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**The Fuzzy Theory  
and Women Writers in the  
Late Eighteenth Century**

By

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Philosophy in English

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**Dedication**

To my mother Angela and my father Philip,  
To whom I owe everything.

And to Richard,  
My friend, my love, my home.

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My loving thanks must also go to my wonderful family. My parents, Angela and Philip, have supported me throughout with their wisdom and generosity. My mother, especially, has followed my every step with unparalleled enthusiasm and with such loving care, while my father has given everything he has to help me succeed. My brothers Nicholas and Timothy have also helped in their unique ways, bringing laughter and love when times were hard. I feel blessed to have such a creative and dynamic family around me.

Thanks are also due to Richard, my fiancé, whom I met at the start of this journey and who has seen me through to the end with love, compassion and lots of laughter. His commitment and ambition continues to be an inspiration, and will, I believe, lead to great success. I am also grateful to Richard for bringing his family into my life. Sharon, Daryl, Lucy and Katie have welcomed me into their family with such kindness, and their company has been a welcome relief and a continual source of pleasure over the last three years.

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**Declaration**

This thesis is my own work; no part of it has been published elsewhere or submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Thesis Abstract**

‘Fuzzy Theory and Women Writers in the Late Eighteenth Century’ contends that women writers require more careful critical treatment, and suggests that critics are still bound by the outdated logic of the Law of the Excluded Middle. This law, first formulated by Aristotle, and developed by Gottfried Leibniz in the early eighteenth century, indicates that where there are two contradictory propositions, one must be true and the other false; a female writer must, therefore, either be feminine or masculine, conservative or radical. The twentieth century concept of Fuzzy logic, however, helped mathematicians and engineers to manage reasoning that was only *approximate*, rather than exact. Borrowing from this, the thesis will employ the Fuzzy Set Theory, which permits the gradual assessment of elements in a set, rather than relying on elements that are assessed in binaric terms (the principle of bivalence, or, contradiction). Put simply, the Fuzzy Set Theory does away with binaries, the Law of the Excluded Middle, and the Law of Contradiction, allowing subjects to be imprecise, and changeable. Thus, each chapter will construct a Fuzzy Set by which a variety of eighteenth century debates, with which women writers engaged, can be examined. The thesis will show that all such concepts are subjective and unstable—changeable and open to personal interpretation, and will discuss such writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay, Charlotte Smith, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Mary Hays, Lucy Aikin, Hannah More and Joanna Southcott.



## Introduction

Our old acquaintance Mrs. Barbauld turned satirist! The last thing we should have expected, and, now that we have seen her satire, the last thing that we could have desired.

May we (without derogating too much from that reputation of age and gravity of which critics should be so chary) confess that we are yet young enough to have had early obligations to Mrs. Barbauld; and that it really is with no disposition to retaliate on the fair pedagogue of our former life, that on the present occasion, we have called her up to correct her exercise?

But she must excuse us if we think that she has wandered from the course in which she was respectable and useful, and miserably mistaken both her powers and her duty, in exchanging the birchen for the satiric rod, and abandoning the superintendence of the ‘ovilia’ of the nursery, to wage war on the ‘reluctantes dracones’, statesmen, and warriors, whose misdoings have aroused her indignant muse.

We had hoped, indeed, that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author: we even flattered ourselves that the interests of Europe and of humanity would in some degree have swayed our public councils, without the descent of (deus ex machina) Mrs. Anna Letitia Barbauld in a quarto, upon the theatre where the great European tragedy is now performing. Not such, however, is her opinion; an irresistible impulse of public duty—a confident sense of commanding talents—have induced her to dash down her shagreen spectacles and her knitting needles, and to sally forth, hand in hand with her renowned compatriot, in the magnanimous resolution of saving a sinking state, by the instrumentality of a pamphlet in prose and a pamphlet in verse.<sup>1</sup>

This scathing attack delivered by the *Quarterly Review* in June 1812, in response to Anna Letitia Barbauld’s poem ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’, outlines the angry sentiments employed by most reviewers of the last poem Barbauld published in her lifetime. As William McCarthy has noticed, the reviewer, John Wilson Crocker, was first secretary at the Admiralty, the office that ran the British Navy, which, along with the *Quarterly Review* itself, acted as a ‘voice of the government’.<sup>2</sup> As McCarthy suggests, Crocker’s review must, therefore, be taken as evidence that ‘*Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*’, coming as it did from a popular and

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<sup>1</sup>John Wilson Crocker, ‘Art. IV: *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven. A Poem.* By Anna Letitia Barbauld’ in *The Quarterly Review, March and June*, vol. VII (London: Printed by C. Roworth, Bell-Yard, Temple-Bar, 1812), p.309

<sup>2</sup>William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 2008), p.477.

prominent writer, ‘seriously irritated the government’ and was intended to reduce Barbauld to the contemptible status of ‘a meddlesome, antiquated schoolmarm’.<sup>3</sup> Reviewers like Crocker clearly believed the poem to be unpatriotic, seeming to predict victory for the enemy, and even, as the poet Elizabeth Cobbold suggested, appearing to express hatred for England.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, however, they were clearly horrified at the way in which this poem appeared to depart from Barbauld’s earlier works—poems which had, for the most part, been considered more suitable for a ‘lady-author’. As Crocker suggests, ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ was ‘[t]he last thing we should have expected’; in his view, Barbauld had ‘wandered from the course in which she was respectable and useful’, ‘mistaken both her powers and duty’, as a ‘nurse’, a ‘muse’, a ‘*lady-author*’ (my emphasis), with ‘shagreen spectacles’ and ‘knitting needles’.<sup>5</sup> In other words, she had forgotten that she was a woman.

Crocker had split Barbauld’s career down the middle, placing it in a binary in which her earlier work was classed as feminine, and ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ was classed as masculine. It is a binary that has existed to the present day. Writing her *Romantic Women Poets* in 2004, Anne Janowitz looked back on Barbauld’s early career and also found that a number of these poems were ‘conventional in relation to the fashions of sensibility’, the ‘work of a *woman* about to turn 30’ (my emphasis), encompassing a ‘sense of freedom within propriety structures’, without any ‘reference to “passion” or any extreme emotions’, and ultimately ‘restrained’.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Janowitz suggests that ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ is atypical of Barbauld’s work; it is the poem to which critics are initially drawn because ‘its voice is so confident, its

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<sup>3</sup> McCarthy, p.477

<sup>4</sup> As quoted by McCarthy, p.479

<sup>5</sup> Crocker, p.309

<sup>6</sup> Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), p.12, p.13., p.19, p.19, p.21.

poetic and political reach global',<sup>7</sup> which, she surmises, came quite suddenly from the 'psychological privilege of advancing age'.<sup>8</sup> To her, 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven' shares little with Barbauld's early poems, which are 'polite' and poetically 'conservative', even if their 'political position' is akin.<sup>9</sup>

Similar views can be found amongst Barbauld's readers from the eighteenth century, before the publication of 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven'. The most well known of these is of William Hazlitt, who in his 'Lecture on the English Poets' referred to Barbauld as a 'very pretty poetess'.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Richard Twiss, travel writer and visitor to the family of Charles Burney in 1774, had expressed admiration for Barbauld's first collection of poetry, *Poems* (1773), encouraging Burney to read them and observing 'there is one poem in them, Come here fond youth,—that described the symptoms of Love, which all the ladies I meet with, have by Heart. Have you ma'am?'<sup>11</sup> Clearly, for some, this was *female* poetry, that appealed to the hearts of women, and could be admired as such by her male readers, who spoke of her work in polite, domestic settings. Similarly, the *Lady's Monthly Museum* in 1798, reflecting on Barbauld's work over the last twenty-five years, honoured her first poems as comparable to the works of some of the greatest male writers:

most of them are evidently stamp'd with an ardour of genius, an unity of design, an expansion of intellect, a boldness, a dignity, a compass of expression, as well as a copiousness and harmony of numbers, seldom surpassed by either Dryden, Pope, or any of their imitators.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Janowitz, p.4

<sup>8</sup> Janowitz, p.6

<sup>9</sup> Janowitz, p.7, p.10

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in William Keach, 'A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld's Career', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), p.309.

<sup>11</sup> Frances Burney, *The Early Diary of Francis Burney* ed. by Lars E. Troide (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.21

<sup>12</sup> "O", 'Some Account of Mrs Anna Letitia Barbauld: From the Lady's Monthly Museum', in *The Edinburgh Magazine, or, Literary Miscellany*, Volume XII (London: Printed for James Symington, 1799), p.197

But it was careful to point out that this did not complicate, or threaten, her position as a woman, and a wife:

It has been pretty generally conceived of female literature, that it sometimes alienates its votaries from many important duties of life; and that several who have cultivated a talent for study, and indulged a taste for the muses and the belle lettres, have either kept themselves single, or acted but an awkward part in a conjugal state. Mrs Barbauld is an eminent exception to this foolish prejudice. In the bloom of life, and with all her honours blushing thick upon her, she gave her hand and heart to the Rev. Mr Barbauld, a foreigner of respectable character and abilities. With him she has passed a great many years amicably, and is as much loved and revered for her fidelity in punctually discharging the circle of social and domestic obligation, as in acting the part of an author on the public theatre of the world.<sup>13</sup>

To this reviewer, Barbauld was modest and gentle, noted for an unusual intellect, but, more importantly, for her spotless female character, as a good wife and moral guide in her poetry and in her person—a character to which other women might aspire. The review was clearly attempting to regender her as a “poetess”.

But such poetry also appeared to some to represent a ‘false system of female manners’.<sup>14</sup> In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Mary Wollstonecraft attacked Barbauld’s ‘To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers’, taken from *Poems*, as a

sensual error [...] which robs the whole sex of its dignity, and classes the brown and fair with the smiling flowers that only adorn the land. This has ever been the language of men, and the fear of departing from a supposed sexual character, has made even women of superior sense adopt the same sentiments.<sup>15</sup>

As Anne K. Mellor suggests, Wollstonecraft appears to object to Barbauld’s identification of femininity with flowers “‘born for pleasure and delight alone” and her conclusion that for women “*your* BEST, *your* SWEETEST *empire* is – to

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<sup>13</sup> *The Edinburgh Magazine*, p.198

<sup>14</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘The Vindications of the Rights of Woman’ in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 1997), p.167

<sup>15</sup> Wollstonecraft, pp.167-8

PLEASE”<sup>16</sup> The writer in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum* had praised Barbauld’s apparent devotion to the art of “pleasing”, as a companionate wife, as one of her greatest achievements, setting her apart from other female writers, but for Wollstonecraft it was ignoble poetry—shallow and lacking “masculine” depth.

