "Yarn" 177).[19] Undoubtedly, she does not seem likely to ever be deprived of her power and autonomy, thus her public influence remains unquestioned. In addition, the personal alliance that technically functions as Travellia's new home within the Kingdom of Amity presents an exemplary manifestation of the above-mentioned distribution of power as well. The highly conventional nature of marriage in general does not decrease her potential as a leader, who is and remains in charge of her narrative on both an official and a private level. Subsequently, the stability of her, or rather her author's, married life is destined to raise some critical questions too.

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successful younger brother [as the Prince], whom Margaret Cavendish married after the death of his first wife, a rich widow" (xvii).

19 Based on the interpretation of the protagonist as a unique and subversive mixture of the two mythological parents, Travellia's legacy as a possible influence on some of the later literary versions of her "brother" as a male traveller might be worth examining as well. Again, I am grateful to the aforementioned anonymous reviewer for pointing out these potential connections and calling attention to François Fénelon's (1651–1715) late seventeenth-century prose work, *Les Aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse*, a promising subject for further analysis.

Throughout her story, Travellia manages to prove herself as a brave, earnest, and skilful person, but her marriage at the end of the plot still, even after multiple occasions on which she acts as anything but a conventional seventeenth-century lady, appears to be a highly controversial conclusion of her journey. Dorman, for instance, directly addresses the core problem that underlies the ending of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" when she observes that Travellia "determines her own fate, but [. . .] also ultimately upholds female conduct codes, resisting while simultaneously accepting the limitations placed on women" (38). If the (semi-)autobiographical nature of the text and, therefore, the parallels between the protagonist and her creator are deemed plausible and compelling enough, then such a status and final narrative destination might very well characterize the life and opinions of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle too. After all, among their shared feat(ure)s we find Cavendish's vocal assaults on male-dominated social standards, her indefatigable pursuits as a woman of considerable importance, her role as a flesh-and-blood materialization of "the outspoken, disobedient, and public woman [who] is ironically aligned with chastity" (Walters, "Gender" 239), as well as the unique interpretation of the very notion of chastity represented by her in the first place.

At the end of his brief overview of Cavendish's life and work as a person of letters, Thomas N. Corns sums up the author's literary and public persona as paradoxical: noticeably progressive on the level of women's participation in "philosophical and scientific discourses that were contemporaneously perceived as wholly male preserves" and essentially cited as a fierce critic of the norms of patriarchy and conventions of femininity, yet "deeply conservative" as a wife and royalist political subject (408). Judging by such a conclusion, the main controversy surrounding Cavendish's legacy originates from a deceptively minuscule-looking yet particularly significant element: the conjunction between her two popular portraits. However, if the author herself was not afraid to use and cherish paradoxical imagery, mixed entities, and hybrid forms in texts such as "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," then what exactly prevents the reader from applying an and, instead of a but or a yet, between the two different (or rather only two of the many different) personalities the name "Margaret Cavendish" seems to have stood—and still stand—for? Based on what she had to say and write about the world she perceived as a place full of wondrous fancies, the kind of re-interpretation of her character that Cavendish herself would probably approve of shows a delicate mixture including a forward-looking, sensational phenomenon of a woman *and* a royalist[20] lady who married in a conventional, "socially and intellectually advantageous" (Lilley ix) way and, through the support she received from her husband, even relied on male help to have each and every piece of her oeuvre published.

20 Offering a nuanced interpretation of certain aspects of the text (such as the concepts of rape, cannibalism, and sovereignty), Walters points out that "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" "explores republican political theory in the context of women, and a careful reading of it can demonstrate how Cavendish did not merely echo her husband's royalism since the 'royalist' label cannot adequately characterize her political leanings" ("Gender" 211; emphasis mine). While Walters' arguments for the republican vein of the narrative are convincing, they indeed mainly focus on and describe Cavendish's literary and, especially, political theory. However, the more practical side of the author's "political leanings" shows that her "life [was] closely governed by the political fortunes of the Royalists" (Lilley ix), and I apply the term to her in the latter sense here.

In conclusion, Cavendish's most notable achievement is not to have gone completely against the rules of her time *but* to have pushed the boundaries of the literary conventions of that period as far as possible *and* to have adhered to the traditions that needed to be respected and maintained in both her real life and the fanciful universes she created for herself and her readers. In other words, within the cultural context provided by the 1650s, and evidently even beyond, Margaret Cavendish went, or rather *travelled*, just far enough in both realms to be considered as worthy a sister for Telemachus as the protagonist of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity."

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Notes on the Hungarian Translation of Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1666)[1]

Alexandra Barta

Abstract

The paper offers insight into some of the challenges of translating Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) into Hungarian. Although Cavendish appears in some comprehensive literary histories and magazine articles published in Hungary, her works have never been translated into the language. The current paper is based on the ongoing translation of Cavendish's widely studied utopian romance. The paper opens with a brief glimpse at the intellectual context of the author and her peculiar position in the male-dominated world of the Scientific Revolution. This is followed by a discussion of questions encountered during the translation of the first, "romancical" part of the text, with special focus on its unique use of Northern geography. While examining the geographical context of the utopia, the paper also explores the potential influence of contemporary maps on the imaginary geography described by Cavendish, together with the maritime lexicon characteristic of this section of the text.

Keywords: translation, geography, cartography, utopia, romance, Margaret Cavendish

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Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673) was probably the most representative female thinker of the period of the Scientific Revolution, and the institutional developments of her time had a profound impact on her public life and her literary works. The establishment of the Royal Society in 1660 was a prominent milestone in seventeenth-century scientific life, however, it was quite exclusive: women could not participate in its activities, and their pursuits were "ignored or unvalued [and regarded as] leisure activities" (Mendelson 11). Despite obvious male dominance, some women could not renounce their ambition to participate in the academic life of their age, the best example of such an attitude being Cavendish herself, who, despite the odds, even managed to visit the Royal Society.[2] On the other hand, her works reflect a genuine

1 This paper is a companion study of my Hungarian translation of the Romance part of *The Blazing World*, published in 1749 in December 2023, see Cavendish, "Leírás."

2 On the complex relationship between Cavendish and the Royal Society, see Wilkins.

interest in and deep knowledge of the scientific discoveries of her time. For example, Galileo Galilei's (1564–1642) development of the telescope, dated to 1611, not only opened the door towards new astronomical observations but it also had a profound impact on literature in general and Cavendish's works in particular.[3] Another optical device with a similarly radical change of vision was the microscope invented by Robert Hooke (1635–1703), which enabled the close examination of various minuscule creatures and objects—and also had a visible impact on Cavendish's *The Blazing World*.[4] Her works have been the subject of critical interest at least since Virginia Woolf's (1882–1941) famous reference to her in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and they have been discussed in innumerable new editions, monographs, projects, and scholarly articles. Many of the more recent works are celebrating the generic plurality/hybridity (or "bricolage" to use Cottegnies' terminology)[5] of Cavendish, which a particularly strong trait of her *The Blazing World*, published in a compound volume together with a work on natural philosophy, and admittedly consisting of three different parts with vastly different generic background. In light of this international popularity, her reception in Hungary has been surprisingly limited so far: apart from a number of references in more comprehensive literary histories, some Hungarian critical articles, and some magazine pieces,[6] not much is available, and to the best of my knowledge, no Hungarian translation of any of her works has ever been attempted. The present study discusses some of the problems faced during the first phase of the ongoing translation of *The Blazing World*, with particular focus on the contextual background of certain lexical decisions the translator had to make in order to deliver a meaningful translation for Hungarian readers, bearing in mind the complications emerging from this process.[7]

Turning our attention to the source text now, Cavendish published *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* in 1666 as a companion volume of her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. Both works are concerned with scientific topics, yet, in *The Blazing World*, the author uses a different tone and genre to talk about these themes, using a unique linguistic register crossing literature and science. Cavendish speaks here in a rather imaginative voice, experiments with genres and goes against the conventions regarding scientific texts. According to Robert Boyle (1627–1691), and other members of the intellectual community, romance, poetry, and fiction are "not legitimate means for expressing philosophical ideas" (qtd. in Sarasohn 2). Cavendish, on the contrary, "embraced all genres as a vehicle for her ideas" and presents the reader with a mixture of genres in *The Blazing World* (Sarasohn 2). As Mendelson argues, the work can be considered a romance, travelogue, fantasy, utopia,

3 On this see Spiller 2000, or, in the context of a more general connection between science and literature in the period, Spiller 2004.

4 On Cavendish's criticism of Hooke, see Cottegnies, "Margaret Cavendish."

5 See Cottegnies, "Generic Bricolage."

6 For one of the more bombastic pieces, see https://fidelio.hu/konyv/orult-madge-a-feminista-hercegno-aki-megirta-a-vilag-elso-sci-fijet-13804.html.

7 As Lawrence Venuti puts it, "Translation never communicates in an untroubled fashion because the translator negotiates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text by reducing them and supplying another set of differences" (468). This is particularly relevant when translating an atypical seventeenth-century text heavily embedded in its own English context outlined above.

satire, and the forerunner of science-fiction (9). This generic fluidity, together with the embeddedness of Cavendish's texts in the linguistic debates of the Royal Society's early years[8] not only make the book a difficult reading but also present the translator with hardships in finding the adequate voice in the target language.

