

## 'If your daughters are inclined to love reading, do not check their Inclination'

Clarissa Campbell-Orr, in a study of 'womanhood in England and France 1780-1920 called *Wollstonecraft's Daughters*, noted the lack of research on British aristocratic women, and especially of work on 'the role of aristocratic women in advancing their children's education' (13). The themes of this conference present me with the opportunity to make a modest step towards addressing this gap, in relation to the experience of some elite Scottish women. Familial letters and memoirs are my main sources. Studies have established the importance of letters, of female epistolary networks, for understanding how women circulated ideas and disseminated their knowledge; they often reveal female views on education, and women's reading practices and experience of reading in their circle. These accounts of personal, 'lived experience' are particularly valuable. Karen Glover, in her recent excellent study, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (2011), remarks that 'when it comes to lived experience, the historiography of women's education in eighteenth-century Britain is surprisingly thin ('a virtual desert', to quote one recent commentator), and the Scottish situation was worse.' (Glover, p. 26). In letters, Scottish women record their experiences and disseminate knowledge based on that experience in the form of advice to younger women, often family members and daughters of friends.

More attention is now being paid to women's memoirs too. Karen Glover has argued that it 'was in family memoirs that women seem to have felt most at liberty to move from reading to writing' so I will draw some evidence from several family memoirs too.

In a letter sent from Italy in January 1753, to her daughter, Mary Stuart, Countess of Bute (1718-1794), the writer Mary Wortley Montagu famously advised her 'dear child' on the education of her granddaughters ( she had five and as many sons at the time):

If your daughters are inclined to love reading, do not check their inclination by hindering them of the diverting part of it; it is as necessary for the **amusement** of women as the reputation of men; but **teach** them not to expect or desire any applause from it. Let their brothers shine, and let them content themselves with **making their lives easier** by it, which I experimentally<sup>1</sup> know is more effectually done by study than any other way.

[Conventional view of female education (recognising role of mothers as teachers of their daughters, the value of reading, gendered attitudes and passing on the benefits of experience) from an unconventional individual.] In 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, as in England, 'mothers (and stepmothers) bore a direct responsibility for the rearing and socialization of daughters'.<sup>2</sup> W Montagu's advice here to her daughter acknowledges this, and her clear awareness of the society's different expectations and educational opportunities based on gender. Before the end of the century Mary Wollstonecraft proposed the same type of education for girls as that Rousseau had proposed for

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Hunt, *Middling Sort*, 84.

<sup>2</sup> She was the daughter of Lord Advocate, Sir James Stewart, and wife of George Scott, a diplomat at German courts in the reigns of Queen Anne and George 1. While abroad she wrote letters to her sister, Anne, Mrs Mure had married William Mure, in 1711. Her son was William and daughter Elizabeth Mure. She had three other daughters: A genealogical and heraldic history of the commoners of Great Britain by John Burke (1833), p, 456.

boys, and argued that if girls were encouraged from an early age to develop their minds, it would be seen that they were rational creatures.

In 1753, MWM's views echo much 18<sup>th</sup> Scottish writing on the education of girls in elite families. In 1719, Marion Scott, daughter of the Lord Advocate and wife of a diplomat posted abroad, wrote to her sister Anne Mure, offering similar advice. Mure had 4 daughters as well as several sons, and Scott too expounds on mothers as first teachers and recalls her own pleasure in books in her youth:<sup>3</sup>

If you can give your daughters a liking for reading you'll do them good office. Nobody knows what may happen to them in this world. I am sure it was a happiness for me that I took pleasure in that. How much idle company hath it kept me from! How many worse diversions even than reading Romances, (such as Balls and Masquerades), have I neglected from pure love to a book. (Hanover, Sept. 8, 1719)

MWM's own library contained all the popular romances of her youth too, as her grandchildren were to discover. In the letter to Lady Bute she laments that too many mothers raise their daughters as great ladies destined for fine marriages:<sup>4</sup>

People commonly educate their children as they build their houses, according to some plan they think beautiful, without considering whether it is suited to the purposes for which they are designed. Almost all girls of quality are educated as if they were to be great ladies, which is often as little to be expected, as an immoderate heat of the sun in the north of Scotland.