Despite this, Harriet Guest has noticed that even before ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ Barbauld’s work also frequently worried and perplexed readers. Quoting the *Monthly Review* which followed the first edition of Barbauld’s *Poems* in 1773, Guest notes that while the reviewer (William Woodfall) praised Barbauld’s genius, he lamented that she “has, in pursuing the road to fame, trod too much in the footsteps of men” [...] [when] “we had hoped the *Woman* was going to appear”<sup>17</sup> She observes that with many of the responses to Barbauld’s work, it is the gendered character of her writing that is the issue: ‘it is her willingness or failure to appear properly feminine that is the central focus of their criticism’<sup>18</sup> McCarthy agrees, noting that from the very start of her career, ‘male commentators found their notions of a woman writer strangely perplexed by Miss Aikin’<sup>19</sup> Both critics notice that Barbauld is not easily categorised as “feminine”, or indeed easily categorised as anything. Guest has comprehensively explored the ways in which poems such as Barbauld’s ‘Rights of Woman’, which has frequently angered feminist critics, is troubling because ‘its use of the language of rights seems to pull it in a different direction from its conclusion’, emphasising ‘a violence in the language that is at odds

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<sup>16</sup> Anne K. Mellor, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the women writers of her day’, in *A Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.153

<sup>17</sup> Harriet Guest, ‘Anna Letitia Barbauld and the Mighty Mothers of Immortal Rome’, in *Small Change: Women, Patriotism and Learning* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.225

<sup>18</sup> Guest, p.226

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, p.117

with the praise of mutual love’, realising that the source of the numerous critical difficulties with this poem, such as those outlined above, can be traced

to the assumption that the final lines of the poem defend a sentimental feminine identity that abandons ambition for “mutual love,” and is incompatible with a politically articulate femininity—or feminism—based on the defiant language of natural right.<sup>20</sup>

As Guest later asserts, Barbauld’s writing ‘could suggest to her contemporaries [and indeed to critics today] that she was, on the one hand, a dangerously radical virago, and on the other, a timid creature’.<sup>21</sup>

These were the critical understandings of Barbauld as I began my thesis, characterised by confusion, contradiction and inconsistency. Unlike many critics, I had not started with ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ and worked backwards, but with ‘To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers’, which I came across while reading Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*. In this context, my immediate reaction had been, like Janowitz, to consider the poem as “polite”, and perhaps typical of a number of other female poets who seemed to be attracted to subjects of a domestic nature. But when I read the ‘Rights of Woman’, a poem which appeared to wade into the debate on women’s rights, with the same complicated tone observed by Guest, I became confused. ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’, which I read last, appeared to me to have been written by a different poet altogether. It compelled me to go back to ‘To a Lady’ and start again. As I began to re-read, it quickly became apparent that a variety of poems written by Barbauld were marked by ambiguity and contradiction, appearing at times boldly political, with a striking and aggressive tone, at others timid and domestic. At one moment, she seemed to be writing poetry for an exclusive female audience, and at another moment it was with a broad social conscience; there were

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<sup>20</sup> Guest, p.228

<sup>21</sup> Guest, p.236

never two moments the same. Just as I thought I had understood one verse, the next would appear entirely different—alien, in fact—causing me to question my original interpretation and to read the poem over and over again.

Despite this, it is clear that vast amounts of criticism has tended to label Barbauld's early poems as "conservative" or "feminine", and then to treat 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven' as an anomaly, a poem that simply does not fit into understandings of her work, and as such, is a moment of unusual indecorum. Thus, take Marlon Ross' 'Configurations of Feminine Reform', in which he characterises Barbauld's sentimental verse (that is, everything other than 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven') as of topics 'that are so generalized and repeatable that they tend toward instant cliché [...] [with] conventional parameters [...] [that] avoid gender indecorum' (although he admits that this does permit some of the same political ideas that are evident in 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven').<sup>22</sup> 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven' he distinguishes as an 'occasional poem', 'normally written by great men for great men'.<sup>23</sup> In his view, the poem is entirely different in character than any of Barbauld's other works. But apart from this, both Ross and Janowitz seem to take comfort in viewing Barbauld as a 'poetic conservative and a political radical',<sup>24</sup> someone who writes in a "feminine" style, even if they express some controversial ideas. Guest and McCarthy might not agree. As previously mentioned, Guest has observed 'violence' in the language of 'The Rights of Woman', terms that are 'strikingly aggressive and militaristic',<sup>25</sup> a view that is clearly at odds with the 'poetic conservative' outlined by Janowitz and Ross. As such, it soon becomes apparent that Barbauld has an uncanny

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<sup>22</sup> Marlon Ross, 'Configurations of Feminine Reform: The Woman Writer and the Tradition of Dissent', in *Re-visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p.101

<sup>23</sup> Ross, p.95

<sup>24</sup> Janowitz, p.10

<sup>25</sup> Guest, p.226

way of slipping away from any critic who tries to categorise her. One minute she might appear to fit the box, the next she had fallen between the cracks and is lost to us.

A similar picture emerges with respect to other female writers. Critically, each female writer from the eighteenth century has, at one time or another, been characterised as either “feminine”, “domestic”, “conservative” or “political”, “liberal”, “radical”. Other than Barbauld, those that have been most consistently labelled “conservative” include Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and Jane West, but have also included Ann Radcliffe, Frances Burney, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, amongst others. Those labelled “radical” include Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Helena Maria Williams and Mary Hays. As observed above, this categorisation rarely stands the test of time: another critic will arrive at a different conclusion, often quite the opposite. In chapter one this problem will be explored more closely with respect to Wollstonecraft, whose “radical” categorisation was tested quite keenly in the 1990s and early twenty-first century, when feminist critics became particularly uneasy about her rejection of female passion. As I will show, some, like William Stafford, even began to suggest that she was not at all radical. Clearly, the problem is not with the writers themselves: they have not changed, they have always been inconsistent and contradictory—which, I will contend, is not a bad thing—the problem must, therefore, be with ourselves, and the labels that we choose to apply.

A number of critics like Guest and McCarthy have realised that women writers do not sit comfortably in binaries such as those outlined above. Eve Tavor Bannet has suggested that the problem originated in the late 1980s, when Janet Todd identified ‘conservative’ or ‘radical/liberal’ currents which she believed persisted throughout the



long eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> As Bannet explains, Todd defined the term “conservative” in very broad terms, as “a nostalgic apprehension of a hierarchical and organic past, sometimes a desire to reassert traditional moral values and sometimes a yearning for external authority”, while she used the term “liberal” or “radical” to mean “a whole spectrum of values from Old Whig notions and through Dissenting ones to those reviled by conservatives as “Jacobin””.<sup>27</sup> Bannet suggests that while this was helpful in a great many ways, making visible the extent to which feminist revisionings of history had focused on the liberal tradition and prompting critics to redress the imbalance by reconsidering the impact of “conservative” women writers, the ‘binary topography created by the division of Enlightenment women writers into conservative and liberals or radicals also proved to have disadvantages’, primarily because the terms themselves carried ‘assumptions’, which steadily became all the more apparent.<sup>28</sup> Instead, Bannet recommends a new binary:

Describing Enlightenment women writers as Matriarchs and Egalitarians to distinguish them from their more patriarchal, liberal or conservative, contemporaries is an important step towards complicating the binary view and making it possible to explore the interplay of diverse domestic and political agendas.<sup>29</sup>

Importantly, however, Bannet clearly believes that liberal or conservative writers exist alongside these “Matriarchs” and “Egalitarians”, and moreover, the entire group is still trapped in a binary, pigeonholed as Matriarchs and Egalitarians, terms which remain problematic.

Over the next four chapters, I will outline the ways in which Bannet’s suspicion of binaries does not go deep enough, nor her suggestion that the problem

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<sup>26</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet, ‘Enlightenment Feminisms and the Domestic Novel’, in *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 2000), p.4

<sup>27</sup> Bannet, p.4; Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: women, writing and fiction 1600-1800* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989), p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Bannet, p.4-5

<sup>29</sup> Bannet, p.5

originated in the 1980s go far enough back in time. Instead, I will argue that the need to assign binaries originated a long time before—probably as far back as twenty-three hundred years ago, during Aristotle’s lifetime. Chapter one will explore this in some detail, suggesting that the problem can be located in the principle of Aristotle’s Law of the Excluded Middle. This is the idea that for any proposition, that proposition is true or its negation is—there are no grey areas, there is no middle ground. It came, as I will show, to have particular significance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the philosophies of John Locke (1632- 1704) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), which is when it became attached to women writers. Crucially, I will not suggest that the principle is wrong, just that its application to women writers is, precisely because their work is too full of grey areas.

Locating the issue is only half the problem; the next step is to find a vehicle in which these writers can be assessed. One way (and I will suggest that there are others) might be to return to logic, from whence the problem came, which can offer many ways of dealing with subtleties through a variety of “systems”. Through this, we might be able to understand ambiguity, inconsistency and contradiction, which pervade the work of female writers, as “fuzziness”. Fuzzy Theory was developed from Lotfi Zadeh’s Fuzzy Set Theory in the 1950s as a way of dealing with reasoning that can be approximate, rather than exact. It is the antithesis of the Law of the Excluded Middle because (on a very basic level) it allows for grey areas. As critics, we are often put off by fuzziness and ambiguity— the Law of the Excluded Middle urges us to find a definitive truth, even if it does not sit comfortably. But logicians, particularly those working in the fields of control theory (a branch of engineering and mathematics), are more at ease with the idea that some things are simply inherently fuzzy; they understand that ambiguity or fuzziness can be a good thing. It can be a

good for critics too. Fuzziness in the work of female writers has a way of giving that work life and drawing the reader in. It also stops the reader from ignoring little details that do not fit their original interpretation and allows them to incorporate the unexpected.