As for the structure of the work, *The Blazing World* opens with an introduction in which Cavendish addresses the "Noble and Worthy Ladies" and explains the ambitions, content and structure of her work: "The First Part is Romancical[9]; the Second, Philosophical; and the Third is meerly Fancy; or (as I may call it) Fantastical" (Cavendish, *The Description* 56). After the dedication, the first, Romance part of the work begins, setting the frame for the story. A Lady is kidnapped by a merchant while she is collecting seashells. The merchant drags her onto his boat, and the ship sails towards the North Pole and given the harsh weather conditions, everyone dies but the Lady. Then, the ship sails through a "portal" that transports her to the Blazing World, where later she is chosen to be an Empress.

The second, Philosophical part of *The Blazing World* can be viewed as a "survey of the state of the scientific knowledge of 1666" (Mendelson 28). In this section, Cavendish's female character establishes philosophical societies and "discusses the findings and scientific achievements" of the strange hybrid creatures of the Blazing World (White 40). These dialogues, however, reveal Cavendish's hidden motives. Given that the Royal Society did not accept her as its member, she established her own scientific society in her utopian universe to convey her criticism of the male-dominated scientific community of her times from behind the disguise of the Empress. The final section of *The Blazing World*, Fancy, is not only different in tone from the rest of the work but instead of dialogues, the reader is presented with a more action-filled and eventful closure.

The generic fluidity of *The Blazing World***,** and finding the appropriate tone for the three distinct sections in the target language, are not the sole challenging aspects of translating Cavendish's pioneering volume, but also the necessity for a thorough cultural-historical awareness on the part of the translator. Although the primary function of the Romance part is not criticising the male dominated scientific community or highlighting the authoress' knowledge in science, but establishing the frame of the story and creating an artificial environment where she can freely convey her disapproval of the practices of the Royal Society, this section still reveals Cavendish's extensive and comprehensive knowledge and her awareness of recent discoveries. In what follows, some of the challenges of translating Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World will be discussed*, with a restricted focus on the so far completed Romance part of the work. The main focus is on the generic complexities of the Romance part of the work, and some aspects the translator has to pay particular attention to when finding the appropriate tone for a Hungarian rendering of this section. The practical lexical difficulties of translating the voyage to the Blazing World and its imperial city will also be explored in light of the wider cultural-historical background.

8 See, for example, Sutton.

9 "Romancical" is an archaic form of the word "Romance." In this paper, I will use the modern term "Romance" when discussing the "Romancical" part of *The Blazing World*.

Subverting the Genre of the Romance and the Voyage to the Blazing World

The beginning of *The Blazing World* seems to follow the patterns of a typical romance established by literary conventions. Yet, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that Cavendish "pushes the boundaries of the generic conventions far beyond [their] natural limit" and eventually presents the readers with something new and unusual (Leslie 26). The story tells of a beautiful young Lady who is kidnapped by a merchant and thus "suffers the typical fate of virginal beauty in danger" (ibid.). The man falls in love with her, but being inferior in both wealth and birth, he would have no other chance to fulfil his desire but to kidnap and imprison her on his boat. The diabolical plot is, however, foiled when the Heavens take pity on the Lady and raise an enormous storm which drives the ship towards the "Icy Sea." Unprepared for the harsh weather conditions, the men freeze to death while she is saved by "the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth and the protection of the Gods" (Cavendish, "The Description" 57).[10] Then, a mysterious portal takes the Lady to the Blazing World. The anthropomorphic inhabitants of this strange place welcome her with wonder and admiration and decide to take her to "the imperial realm of *The Blazing World*," Paradise, and present her to their Emperor (Trubowitz 233), who, as soon as he sees the beautiful Lady, perceives her as a goddess, marries her and makes her an Empress—by which name she is referred to for the rest of the book—and then quickly disappears from the narrative. As Leslie puts it, from that point on, the Lady's role shifts from victim to heroine, and the "Romance plot turns from a conventional narrative of feminine vulnerability to [. . .] a narrative of female power" (13).

One of the difficulties of producing a Hungarian translation of Cavendish's pioneering volume is that the translator has to be aware of such changes in the Lady's roles within the text and translate it accordingly. At the beginning of the Romance part, the Lady is vulnerable and afraid, not knowing whether "her life was to be a sacrifice to [the] cruelty" of the strange, hybrid creatures or she reached safety after the fouled voyage (Cavendish, "The Description" 58). Once the Lady decides to learn their language and is no longer afraid of their company, is the point where she begins her transformation towards a strong heroine, but here a minor change can be observed in the narration of the story as well. When the Lady reaches the Blazing World and begins her journey to the imperial city accompanied by the hybrid creatures, whilst describing the world, the "attention of the reader is [quite often] diverted to maritime details," and geographical data (Wynne-Davies 233). After the Lady feels safe and happy in this place, however, the descriptions become more detailed regarding the scenery and the appearance of the inhabitants, implying her genuine enthusiasm and increasing confidence. Her transformation culminates when she is elevated as the Empress of the Blazing World, marking that the lady is now ready to "act out [Cavendish's] philosophical fancies" (Wynne-Davies 233).

10 All references to the original English version of *The Blazing World* are to the edition of the text in *Restoration and Augustan British Utopias* (Cavendish, "The Description"). All quotations in Hungarian refer to my translation, published in December 2023 (Cavendish, "Leírás").

The translator has to consider this slight change in the descriptions and prepare the Hungarian translation accordingly, and it must also be ensured that the beginning of the text, with the frequent descriptions of the sea and the geography, also transmits the dreamlike and fanciful quality of the text. Finding the right tone in the target language is not the sole difficulty of the Romance part of the text, but the geographical conditions of the fouled journey likewise present the translator with several hardships. Cavendish discusses the entry into the Blazing World in particular detail; from the movements of the merchant's boat amongst the ice slabs to the geographic positions of this world and the portal through which one can enter this place, the authoress presents the readers with a quite elaborate description:

> the Vessel [. . .], was carried as swift as an Arrow out of a Bow, towards the North-pole, and in a short time reached the Icy Sea, where the wind forced it amongst huge pieces of Ice [. . .] At last, the Boat still passing on, was forced into another World; for it is impossible to round this Worlds Globe from Pole to Pole, so as we do from East to West; because the Poles of the other World, joining to the Poles of this, do not allow any further passage to surround the World that way; but if any one arrives to either of these Poles, he is either forced to return, or to enter into another World [. . .]. ("The Description" 57)

As the passage highlights, Cavendish's utopia is located in the "far North" and it is both "realistic and imaginative in space" (Brataas 225). The poles of the Blazing World are connected to the farthest point of our world, and if one reaches this point and is worthy of entering, they can pass through the portal. It is no wonder Cavendish chose this particular location as the entry point of her utopia; the North was fairly undiscovered and thus surrounded by a sense of mystery—the first maps of this territory were "inspired by imaginative narratives," not actual knowledge—in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Brataas 224). Contemporary explorers likewise showed a sparked interest in discovering this relatively unknown territory, and it can be supposed that such interests also "fed Cavendish's imagination" when she wrote her pioneering volume (Brataas 224). Therefore, to provide an authentic translation, it is essential to review and research the historical background of the age, especially when it comes to the description of the position of the two worlds to each other. Finding the Hungarian equivalents for seemingly straightforward phrases like "Icy Sea" can be surprisingly difficult,[11] because it is not entirely clear whether Cavendish uses "icy" as an adjective (as in "jeges tenger") referring to the iciness of the sea or, in geographic terms, as a proper noun ("Jeges-tenger"). To explore the exact nature of "Icy Sea" in

11 "Icy Sea" starts with a capital letter, yet it does not necessarily mean it was used as a proper noun in the text, as in the early modern times, using capitalised letters had a slightly different purpose than it has today. As David Crystal highlights, John Hart, a sixteenth-century teacher, suggested that sentences, proper nouns and important nouns should start with a capital letter. By the seventeenth century, this "practice had been extended to titles (Sir, Lady), forms of address (Father, Mistris), and personified nouns (Nature)," and also to emphasise certain words and phrases. This extended use of capital letters was flourishing at the end of the seventeenth century—writers used a capital for "any noun they felt to be important"—and then it gradually disappeared (Crystal 67).

this particular context, thorough research is necessary on both possibilities before any informed decision is to be made.

The Geographical Context: Search for the Northwest Passage

The North was more or less unknown up to the sixteenth century, and, as Degroot puts it, previous representations of the territory "largely relied on hazy and imprecise recollections of adventurers, who had never reached the very high latitudes" (71). This, however, was about to change at the turn of the century. Henry Hudson's expeditions were the most remarkable amongst the various English voyages in the Arctic and probably the ones causing the greatest stir in the public. He made four journeys in the attempt to find the Northwest Passage, and even though they were not successful in their initial endeavour, they largely contributed to a better understanding of the geographical conditions of the North (Degroot 74). Degroot examined the nature and conditions of these expeditions based on the journals Henry Hudson kept of his travels, which reveal that each of their expeditions was severely hindered by the harsh weather conditions and the icy seas (74-80).[12] Given that the merchant of Cavendish's volume takes a similar route, and Henry Hudson's voyages had a considerable resonance in England, it can be surmised that Cavendish was informed about the events, and reflecting on them, used "Icy" as an adjective. However, to provide an authentic translation one has to examine the other possibility, that the phrase "Icy Sea" refers to an exact location, and functions as a proper noun in the text.

Seventeenth-century scientific achievements and maritime expeditions brought about significant improvements in navigation and cosmographic tools, and led to the "increased production and popularity of maps" (Brataas 224). As Tom Conley highlights, early modern studies witnessed "a sudden and dramatic development" in the two decades leading to the early 2000s regarding the connection of literature and cartography, and some researchers recognised that "printed maps informed the creation of poetry and fiction" in the era (401). Given that the merchant of *The Blazing World* sails towards the North Pole when he reaches the "Icy Sea," it is worth elaborating on early modern cartography to explore what that particular territory was called in Cavendish's time since it may be possible that, influenced by contemporary maps, the authoress used "Icy Sea" as a proper noun referring to an exact location.