So she directs her daughter to more sensible child rearing

You should teach yours to confine their desires to probabilities, to be **as useful as is possible to themselves**, and to think privacy (as it is) the happiest state of life.

This provision will be a safeguard against false/dashed expectations. [she claims to know from her own experience [that] it is in the power of study not only to make solitude tolerable, but agreeable]. Here though MWM's advice departs from that in the many contemporary conduct books for women that disseminated the view that a girl's education should aim to make her useful to others. [Groomed for marriage (Cynthia Lowenthal)] This is nowhere more clear than in For instance, on the subject of reading, the *Sermons for Young Women* (1766) by Scottish clergyman (and poet), James Fordyce, in which he pronounced:

Your business chiefly is to read Men, in order to make yourselves agreeable and useful.[...] Nevertheless, in this study you may derive great assistance from books. Without them, in effect, your progress here will be partial and confined. [...] Firstly, I would observe that History, in which I include Biography and Memoirs, ought to employ a considerable share of your leisure. [...] we also recommend books of Voyages and Travels ... Geography ... Astronomy' (James Fordyce, *Sermons for Young Women*, 1766, Sermon VII)<sup>5</sup>

[You'll recall that in P & P Jane Austen mocked Fordyce through Mr Collins' frustrated attempts to

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<sup>3</sup> 'qualifying her for a station in which she will never appear, and at the same time incapacitating her for that retirement to which she is destined. Learning, if she has a real taste for it, will not only make her contented, but happy in it. No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting.'

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Hunt (Middling Sort) says this was reprinted 14 times before 1814.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt says this one reprinted 'at least twenty-three times by 1877' (75)

read his *Sermons aloud* to the Bennet girls. Nevertheless, the work was a bestseller, reprinted some 14 times before 1814, and it was translated into French in 1788.

[An even more 'popular' conduct book was John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, first published in Edinburgh (by his son) in 1774. Reprinted 27 times by 1877, been described as a bestseller. Just as MWM warned that daughters should let their brothers 'shine', and advised her granddaughters to conceal their learning, Gregory counsels young women to:

Be ever cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company. - But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding. A man of real genius and candour is far superior to this meanness. But such a one will seldom fall in your way; (**John Gregory**, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 1774, 'On Conduct and Behaviour', p. 15)<sup>6</sup>

I am at the greatest loss what to advise you in regard to books. There is no impropriety in your reading history, or cultivating any art or science to which genius or accident leads you.' (Gregory, 'Amusements', 24)

Like MWM: let the boys shine!

NB: how young women should conduct themselves in company, particularly in conversation with men, this in contrast to MWM's greater stress on preparing for what she called the 'amusement of solitude'.<sup>7</sup> Although MWM also stresses the importance of a 'necessary knowledge of the world' (Her editor's wording not hers) for 'knowledge of mankind (the most useful of all knowledge) can only be acquired by conversing with them. Books are so far from giving that instruction'. [Needlework too!]

For Fordyce, women should learn to be useful, agreeable companions to men, esp. husbands; for MWM, female education was about self-improvement, to make their lives, especially single lives, richer, and happier

[Whether reading men and/or books. The purpose was self-improvement. 'The prioritisation of reading as an improving activity from an early age was one of the most significant factors influencing the ways in which elite women engaged with the world around them.' (Glover, 77) and see qualification in next few sentences.

Janet Todd, renowned scholar of early women writers, has observed that while 'male-authored conduct books ... appealed primarily to authority', '[w]hen women wrote conduct books themselves, they tended to emphasise their own experience' (Todd, Intro to *Female Education in the Age of Enlightenment* vol 1, p. xv). Reading (recent essay by Markman Ellis focuses on reading practices revealed in Eliz Montagu's epistolary network of the 1750s) 'uses her correspondence to focus discussion on **the experience of reading** among her circle' (p. 213).]