Of course, fuzziness needs more careful management. Fuzzy Set Theory was developed by Zadeh so that scientists and mathematicians might be able to deal with such fuzziness. It was an extension of Set Theory, which assessed the membership of elements in binaric terms: an element either belonged, or it did not. For example: in a “set of men”, any element would either be “in” (if it was a man) or “out” (if it was a woman, an animal, or anything other than a man). By contrast, Fuzzy Set Theory permits the *gradual* assessment of the membership of elements in a set: allowing for *degrees* of membership. In a set of “handsome men”, it might not be clear if someone belonged or did not; membership would not be clear—it would have to be gradually assessed. The same applies to a woman writer: a critic might say that “women writers have a social conscience”, but the problem with this is that “social conscience” might mean different things to different people: it is an ambiguous term. The critic would have to understand this, before gradually building up the membership of each writer into that set. In other words, he or she will build up a picture of each female writer’s social conscience, as defined by them. Crucially, Fuzzy Set Theory does not need to specify everything in detail: the “system” can be roughly defined. Moreover, Fuzzy Set Theory does not look for “yes” or “no” answers: there are times when we need an *intermediate* answer. The critic would not therefore say “Wollstonecraft, Macaulay and Williams have a social conscience, while Smith, Robinson and Burney do not”. Alternatively, he or she might say: “All six writers express elements of a social

conscience, Wollstonecraft, Macaulay and Williams more explicitly than Smith, Robinson and Burney”): there are, therefore, degrees of membership.

This is, of course, a very loose understanding of Fuzzy Theory and Fuzzy Set Theory. It should not be understood as an extension of logic, or, indeed, even as a representation of it. Logicians will not find anything useful here, and may even feel uncomfortable with the way in which the theory is manipulated. As logician Richard Milton Martin suggests, however:

[logic] should not be thought of as being frozen once and for all. It should not be thought of as a ‘straitjacket’ but rather as a pliable instrument with all kinds of built-in devices for adjusting itself to given subject matters.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, by appropriating this single branch of logic, refigured and revised, to the field of eighteenth-century criticism, I will outline just one possible tool that can be used to show that women writers require more careful critical treatment, that they are inconsistent, contradictory and ambiguous, but that this does not have to cause problems. It will encourage critics to accept fuzziness, to change their perspective, to stop thinking in boxes or binaries which are outdated, and to start thinking of “gradual assessment” and intermediacy. It is just one way of envisioning women writers.

Importantly, if we start with logic, which by nature encourages self-questioning, then other issues with regards to women writers become more noticeable. Throughout the thesis I will observe several problems that resurface time and again in criticism which will allow me to develop each set. Chapter one will outline quite a few of these problems, including the Problem of Translation, of biography, of biographical interpretation and Dangerous Association, before they are developed in following chapters. It will also explore a large range of binaries— indeed, the thesis will be full of binaries— sexual, religious, medical, as well as those already revealed

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Milton Martin, *Pragmatics, Truth, and Language* (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1979), p.289

above, such as the radical/conservative, feminine/masculine. As such, the Fuzzy Sets incorporated into this thesis have not been picked at random. Each one serves a specific purpose, to undermine the assumptions about binaries, to explore the problems outlined above, to test the limits of the Fuzzy Set Theory, and to develop it further. Thus, in chapter one, I will explore the ways in which Wollstonecraft, who has dominated investigations into the works of female writers from this period, has caused a variety of difficulties for critics, from her rejection of female passion (as indicated above); the misrepresentation of her life and work by her husband William Godwin; the way in which she is consistently compared and contrasted with other female writers, and often used against them. It will also show how contemporary literary theory can be used to bring two writers together in a Fuzzy Set, and suggest that while Macaulay has frequently only been considered as Wollstonecraft's "muse", as providing the seeds for Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, in this set, their differences can be observed in the sense that while they both appear to anticipate contemporary literary theory, Macaulay's understanding of sex and gender is more multifaceted than Wollstonecraft's. Chapter two will develop the idea of Dangerous Association, exploring the ways in which associations between writers, or even family members, can lead to binaries, in which one woman will always appear to be less successful, less brilliant, or less open-minded. It will examine two writers who have been consistently paired with another: Hays (who has often been paired with Wollstonecraft) and Lucy Aikin (who critics only ever encounter through the works of Barbauld). These pairings will be examined within the context of the problem of biography, a genre which is inherently fuzzy. It will demonstrate the ways in which a critic might deal with unusual patterns, bias, misrepresentation and complex biographical debates. The theme of complex discourse remains the focus for chapter

three. This Fuzzy Set will examine the midwifery debate, which although initially appearing straightforward, soon reveals several fuzzy layers. It will, for example, examine the ways in which some debates continue to have significance for contemporary society—a link of continuity or endurance—effecting our interpretation and understanding of debate in the eighteenth century, and will seek to understand the ways in which the lives of writers such as Charlotte Smith and Barbauld feed into the discourse, creating tension and fuzziness between lived experience and medically visioned understandings of childbirth. Building on from the idea that women writers use personal experiences in their writing, chapter four will show how critics can engage with a writer who has been so completely categorised that we now only recognise her as a prophetess. Joanna Southcott's writings, which were pulled from her visions, will be considered within a Fuzzy Set that will also incorporate Hannah More, isolating the fuzzy margins of their writings in order to show how Dangerous Association can work more positively, bringing writers who have survived on the fringes of critical analysis back into main-stream.

Many of these issues have already been observed with respect to Barbauld, outlined at the beginning of this introduction. I revealed, for instance, that I had only come across Barbauld's poetry while reading Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, in which 'To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers' had been attacked. This almost certainly influenced my original interpretation of Barbauld's poetry and is just one way in which Dangerous Association can work. Indeed, a large proportion of critics tend to approach Barbauld's work in this way, and measure her against Wollstonecraft—just because the writers appear to have briefly engaged in a dispute about women's rights and how the debate should be approached. Barbauld also appears to have been trapped in a number of other binaries. The word most

consistently applied to Barbauld in the opening paragraphs of this introduction—whether or not Barbauld was feminine as a writer (or as a person)—seems wholly inadequate as a term and an understanding, confining her, and her work, to one of the most obvious binaries I have identified. In the conclusion I will return to Barbauld, and the poem ‘To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers’, and draw out these connections more fully, linking them to other women writers I will have discussed, and revealing the ways in which this poem can be understood within a Fuzzy Set.

Ultimately, this thesis is about freedom: freedom for women writers to be who they are without being confined, freedom for critics to consider these writers without being restrained. Freedom is, after all, what the work of these female writers is all about, at a time when their freedom of expression within the public sphere was being controlled. For these writers, happiness was to be found in the freedom to study and write, to make choices, and to participate fully in society. ‘This is an age of controversy’, said Mary Hays in *Cursory Remarks* (1791), ‘and all who love truth must rejoice in seeing the spirit of freedom and enquiry universally disseminated’.<sup>31</sup> The political writings of most agreed: ‘liberty is the mother of virtue’, explained Wollstonecraft, but should be ‘fair and proportioned’,<sup>32</sup> insisted More, while Barbauld employed the plight of a mouse to highlight the importance of liberty and to critique masculine values:

If e’er thy breast with freedom glow’d  
And spurn’d a tyrant’s chain  
Let not thy strong oppressive force  
A free-born mouse detain.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Hays, ‘Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship’, in *The Idea of Being Free: A Mary Hays Reader*, ed. by Gina Luria Walker (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 2006), p.124

<sup>32</sup> Wollstonecraft, p.147 and Hannah More, *Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont: Made in the National Convention of France on the Subjects of Religion and Public Education* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1793), p.21

<sup>33</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, ‘The Mouse’s Petition’, in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ont, Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), p.71, ll.9-12

If we lose sight of this value, this common female cause, then we lose sight of the importance of freedom and we forget to test its limits—both in the context of criticism and in the wider context of our own society.



**Chapter I: 'The Unsex'd Females': the Law of the Excluded Middle, Fuzzy Set**

**Theory and the Heterosexual Matrix**

See Wollstonecraft, whom no decorum checks,  
 Arise, the intrepid champion of her sex;  
 O'er humbled man assert the sovereign claim,  
 And slight the timid blush of virgin fame.  
 [...]  
 She spoke: and veteran BARBAULD caught the strain,  
 And deem'd her songs of Love, her Lyrics vain;  
 And ROBINSON to Gaul her Fancy gave,  
 And trac'd the picture of a Deist's grave!  
 And charming SMITH resign'd her power to please,  
 Poetic feeling and poetic ease;  
 And HELEN, fir'd by Freedom, bade adieu  
 To all the broken visions of Peru;  
 And YEARSELEY, who had warbled, Nature's child,  
 Midst twilight dews, her minstrel ditties wild,  
 (Tho' soon a wanderer from her meads and milk,  
 She long'd to rustle, like her sex, in silk)  
 Now stole the modish grin, the sapient sneer,  
 And flippant HAYS assum'd a cynic leer;  
 While classic KAUFFMAN her Priapus drew,  
 And linger'd a sweet blush with EMMA CREWE.  
 [...]  
 'O come (a voice seraphic seems to say)  
 Fly that pale form — come sisters! come away.  
 Come, from those livid limbs withdraw your gaze,  
 Those limbs which Virtue views in mute amaze;  
 Nor deem, that Genius lends a veil, to hide  
 The dire apostate, the fell suicide.—  
 Come, join, with wonted smiles, a kindred train,  
 Who court, like you, the Muse; nor court in vain.  
 Mark, where the sex have oft, in ancient days,  
 To modest Virtue, claim'd a nation's praise;  
 Chas'd from the public scene the fiend of strife,  
 And shed a radiance o'er luxurious life;  
 In silken fetters bound the obedient throng,  
 And soften'd despots by the power of song.  
 'Yet woman owns a more extensive sway  
 Where Heaven's own graces pour the living ray:  
 And vast its influence o'er the social ties,  
 By Heaven inform'd, if female genius rise —  
 Its power how vast, in critic wisdom sage,  
 If MONTAGUE refine a letter'd age;  
 And CARTER, with a milder air, diffuse  
 The moral precepts of the Grecian Muse;  
 And listening girls perceive a charm unknown  
 In grave advice, as utter'd by CHAPONE;

If SEWARD sting with rapture every vein,  
 Or gay PIOZZI sport in lighter strain;  
 If BURNEY mix with sparkling humour chaste  
 Delicious feelings and the purest taste,  
 Or RADCLIFFE wrap in necromantic gloom  
 The impervious forest and the mystic dome;  
 If BEAUCLERK paint Lenora's spectre-horse,  
 The uplifted lance of death, the grisly corse;  
 And e'en a Princess lend poetic grace  
 The pencil's charm, and breathe in every trace.<sup>1</sup>  
 She ceas'd and round their MORE the sisters sigh'd!  
 Soft on each tongue repentant murmurs died;  
 And sweetly scatter'd (as they glanc'd away)  
 Their conscious 'blushes spoke a brighter day.'<sup>1</sup>

Robert Polwhele's poem, written in 1798 in response to Thomas James Mathias' satirical attack 'The Pursuits of Literature' (1794), not only absorbs contemporary anxieties regarding the role of women writers in society, but also outlines a series of binaries that persist even to the present day. Polwhele clearly positions female writers on two opposing ends of a binary, identified by William Stafford as the 'unsex'd' and the 'proper' woman writer.<sup>2</sup> The "unsex'd" camp is led by Mary Wollstonecraft, and followed by Anna Letitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Helena Maria Williams, Mary Hays, and two artists—Angelica Kauffmann and Emma Crewe. In the "proper" camp, Polwhele lists Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, Anna Seward, Hester Lynch Piozzi, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Hannah More, and further two female artists—Lady Diana Beauclerk and Princess Elizabeth. This binary logic has, according to Stafford, been erected upon 'a fundamental gender binary, namely the presence or absence of a phallus'.<sup>3</sup> In his view, therefore, to be an "unsex'd" female writer is to be masculine,

<sup>1</sup> Robert Polwhele, 'The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature' (London; Printed for Cadell and Davies, in the Strand, 1798), ll.63-66, ll.91-106, ll.169-206.