For a long time, the North was relatively unknown, and early maps were based on imaginative narratives. The first and best-known atlas of the North was created by Gerardus Mercator (1512–1594) in 1595. According to Helen Wallis, the renowned scientist and cartographer's concept of the North Pole was widely influential and a source of inspiration for several sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century maps (454). Mercator's depiction of the Arctic supposedly "stems from a lost 14th-century work"

12 As Degroot highlights, the Little Ice Age presumably had its impact on Henry Hudson's journeys, as the 0.5°C cooling of the climate between approximately 1565 and 1720 "dramatically altered the distribution of sea ice" and causing, besides unpredictable weather conditions, frequent storms and strong ocean currents (69).

and stories from contemporary explorers (Briså 253). In his *Atlas sive Cosmographicae meditations de fabrica mundi et fabricate figura* (1595), the Arctic is depicted as a continent of four distinct islands, which are separated by narrow channels that lead to the Pole, imagined as a large rock surrounded by a giant whirlpool (Mercator, et al.). In his map, Mercator never refers to the waters around the continent as "Icy Sea" nor does he mention anything that could help the translator gain a better understanding of the nature of the phrase within the context of *The Blazing World*. The map still bears significance regarding the translation, if in an indirect way: Cavendish's narrative meticulously records the voyage to the imperial city, Paradise, and those descriptions imply the influence of Mercator representation:

> [T]here was but one way to enter, and that like a Labyrinth, so winding and turning among the Rocks, that [only] small Boats, could pass, carrying not above three passengers at a time: On each side all along the narrow and winding River, there were several Cities, [. . .] all which after the Lady had passed, she came to the Imperial City, named Paradise, which appeared in form like several Islands; for, Rivers did run betwixt every street [. . .]. ("The Description" 60)

The narrow straits clearly resemble the North Pole as depicted in Mercator's atlas. The layout of Paradise likewise corresponds with the cartographer's version, as the city is divided into small islands by rivers. While Mercator's map cannot provide answers to the original question, it does suggest a possible inspiration for Cavendish's utopian universe. To explore the possible nature of "Icy Sea" in that particular section of *The Blazing World*, it is worth exploring other contemporary maps.

The next highly influential map is Robert Walton's work from 1659, and on this map the territory in question is called "Mar de Nort" (= North Sea) (Walton). Its location roughly matches the present-day Arctic Sea and the territory where the merchant of *The Blazing World* presumably sails, based on Cavendish's descriptions. John Gibson's map from 1760, however, uses a more detailed name for the same territory: "The Icy or Great North Sea." Based on this cartographical context, it can be assumed that "Icy Sea" and "North Sea" were used interchangeably in Cavendish's time to refer to the same geographical territory, and, regarding *The Blazing World*, it may also be possible that the authoress too, used "Icy Sea" as a proper noun in the text. From the above discussions, however, it is also possible that by "Icy Sea" Cavendish is referring to the iciness of the sea, reflecting on Henry Hudson's ill-fated voyage. Since a firm decision could not be made, the Hungarian translation of the passage quoted at the beginning of this subsection uses "jeges tenger" (= "icy sea") showing a preference for the adjectival interpretation, but it adds an explanatory footnote as well (Cavendish, "Leírás").

The Translation of Maritime Expressions

Throughout the journey towards the Blazing World and its capital, Paradise, Cavendish frequently presents the reader with information on types of ships and nautical equipment, which, as Wynne-Davies puts it, "suggests [her] reasonably accurate knowledge

of shipping" (226). The reader gets acquainted with a particular type of boat at the beginning of the work when the beautiful young Lady gets abducted by the merchant; she was collecting seashells on the shore when the merchant carries her away on a "little light vessel, not unlike a packet-boat" (Cavendish, "The Description" 57). Packet boats were typically used to carry mail, yet they were "also able to take a few passengers under cramped conditions" (Wynne-Davies 226), and even though these ships only became widely used in England in the mid-or late seventeenth century, Cavendish presumably knew packet boats early on. As Wynee-Davies highlights, when Cavendish and her husband lived in Antwerp, they "sailed regularly along the Scheld River," where they could have seen such watercraft (226). Based on that, in the Hungarian version the word "postahajó" (mail ship) stands for "packet boat," along with a short explanatory note on the function of such vessels in the seventeenth century.

After the Lady arrives in the Blazing World, Cavendish introduces various other types of unusual ships. The authoress' utopian universe is home to "fantastic anthropomorphic animals" (Trubowitz 232)—Birdmen, Foxmen and Bearmen, for instance—and these hybrid creatures seem to use watercrafts fitting to their physique or social status. For instance, the Birdmen use boats resembling bird nests, while the Foxmen travel on boats similar to fox traps. Meanwhile, the Emperor's ships are made of gold and the merchants of leather. While the golden ships strive to symbolise the richness of the Blazing World, leather ships have a peculiar cultural-historical significance. In his study on the history of sea travel, Mark Dunkley argues that, unfortunately, leather boats are almost "absent from the archaeological record" (198). However, from the extant data, it can be suspected that leather vessels were used as ferries, fishing boats and trading vessels (Dunkley 188–191). Henry Coleman Folkard also elaborates on leather boats in his early, pioneering volume, *The Sailing Boat: A Description of English and Foreign Boats*. Moreover, the scholar devotes a chapter to coracles, the specific type of leather boat used by Scottish and Welsh sailors in the sixteenth century. Folkard describes the coracles as small boats having a "shape something like the half of a walnut shell" (24), which are quite similar to the Birdmen's rounded, bird's nest-shaped boats in *The Blazing World*. Coracles, furthermore, were light and fragile, and their hulls were made of willow covered with animal skins. The leather was then treated with a thin layer of pitch to make them waterproof (Folkard 25). In *The Blazing World*, Cavendish mentions the very same method whilst elaborating on the construction of leather boats: "But the Leather Ships were not altogether so sure, although much lighter; besides, they were pitched to keep out Water" ("The Description" 59).

Furthermore, Cavendish's text also refers to various nautical equipment, another challenging aspect of translating the work. On the voyage towards Paradise, the authoress comments upon how skilled seafarers the habitants of the Blazing World are and compares them with mariners of her own world:

> Very good Navigators they were; and though they had no knowledg of the Load-stone, or Needle or pendulous Watches, yet (which was as serviceable to them) they had subtile observations, and great practice; in so much that they could not onely tell the depth of the Sea in every place, but where there were shelves of

> Sand, Rocks, and other obstructions to be avoided by skilful and experienced Sea-men. ("The Description" 58–59)

Besides the professional terminology, this particular section represented another translation challenge: the archaic nature of the text had to be preserved when finding the Hungarian equivalents for the instruments. Therefore, I used "mágneskő" for "loadstone" instead of the more modern versions "mágnes" or "mágnesérc," and I translated "Needle" not as "iránytű" but as the more archaic "tájolótű." Finding the Hungarian equivalent for "pendulous watches," however, required more careful consideration.

By "Pendulous watches" Cavendish is presumably referring to the early pendulum clocks used by mariners to calculate longitudes. In the early seventeenth century, Galileo was the first to experiment with pendulums, and following his path Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695) "set out to solve the longitude problem" and strived to find a method that could help mariners determine longitudes and thus help them in navigation (Bennett et al. 563). Huygens created the first successful pendulous watch in 1657, and there were many sea trials to explore the reliability of the instrument. Most of these trials can be linked to Sir Robert Holmes (1622–1692), who collected and published his experiences in the pamphlet entitled "A Narrative Concerning the Success of Pendulous Watches at Sea for the Longitudes" in 1665. This pamphlet highlights that the results surpassed Holmes' expectations, yet pendulous watches do not always work accurately aboard a ship (13–15). Based on these data, I eventually translated the term as "ingaóra," but provided an explanatory note on the navigational use of pendulous watches.

Conclusion

The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be considered among the most prosperous periods of England in terms of science. The Scientific Revolution brought about the invention of various instruments that helped scholars better understand the world around them. For women, however, participating in scientific discourses was nearly impossible as they were by and large disregarded by the scientific community. Nonetheless, some women were not willing to give up their ambition to engage in the emerging scientific discourse of their time. A notable example is Margaret Cavendish, who, after being rejected by the Royal Society, wrote her influential *The Blazing World*, in which she established her own scientific society, thus ridiculing her age's scientific men from behind the thin disguise of the Empress.

The Hungarian translator has to be aware of the endeavours of the authoress besides being familiar with the cultural-historical context of the age. As mentioned earlier, the primary function of the Romance part of the work is to establish the frame for the story and to create an artificial fictitious environment where Cavendish can freely express her disapproval of the practices of the Royal Society, at the same time highlighting the authoress's extensive knowledge and awareness of the latest discoveries of her age. For instance, when discussing the merchant's fouled voyage, Henry Hudson's expeditions and contemporary maps may have influenced Cavendish in choosing the location for

the entry point to her utopian universe and throughout the journey towards the imperial city. Cavendish quite frequently elaborates on different types of ships and maritime instruments in particular detail. Without reviewing Cavendish's potential influences, including contemporary expeditions, documents and inventions, producing an authentic translation of *The Blazing World* is nearly impossible. A full translation of the work in the future, due to the demonstrated context-bound specificity, could certainly represent an interesting case for translation studies, as the development of scientific language in Hungarian and the establishment of scientific institutions takes place significantly later. Taking everything into account, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* gives an imprint of the contemporary scientific worldview, is considered by some as the first science-fiction narrative, and also a significant milestone in the history of literary works written and published by women. Translating Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is a challenging task, given the complexity of the work. Cultural-historical awareness and in-depth research are necessary from the side of the translator, yet I consider the translation of the text an important task, as it would make Cavendish's work available to a wider, more precisely Hungarian readership, settling at least some of our debts in the reception of early modern English women writers.