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<sup>6</sup> 'The pleasurable occupation of the attention, or diversion of the mind' (OED)

<sup>7</sup> Friendship with David Hume. Brother's friendship with Earl of Bute, Louisa's father.

This had been Wortley Montagu's own experience as she essentially lived an itinerant single life from 1739 (Italy) until her death in 1762:

**I know, by experience**, it is in the power of study not only to make solitude tolerable, but agreeable. I have now lived almost seven years in a stricter retirement than yours in the Isle of Bute, and can assure you, I have never had half an hour heavy on my hands, for want of something to do. Whoever will cultivate their own mind, will find full employment.

 from MWM's experience to that of one of the granddaughters whose education so her. Louisa Stuart. Similarly writes from her experience, and shares belief in reading as a living activity.

**Lady Louisa Stuart** (1757-1851) was Montagu's youngest grand-daughter, and the youngest of eleven children of Mary, Countess of Bute and John Stuart, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute [painting]. She lived from mid-18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, dying in her 94<sup>th</sup> year. She wrote many letters throughout her long life, as well as several memoirs of friends and relatives. As you may know, one of her correspondents was Walter Scott. But it's her letters to a friend's daughter in the 1820s that afford a fascinating insight into the enduring influence her famous grandparent had on Louisa, and on how her experience of reading influenced her views on female education.

Stuart frequently encouraged her young protégée, another Louisa, to extend her knowledge through wide reading, often recommending and lending books. She is also delighted to learn the young woman is learning the classical languages that in her own youth were considered the preserve of males. [She herself was 'not suffered to learn Latin' as a girl.] Like her grandmother, though, she urges concealment of this self-improving activity:

I rejoice to hear of your returning to your Latin studies, which I particularly wish you to cultivate. My knowledge of the language is so very slight and imperfect I can speak little of it; but I am fully persuaded the Classics are the foundation of all good sense and good taste, and, as you had the advantage of being taught it early, I want you to persevere and learn it thoroughly. Aye, and Greek too. Why not? Nobody need know anything of the matter. Besides, it is not run down as it was in my time. Women are now permitted, if not encouraged, to know something. [Solid and difficult studies never make coxcombs of either sex.] (Letter to L. Clinton, September 1822)

Like her famous grandmother, Louisa Stuart offers advice based on her own experience. That experience, at least in her girlhood, had not been happy. Well into her sixties she could vividly recall the humiliation she had endured as a child constantly taunted by her older siblings for her love of books, and her supposed resemblance to her grandmother in this respect. She wrote to the same young friend in 1826:

"Every one knows his own sore," says the proverb, and I, with all *your* tastes, knew the evil of being the *youngest* among brothers and sisters, of being daily snubbed and checked "*for all my nonsense*," and told by elders, of whom I stood in awe, of **my self-conceit and affectation of wisdom, in reading books**. I had no sort of business with instead of minding

my work as I should do, with this constant burthen. "I know as well as possible you have got it in your head that you are to be like my grandmother," whereas it was this reproach that first informed me I had ever had a grandmother, and I heartily hated her name.<sup>8</sup> Whatever I wanted to learn, everybody was up in arms to oppose it, and represent that if I indulged in it I should become such a pedant nobody would be able to bear me.

What she calls 'the blue-stockingphobia ... so prevalent with the males of my house' had a lifelong effect, and led to a crippling lack of confidence in 'general conversation' because of 'fear of ridicule'. [which I detested, and the castle-building went on in secret unchecked.'](s (September, 1828, pp. 228-29) Fear of being thought a blue-stocking. " Even her sisters later in life: 'not surprised to find her still fearful in late middle age of being a blue-stocking by her ageing sister Lady Lonsdale!' (Susan Buchan, xii)]

Hence she says 'I am always solicitous to guard you against the errors that have been most prejudicial to myself'. (September, 1822) Her correspondent, she noted, was fortunate in being the eldest child in her family, not the youngest.