<sup>2</sup> 'Women writers were evidently being marshalled into rival camps in the 1790s [...] Above all male antijacobin writers set out to establish a contrast between 'proper', approved women writers and their detested antitypes'. William Stafford, 'Unsex'd Females and Proper Women Writers', in *English Feminists and their Opponents* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Stafford, p.43

and to be a “proper” female writer is to be feminine. By reconstructing the binary in this way, Stafford translates Polwhele’s poem into a language that has more relevance to the field of post-structural feminism, by which modern scholars can more easily critique. But Stafford is troubled by this new binary:

After examining the writings of ‘unsex’d and ‘proper’ female writers, one is left with the sense that the gender binary has been undermined or hollowed out; everything of solid substance has been extracted. Any basis of femininity in a lack of intellect, or reason, or genius, or courage, or strength of mind, in a natural or irremediable excess of sensibility not to be found in men, has been subverted or challenged. All that is left is our outer surface, the appearance of gender difference [...].<sup>4</sup>

As Stafford realises, Hannah More— here pictured as one of Polwhele’s “proper” female writers— was a critic of female sensibility, while writers such as Mary Robinson and even Mary Wollstonecraft were often advocates for it.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as briefly explored in the introduction, Anna Letitia Barbauld had endured a complex critical reception, her early poems dismissed as those of a ‘pretty poetess’, and her later poems and essays rejected as too masculine. She was admired by Polwhele as a poet and critic, but he was troubled by her involvement in various controversial debates.<sup>6</sup> Stafford notes that contradictions such as these make it impossible to find a ‘strong and sharp construction of gender polarity in texts by “unsex’d” and “proper” female writers around reason, intellectual power, genius or sensibility.’<sup>7</sup> Instead of, therefore, throwing out these binaries, he clings to a thinly veiled modification: ‘Is it to be found in terms of a contrast between feminine modesty and masculine assertiveness? This looks promising’.<sup>8</sup> The remark itself seems unconvincing: what makes modesty feminine and assertiveness masculine? Why must this gendering, of writers, and of the terms that characterise them, persist? And where did this binaric

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<sup>4</sup> Stafford, p.200

<sup>5</sup> Stafford, p.219

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Barbauld and Polwhele will be explored more thoroughly in the conclusion.

<sup>7</sup> Stafford, p.196

<sup>8</sup> Stafford, p.196

fascination, this need to martial female writers into opposing camps— sometimes gendered, sometimes simply “radical” or “conservative”, “assertive” and “modest”— come from?

Stafford’s treatment of Wollstonecraft shows the extent of his unease with his proposed new binary: ‘so many of the opinions of that book [the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*] were extreme, not shared by other radical women’.<sup>9</sup> Like Polwhele, he is particularly troubled by this writer’s antagonism towards the feminine, though for quite different reasons. In his view, she is ‘conventionally masculine’,<sup>10</sup> employing a masculine rhetoric, failing to challenge patriarchal complicity and offering an ‘essentially masculine conception of the public sphere’, with the opportunity to enter in it, only by ‘adopting masculine characteristics’.<sup>11</sup> This, he believes, makes her misogynist—no other “unsex’d” or “proper” female writer is as critical of women as she is’.<sup>12</sup> Stafford’s binary has, then, failed at the first hurdle: the problem of Wollstonecraft. The first woman to be named in Polwhele’s poem, and the only one to be extensively attacked by him, the first woman to write explicitly and comprehensively on women’s rights, should, by all accounts, be the easiest to categorise as feminist. Yet, Stafford believes that in her language ‘there is no liberation for women’;<sup>13</sup> hers is a ‘cold, distanced, masculine rationality’, unlike Mary Hays and her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), which, he believes, can be celebrated as possessing ‘distinctively [a] woman’s voice’.<sup>14</sup> Stafford’s answer is to exclude the problem entirely from the binary— ‘decentering’ Wollstonecraft and the *Rights of Woman*.

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<sup>9</sup> Stafford, p.219

<sup>10</sup> Stafford, p.184

<sup>11</sup> Stafford, p.48

<sup>12</sup> Stafford, p.219

<sup>13</sup> Stafford, p.184

<sup>14</sup> Stafford, p.220

### 1.1: The Law of the Excluded Middle and Fuzzy Sets

Certainly Stafford is not alone. It has long been our practice to find a label, and, more specifically, a binary with which to brand female writers. As can be seen here with the “proper” and “unsex’d” binary, this often comes directly from the eighteenth century itself, pulled from literature like Polwhele’s poem, refigured and transformed for criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The tradition is ingrained, stemming back thousands of years to early Ancient Greek philosophy, classic logic and the Law of the Excluded Middle. Here, the earliest form of the Law of the Excluded Middle can be found in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. This, and the Law of Contradiction, relate to Socrates’ principle of the law of identity, which divides the Universe into two parts: self and other, thus creating a dichotomy in which two parts are jointly exhaustive (belonging to one part or the other), and mutually exclusive (and therefore cannot simultaneously belong to both parts). The principle of the excluded middle correlates with the mutually exclusive aspect of this dichotomy.

In *Metaphysics*, while Aristotle was clear that there cannot be an intermediate between contradictions he did allow that ambiguity can arise if ambiguous terms (or names) are employed:

It is not, therefore, possible that being in man signifies the same particular thing as the not being man [...] and it will not be possible that the same thing be and not be, save by equivocation; just as we would call any one a man whom others would [sic] call a not-man. The subject of doubt, however, is not this, if it is possible that the same thing at the same time should be and not be the man nominally.<sup>15</sup>

He did, however, insist that it was ‘impossible that contradictories should be at the same time true of the same thing’, explaining that “extremes” are impossible to avoid:

Either will there be a mean between contradiction, as that of a darkish colour between black and white, or it will be as that which is neutral between man

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 5, Chapter IV, trans. By John H McMahon (Mineola; New York: Dover Publications, 2007), p.71

and horse. If, therefore, this subsist in this way, there would be no change, (for a change takes place from something that is not good into that which is good, or from this latter into what is not good); but now it is always apparent as taking place, *for there is not a change existing but one into opposites and media* [my emphasis].<sup>16</sup>

By the seventeenth century, philosophers had begun to explore Logic in more detail, sketching several fundamental philosophical principles, including the principles of identity and contradiction. In the second volume of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), John Locke, a philosopher whose work exercised a profound influence upon the next generation of Enlightenment thinkers, had alluded to these principles, building on and borrowing from Aristotle and René Descartes. Although he did not go into any significant detail, the Law of the Excluded Middle (and especially the Law of Contradiction) are still discernible. Chapter VII, ‘Maxims’, rests principally on the idea that a proposition such as ‘*It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be*’ is a maxim, and one to which the mind admits no doubt or uncertainty:

These two general Maxims [“Whatsoever is, is” (the law of identity:  $A \equiv A$ ), and “It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be” (the Law of the Excluded Middle/Contradiction)] amounting to no more in short but this, that the same is the same, and same is not different, are Truths known in more particular Instances, as well as in these general Maxims, and known also in particular Instances, before these general Maxims are ever thought on, and draw all their Force from the Discernment of the Mind imploy'd about particular Ideas. There is nothing more visible than that the Mind, without the help of any Proof, or Reflection on either of these general Propositions, perceives so clearly, and knows so certainly, that the Idea of White is the Idea of White, and not the Idea of Blue; and that the Idea of White, when it is in the Mind, is there, and is not absent; that the Consideration of these Axioms can add nothing to the Evidence or Certainty of its Knowledg[e].<sup>17</sup>

In fact, Locke is suggesting that the Law of Contradiction and the Law of the Excluded Middle are inescapable; our minds are drawn to them, believing them to be entirely certain. Gottfried Leibniz, writing in the early eighteenth century, agreed.

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<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, p.85

<sup>17</sup> John Locke, ‘On Maxims’, *The Works of John Locke Esq.*, trans. unknown (London: John Churchill and Sam Manship, 1722), p.277.

Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding*, written between 1695 and 1705 but unpublished until after his death in 1765, commented extensively on Locke's *Essay*, extensively critiquing and developing aspects of his argument chapter by chapter in a dialogue between two friends, Philalethes (Locke) and Theophilus (Leibniz). Conscious that Locke's views on contradiction were underdeveloped (Philalethes thanks Theophilus for expanding his ideas on intuitive knowledge), Leibniz outlines this more extensively, and appears to anticipate modern logic, formulating an argument in which the Law of the Excluded Middle is ever more perceptible. In book IV, chapter II, he too suggests that it is inescapable, first by familiarising the reader with Locke's thoughts on those maxims that make up intuition:

the mind perceived the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other... In this, the mind is at no pains of proving or examining... the truth[. As the eye sees light, so] the mind perceives, that white is not black, that a circle is not a triangle, that three [is] one and two. [This] knowledge is the clearest, and most certain, that human frailty is capable of. It acts in an 'irresistible' manner, and leaves the mind 'no room for hesitation'.<sup>18</sup>

Leibniz agrees, and extends the argument further, identifying two types of intuition:

The primary truths which we know by 'intuition' are of two sorts, as are the derivative ones. They are either truths of reason [Law of Contradiction] or truths of fact. Truths of reason are necessary, and those of fact are contingent. The primary truths of reason are the ones to which I give the general name 'identities', because they seem to do nothing but repeat the same thing without telling us anything. They are either affirmative or negative. [...] [Negative identities] derive from either the principle of contradiction or from 'disparities'. Stated generally, the principle of contradiction is: *a proposition is either true or false*. This contains two assertions: first, that truth and falsity are incompatible in a single proposition, i.e. *that a proposition cannot be both true and false at once*; and second, that the contradictories or negations of the true and false are not compatible, i.e. that there is nothing intermediate between the true and false, or better that *it cannot happen that a proposition is neither true nor false*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Trans. and ed. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Francis Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), IV.II 361-2

<sup>19</sup> Leibniz, IV.II 362

The Law of Contradiction and the Law of the Excluded Middle are here, for the first time, explicit. Moreover, Leibniz proved just how enticing these truths of reason could be; neither he nor Locke admitted the possibility that there might be some instances where there might actually be an intermediate between true and false.

In the early twentieth century, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell formally identified this principle as the Law of the Excluded Middle, in their *Principia Mathematica* (1910), ascribing it to the formula  $\sim p \vee p$ . Logic had come to have far more significance in the fields of Mathematics, and later, computer engineering, than it had for criticism. As such, somewhere in the early twentieth century, there appears to have been a split. The fields of literary criticism became stuck in this realm of classic logic, while in Mathematics and Analytical Philosophy, new understandings quickly moved forward. In the 1920s the Law of the Excluded Middle was officially challenged by Jan Łukasiewicz, a Polish mathematical and analytical logician, who offered a third or “possible” value (other than just true or false): ternary logic. Ironically, it had first been Aristotle who suggested that his laws (which included the Law of Contradiction) did not necessarily apply to future propositions, explained as: ‘nothing is possible except what actually happens: there are no unactualized possibilities’.<sup>20</sup> Although Aristotle did not offer an explicit alternative, Łukasiewicz undoubtedly realised this gap in classic logic and paved the way for many-valued logic, which would have extraordinary implications for the next generation of philosophers and mathematicians.

Within sixty years, multi-valued logic had transformed the modern world. This new world of technology required logic that was not so rigid in application and could allow for the imprecise, for paradoxes, inconsistency, contradiction. In 1950,

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<sup>20</sup> Robin Smith, ‘Aristotle's Logic’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/aristotlelogic/>><http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-logic/> [accessed January 2011].



Fuzzy logic emerged from the development of Fuzzy Set Theory, which had in turn risen from the classical notion of set. Late in the nineteenth century, John Venn had designed the Venn diagram, to demonstrate how differing (even opposite) subjects might have correlations (fig. 1). This was the first time that an intermediate, or grey area, was permitted in the analysis of a particular, ambiguous subject. It was a concept that some critics found useful, but led to further restriction with regards to women writers, whose correlations were never anything other than based on gender (fig. 2).

Fig.1: Venn Diagram

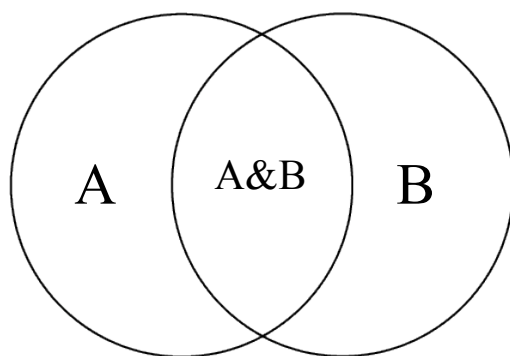
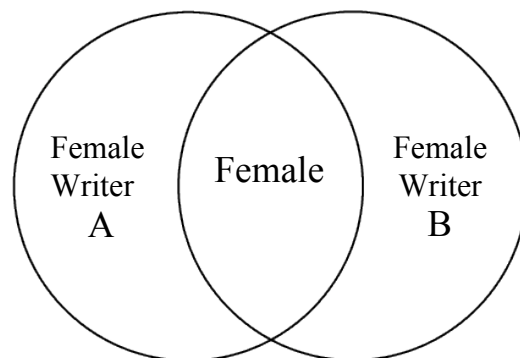


Fig. 2: Venn Diagram signifying gender



From the traditional notion of sets, Lotfi A. Zedah developed Fuzzy Sets— doing away with rigid parameters that had no flexibility.<sup>21</sup> As outlined in the introduction, Fuzzy Sets, by contrast, permit the gradual assessment of elements in a set, rather than relying on elements that are assessed in binaric terms (the principle of bivalence, or, contradiction). Put simply, Fuzzy Sets do away with binaries, the Law of the Excluded Middle, and the Law of Contradiction, and allow for subjects to be imprecise, and changeable.

<sup>21</sup> In a traditional or conventional set, Masao Mukaidono explains that ‘it must be clear whether any element is “in” or “out”, for example a set of men or a set of integers. If it is not clear, it can not be called a set’. Masao Mukaidono, *Fuzzy Logic for Beginners* (London; Singapore; River Edge, NJ: World Scientific, c2001), p.17.

Using the traditional notion of set, a computer scientist fixes the values (say, 0 and 1) of a system, so that a computer can produce results. Quite often, however, these results will be wrong. Musao Mukaidono suggests that this is reasonable: ‘In most cases, the computation is correct, but the temporarily fixed parameters cause the error. That is, the failure is caused because what is ambiguous is forced to be fixed.’<sup>22</sup> In his view, ambiguity should be treated for what it is. In the case of critics, the problem is very much the same: when examining a particular female writer, the critic will temporarily fix the parameters of his “system” or analysis. More often than not, these parameters will be based on how radical the writer is, or how feminine a poem appears to be, etc. The “computation”, or process of analysis, will be detailed, with insightful, even revealing, ideas, but the ultimate output, or result, might appear inaccurate. Another critic might easily move in and argue quite the opposite, using the same method and a different, but equally mistaken parameter.

Once we recognise the fault, however, it can be easily fixed. The critic must first choose his or her own set. This set can be anything, and the possibilities are limitless. In this chapter I choose the heterosexual matrix—a common, shared value—in the works of Wollstonecraft and Macaulay. It will seek to understand the ways in which these two writers negotiated sex and gender in their work, anticipating the literary theory of Judith Butler, and will look to the margins of their work where their writing is especially fuzzy. (It also usefully outlines the way in which eighteenth-century discourses can continue to have meaning today—a link of continuity, or endurance, between eighteenth-century writers and contemporary theorists, a phenomena which will become particularly important in chapter three, with the midwifery discourse.) Both writers have been problematic for critics, not

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<sup>22</sup> Mukaidono, p.19

least because of their close association. As such, the fuzziness within each will have to be addressed before it can be incorporated into the Fuzzy Set. Importantly, however, the set will not force labels on these writers. It will notice patterns, and draw the reader's attention to interesting correlations, but it will not assume and it will not force a yes/no answer—there will be no parameters, no binaries. This chapter will not, therefore, argue that Macaulay was more “radical” than Wollstonecraft, although it will notice differences between them. Thus, the position of women within the set will embrace ambiguity, and will adapt to inconsistency. Crucially, the set will be added to by other critics, and over time the picture of each topic will become broad, variable, colourful—an expression of the writer it wishes to analyse, rather than a rigid, restrictive assumption.

The first hurdle is, however, to recognise that women writers are fuzzy, and that this fuzziness can be problematic, if it is ignored. Although he fell back into the trap of the Law of the Excluded Middle, Stafford had, unwittingly, realised this very fact in outlining and demonstrating the problems with Polwhele's binary when he said: ‘We have failed to find a strong and sharp construction of gender polarity in texts by “unsex'd” and “proper” females’.<sup>23</sup> Nor is he alone. In her progressive essay ‘Vindication of the Writings of Woman: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Enlightenment Rhetoric’, Miriam Brody had, in 1996, similarly recognised that Wollstonecraft was inherently fuzzy:

she has been generous to us after her death. We can find all we are looking for. One reader may argue that Wollstonecraft is a reformer, advocating the limited advances of education of women, but reserving sexual spheres of work that consigned them to the domestic or private half of human labor. Another may claim that Wollstonecraft is a revolutionary, more radically undermining

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<sup>23</sup> Stafford, p.196

prevailing codes and masculine genres in the apostrophes, expostulations, and digressions that mark her text.<sup>24</sup>

So too, has Mary Lyndon Shanley observed in Hilda L. Smith's *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, that '[a]lthough she deeply engaged the political issues of her day, Wollstonecraft's ideas concerning women and political life have defied ready categorization',<sup>25</sup> while Ashley Tauchert has indicated that Wollstonecraft shifts almost imperceptibly between feminist, lesbian or transgendered categorization.<sup>26</sup> In her equally perceptive introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Claudia Johnson also notes that Wollstonecraft displays 'sudden fluctuations of tone and mood' and a diversity that has proved confounding, arguing that she seems to 'elude our efforts to categorize or even name her [as a novelist, educationalist, theorist and so forth]'.<sup>27</sup> In the same volume, Andrew Elfenbein also notes in his essay 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius', that Wollstonecraft consciously blends her language, making it difficult for one to categorise her rhetoric as either masculine or feminine, thus eluding a binary that has been consistently applied to her:

She skillfully sets off feminized characteristics like the 'warm sketches of fancy' with masculinized descriptions of 'intractable spirits' so that no one gender has a monopoly on genius's traits. She also uses biological and scientific phrases like 'animal spirits' and 'subtile electric fluid' to avoid locating genius in one gender. As she describes it, genius has the privilege of avoiding all conventions of categorization.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Miriam Brody, 'The Vindication of the Writings of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Enlightenment Rhetoric', in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Maria J. Falco (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p.105

<sup>25</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Sensibility, Women's Rights, and Patriarchal Power', in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. by Hilda L. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.148-9.

<sup>26</sup> Ashley Tauchert, 'Feminist, Lesbian or Transgendered', in *Exclusions in Feminist Thought: Challenging the Boundaries of Womanhood* ed. by Mary F. Bewer (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), p.236

<sup>27</sup> Claudia Johnson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.3

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia Johnson, p.239

These critics have, in some way, shown that female writers such as Wollstonecraft (and especially she) cannot be pigeonholed. Once they accept this ambiguity, their representation of Wollstonecraft is more successful, their arguments free of assumptions, restraints and contradictions.