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Reviews

Peacock, Francesca. *Pure Wit: The Revolutionary Life of Margaret Cavendish*. **New York, Pegasus Books, 2024. 384 pp. ISBN 978-1-63936-603-3**

Dorina Gyenis

The legacy of the seventeenth-century authoress Margaret Cavendish is increasingly well-known amongst literary and academic circles but, in terms of a mainstream presence or a place in the canon, she is still considered somewhat obscure. Recent publications, however, such as Francesca Peacock's *Pure Wit* (2024) might change that soon. Peacock's biographical work is certainly not the first to be ever written about the life of authoress and public figure Margaret Cavendish. In terms of style and content, *Pure Wit* follows in the footsteps of two major contributors to the topic, the first being Douglas Grant's *Margaret the First* (1957), which was much later followed by Katie Whitaker's *Mad Madge* (2002). Now, over twenty years later, Peacock intends to tackle the topic once again, most likely due to the current academic boom surrounding Cavendish. The book consists of fifteen chapters in total (including the introduction) that provide a chronological account of the life and death of the Duchess of Newcastle. The volume, apart from demonstrating the most significant events and achievements that occurred in her life, successfully presents them within the context of seventeenth-century England, making the book a worthwhile read for a wide audience.

In her introductory chapter ("The empress and authoress of a new world") Peacock poses the question, why only "few people outside academia and dusty archives heard of [Margaret Cavendish]?" (xvi), a question that is in the center of much of the contemporary research surrounding Cavendish and her oeuvre. The chapter then goes on to give a brief overview of Cavendish's achievements within both the public and literary spheres, highlighting the somewhat paradoxical nature of her reputation that persists even today. Chapter 1 ("The monstrous regiment of women") focuses on Cavendish's (then Lucas) family background and explores the status of female education and the attitudes around the issue in seventeenth-century Europe by invoking the names of the female scholars of the time, such as Bathsua Makin or Anna Schurman. The chapter intends to situate Cavendish within the discourse of women's agency and education, and draws attention to how she subverted certain cultural norms. Chapter 2 ("This unnatural war came like a whirlwind") focuses on the English Civil War and its definite role in shaping Cavendish's life and how that is reflected in her literary works as well. This part highlights Cavendish's Royalist perspective on the situation and provides ample context for the historical events that transpired. Chapter 3 ("Generalissimas and she-soldiers") examines the role of women in military and political contexts of the seventeenth century, opening

with a description of Cavendish's life as the Queen's maid of honor living in exile. The chapter then delves into her writings that feature women depicted as military leaders and active participants in war, emphasizing Cavendish's unique approach to the matter at hand. Chapter 4 ("On sorrow's billows this ship was tossed") further explores Cavendish's life in exile, focusing on her personal struggles and how politics inherently became interwoven with those, especially after her marriage to the exiled Royalist, William Cavendish. The chapter further highlights the frequent use of storm motifs that are ubiquitous in her works.

Chapter 5 ("It is hard to get children with good courage") is centered around Margaret's marriage to William and the issue that plagued many royal families at the time: legacy. It explores the intersection of societal and personal expectations towards women at the time regarding the production of heirs. Chapter 6 ("A sumptuous banquet for the brain") examines Cavendish's (for the time unorthodox) engagement with natural philosophy and science, and dissects the intellectual circles in which the Cavendishes moved, including the male pioneers Margaret wished to challenge with her own ideas. Chapter 7 ("The first English poet of your sex") turns the focus towards Cavendish's literary ambitions and achievements, notably her efforts in painting herself as an innovator in her own right. Important issues regarding "authorship" and "female authorship" in the seventeenth century are also discussed here.

Chapters 8 ("We women are miserable"), 9 ("I have been asleep sixteen years"), and 10 ("Women's kisses are unnatural") examine Cavendish's stance on marriage and women's inequality, exploring what can be best described as "proto-feminist" ideas. The chapters reflect on the Cavendishes' re-entry into English high society following the Restoration and its impact on Margaret's life and writings. Furthermore, these three chapters explore the themes of romantic and platonic relationships, most notably same-sex affections as portrayed in her works. The chapters provide interesting and well-researched arguments about the contemporary representations of female friendship in literature, bringing attention to the poetry of Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn. Peacock argues that Cavendish is somewhat of a pioneer amongst her contemporaries even in this aspect, as her plays explore the topics of marriage and female sexuality beyond the limitations of late-Renaissance ideals.

Chapters 11 ("The thrice noble, illustrious, and excellent Princess of Philosophy") and 12 ("The Duchess of Newcastle is all the subject now discoursed on") circle back to Cavendish's contributions to natural philosophy, her relationship with the Royal Society, paying special attention to Cavendish's public persona and her contemporary reception, one that fluctuates between images of a misunderstood genius and a madwoman belonging to an asylum. Chapter 13 ("What will survive of us is books") reflects on Cavendish's obsession with ideas of fame and legacy. It highlights her efforts at attaining immortality and a level of transcendence through her extensive literary output. Finally, chapter 14 ("Doubt of an after being") concludes the biography by beautifully exposing Cavendish's personal musings on legacy and how she perceived the tangled relationship between fame and the afterlife. Though Cavendish is certainly a unique figure within English literary history, in her closing passages Peacock warns against putting Margaret Cavendish in a box. Instead, she suggests we should take in and appreciate all the complexities and contradictions her character offers.

Reading *Pure Wit* certainly enables readers to do exactly that. In terms of new information regarding Margaret Cavendish's life and death, the volume will not offer much more than the previous biographies. In fact, Peacock is both explicitly critical yet heavily reliant on both Grant's and Whitaker's works. However, references to Whitaker's book appear far more frequently, and for those who are more familiar with *Mad Madge* and its sources, names like Battigelli, Chalmers, and Fitzmaurice will ring familiar in *Pure Wit* as well. Nonetheless, it is still a valuable read even for those already somewhat acquainted with the subject matter. The book contains individual research in the form of the many examined letters and manuscripts including Cavendish's own autobiography, and Peacock is ready to voice criticism when she finds Cavendish's claims disingenuous or whenever they fail to cohere with the historical context. That is perhaps the strongest characteristic of the volume which also sets it aside from previous publications. Peacock provides well-detailed and clearly explained historical backgrounds for each chapter that truly help with contextualizing and understanding exactly what Margaret Cavendish did to make herself singular in her time. Moreover, the volume challenges many of the previous, often sensational, preconceptions surrounding Cavendish's character, aiming to paint a fair and considerate picture, leaving behind the monikers of madness. While it is an enjoyable read for those familiar with the topic, the book seems to be intended for a wholly uninitiated audience. It provides a fresh, modern take that turns a complicated early modern English authoress into a much more approachable figure. Indeed, *Pure Wit* by Francesca Peacock may very well help Margaret Cavendish reach the fame in posterity she so desired.

Parry, Kyle. *A Theory of Assembly: From Museums to Memes.* **Routledge, 2023. 331 pp. ISBN 978-1-5179-1315-1**

Dávid Papp

As it is often discussed in cultural theory and philosophy, the link between the "whole" and its constituents is more convoluted and abstract than it seems. Sometimes it cannot even be determined what the smallest unit of a system or structure is, or how the interplay between the elements of the whole affects what we call its meaning. The issue becomes infinitely more complicated as one moves from, for example, the meaning of individual utterances to that of complex structures made of a great many signifiers—such as images—where the question "what does it mean" seems to require a leap of faith across an infinite chasm. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari were thinkers who leapt over many similar conceptual fissures; they often connected unexpected constituents to change the way the whole is viewed. "Assemblage," "rhizome," and "deterritorialization" are among their key words used to denote surprising connections between seemingly incompatible elements. As such, they enjoy widespread usage among researchers who wish not just to show what something is made of, but also how revisiting the connection between its elements can change how the whole is perceived. In *A Theory of Assembly: From Museums to Memes,* Kyle Parry sets out to argue in a broadly Deleuzian fashion that there is an organizing force between "plywood and keywords to epoxy, pixels, and people" which makes up art, exhibitions, memes, and even whole communities (47).

An associate professor of history of art and visual culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Parry has taught several courses on memes, and encountered the difficulty of establishing a categorical definition for his subject. In his attempt to overcome this difficulty, he has worked out in this ground-breaking and much needed work a theoretical framework that draws heavily on the one outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. *A Theory of Assembly* convincingly argues that assembly has become the dominant mode of both making something and sharing its meaning, making it equal to narrative, representation and abstraction. Rather than prescribing the way art should be classified, Parry aims to offer a new perspective that becomes a de-categorization. Starting from museum exhibitions, through internet memes and participatory digital culture, to the generalising effect of media, the five chapters of his book blur the boundaries that separate these seemingly distinct practices and reveal the memetic way in which their roots intertwine. Parry concludes that what seem to be distinct art forms are all instances of selective and configurative practices that work with constituents and positions. His book is, therefore, engaging

material for students who seek entry points to meme studies as well as for experienced researchers looking to broaden their perspective on visual arts.