Fortunately, Louisa Stuart's 'hatred' of her learned grandmother did not last! Went on to write a brief biography in 1837, to which I'll return at the end of my paper.

## MEMOIRS

In the second part of my paper I'll now turn from women's views on reading expressed in letter writing to family and friends and by an older generation to a younger, to how that later generation was affected. My evidence is their memoirs, compiled in some cases to commemorate their influential mothers and grandmothers.

**Karen Glover has argued that it 'was in family memoirs that women seem to have felt most at liberty to move from reading to writing; at once personal and precept, memoirs were the literary representation of women's role in the family.' (Glover, 75-76). These were often biographies of significant family members, but 'more and more women wrote their autobiographies too. (Hunt)**

[The ability to read and write allowed girls and women to maintain emotional connections with a far-flung network of male and, especially female friends. It also gave them new tools with which to influence their male and female kin, place their mark upon the historical record, and even engage in polemical writing. **More and more women wrote their autobiographies**, and some of these women were willing to describe in very explicit terms the mental or physical abuse they had suffered at the hands of men and other women . (Hunt, 88)]

**The memoir of Elizabeth Mure** of Caldwell (Renfrewshire), daughter of Anne Mure, already mentioned, is a good example. Her life spanned much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (c.1715-c.1791,<sup>9</sup> possibly

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<sup>8</sup> See version in the *Scotswoman at Home and Abroad*, pp. 39-40). Dorothy McMillan notes that according to her brother William, it was "'surreptitiously printed in one of the few numbers of the short-lived periodical set on foot in Edinburgh in 1818, under the title of *Constable's magazine*". p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Wolroar: reference to Eloisa's Letters.

1795). Whether her mother had taken the sisterly advice of Marion Scott or not, towards the end of her life Elizabeth wrote down her own views on reading, recording how this and other aspects of young women's education had changed over her lifetime. In her youth in Renfrewshire books were not easily come by, with the result that:

The weman's knowledge was gain'd only be conversing with the men not by reading themselves, as they had few books to read that they could understand. Whoever had read Pope, Addison & Swift, with some ill wrot history, was then thought a lairnd Lady, which Character was by no means agreeable". (*Some remarks on the change of manners in my own time*, p.269)<sup>10</sup>

[She also observes that a mother of a large family 'could give little attention to her girls']

To make matters worse, she says, women lost even that source of information when Scottish households, in the 1760s, adopted the 'English fashions' of long dinners [starting at 3 pm and lasting until 8pm] from which womenn were expected to withdraw early while the men caroused on for hours. 'The weman were all the evening by themselves, which put a stope to that general intercourse so necessary for the improvement of both sexes' (272). As a consequence, parents started to assume more responsibility for the socialization and education of their children, beginning at an early age:

Cut off in a great measure from the Society of the men, its necessary the women should have some constant amusement; and as they are likewise denied friendships with one another, the parents provides for this void as much as possible in giving them compleat Education: and what formerly begun at ten years of age, or often leater, now begins at four or five. How long its to continue the next age must determine; for its not yet fixed in this. Reading, writing, musick, drawing, Franch, Italian, Geografie, History, with all kinds of needle work are now carefully taught the girls, that time may not lye heavie on their hand without proper society. Besides this, shopes loaded with novels and books of amusement to kill the time.

