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## WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN THE LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

GLASGOW WOMEN'S LIBRARY, 8 SEPTEMBER 2016

Scholars from all across Britain and from as far as China and Russia travelled to Glasgow to attend a one-day workshop exploring women and their contributions to, influence on and experience of education in the long eighteenth century. The workshop was held at the Glasgow Women's Library, an organization that aims to create a vibrant platform between researchers, arts practitioners and the general public. This event certainly embraced such aims, bringing together over fifty academics, musicians and non-academic attendees to explore this vast and important area through paper sessions and a lunchtime concert. A diverse array of interdisciplinary subjects was explored by the twelve speakers, with discussions focusing on women's contribution to domestic and school education and their own educational experiences in music, dancing, reading and needlework.

Kirsteen McCue (University of Glasgow) began with an exploration of the self-proclaimed 'Song broker for the ladies' by George Thomson (1757–1851). Thomson produced three major collections of National Song (Scottish, Welsh and Irish) that were specifically marketed to a female clientele. He is perhaps best known for commissioning composers such as Haydn and Beethoven to make arrangements of Scot songs, but his choice of clientele greatly affected his editorial decisions. He frequently asked composers to simplify their arrangements to better suit British tastes and to render them easier to play by amateur musicians. The same went for the writers from whom he commissioned new lyrics: Thomson would often suggest amendments to texts, ensuring they were suitable for young, middle class ladies. It would seem that Thomson had a clear vision of the genres appearing in his collections. McCue noted that the songs fall into three categories of love song: pastoral, dialogue (between two lovers) and lost or unrequited love, all of which were very popular among the British people. McCue made further reference to Thomson's overarching editorial

policy during her performance of three songs from his *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*. She concluded that the success of Thomson's collections was due to his understanding of British taste, allowing him to curate collections of songs that ladies very much enjoyed.

On the other hand, Violetta Trofimova (St Petersburg, Russia) noted that many seventeenth-century female educators, including Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678) viewed subjects such as music and painting as nothing more than 'adornments' to women's education. Yet this idea was not shared by two eminent female educators who were inspired by van Schurman's treatise *Dissertatio logica*. Marie du Moulin's *Directions for the Education of a Young Prince* (1673) and Bathsua Makin's anonymously published *Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) encouraged instruction in music as well as in languages, mathematics and geography. While both treatises share similar values, including making no distinction between the education of boys and girls, Moulin concluded that girls should be taught to be obedient in order to ready them for marriage. Karen McAulay (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) similarly addressed the importance of women attaining musical excellence in the pursuit of an advantageous marriage, drawing on the eighteenth-century music collections at St Andrews University.

While many of the papers argued that a woman's education was not only valued but socially necessary during the eighteenth century, the idea of girls being educated in order to ready them for marriage, particularly in middle class families, was a prominent theme. Mary Hatfield (Trinity College, Dublin) brought attention to the 'Ladies of the Bar', a group of female religious educators who set up a school in York offering an elite Catholic education to young girls. The exclusive nature of this expensive school, which was mainly populated by girls from Dublin, Galway and York, assisted their families in gaining social capital. In

focusing on the cultivation of genteel and polite speech, this education prepared the girls for an easy transition into polite society.

Lindy Moore (independent scholar) discussed the female educator Isobella Marshall Graham (1742–1814), who opened a school for girls in Paisley after her husband's death in 1773. While the girls were educated in reading, writing, dancing and singing, the use of vernacular Scots for the school's advertisements demonstrate that it was set up to educate the young working class. Isobel Stark (University of Southampton) examined the charitable education work of Mary Mee, Second Viscountess Palmerston (1752–1805), who reformed the typical model of a school of industry, where girls would work for four hours instead of fifteen and were offered uniforms and food.

In the day's second session, Mark Towsey (University of Liverpool) discussed the importance of women's reading of history, where demonstrating knowledge and clear understanding was seen as a social accomplishment. In addition, reading history could shape women's political and religious values, a subject also addressed by Katie Garner (University of St Andrews). Garner examined the translation and edition by Sussanah Dobson (died 1795) of *Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie* by French medievalist writer Jean-Baptiste de le Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1759–1781). Garner argued that Dobson's edits, including abridging the three-volume work to a single volume, rendered medieval romances more accessible to the British public. Dobson's edition promoted values of chivalry and sensibility that both men and women could adopt, and even inspired the next generation of female writers including Mary Robinson (died 1800) and Clara Reeve (1729–1807).

While it was important for ladies to acquire knowledge in order to converse within polite society, appearing visually graceful in body was another expression of status and wealth, as was discussed by Katrina Faulds (University of Southampton). Dance and the development of a graceful demeanour were intimately connected. Thus, women being sent

for instruction with renowned dancing masters was a common social convention. Yet Faulds demonstrated that the necessity for grace in polite society applied to other art forms, including drawing and music.

These ideas of a woman's socially acceptable behaviour resonated throughout the lunchtime concert, which featured music composed by, in collaboration with or for women. David McGuinness (University of Glasgow) gave a beautiful rendition of two movements from the *Pièces de clavessin* (1687) and 'La Flamonde, et double' from the *Pièces de clavecin qui peuvent se jouer sur le violon* (1707) by Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre (1665–1729). Elizabeth Ford, Andrew Bull and Allan Wright (University of Glasgow) performed 'Sonata 3' by William McGibbon (1690–1756), which was dedicated to the Countess of Englington, Susanna Montgomery (1690–1780). Prior to her marriage, Montgomery had been sent a flute by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik (1611–1674) with a sexually suggestive love poem hidden inside, which supported the idea that the flute was not an appropriate instrument to play by a lady of society. Penelope Cave and Katrina Faulds performed a fortepiano duet in C major by Johann Christian Bach, which was dedicated to another influential patroness of the arts, the Countess of Abingdon, Charlotte Warren (died 1794). Kirsteen McCue finished the concert with three songs that appeared in Thomson's collections: 'Duncan Gray', 'Let not woman e'er complain' and 'O where tell me where is your highland laddie gone', which provided further context for Thomson's work.

Feeling rejuvenated, the participants assembled for the final session. Penelope Cave (Southampton) discussed the education that Lady Jerningham (1748–1825) provided her daughter Charlotte, who would later marry Sir Richard Bedingfeld. Like her mother, Charlotte educated her own eight children with a confident and practical approach. Helen Whiting (University of Dundee) also discussed the synergies between upbringing and education in her paper, which examined a painting of the Hunter Blair family by artist David

Allan (1744–1796). The painting followed social conventions associated with family harmony in depicting a woman's place as a genteel, matriarchal figure.

Departing from the theme of British women and their educations, Banwo Adetoro Olaniyi (Xiamen University) discussed the first and only Empress of China, Wu Ze Tian, an ambitious woman who began her political career as concubine to two Emperors. To climb the social ladder, she was expected to be well spoken, versed in literature and politics and skilled in music. It was the attainment of these skills that facilitated her successful reign.

Despite the diversity of topics, there were common, overarching themes throughout the workshop, and these were further discussed during a final roundtable. This validated the notion that a larger, interdisciplinary event would afford scholars the further possibility of sharing their methodologies and considering practical applications. All the speakers provided captivating insight into the topic, and I hope that future events will attract an even broader spectrum of scholars who are exploring eighteenth-century women and education.

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