Perhaps there is no better example featured in the book which highlights the need to understand cultural artefacts as assemblies than Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1540). As Parry describes, the tripartite altarpiece has evaded any coherent interpretation chiefly because it appears to lack a coherent linear narrative. In a way, the overwhelming visual activity depicted on the panels forces the viewer to abandon their sense of scale or proportion; one is coerced into focusing on the connections that the innumerable details establish. "There are couplings; there are gatherings; there are stampedes. Bosch is presenting us with an effervescent catalog of fleshly recombination," writes Parry (103). He argues that assembly becomes the animating principle of the work as it challenges viewers to undertake their own personal interpretation. Also, perhaps even more importantly, Parry demonstrates through analyses like this that the practice of assembly, rather than being the product of the digital realm, has always been present in the arts.

From the above example, it becomes clear that Parry's enterprise is far greater in scope than just an inquiry that traces the movement of images from museums to online spaces. It appears that, strictly speaking, anything can be seen as an assembly. Anticipating the argument that his theory is "just a reinvention of the wheel," Parry dedicates some sections of the book to counter such assertions. While in the *Theory of Assembly* it is indeed suggested that everything is and can be an assembly, which might sound suspiciously similar to claims like "everything is a remix" or "everything is a story," Parry decidedly refuses to take this stance, and says that assembly is but a feature that is ubiquitous but more prominent in some cultural forms than in others. As he puts it in the "Conclusion": "Assemblies are open-ended interpretations of the shapes the world might yet take" (258). Thus, far from a universalizing definition, Parry's theory of assembly becomes a lens or a multitude of lenses that make visible the interconnectedness of cultural products and instances rather than these objects themselves.

The spectrum of the presented cultural instances which take on the feature of assembly, as well as the range of cultural forms, is vast. In the second chapter, Parry begins his analysis with an "art object" titled *Verb List*, which is essentially a thematic list of strategies that artists can employ in their creative processes. In Parry's reading, the work manifests the very attitude that a theory of visual arts needs to adopt in order to abandon the prevailing taxonomies and dominant modes of thinking that predetermine the contexts in which cultural instances are classified as belonging to a certain type of art. This line of thought is followed throughout the whole chapter as Parry's approach is applied to more assembly-based artworks: twenty-two pages later the reader is introduced to a more than impressive "mosaic" made up of ten thousand individual images sourced from Google—each being the result of a search conducted using keywords like: curiosity, knowledge, wisdom, etc.—which come together to depict an interrogation cell at the infamous Guantanamo detention centre. Here, Parry emphasizes the fact that the individually meaningful constituents come to be deterritorialized into a larger whole, where meaning is generated precisely by the relationship of said constituents. As Parry puts it, "What is binding for this

dynamic is the work of breaking down and remaking the constituent elements of something, whether by means of aesthetic (and aestheticized) objects, looping GIFs, or performative action" (122).

Chapter three is the centrepiece of *A Theory of Assembly*. Serving as a separately coherent examination of contemporary meme culture, the chapter also mediates between two others that deal with visual arts action, reaction and questions of media representation during disasters respectively. It traces the steps of Parry's inquiry into the phenomena that might very well be the most frequently encountered kind of media today: internet memes. As it is immediately revealed, Parry challenges the traditional understanding of memes, refusing to see them only "as funny images with a bit of text on them" or even as "a piece, series, or recognizable use of media, typically humorous, that is easily shared, transformed, or performed via the internet, and that is collectively embraced by specific communities or subcultures" (135, 137). This follows from the consideration that the word "meme" simply no longer functions as just a noun. "To meme" is a verb that not only suggests participation in the online-offline activity of recapitulating certain characteristic features (like specific dance moves, or a well-known figure), but, in Parry's understanding, presupposes the drive to reconfigure and add something to these elements as well. For this reason, Parry claims, memes are best considered as assemblies, or, more specifically, hyperdistributed media assemblies. This is where a great deal of emphasis falls on the aspect of sharing one's creation, making it similar to stories being shared through folklore, or public space remade through street art, or the free labelling of data chunks via folksonomy.

Chapter four, "Generative Assembly after Disaster," which deals with media reaction to natural disasters, may at first seem like a strange inclusion in a book that has so far been concerned with artworks in museum spaces and with memes of the internet—decidedly viewed with their aesthetic and performative properties in mind, not necessarily as discursive units (162). Upon reflection, what becomes most clear in this chapter, although it is constantly present throughout the work, is that Kyle Parry is acutely aware of the ethical implications that his position as theorist entails. It would be far too easy to assume the role of the distant observer "merely documenting" the shifts in latest trends. Therefore, Parry begins by highlighting that the natural disaster Hurricane Katrina was "neither natural nor neutral," since part of the disaster only unfolded as the media began reporting it, often in a discriminatory manner (180). In a notable instance, as seen on Lisa-Marie Ricca's contribution to the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank titled "Racism" (180), AFP and AP news agencies released very distinct reports. According to AP, a black survivor was just seen "looting" a grocery store, while in AFP's report the white survivors who were in a similar situation "found" supplies. According to Parry, such media reports painfully perpetuate the often sexist and racist motifs that underline so-called "edgy" memes as well. Cultural forms seizing on their capacity to counteract and oppose these aforementioned biases, Parry suggests, should be called generative assemblies, since they are not only able, through compilation and configuration, to showcase otherwise suppressed narratives and introduce invisible people, but can also mobilise others to participate in the betterment of the situation.

Chapter five, so to speak, is concerned with concern itself. The tension present in the chapter stems from the possibility of using media assembly either for good or bad. Overall, it is noted that the wider availability of media can help in mitigating violence through visibility and destigmatization. On the other hand, practising power through media always entails the very (un)selection that is inherently present even when deciding which narrative is to be featured on a given platform. The invisible "slow violence" of Rob Nixon is often recalled and re-examined in the section, where according to Parry the question is whether violence, as such, can be conceptualised without residue. Here, Parry stresses the potential inherent in assemblies to foreground cultural forms that reveal information suppressed by dominant modes (thematic counter-mapping) as well as the regularity with which this information is kept on the surface (memetic drip). The emphasis on activism associated with these practices is not accidental either: Parry underscores that assembly has (or always had) its roots in political representation. As such, the mediaspace in which museums, memes, disasters, people, epoxy and plywood come together will always carry an air of artificiality precisely because it is created through action, which in turn always has the potential to become intervention. This idea, due to its simplicity, is less of an all-encompassing, grand conclusion that could be expected from such a work; rather, it follows up on what Parry advocated for, it is a call to action. The conclusion ends with a quote from Judith Butler's address at a graduation ceremony, emphasizing the need for learning to read well in order to maintain an active and sensible democracy. In an ideal world however, according to Butler, reading well would entail becoming, so to speak, assembly. She said, ". . . we will lose ourselves in what we read, only to return to ourselves, transformed and part of a more expansive world—in short, we become more critical and more capacious in our thinking and our acting" (270).

In conclusion, *A Theory of Assembly: From Museums to Memes* undertakes the prodigious task of establishing a system of several shifting lenses through which many facets of the contemporary mediascape become visible as an interconnected whole. Not only does the work achieve this goal, but it is itself a delightful example of assembly done well—by presenting museums, memes, reaction to disasters, art-making, art sharing and participation in one and the same context, it brings much needed clarity and comprehension to an otherwise overspecialised and fragmented field of knowledge.

Holdstock, Dick. *Again With One Voice: British Songs of Political Reform, 1768-1868.* **Loomis House Press, 2021. 398 pp. ISBN 978-1-935243-77-9**

Andrew C. Rouse

Compilations of political ballads are nothing new. After all, practically from the earliest days of the broadside trade, they were seen as at least in part serving a journalistic role, and what is journalism at its best if not the voice of criticism of all aspects of life, whether of capital punishment, matrimonial infidelity, turncoat allegiances or merely unseemly new fashions. What makes Dick Holdstock's book an especially welcome addition to the bookshelves of the ballad collector and social-political historian alike is the manner of its inception: "This book arose out of my curiosity about why, throughout the English-speaking world, there are so many songs in the repertoires of traditional British folk music performers that admire Britain's historically accepted enemy, Napoleon Bonaparte" (Preface xi.). Setting aside the anomaly of traditional British singers ranging all over the English-speaking world, the phenomenon is after all not so strange. Successive British governments raised taxes to finance military operations both on land and at sea, and while the Royal Navy partly existed on the system of sharing out captured enemy ships, maintaining a large, trained land army was extremely draining on the country. It is not so illogical for the hungry, underpaid native, the family of the press-ganged breadwinner, to cast the blame not on the foreign foe but domestic taxation. Moreover, France was undergoing drastic political changes that certainly appealed to many parts of society.

In method the volume, the result of decades of collection and research, follows the path of the late Roy Palmer, long a lonely pioneer in bringing together historic song and sociocultural history on alternating pages. This collection brings together 120 songs that provide insight into a wide variety of areas of reform and dissatisfaction covering the century in the title, which obviously stretches far beyond the Napoleonic era. Holdstock is more fortunate than earlier writers in this genre, for today historians consider all kinds of materials as bona fide sources for uncovering and understanding the past. As for socio-political song texts, the author of the book's Foreword, Steve Roud, creator of the digital Folk Song and Broadside Indexes housed in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, gives a lucid explanation as to their value to the professional historian:

> Song was not simply a colorless[1] medium by which the reformers got their message across; it had a resonance of its own, a social meaning, and was an integral part of everyday experience of nearly everyone in society . . . But not everyone sang in the same way, or the same songs, and to a certain extent what songs you knew and performed partly defined you . . . For all levels, *song* was one of the glues which kept a community together . . . While radicals were vocalising their "seditious" sentiments, conservatives were using patriotic verses to stiffen their resolve to fight them tooth and nail . . . Increasingly in the period covered by this book, printed materials played a big part in song circulation. Huge numbers of song-books were published each year, tailored for all tastes and budgets. (ix-x)

Indeed, the difference between the massive output of the seventeenth century in cheap one-page publications and that of the succeeding couple of centuries was the incremental percentage of the literate and semiliterate population. And by their very nature, the written broadsides were almost immediately available to those without the ability to read, or at least with any facility, as they very quickly became part of the oral culture, just as the hymns written by the early Methodists (who also taught many a working man to read) were learnt and sung by all of the congregation.