(272)

Borne out by the experience of the philosopher and educationalist Elizabeth Hamilton (1757-1816) who described in her memoir how, having first learned to read at the age of 4, her learning was then nurtured by her foster-mother, her maternal aunt by whom:

I was adopted, and educated with a care and tenderness that has been seldom equalled. No child ever spent so happy a life; nor, indeed, have I ever met with anything at all resembling the way in which we lived, except the description given by Rousseau of Wolroar's farm and vintage. Disgust at the unkindness of some of the former friends of her family, had induced my aunt to withdraw herself from those connections who might have introduced me into notice\* She wished me to be self-dependent; and, consequently, taught me to value myself upon nothing that did not strictly belong to myself, nor upon any thing that did, which was in its nature perishable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The family were staunch Whigs and Presbyterians and were exiled to the Netherlands after the Rye House plot of 1683 (DNB).

<sup>11</sup> Colin Maclaurin (1698-1746), Professor of Mathematics. An account of his tour of the Continent, 1722 is

Her aunt 'had a genuine love of reading, and when no other engagement intervened, it was one of her domestic regulations, that a book be read aloud in the evening for general amusement' (Memoir). Even so:

These social studies were far from satisfying her avidity for information; she perused many **books by stealth**. Mrs. Marshall, on discovering what had been her private occupation, expressed neither praise nor blame, but quietly advised her **to avoid any display of superior knowledge**, by which she might be subjected to the imputation of pedantry. This admonition produced the desired effect, since, as she herself informs us\*, she once hid a volume of Lord Kaime's Elements of Criticism under the cushion of a chair, lest she should be detected in a study which prejudice and ignorance might pronounce unfeminine.

I want to turn now to two memoirs of outstanding women written by their offspring, in the first case by a daughter and in the second by a granddaughter.

### **Lady Murray of Stanhope's Memoir of her Mother, Grisell Baillie**

Grisell Baillie, later Lady Murray of Stanhope by marriage, was the eldest of two daughters of Lady Grisell and Sir George Baillie of Jerviswood. An only son died in infancy. Murray wrote the memoir shortly after her mother's death (Dec 1749), for circulation in the family. Later Published in 1822 **(Image of memoir), and became the source of Joanna Baillie's metrical legend of her**

A recurring theme in Lady Murray's memoir of her mother is the role of parents, and grandparents, as the primary educators of children. She also stresses the importance of women's knowledge, and how this is passed on.

Lady Murray attributes much of her knowledge of her grandmother to her mother, Lady Grisell, as her maternal grandmother had died when Murray was 10 years old. It was also from her mother that she learned that, when this Covenanting family was in exile in Utrecht,<sup>12</sup> while her grandfather 'taught them every thing that was fit for their age; some Latin, others French, Dutch, geography, writing, reading, English, &c.; and my grandmother taught them what was necessary on her part.' (Memoir). As the eldest of 13 children, her mother's duties in the family meant that it was only sometimes that she 'took a lesson with the rest, in French and Dutch, and also diverted herself with music'. This knowledge of languages came in useful when Lady Grisell later took her own family, the two daughters, son-in-law and grandsons, to Europe she made use of both languages. In Italy she set about learning Italian, her daughter recalls with great admiration. [Murray inherited her mother's lifelong love of music and preserved a book of songs her mother had written. She herself was admired for her singing.]

Mother and daughter were close ('never in my life from her above two months at a time, and that very seldom, and always unwillingly'), and Murray recalls affectionately a relationship based on friendship from childhood. She and her sister learned much from their mother, and from the governess appointed by her in due course:

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held at Aberdeen University (MS 206 Papers of Colin Maclaurin, GB 0231 University of Aberdeen, Special Collections)

<sup>12</sup> Stuart met her grandmother for the first time just six months before her death in 1762 when MWW was met when ill-health forced her to return to London. The whole Bute family were there when she landed from Holland. Lord Bute had just become the first Scottish PM - and office he held for only 15 months.