## **1.2: The Problem of Translation and Mary Wollstonecraft's masculine rhetoric**

Elfenbein's essay alludes to a debate about Wollstonecraft's masculine rhetoric, which has been troubling and provoking feminist critics in equal measure, and relates to a further logical problem—the Problem of Translation. Writing the introduction to his *Aristotle's "best regime": Kingship, Democracy, and the Rule of Law*, Clifford Angell Bates noted the problems he had encountered when relying on translations from Ancient Greek into English:

all translations are by implication interpretations. Since we have no direct access to the language of the object of inquiry, we have to make working assumptions about it based upon scholarly consensus about the language. Those assumptions are now the basis of our understanding of the text. But in doing so we must be suspicious of translations when we attempt to interpret.<sup>29</sup>

His argument is, perhaps, obvious to many scholars involved in the translation of ancient texts and the wealth of scholarship that surrounds them. Their way of overcoming this problem is to 'discuss the Greek text itself and not rely merely upon interpretations'.<sup>30</sup> This is, again, reasonable. Yet, modern literature post-1650 (and even, perhaps, before), has been treated without this care and attention. Critics believe that because the language they encounter very much resembles our own, requiring only minimal translation, it does not require the same management. C.S Lewis had recognised as much in his *Studies in Words* (1960), written to demonstrate

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<sup>29</sup> Clifford Angell Bates, *Aristotle's "best regime": Kingship, Democracy, and the Rule of Law* (Louisiana State University Press: Louisiana, 2003), p.11.

<sup>30</sup> Bates, p.11

how definitions of words from previous centuries, even from the nineteenth century, might be different today:

Indeed I am ashamed to remember for how many years, as a boy and a young man, I read nineteenth century fiction without noticing how often its language differed from ours. I believe it was work on far earlier English that opened my eyes: for there a man is not so easily deceived into thinking he understands when he does not.<sup>31</sup>

In his study of books from both the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Lewis saw how language from these periods required elucidation ‘not very much more rarely, and in a more subtle way’, than that from texts of the eleventh or twelfth centuries.<sup>32</sup>

In his view, texts in which the language very much resembles our own have led to years of misreading, because the reader interpolates senses other than those the author intended.<sup>33</sup> A critic might think that he understands a word, but in fact he has completely misunderstood: this Lewis calls ‘verbicide’.<sup>34</sup> Yet, in spite of Lewis’ work, the Problem of Translation can, and does, still exist, particularly with respect to the work of female writers, and consistently with regards to Wollstonecraft.

Wollstonecraft is, perhaps, unique in being one of the only writers from this period to recognise that certain expressions are inadequate and are at risk of being misinterpreted and misapplied. In her *Rights of Woman*, she took particular offense to the word “masculine”:

—from every quarter have I heard exclamations against masculine women, but where are they to be found? If by this appellation men mean to inveigh against their ardour in hunting, shooting and gaming, I shall most cordially join in the cry; but if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal being, when they are comprehensively termed mankind; —all those

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<sup>31</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.311

<sup>32</sup> Lewis, p.i

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, p.i

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, p.7

who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may, every day grow more and more masculine.<sup>35</sup>

As a writer Wollstonecraft had herself taken the brunt of this criticism. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Man* had deliberately turned its back on the sensibility of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in favour of an apparent "masculine" rhetoric—which, in Ashley Tauchert's opinion, was a 'violent foreclosure of femininity'.<sup>36</sup> The *Rights of Woman*, however, as many have noted, is inconsistent in its tone. At times, it seems torn between defending women writers from being called masculine and at other times, arguing, as this passage does, in favour of women becoming ever more masculine in their pursuits. As Wollstonecraft rightly admits, 'the word masculine is a bugbear' (*Rights of Woman*, p.113)—it is not that she wishes women were more masculine, or less feminine, but that she wishes to revise the common notion that values females 'rather as women than human creatures' (*Rights of Woman*, p.109). As Sylvana Tomaselli notes, she reasons with them, 'like a man, that is, a *rational creature*' [my emphasis].<sup>37</sup> In Wollstonecraft's view, the term 'masculine' (and indeed feminine) is outdated and redundant; a more appropriate understanding of woman is required: 'the first laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex' (*Rights of Woman*, p.112). In spite of this ambition, she often struggles to conceive such an appropriate understanding, or term. At various instances she employs 'mankind' (*Rights of Woman*, p.110), 'human creatures' (*Rights of Woman*, p.109), 'human being' (*Rights of Woman*, p.112), in an effort to unite the two sexes under one roof.

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, 'The Vindications of the Rights of Woman' in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1997), p.110. All subsequent line references are from this edition, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>36</sup> Ashley Tauchert, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Accent of the Feminine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.56

<sup>37</sup> Sylvana Tomaselli, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men; with, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and Hints* (Cambridge; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.xxvi.

As Barbara Taylor suggests, Wollstonecraft is trying to see herself as ‘a woman *sans* woman, a self undivided by sexual distinctions’.<sup>38</sup> This, however, falls flat when she acknowledges women’s physical (and sexual) inferiority— an apparent undeniable reality that she is unable to negotiate. As such, she continually re-genders her argument, urging women to become ‘more masculine and respectable’ (*Rights of Woman*, p.113). She is not simply, as Tauchert suggests, ‘struggling to define femininity and masculinity in new ways’,<sup>39</sup> but attempting to do away with these terms altogether, while ‘helping herself’, as Tomaselli has added, to ‘all the terms like ‘unmanly’ or ‘a woman’s reason’, so easily evoke’, with little regard for the differences in how they might actually be received.<sup>40</sup>

From the 1970s onwards, as the popularity of Wollstonecraft’s work gathered momentum, scholars similarly struggled with her use of the word masculine, as a value to which women should aspire. Mary Poovey suggests that Wollstonecraft rapidly began to ‘make herself over to the “masculine” image of an intellectual’, suppressing the ‘mortal longings’ associated with femininity.<sup>41</sup> Joan Landes accuses Wollstonecraft of orienting herself ‘almost exclusively towards the male logos’, and sharing the ‘implicitly masculine values of the bourgeois public sphere’.<sup>42</sup> Neither appears comfortable with a word (and a language) which is based on an anti-feminist notion of masculine. Wendy Gunther-Canada has attempted to defend Wollstonecraft, arguing that her work, like that of many female writers, engages in ‘active textualization’, though she is uncomfortable with a comparison between the *Rights of*

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<sup>38</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.17

<sup>39</sup> Tauchert, p.56

<sup>40</sup> Tomaselli, p.xxvi

<sup>41</sup> Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.55

<sup>42</sup> Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the Revolution* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.135



*Woman and the Rights of Men*, which she believes over-complicates the relationship of women to language.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Brody is one of few critics (alongside Gunther-Canada) who have recognised that during the British Enlightenment, rhetoricians were debating the English language, championing the speech and writing of the ‘university-educated elite’.<sup>44</sup> When Wollstonecraft entered the debate, she daringly appropriated its gendered and embodied terms, using ‘masculinized values for the description of language to assist her argument that women may participate in the political debate in public life’.<sup>45</sup> Andrew Elfenbein, too, has suggested that in the eighteenth century, “masculinity” and “femininity” were not fixed categories; gender definitions were subject to change, depending on the discourse, and ‘as likely to differ as to complement one another’.<sup>46</sup> Each has recognised that the English language has always been open to change, reflecting the values of the culture it embodies. Others, Lewis might say, have been ‘deceived’ by the meaning of masculine which has a ‘dangerous sense’—a meaning which makes tolerable sense, but has actually been misread.<sup>47</sup>

To Virginia Sapiro, Wollstonecraft’s ‘common sense [notion] of “masculine”’ from the eighteenth century included the ‘human virtues of reason, strength and independence’.<sup>48</sup> Wollstonecraft outlined as much when writing about her friend and predecessor Catherine Macaulay, who had died the year before the *Rights of Woman* was published, and who had also been criticised as masculine:

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<sup>43</sup> Wendy Gunther-Canada, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s “Wild Wish”: Confounding Sex in the Discourse on Political Rights’, in *Feminist Interpretations*, ed. by Maria J. Falco, p.76

<sup>44</sup> Brody, p.106

<sup>45</sup> Brody, pp.107-8

<sup>46</sup> Elfenbein, p.228

<sup>47</sup> The ‘Dangerous Sense’ is the dominant sense of any word uppermost in our minds: ‘Whenever we meet the word, our natural impulse will be to give it that sense [...] if it makes tolerable sense our tendency is to go merrily on. We are often deceived. In an old author the word may mean something different.’ Lewis, p.113

<sup>48</sup> Virginia Sapiro, ‘A Woman’s Struggle for a Language of Enlightenment and Virtue: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment “Feminism”’, in *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.132

Catherine Macaulay was an example of intellectual acquirements supposed to be incompatible with the weakness of her sex. In her style of writing, indeed, no sex appears, for it is like the sense it conveys, strong and clear.

I will not call hers a masculine understanding, because I admit not of such an arrogant assumption of reason; but I contend that it was a sound one, and that her judgement, the matured fruit of profound thinking, was a proof that a woman can acquire judgement, in the full extent of the word. Possessing more penetration than sagacity, more understanding than fancy, she writes with sober energy and argumentative closeness; yet sympathy and benevolence give an interest to her sentiments, and that vital heat to her arguments, which forces the reader to weigh them (*Rights of Woman*, p.231).