The 120 broadsides in Holdstock's book are divided chronologically but also thematically in the stages of the struggle for reform: Liberty: 1768-1781; Revolution: 1780-1789; Paine: 1789-1795; Insurrection: 1796-1799; War: 1800-1815; Suppression: 1815-1819; Gagged: 1819-1830; Union: 1830-1836; Charter: 1837-1851 and Reform: 1851-1868, thereby providing an explanation for the seemingly arbitrary 100 years covering these "British Songs of Political Reform" in the subtitle of the book. Reform, after all, certainly began earlier than 1768 and continues to this day with every demonstration, strike, and lobbying of those in authority. The subject matter of the individual songs is wider than one would at first suppose, yet each is deeply relevant to the overall theme, and show how broad a net dissatisfaction and unrest can cast: in the first section alone (Liberty), the stormy political career of the radical John Wilkes; the increasing demand for an abolition to slavery; in Boston, America, undercutting regular local wages with cheap casual off-duty pay for the unloved military personnel. A curious broadside in Chapter 2 – Revolution, "The Rats and the Ferret," utilises an already familiar reverse anthromorphisation as commentary upon the Gordon Riots of 1780, with Lord Gordon as the ferret. Seditious literature carried severe penalties, so "the names of all parties are concealed to protect the guilty, but it is understood that the rats are members of Parliament and the mice are the working class. The ferret is Lord George Gordon, who used anti-Catholic bigotry for his own aggrandizement" (37). Here Holdstock stands on the brink of anachronism: in the Preface to his seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson gives 1780 as the beginning of the process when "most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers" (Thompson 11). A half-century later, Thompson's description still rings

1 This is an American publication. Where spellings diverge, I have kept the orthography of the original, but otherwise used British English.

true in Holdstock's book. In "The File Hewer's Lamentation" (61-62), the file Hewer compares his lot with that of the African slave. Similarly, in contrast with the coeval gung-ho naval songs promoting the indomitable courage unto death of the True British Tar, "The Tenders Hold" laments,

> Is this your proof of British rights?
> Is this rewarding bravery?
> Oh shame to boast your tars' exploits,
> Then doom those tars to slavery. (108)

Not all the items in this book are against the ruling class. In 1797, there was an unsuccessful attempt by the French to invade via Pembrokeshire, Wales, repulsed through "the virtue and military acumen of the proud yeomen . . . under the command of the bold Lord Cawdor" (114). The piece, apparently "transcribed from the dictation of an old man, who used to sing it," concludes with a standard beatification of king and country and curse upon the enemy:

> God bless our king and country
> With plenty, joy, and peace,
> And may all French and Spanish
> From Britain ever cease.
> Likewise all our noblemen –
> Bless them with counsel wise
> For to be loyal to their king
> And face their enemies. (114)

The heroes, however, are the common Welsh yeomen. More tragic are the main protagonists of the broadside "Edward" relating the attempted rebellion of the Irish rebellions the preceding and following years, who are caught and executed. As with many of the ballads in the volume, today only scholars and devotees would be aware of the events and characters, but in each case Holdstock succinctly (in this piece, just one page) clarifies the events leading to its celebration in song. Importantly, the broadsides in the volume provide an angle to history that we would not possess were we to rely entirely on more conventional historical records.

Anyone familiar with the ephemeral popular verse will know that it was not the task of the collector-author to discover or further disseminate works of art, or even the rare "moderate jewel" among the "veritable dunghills" to be found in the popular canon, as the great American collector F. J. Child described them in an 1872 letter to the Danish scholar Svend Grundtvig (Palmer 157). The jewels, moderate or otherwise, of *Again With One Voice* are in the insight they provide in this intensive period of struggle for the most basic of human rights without which any subsequent (and present) strivings would come to nothing. This is not to say that no literary skills or pithy, witty humour can be found among them: the song is a communal form and for it to survive even briefly depends on an instantaneous magnetic effect. With regard to text, the draw of each piece lay in its topicality, for these broadsides were

in a very real sense journalistic: both their popularity and ephemerality derived from the great speed each had to be composed and printed, and the rate at which one had to succeed another in a matter of days—hence the derogatory name *ephemera* (lasting one day). An excellent example is the song from the period 1789-1795, "Billy is Sick of the War" (95). "Billy" is William Pitt the Younger, who strove to maintain support for the war against revolutionary France when things were going badly—the Duke of Brunswick lost battle after battle, Prussia, and Spain signed peace treaties, France occupied Holland. And other British broadsides, as we have already seen, appeared placing Bonaparte in a positive light.

The piece is an open ridicule of Pitt, not only as regards its text, but also its already popular tune, which parodies "What Can the Matter Be." The popularity of existing tunes was very important, as there was literally no time to compose a new one for each broadside, or to teach it to the public even if one had been created, or most basic of all, to set up a manuscript that anyway few would be able to read. Just as many a football jingle on the stadium terraces of today exploits an existing popular piece, the broadside ballad from its inception made use of extant, well-known tunes. Although Holdstock does not spend energy on this element, it is worth noting that while employing existing tunes—"Billy is Sick of the War" uses "Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be"—the hack writers of varying standard did not always, indeed rather frequently paid no heed to the number of syllables required to fit into the designated tune.

All in all, the radical broadsides in *Again With One Voice* are at once edifying, educational and entertaining. Some are even singable, although that is not the main concern of the compilation. The volume is a valuable contribution to any social or political historian and every enthusiast of the century covered and well deserves a place among their bookshelves.

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Kascakova, Janka, and David Levente Palatinus, editors. *J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy*. **Routledge, 2024. pp. ix + 188. ISBN 9781032525587**

Taha Al-Sarhan

Janka Kascakova and David Levente Palatinus' edited book *J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy* offers an in-depth examination of the development of Tolkien Studies in this region. The three chapters provide a substantial understanding of Hungarian, Slovakian, and Czech translations of Tolkien, and their reception in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the volume displays how the study of Tolkien might progress not only in Central Europe but also in the broader framework of the modern twenty-first-century evaluation of Tolkien's significance as a foundational figure in the fantasy genre.

The first part, "Reception and Translations of Tolkien in Hungary," which includes two essays written by Gergely Nagy, examines how J.R.R. Tolkien's works have been received and translated in Hungary in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Initially categorized as children's literature and science fiction, Tolkien's works were re-evaluated in the 1990s as influential classics. Nagy discusses the impact of Hungary's cultural and ideological shifts, especially the post-1989 period, and the influence of the 1970s "fantasy boom." The rise of new fantasy authors, like Andrzej Sapkowski and George R.R. Martin, in the 1990s prompted a reassessment of Tolkien's impact on literary studies. Nagy also emphasizes Peter Jackson's film adaptations in the early 2000s which renewed interest in Tolkien studies, leading to the formation of the Hungarian Tolkien Society in 2002. Nagy also addresses translation challenges and highlights key figures such as Árpád Göncz and Péter Kuczka in making Tolkien's works accessible to Hungarian readers.

The second part, titled "Reception and Translations of Tolkien in Czechoslovakia and Its Successor States," comprises articles that examine the influence and adaptation of Tolkien's literary works in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Janka Kascakova's research, "Mythologia Non Grata: Tolkien and Socialist Czechoslovakia," explores the impact of Tolkien's writings on Czechoslovakia's struggle for liberty against the communist regime, emphasizing the intricate relationship between literature, politics, and culture. Kascakova details the significance of a prominent individual, Victor Krupa, and the role of underground "Samizdat" publications in introducing Tolkien to Czechoslovak audiences, with a focus on cultural opposition to the communist dictatorship. The second article, Tereza Dedinova's essay, titled "Through Darkness, You Have Come to Your

Hope: The Dynamics of J.R.R. Tolkien's Work Reception in the Czech Context," examines the transformation of Czech readers' relationship with Tolkien, tracing its development from the communist era to the digital era. Dedinova's surveys offer valuable insights into the present-day attitudes of Czech readers, particularly those of younger generations who are well-acquainted with the cinematic adaptations of Tolkien's works. The essay explores issues of appreciation, criticism, and current societal sensitivity, such as female representation in Tolkien's texts.

The third essay, "J.R.R. Tolkien in the Slovak Press: Situation After 1990," written by Jozefa Pevcikova and Eva Urbanova, assesses the Slovak translations of Tolkien's mythology and examines their reception in academic journals, fanzines, and the mainstream press. The findings reflect a wide spectrum of opinions, encompassing both acceptance and criticism. Jela Kehoe's work, titled "Unknotting the Translation Knots in The Hobbit: A Diachronic Analysis of Slovak Translations from 1973 and 2002, looks at and contrasts the translations of "The Hobbit" by Viktor Krupa and Otakar Korfnek. Kehoe's primary focus is on the difficulties encountered in translation, specifically related to naming conventions and a culture-specific vocabulary, and the strategies employed by translators to address these constraints. This highly informative essay explores the complexities of translating literature, particularly in the field of fantasy fiction. It specifically considers the strategies of "domestication" and "foreignization" in translating children's literature and fantasy genres.