from our infancy [she] treated my sister and me like friends, as well as children, and with an indulgence that we never had a wish to make she could prevent; always used us with an openness and confidence which begat the same in us, that there never was any reserve amongst us, nor any thing kept secret from one another, to which she had used us from our early years. We were always with her at home and abroad, but when it was necessary we should learn what was fit for us; and for that end she got Mrs May Menzies, a daughter of Mr Menzies of Raws, writer to the signet, to be our governess, who was well qualified in all respects for it, and whose faithful care and capacity my mother depended so much upon, that she was easy when we were with her. She was always with us when our masters came, and had no other thought or business but the care and instruction of us; which I must here acknowledge with gratitude, having been an indulgent though exact mistress to us when young ; and to this time, it being now forty-five years that she has lived with us, a faithful disinterested friend, with good sense, good temper, entirely in our interest, and that with so much honesty, that she always spoke her mind sincerely, without the least sycophantry. She has a solid judgment and advice to give upon any occasion, and an integrity in all in all her actions, even to a scruple. As such she always has been, and still is regarded by us all;

Lady G's household accounts book reveal that May Menzies was in fact the best paid Baillie family employee (Scots £100 = £8.6d, p.a.). Also records payments over the years of tutors employed for her daughters' education ( reading, writing, languages, arithmetic, dancing and singing), so in that respect too we know she set a high value on her daughters' education. From the same meticulous records we also learn that when the family was away from their home in Berwickshire, Lady Grisell made sure lessons continued in London (her husband was an MP and Lord of the Treasury).

[Murray also learned Italian which assisted her mother when the family travelled to Italy 1731-33, although expresses admiration for her mother who teaches herself Italian in Naples at first 'with only the help of a grammar and dictionary' although we learn from her careful account keeping that she also employed a Professor of Italian as a tutor too.]

Murray conveys her mother's lifelong value for learning, and her important role in the education of her extended family too. Lady Grisell took charge of the education of her nieces and nephews, as part of 'the whole management' of her brother Alexander's affairs while he was Envoy to Denmark between 1716 and 1721. (Alexander Hume, had 4 girls and 4 sons) [The eldest child, a girl, Anne, and already over 18 at time, eldest son, George (b. 1704) she sent 'abroad) under bear-leader, Prof Maclaurin, prof of Maths at Aberdeen, (but died at Montpelier in 1724) sent two nephews, 8 yrs at the time, to in school in London (where she and George and family lived while he held various posts in the Whig ministry until 1725.). Then to Utrecht where traditionally the males of family went to university.]

Her grandsons, Lady Murray's nephews, were only 11 and 9 when their father died prematurely in 1732 and Lady Grisell went on to play a key role in their education. Murray writes that her mother desired that 'they should appear in the world with distinction, and omitted nothing she could devise to further them this way'. This included remaining in London and Oxford while they attended school and then university. She then prepared them for the extension of their education through the grand tour, even providing them with a memorandum containing sound advice about what to see, whom to meet, transport, and currency, all drawing on her own experience of travelling on the continent, especially in the early 1730s.



In 'September 1744, it was thought proper her grandsons should go to London. As they were *but* just entering into the world, her **knowledge, experience, and continual advice**, could not but be of great use to them; therefore she resolved we should all go together'. This despite her age (75).

**Lady Louisa Stuart** (1757-1851) is best remembered by her memoir of her 'outrageous' grandmother (Rubenstein), Mary Wortley Montagu, the only one of her memoirs to be published in her lifetime and then anonymously as, among her self-confessed 'aristocratic prejudices' was a disdain for publication.

She composed these 'Biographical Anecdotes' as an introduction to *The letters and works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1837) edited by her nephew - and Wortley Montagu's great grandson - Lord Wharnccliffe. Her main sources were her mother, Lady Bute, and her grandmother's letters and diaries (before these last were destroyed by Lady Bute just before she died in 1794). As noted earlier, Stuart barely knew the grandmother who nevertheless exerted a powerful and long-lasting influence on her. Having moved to Italy in 1739, MW only returned to London because of ill health, where she died in 1762 when Louisa was 5 years old. [It was also the first time mother and daughter had met in over 20 years]

It was actually Louisa's eldest sister Mary that MWN had in mind when she offered advice on her - daughters' education, thinking she and her sisters were unlikely to marry. [Thought of her granddaughters as 'a sort of lay-nuns'.] In the event, Mary and all her siblings except Louisa married, and married well. Louisa is the one who most conformed to her grandmother's prediction and ideas.