She struggles with the word masculine, and outlines the characteristics of a writer who could defy a gendered analysis: it is ‘strong and clear’, penetrative, sober, deep, and without sensibility—yet, sensitive and generous. Contemporaries, however, would certainly have identified it as masculine. There was, as Macaulay herself had coolly noted in *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790), simply not a word for this manner of writing: ‘when we compliment the appearance of a more than ordinary energy in the female mind, we call it masculine’.<sup>49</sup>

Undoubtedly, this idea of masculine, incorporating reason, strength, independence, and also sensitivity and liberality, is very distant from modern, feminist understandings. Contemporary feminist criticism insists that womanhood is a prize, something to be honoured. As Adriana Craciun argues, feminism could not embrace *Rights of Woman* because of ‘the vehemence with which it attacks femininity, certain aspects of sensibility, and because of its celebration of “masculinist” concepts of reason and language’.<sup>50</sup> In employing an apparently masculine rhetoric, Wollstonecraft had unknowingly alienated herself from the group she had inspired,

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<sup>49</sup> Catherine Macaulay, ‘Letters on Education, With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects’ (London, 1790), p.204, in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 25 January 2011]. All subsequent line references are from this edition, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>50</sup> Adriana Craciun, *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on Mary Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.36-7

appearing to deny her sex and to imbue femininity with shame. But for Wollstonecraft to have reconciled these contradictions, Craciun continues, would have been historically and ideologically impossible.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, Wollstonecraft was not comfortable with a language so closely connected to a masculine rhetoric, but her perspective, her “new genus”, was so novel, that there was not a word in the English language at this time to encapsulate it. Almost immediately, critics set out to find one more suitable. Wollstonecraft’s association with Joseph Johnson and his group of non-conformists allowed for the word “radical” to be a viable alternative. Claudia Johnson is one critic to make the link between these two terms and Wollstonecraft, saying, ‘the subject of liberalism is always implicitly masculine, even when it touts its neutrality’.<sup>52</sup> Barbara Taylor has also linked masculinity and radicalism, suggesting that ‘radicalism was for the most part a staunchly masculine affair’.<sup>53</sup> She explains the connection by suggesting that Jacobin men were endlessly celebrating their political virility, ‘with Paine praising the ‘gigantic manliness’ of the new American republic while ‘John Thelwell never tired of recommending the “manly energies of reason”, “manly firmness”, and the “powerful energies of manhood”’.<sup>54</sup> It is therefore reasonable that critics latched onto a term that simultaneously represented the Jacobin spirit, of which Wollstonecraft was undoubtedly a part, and one that was not so distant from the original term masculine, which Wollstonecraft had herself employed, while thoroughly encapsulating the rebellious sentiments which it invoked. Yet, it was distant just enough for critics to forget its origin. In fact, there have been many instances where “radical” has completely subsumed “masculine”, bearing little or no resemblance to the original

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<sup>51</sup> Craciun, p.37

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’s Novels’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia Johnson, p.199.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, p.176

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, p.176

meaning. Scholars began to talk of “radical feminism”, “radical motherhood” instead, and others linked the terms in complex and uncertain ways. This is explained by Lewis as ‘semantic ramification’, when the speaker’s meaning becomes very common, in the end establishing itself as one of the word’s meanings.<sup>55</sup> It is, arguably, the biggest problem faced by the current generation of scholars.

In 1990, Jennifer Lorch produced a book titled *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Radical Feminist*, arguing that the *Rights of Woman* (and the *Rights of Men*) were not the most cogent representations of Wollstonecraft’s feminism.<sup>56</sup> In her view, anything before the *Rights of Men* was framed by a ‘conservative political and religious outlook’, which she characterises as having ‘feminist emphasis, some might say emphatically feminist, without democratic and radical politics’, and, moreover, that it was not until the *Vindication(s)* that radical ideas ‘assumed a prominent place in her work’.<sup>57</sup> She attacks both pieces of writing for a masculinist rhetoric that lacks ‘the expression of warmth in her attitude to women’.<sup>58</sup> Lorch thus separates Wollstonecraft’s work into two halves: pre-*Vindication* is characterised as feminist; post-*Vindication* is labelled radical, masculine (which are unconnected) and anti-feminist. Despite the misleading title, “radical” is divorced from “feminist”, and relates only to political thought, rather than women’s rights or even masculine rhetoric. Thus, “masculine”, an already complicated, unfit word, has been made even more problematic by being translated into several words that are entirely alien—most particularly radical and feminist—and then even these translations have been lost, re-interpreted, reappropriated. Using Lewis’ analysis, these words have become less ‘descriptive’ and more ‘evaluative’, a way by which critics can express their approval

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<sup>55</sup> Lewis, p.15

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Lorch, *Mary Wollstonecraft : the making of a radical feminist* (New York; Oxford: Berg, 1990), p.1

<sup>57</sup> Lorch, p.2 and p.67

<sup>58</sup> Lorch, p.89

or disapproval, without really describing the author at all.<sup>59</sup> Crucially, critics working within the Romantic field (and even, perhaps the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries) have forgotten the philosophy of the words that they use. They believe that language, a language largely borrowed from the Romantic Period itself, is an adequate vehicle of expression, but, unfortunately, it is not. There is need for a more critical awareness of contemporary developments in language, a need to understand the expressions that are in circulation.

### **1.3: Fuzzy binaries, Fuzzy writers and William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman***

The Problem of Translation reveals that binaries are themselves fuzzy. As Hung Nguyen and Elbert Walker have discussed, even without the Problem of Translation, everyday language is inherently imprecise and vague:

Terms such as *depressed* and *old* are fuzzy in the sense that they cannot be sharply defined. However, as humans, we do make sense out of this kind of information and use it in decision making [...] Forcing a yes-or-no answer is possible and is usually done, but there may be information lost in doing so because no account is taken of the *degree* of depression.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, “radical” or “conservative” are based on personal experience: what we perceive to be “radical” may be perceived differently by some one else—the truth is ‘a matter of degree’.<sup>61</sup> One way to combat this problem might be to create a Fuzzy Set specifically for each term (radical, conservative, feminine, masculine etc.), and create an overall “expression” of the word, rather than a precise definition, that will allow for subjectivity. This is neither practical, nor feasible, however, simply because it would require the input of every critic, over a very long period of time, and, more

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<sup>59</sup> Lewis, p.7

<sup>60</sup> Hung Nguyen and Elbert Walker, *A First Course in Fuzzy Logic*, 3rd edition (Boca Raton, FL: Chapman & Hall/CRC, 2006), p.2

<sup>61</sup> Nguyen; Walker, p.3

importantly, because it would not help with the bigger issue—that women writers are themselves fuzzy. It is not simply that the terms and binaries used to analyse them are insufficient, it is also that consistently elude all types of categorization, as Brody, Elfenbein, Shanley, Brewer and Johnson have noted above.

This fuzziness appears to have come about for several reasons and the Problem of Translation is certainly one significant aspect of this. It is, as I have shown, too embedded in criticism to be easily extracted, and all the while it further mystifies the writers we wish to elucidate. Coupled with this, there is a tendency for critics to juxtapose the lives of female writers (much more so than with male writers), with their work, which undoubtedly causes contradiction. Again, this appears to have stemmed from the eighteenth century (and before), when a female writer could not publish without having her person and life scrutinized. It is a problem that will become evident throughout the thesis in relation to a number of women writers. Polwhele had done just this in ‘The Unsex’d Females’, observing Wollstonecraft’s work in constant reference to the details of her life:

Bath'd in new bliss, the Fair-one greets the bower,  
And ravishes a flame from every flower;  
Low at her feet inhales the master's sighs,  
And darts voluptuous from her eyes.  
Yet, while each heart-pulse, in the Paphian grove,  
Beats quick to IMLAY and licentious love,  
A sudden gloom the gathering tempest spreads;  
The floral arch-work withers o'er their heads;  
Whirlwinds the paramours asunder tear;  
And wisdom falls, the victim of despair.<sup>62</sup>

This aspect of the poem clearly alludes to Wollstonecraft’s affair with Gilbert Imlay, the father of her illegitimate daughter Fanny Wollstonecraft-Imlay. In Polwhele’s opinion, Wollstonecraft’s literary production, her ‘floral arch-work’, fails precisely

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<sup>62</sup> Polwhele, ll.151-160

because of this association with ‘licentious love’.<sup>63</sup> Her wisdom, he suggests, must be flawed, or else she would not have been a ‘victim of despair’— and thus doomed to ‘fall’.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the word ‘voluptuous’, implying sensuality, suggests that Wollstonecraft must have been prone to sexual excess, but this can have nothing to do with her work, in which she appears (as many have noted) to reject passion. Note, then, Taylor, who in trying to understand the contradictions that surface in Wollstonecraft’s work suggests that her ‘denigrated femininity returned to haunt her, fuelled by erotic insecurity and a crippling personal dislike rooted in her miserable early history.’<sup>65</sup> In chapter three, I will demonstrate how biographical interpretation might be incorporated into the Fuzzy Set to better understand a particularly convoluted discourse, but it is clear that it can, at times, be a slippery slope.

As such, I am not advocating a return to Roland Barthes’ *Death of the Author*. It is, however, important to remember that these writers’ lives are now very distant from our own, and biographical context is nearly always related through another, equally distant, author. Critics must imagine that, like engineers who employ the Fuzzy Set Theory, they are building a construction that has no fixed measurements and dimensions, no blueprint that can be followed step by step. We cannot possibly know the author’s intentions, even when they are apparently provided, and we cannot rely on measurements taken by others (who are subject to bias, prejudice, or who have ulterior motives). This will be a crucial point in the next chapter on the representation of Elizabeth I. But it does not mean that the construction should not be built, that it will be unsound or unstable, because Fuzzy Set Theory can allow for the imprecise and the unknown. The construction may not resemble “radical” architectural masterpieces of the post-modern world, or “conservative”, classical and functional

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<sup>63</sup> Polwhele, 1.58, 1.56.

<sup>64</sup> Polwhele, 1.160.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, p.17

buildings of parliament; it may oscillate and change over time, as more and more critics add to the structure. Ultimately, it will not resemble anything already constructed—in that sense, it will be an entirely unique representation of the writer it wishes to embody.