The third part of the book, "Studying Fantasy after Tolkien: Legacies and Contemporary Perspectives," begins with Martina Vrdnová's article, "Growing Up in Fantasy: Inspecting the Convergences of Young Adult Literature and Fantastic Fiction." Vrdnová explores the relationship between Young Adult Literature (YA) and the fantasy genre, noting their historical growth and interaction. She highlights the significant expansion of YA literature, attributing some of the genre's success to the integration of fantasy elements, as seen in popular series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Vrdnová argues that both YA and fantasy focus on the theme of identity exploration, making their combination particularly appealing. Using Jungian psychology and cognitive narratology, Vrdnová provides a deep insight into how these genres address complex issues relevant to young people. Nikolett Sipos's article, "One Does Not Simply Teach Fantasy: How Students of English and American Studies in Hungary View the Genre and Tolkien's Legacy," examines the perspectives of Hungarian university students on the fantasy genre and Tolkien's impact. The study emphasizes the importance of including fantasy in academic curricula, highlighting its cultural and educational value. Surveys conducted at the University of Pannonia and Pázmány Péter Catholic University reveal students' engagement with fantasy in various media and their interest in discussing it academically. The final article, "From Niche to Mainstream?" by David Palatinus, explores the ways in which screen culture and the rise of streaming services like Netflix, HBO, and Amazon Prime have made fantasy a widely popular genre. Palatinus discusses how these platforms use high production quality and transmedia storytelling to attract global audiences. He examines technological advancements in filmmaking, budgetary considerations, and the impact of audience engagement on the growth of fantasy in screen culture.

J.R.R. Tolkien in Central Europe: Context, Directions, and the Legacy is an innovative book that showcases the significant contributions of Hungarian, Slovak, and Czech researchers to the field of Tolkien studies in the global realm of fantasy studies. The book comprehensively examines how Tolkien's work was received and translated in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, offering unique insights into the socio-political and cultural conditions that influenced the reception and appreciation of his work in these areas. An in-depth historical examination, focusing on the ideological changes after 1989 and the influence of Peter Jackson's films, this collection of essays enhances our comprehension of the intricate dynamics involved in the reception of speculative fiction. The book explores the place of fantasy literature in academic curricula and the impact of digital culture on the appeal of fantasy literature to contemporary readers. These modern perspectives illuminate fantasy literature's educational potential and its increasing prominence in the digital age, revealing readers' changing engagement with the genre. The book puts great emphasis on historical and translation aspects, although it sometimes neglects references to literary debates regarding representation, for example. Ultimately, the book provides a solid foundation of Tolkien's reception in Eastern Europe by providing extensive research of Tolkien's work and the challenges it has faced in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This opens the door for future studies to delve deeper into the academic exploration of Tolkien's works and their lasting impact in different countries.

Maier, Sarah E., et al., editors. *Neo-Victorian Things: Re-Imagining Nineteenth-Century Material Cultures in Literature and Film*. **Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. 233 pp. ISBN 978-3-031-06203-2**

Özlem Demirel

In *Neo-Victorian Things*, editors Sarah E. Maier, Brenda Ayres, and Daniella Mariann Dove compile a comprehensive collection of essays, each of which discussing the role of material objects in neo-Victorian narratives. Dove and Maier centre upon the concept of *thingness*—a term they use to describe material objects in these narratives—suggesting that these objects do not merely represent the Victorian past but actively *animate* it, creating "a visceral, tactile and/or emotional" (2) experience for the modern reader. The volume's theoretical framework is strongly grounded in Bill Brown's *Thing Theory*,[1] which frames *things* as agents that actively shape the relationship between *humans* and *things*. This perspective in literary criticism is further enriched by newer approaches in object-oriented ontology, new materialism, phenomenology, and sensory studies. The Introduction lays out a well-rounded structure for the volume, unpacking the key terms of materialism and neo-Victorianism. It then offers an overview of how each chapter explores the complex relationship between *things* and humans across various neo-Victorian adaptations—be it literature or film. In chapter 2, Rosario Arias focuses on Deborah Lutz's *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015). Arias argues that Lutz's approach to Victorian materiality is about more than mere historical curiosity; instead, it positions artefacts (such as Charlotte Brontë's fern book) as dynamic entities that allow contemporary readers to form a sensory and emotional connection with the past. Arias' analysis of Lutz's work significantly contributes to neo-Victorianism in terms of reconstructing the daily lives of the Brontës. As Arias also highlights, Lutz's study provides a deeply phenomenological reading of Brontës' material world, focusing on the affective relationship between "objects and humans" (35).

Following this, Lewis Mondal expands the discussion in chapter 3 by situating Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990) as a neo-slave narrative that reinterprets Victorian objects—particularly the ship—as a mediator between identity and historical memory. Mondal shows how the ship's materiality, its function as both a tool of economic exchange and a site of racial violence, complicates traditional readings of

1 Arias highlights that *Thing Theory*, as proposed by Bill Brown, suggests that objects are considered to be *things* "when they stop working for us" (qtd. in Arias 25) or disrupt our usual interactions with them, thereby transcending their mere "utilitarian" (25) function. This shift demonstrates the relationship between human subjects and objects, where *things* take on a new, almost subject-like significance, revealing the complex ways in which we use and relate to material objects beyond simple commodity exchange.

the neo-Victorian. Mondal's chapter challenges us to rethink the boundaries of neo-Victorian studies beyond the British perspective, thereby expanding the scope of neo-Victorian studies across the continents. In chapter 4, Nadine Boehm Schnitker takes a similar postcolonial approach in her analysis of opium paraphernalia, as explored through her reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's short story *The Man with the Twisted Lip* (1891), its Granada TV adaptation (1986), and Amitav Ghosh's historical fiction, *Sea of Poppies* (2008). She examines how opium, as a material substance, coincides with various socio-political discourses (e.g., colonialism, class, and race) within the framework of Victorian and neo-Victorian materiality. By foregrounding the agency of *things*, Boehm-Schnitker emphasizes their symbolic performative roles in shaping identity and power relations, deepening the critical understanding of how material culture intersects with identity politics.

From the postcolonial perspective, another highlight of the volume is the analysis of piano as a *thing* that has dynamic roles in postcolonial and neo-Victorian narratives. In chapter 5, Dany van Dam discusses the symbolic importance of the piano and how it functions in a way as an extension of its owner's body, voice, and even colonial power in Jane Campion's film *The Piano* (1993) and Daniel Mason's novel *The Piano Tuner* (2002). As such, van Dam expands the discourse on materiality, Brown's *Thing Theory*, postcolonialism and its gendered dimensions[2] by investigating the ways in which the piano functions as a mediator of identity, power, and cultural displacement. Moving onto chapter 6, Daniella Mariann Dove presents an intriguing analysis of haunted materiality in Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004). Drawing on new materialist theories, particularly those of Jane Bennett (2010)[3] and Diana Coole (2010),[4] Dove discusses how the dress acts as an active, haunting agent in the fictional life of Henry James, recalling and reanimating the past. Her careful reading of *The Master* through the lens of haunted materiality offers significant insights into how *things* function as agents of memory and emotion in neo-Victorian historical fiction.

Maintaining the theme of haunted materiality, Brenda Ayres discusses "the *thingness* of a haunted house" (138) in chapter 7, focusing on Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), its screenplay adaptation *The Innocents* (1961), and Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959). While she draws on a range of critical perspectives, including those of Stephen King,[5] she argues that the haunted space is not

2 Van Dam's analysis is particularly strong in its attention to the gendered dimensions of piano playing in both texts. She draws on the work of feminist scholars such as Christine Knight and Mary Burgan to argue that the piano is not only a symbol of class and race but also a distinctly gendered object. In *The Piano*, Ada's relationship to the piano is explicitly gendered, as the instrument becomes a site of both her sexual expression and her resistance to male domination. Similarly, *The Piano Tuner*, "initially associates piano playing with middle-class femininity" (94), but as the piano is transported into the colonial setting, its *thingness* takes on more masculine connotations, representing the British Empire's cultural and political power.

3 See Janet Bennet's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke UP, 2010).

4 See *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics,* edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Duke UP, 2010).

5 Ayres references Stephen King's assertion that haunted houses are "the 'archetype of the Bad Place'" (qtd. in Ayres 134), in which these spaces are frequently haunted not just by spirits, but by the weight of their historical and material presence.

simply a backdrop for the psychological and emotional turmoil of the characters, but rather it is "a *thing* [that] has an agenda and agency of its own" (151), characterised by the emotions that the characters project onto the house. While Ayres' analysis is quite compelling, her argument might be expanded to include a discussion of how such haunted materiality interacts with other neo-Victorian works that focus on mental institutions, where perceiving the distinction between the animate and inanimate becomes increasingly blurred.

In chapter 8, Claire Nally takes a different approach and examines the materiality of crime through the notorious case of Mary Ann Cotton (1872). To do this, Nally focuses on the teapot associated with Cotton's alleged arsenic poisoning of her family, which was also featured in the TV series *Dark Angel* (2016). She argues that this seemingly mundane object, the teapot, in a way becomes an extension of Cotton's body, imbued with murderous agency. Nally's analysis offers a great perspective on the intersections between gender, objects, and crime narratives, while also advancing the discussions on the role of materiality in shaping historical narratives in neo-Victorian media. Chapter 9 shifts the focus to the material world of Sherlock Holmes and its contemporary adaptations in various types of media. Sarah E. Maier calls attention to Holmes' way of "forensic tracking of things" (183), which is a reflection of Holmes' scientific mind. Holmes often portrayed as "a calculating machine" (qtd. in Maier 184) by Watson, deeply entrenched in the material world, but estranged from human relations because his brilliance is inextricably tied to his detachment from emotional and social concerns. Maier analyses how Holmes' own identity is constructed and defined through his relationship with *things*. In addition to all these, the final chapter by Brenda Ayres brings the volume full circle by discussing the material and metaphysical connections between "things" and Victorian magic in neo-Victorian narratives. Ayres illustrates how conjuring items not only manipulates material reality, but also interrogates philosophical questions surrounding identity, objecthood, and agency, situating Victorian magic within historical contexts and modern cinematic interpretations, such as *The Prestige* (2006).