Like Lady Murray, Lady Stuart's main source of knowledge about her grandmother was her mother, Lady Bute. She believed that MWM did not learn Greek because her mother told her she did not. Wortley Montagu's own letters are a key source of course, and tell her that her grandmother taught herself Latin as a child. [perhaps of particular interest as she herself was not 'suffered to learn Latin' as a girl] Stuart even quotes phrases from the very letter MWM sent to Lady Bute about educating granddaughters. Stuart describes that letter as one recommending the 'learned education of women' and notes that her grandmother decried own education as 'one of the worst in the world' at the hands of ignorant tutors, though matters improved when Bishop Burnet took an interest and encouraged the precocious Mary in her studies. Stuart also includes own ideas on education, thoroughly distilled as they were when she wrote this memoir, at age of 80. She clearly approves that the largely self-educated Lady Mary 'read everything', 'in pursuit of information', though often stealthily just as Stuart had in her youth. Perhaps she rather envied the freedom to do so that her grandmother had enjoyed. [There's ample evidence of Stuart's own extensive reading throughout her letters, and her self-taught knowledge of the modern languages.]

Stuart also draws on her memory, recalling her grandmother's library and providing insights into Wortley Montagu's reading habits. Clearly the romances of Lennox and others devoured by the young MWM were not to Stuart's taste, though she lists the titles and recollects that they were read and re-read by one of Lady Bute attendants! Perhaps the most touching moment in the memoir is this account of how an old family retainer vigilantly protected Montagu's books from careless children and their nursery-maids. Stuart also sees fit to mention the works in library by the feminist Mary Astell, whom her grandmother knew, and to whom the books were gifted. Stuart had read these and observes that many of Astell's ideas on female education became better known through Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of Rights of Woman*. (No evidence W knew Astell's work,

according to a recent study, Christine Mason Sutherland, *The Eloquence of Mary Astell*, 2005)

## CONCLUSION

Cultural and social commentary about reading became widespread in the 18th century, prompted by new education ideologies such as those proposed by John Locke (*Essay on Human Understanding*, 1690) and Jean Jacques Rousseau ( ), and new ideas about the education of both men and women, boys and girls. . Reading was considered as a central component of any proper education. Of course, education for the gentry and middling classes was not just about reading, but ideas of good breeding and politeness.

At the end of the century, Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay and other bluestockings published their influential books on the education of girls and the associated rights of woman. They saw reading as a necessary part of girls' intellectual development, and in later life a comfort and resource, just as Montagu had. Louisa Stuart certainly read Wollstonecraft and was familiar with the work of the Scottish educationalist Elizabeth Hamilton, but her expressed views and advice to others derive from her lived experience. Elizabeth Mure provides a historical perspective on changes in the education of children over the best part of a century, tracing the shifts she witnessed in her lifetime.

All of the women I've quoted from were Scottish, with the exception of Wortley Montagu, although she was descended from the Duke of Argyll. But it would be unwise to suggest that Scottish national identity was something these writers shared. Murray and Stuart lived most of their lives in or near London and as members of elite Scottish families were part of what might indeed be called a cross border society.

And while, as Dorothy McMillan has pointed out in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (1997) letters and memoirs , like other non-fiction writing by women are 'hardly a distinctively Scottish phenomenon', their interest and value lie in the insights they provide into the experiences of real Scottish women. Largely because the letters and memoirs of the kind I have cited were not intended for publication the writers felt free to be frank about their personal educational experiences, the views on reading and learning they developed and shared as a consequence.

This cross-generational aspect seems a particularly fruitful line for further investigation, not just the passing of knowledge from an older female generation to a younger, but evidence recorded in memoirs of that younger generation's appreciation of mothers and grandmothers.