Neo-Victorian Things offers a critical and contemporary approach to understanding how *things* function within neo-Victorian narratives. Across the volume, each chapter illustrates how the *thingness* of these objects in neo-Victorian literature and media are not merely passive remnants of the Victorian past; instead, they serve as dynamic agents of memory, linking the Victorian past and present through material culture. Whether through fern books, teapots, pianos, haunted dresses/houses or opium paraphernalia, these *things* take on lives of their own, shaping both modern identity and culture. The diversity of media explored—ranging from novels and short stories to screenplays, TV series, and films—ensures that the volume's insights are relevant across a variety of contemporary cultural forms/mediums. In conclusion, I do consider *Neo-Victorian Things* as a valuable contribution to neo-Victorian scholarship by widening the boundaries of how we think about Victorian materiality. Yet, it could push these boundaries even further by including the discussion of the role of mental institutions (or asylums), money, gold, and archaeological artefacts in neo-Victorian narratives. Evidently, the volume provides a solid foundation for future studies on the relationship between materiality and neo-Victorianism, inviting readers to reconsider how *things* not only present the past but actively shape our understanding of it.

Jennifer Nash, and Samantha Pinto, editors. *The Routledge Companion to Intersectionalities*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023. 673 pp. ISBN 978-0-367-65266-1

Arthur K. Muhia

The Routledge Companion to Intersectionalities is a recent scholarly multidisciplinary reference book devoted to both ancient and contemporary intersectional studies. It comprises nine parts which contain fifty-three chapters in total. The contributors' team is made up of interdisciplinary scholars in the humanities and social sciences. The introductory section takes the concept of intersection, and explores the lived experiences, identities, and injuries of Black women, considering the multiple variables where axes converge. It uses this as a starting point to understand intersectionality as a key contemporary framework in feminist thought. Vital questions regarding intersectionality are asked and deliberated upon throughout the book. They include: "Is it a way to neutrally describe the multiplicity of identities that all subjects accrue? Is it an 'oppression olympics,' with the intersection as a site of accumulation of injury? Is it an analytic strictly 'belonging' to Black feminism—and to Black women—that includes an ethical and intellectual imperative to focus on marginalized communities and identities? Is it a way of 'doing' feminism, both academically and in the world? Does it dismantle or build institutional affiliations across subjects, disciplines, and infrastructures?" (1).

Part one has eight chapters that retrace intersectional genealogies which influenced Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose works are most closely associated with the concept of intersectionality.[1] She conceptualized it in a legal context, drawing attention to the limitation of institutional paths to justice and equity especially for Black women in the United States. She was influenced by other Black feminist theorists whose concerns were not only equality for Black woman but also social justice for all. The chapters in this part assertively discredit the popular opinion that often claims Crenshaw to be the sole progenitor of intersectionality thought. A notable chapter on the Memphis school of thought provides a critical analysis of Black feminist theorizing around multiple and overlapping modes of domination, leading to contemporary intersectionality.

Part two is composed of eight chapters which examine intersectional methods and interdisciplinarity. In this part, identity exclusivity in health systems, psychology, law, and literature are among the areas discussed. It focuses on the individual-level

1 See *Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex* (U of Chicago P, 1989) and *Mapping the Margins* (Columbia UP, 1991).

experiences of people and communities who have been historically marginalized or stigmatized within systems and structures of power. Therefore, portraying that intersectionality has traveled across academic disciplines, policy circles, and community settings. Additionally, this part examines Black women as both producers of intersectionality scholarship and the subjects of intersectional inquiry.

Part three consists of five chapters that explore the applications of intersectionality across the geopolitical classifications of the world, with a particular focus on race and class. It examines the global North as a site of accountability, and its relationship with the global South. The extensive journey of the concept of intersectionality—spanning geographical spaces and intellectual and activist domains, from academia to social movements—is thoroughly discussed. Examples from the USA, India, China, North Africa, and West Africa serve as frames of reference. Additionally, this section addresses issues related to migration and asylum-seeking within the diasporas of the global North.

Part four is made up of five chapters under the umbrella of intersectional border work which interrogates identity formation, power relations, and ontology. Another key area in this part is feminists and critical queer scholars elaborating their unique line of thoughts. The fluidity of intersectionality extends beyond the USA university system, generating multiplicative collaboration across diverse fields of study. The challenges faced by minorities who migrate and seek asylum in host territories are also explored. Intersectionality in the COVID-19 pandemic is introduced, and this discussion is continued in Part five.

Part five outlines the transnational nature of intersectionality as both theory and activist praxis in three chapters. Systems within which components of intersectionality, such us racism, operate are discussed, tracing the origins of race and race-thinking to the Middle Ages and early modernity. Furthermore, Western philosophical works, such as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, are used to explore the intertwined nature of racial and gender identities in relation to religious devotion. An examination of various religious beliefs—medieval Jews, Muslims, and Black "Pagans"—in the context of the history of Western Christianity highlights how religion plays a central role in intersectionality.

Part six has four chapters exploring the nexus between intersectionality and disability studies. It commences with exploring harassment and assault of Black girls in schools and their criminalization and arrest. Then it specifically deals with the plight of Black girls living with disabilities and their capitalist economic exploitation. This thought is further expounded to include sterilization of women of color in relation to the education experience of Black girls with disability. Another area of focus in this section is the medical condition that can be considered a form of disability, as highlighted in the Black Lives Matter movement, guided by the victims' desperate cry of "I can't breathe," which was ignored, leading to casualties. Additionally, the challenges faced by people living with disabilities, particularly artists, during lockdowns such as those imposed during COVID-19 is analyzed.

Part seven consists of four chapters that outline intersectional science and data studies, with a particular focus on Black feminists in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The exclusion of women of color and indigenous women—

both as participants and in representation within the content of digital humanities—is examined. This section concludes with an analysis focusing on biomedical studies, minority women's health, and the epidemiology of sexually transmitted infections.

Part eight consists of seven chapters addressing popular culture within the discourse of intersectionality. Contemporary phenomena, such as COVID-19 across the world and the Black Lives Matter Movement in the USA, are explored by examining popular literary culture, including Hip Hop and Blues music, comedy, and movies. Part nine, the final section, comprises nine chapters, all unified in their dedication to rethinking intersectional justice. Emerging issues and trends, such as the question of Palestine, armed citizenship, and inequalities in caregiving work are thoroughly analyzed in a logical and coherent manner.

This well-informed critical volume represents significant growth and development of intersectionality, evolving from a methodological approach into a more stable theoretical framework to guide and shape scientific studies in relevant fields. As a theoretical framework in literary studies, it emphasizes the multiplicity of voices and perspectives as a precondition for social transformation, asserting that no single explanation can encapsulate a phenomenon. I highly recommend this companion to students, teachers, and researchers working in women's and gender studies, sexuality studies, African American studies, sociology, politics, and other related disciplines.

Notes on Contributors

Boróka Andl-Beck graduated from the University of Vienna in 2021 and is currently a student of English literature at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Her scholarly work is mostly concerned with the "imagined Gypsy" and the Western, Oriental gaze in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary fiction, ethnographical works, and newspaper articles, with the representation of marginalised groups in Britain and the arbitrary categorisation of humans as a broader field of interest. She won first place at the 2023 OTDK competition and participated in several conferences.

Alexandra Barta is an independent researcher from Budapest. She obtained a master's degree in English literature at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary in 2022. Her thesis focused on the possible explanations of the stage directional differences between the two texts of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in light of The Henslowe Diary. She is likewise interested in Margaret Cavendish's works, and she has published the first partial translation of Cavendish's *The Blazing World*.

Özlem Demirel is a PhD student at the Department of Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Pécs, in Hungary. Her area of interest includes the theme of double, or Doppelganger, its manifestations in literature, as well as Victorian sensation fiction and its relation to neo-Victorianism.

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Bálint Gárdos is senior lecturer at ELTE University, the Department of English. His research concerns the tradition of exemplary history and eighteenth-century British literature.

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Filip Bul Krajník is Assistant Professor at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, specialising in early English literature. He has published internationally on a range of topics, chiefly on the history and modern reception of English Renaissance and Restoration theatre. His chapter on Chaucer and medieval authorship appeared in Paul Poplawski's *Studying English Literature in Context: Critical Readings* (CUP, 2022). His volume on Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre adaptation, titled *"a Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht": Essays in English Theatre Adaptation ca. 1660–1800*, will be published by Masaryk University Press in 2025.

Mária Kurdi is professor emerita in the Institute of English Studies at the University of Pécs, Hungary. She has widely published about modern drama and Irish theatre and literature. Her latest book is an edited collection titled *Negotiating Age: Aging and Ageism in Contemporary Literature and Theatre*, which came out in the HJEAS Books series in 2023.

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Taha Al-Sarhan is a PhD student at the University of Pécs currently researching the field of the Weird and New Weird with special emphasis on the sublime in H.P. Lovecraft's works. He also researches topics related to different media adaptations of Lovecraft's works such as comic books, video games, films, and tabletop games. His other interests include postcolonial horror, ecocriticism, environmental studies, and the fantasy genre.

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