An interesting example of the way in which women writers are fuzzy can be found in William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a candid and feeling account of the writer written after her death, by her husband. It is a biography that modern critics might treat with more consequence than the rest, because it is written by somebody who observed a portion of her life day by day, and to whom she may have imparted intimate thoughts and details. It is to these people that Godwin, 'as the observer of those virtues which discover themselves principally in personal intercourse', appeals.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, it appears to have been Godwin's wish to defuzzify his wife, whose work had caused confusion and misinterpretation even during her own life, and he claims to detail 'facts' which are 'principally taken from the mouth of the person to whom they relate'.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, however, he cannot resist the opportunity to re-interpret, rather than simply relate her life, being troubled, as he is, with a representation that appeared to be edging more towards the "unsex'd" than towards the "proper". He is undoubtedly angry at those who referred to Wollstonecraft's work as masculine, a criticism which he alludes to as 'thoughtless calumny, or malignant misrepresentation'.<sup>68</sup>

Despite referencing the *Rights of Woman* in the title of *Memoirs*, Godwin is surprisingly reticent on the subject of Wollstonecraft's most important work. He also immediately acknowledges the public reception, allowing that many of her sentiments

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<sup>66</sup> William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ed. by Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker (Canada; Hertfordshire; Broadview Literary Texts, 2001), p.43

<sup>67</sup> Godwin, pp.43-4

<sup>68</sup> Godwin, p.43



‘are undoubtedly of a rather masculine description’, with occasional passages of ‘stern and rugged feature’ and ‘amazonian temper’.<sup>69</sup> This is soon undermined, however, by the suggestion that the *Rights of Woman* displays ‘trembling delicacy of sentiment, which would have done honour to a poet bursting with all the visions of an Armida and a Dido’, known for their sensibility,<sup>70</sup> and further, that Wollstonecraft was not the person she appeared to be in her writing:

Those whom curiosity prompted to seek the occasion of beholding her, expected to find a sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago; and they were not a little surprised, when, instead of all this, they found a woman, lovely in her person, and, in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners.<sup>71</sup>

This, of course, is reminiscent of the review in the *Lady’s Monthly Museum*, which, as quoted in the introduction, had emphasised Barbauld’s attention to her person and domestic roles, and had been published the same year as Godwin’s *Memoirs* in 1798. It is a form of justification that would become very popular in the proceeding century. Godwin finishes this conversion by depicting Wollstonecraft as the champion of ‘oppressed and injured beauty’,<sup>72</sup> an aesthetic paradigm she seems to have fought hard to avoid.<sup>73</sup> Godwin’s appears to have tried to reinstate Wollstonecraft in the tradition of sensibility, an arena more commonly associated with the female sex. This was the only appropriate arena for women writing in the public sphere, as being associated with femininity. It was for this that Polwhele had praised writers like Anna Seward, who, he believed, had the ability to ‘sting with rapture every vein’ and Frances Burney, who created ‘delicious feelings and the purest taste’.<sup>74</sup> As Lawrence R. Kennard has suggested, Wollstonecraft had not rejected sensibility entirely (in spite of

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<sup>69</sup> Godwin, p.75

<sup>70</sup> Godwin, p.75

<sup>71</sup> Godwin, p.76

<sup>72</sup> Godwin, p.76

<sup>73</sup> ‘Aesthetic paradigm’ is an expression employed by Mary Poovey, which will be discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Polwhele, 1193 & 1.196

her attack on Burke's *Reflections*), and had attempted to 'renegotiate' and combine it with understanding in her essay 'On Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature' (published posthumously in 1797).<sup>75</sup> But her *Rights of Woman* was not a poem, it was a political essay, in which she disdained 'flowery diction' (*Rights of Woman*, p.112) and was 'employed about things, not words' (*Rights of Woman*, p.112). Even if, on occasion, she loses sight of this, more damage is done by Godwin's systematic misrepresentation, than by Wollstonecraft herself.

The effect was, of course, that while Godwin had hoped to clarify those passages that were problematic for Wollstonecraft's contemporaries, he merely had the effect of embedding artificial contradictions, inimical to fuzziness. Thus, disciples of Wollstonecraft, who alongside Godwin included Amelia Opie and Hays, have systematically obscured and complicated the meanings behind her work, creating a barrage of contradictions and interpretations that continue to exist today. These elements can not be ignored, however; they are an important aspect of her fuzziness, one in a number of factors that must be weighed and considered alongside her work. It is, therefore, from Godwin's *Memoirs* that I will take the inspiration for the first Fuzzy Set—the concept of the lesbian and the heterosexual matrix.

#### **1.4: The Fuzzy Set: Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Macaulay and the Heterosexual Matrix**

She thinks that not only the eye sees her virtuous efforts from whom all her comfort now must flow, and whose approbation is life; but her imagination, a little abstracted and exalted by grief, dwells on the fond hope that the eyes which her trembling hand closed, may still see how she subdues every wayward passion to fulfil the double duty of being the father as well as the mother of her children. Raised to heroism by misfortunes, she represses the first faint dawning of a natural inclination, before it ripens into love, and in the

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<sup>75</sup> Lawrence R. Kennard, 'Reveries of Reality: Mary Wollstonecraft's Poetics of Sensibility', *Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives*, ed. by Helen M. Buss, D.L MacDonald and Anne McWhir (Canada; Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), p.56

bloom of life forgets her sex – forgets the pleasure of awakening passion, which might again have been inspired and returned (*Rights of Woman*, p.164).

Next to Wollstonecraft's apparent masculine rhetoric, her rejection of female passion (which is linked to her rhetoric) has troubled feminist critics the most. Her imagining of an ideal widow, proudly turning her back on marital happiness and sexual pleasure, in order to devote herself to her children's welfare, provides just one example of a philosophy that has provoked scholars incessantly. This criticism has either suggested that Wollstonecraft had a sexual phobia— as Cora Kaplan has argued, a 'most profound anxiety about the rupturing force of female sexuality' and 'a violent antagonism to the sexual'<sup>76</sup> or, more diplomatically, as Taylor has suggested, that she longed for 'a de-eroticised standard of modesty for both sexes', drawn from a puritan tradition.<sup>77</sup> Poovey is among the few who have understood the *Rights of Woman* as a rejection of the aesthetic paradigm developed by Edmund Burke which 'takes the female body as the paragon of beauty and the sexual "fit" between (heterosexual) bodies as the incarnation of providential proportion'.<sup>78</sup> Poovey recognises that this paradigm is heterosexual, and that Wollstonecraft is specifically rejecting the phallus as normalizing, rather than simply female passion. More tellingly, Elfenbein notes that 'the most compelling aspects of her [Wollstonecraft's] career is its power to unsettle the homosexual/heterosexual split'.<sup>79</sup> As he has noted, Wollstonecraft revises the misogynistic tradition towards female masculinity, and aligns it more explicitly with homosexuality, expressed more openly in her novel *Mary, a Fiction* (1788), in which the real focus of the heroine's passion is her 'unconventional love for her friend Ann: "Her friendship for Ann occupied her

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<sup>76</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), p.41

<sup>77</sup> Taylor, pp.118-20

<sup>78</sup> Poovey, 'Aesthetics and Political Economy in the Eighteenth Century: the Place of Gender in the Social Constitution of Knowledge, *Aesthetics and Ideology* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p.97

<sup>79</sup> Elfenbein, p.228

heart, and resembled a passion”<sup>80</sup>. In Elfenbein’s opinion, Wollstonecraft’s message is plain: ‘female genius is more interested in loving another woman than in settling down to bourgeois marriage’.<sup>81</sup> Wollstonecraft’s rhetoric can, therefore, be understood not merely as a rejection of femininity, but as a rejection of compulsory heterosexuality. Thus, her comments regarding female passion start to make more sense.

In the *Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft had, in no uncertain terms, branded homosexuality as ‘voluptuous’:

the lustful prowler [...] refines on female softness. Something more soft than woman is then sought for; till, in Italy and Portugal, men attend the levees of equivocal beings, to sigh for more than female languor’ (*Rights of Woman*, p.274).

This peculiar moment appears to betray homophobia, but it is important to recognise that it is directed exclusively at men, not women. As Taylor has noted, Wollstonecraft appears to employ homophobic rhetoric when it suits her argument, most famously in the *Rights of Men*, when she utilises the homosexual slander surrounding Edmund Burke: ‘Your politics and morals, when simplified, would undermine religion and virtue to set up a spurious, sensual beauty, that has long debauched your imagination’.<sup>82</sup> Wollstonecraft’s attitude to lesbianism, however, is quite the opposite. Alongside *Mary*, Elfenbein has noticed that the margins of Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman* reveal such potent sexual daring:

in a footnote, she lists female geniuses whom she admires because they received a “masculine education”: “Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d’Eon, etc.” [...] The list is quite a remarkable one in terms of sexuality: it begins with a woman famous for loving other women and ends with male-to-female transvestite. Except for Mrs. Macaulay, the sexuality of all these women is characterized by the same association with

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<sup>80</sup> Elfenbein, p.237

<sup>81</sup> Elfenbein, p.238

<sup>82</sup> Taylor, p.67 (n. p.268)

illicit, extra-marital love that characterized Wollstonecraft's heroine Mary [from *Mary; a Fiction*].<sup>83</sup>

Elfenbein concludes that this 'flash' of sexual daring is licensed by Wollstonecraft's understanding of 'genius', which is 'gender-bending', but that she must, ultimately, stigmatise sexuality and insist on 'clearly marked gender roles' for women, to avoid 'the wrong kinds of gender-crossing and sexuality'.<sup>84</sup>

To our Fuzzy Set, which so far includes critical perceptions and uncertain extracts from Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* and *Mary; a Fiction*, we must add Godwin's *Memoirs*, the first ever text to directly address Wollstonecraft's relationships with other women. Godwin describes the initial meeting between Wollstonecraft and Fanny Blood as resembling 'the first interview between Werter and Charlotte'; the impression on the young Wollstonecraft is 'indelible'.<sup>85</sup> The *Sorrows of Young Werter* (1787), by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, observes the tragic love of Werter for a girl Charlotte, whom he first meets as she is attending to her young brothers and sisters. The scene is one of passion and sensuality: 'my whole soul was taken up with her air, her voice, her manner [...] My looks steadfastly fixed upon her fine black eyes; my very soul attached to hers'.<sup>86</sup> Such sensuality would have been recalled, and certainly not mistaken, by eighteenth century readers, but Godwin continues further still, describing the co-habitation of Wollstonecraft and Blood as one of intimacy, their attachment becoming ever more 'rooted and active'.<sup>87</sup> It is a friendship so 'fervent' that for years to come it was 'the ruling passion of her mind'—Blood is 'the chosen object of Mary's attachment'.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Elfenbein, pp.239-40

<sup>84</sup> Elfenbein, p.240

<sup>85</sup> Godwin, p.50

<sup>86</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'The Sorrow of Werter', Volume 1, pp.33-35, in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 13 January 2011].

<sup>87</sup> Godwin, p.53

<sup>88</sup> Godwin, p.50, p.60.

The representation is expanded by the description of Wollstonecraft's early childhood: she is a daring and brave character, 'wild', prone to action, throwing herself between her father and mother, 'the despot and the victim', in a show of strength.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, she rejects dolls and other female amusements in order to join in the 'active and hardy sports of her brothers', and exercises in the open air,<sup>90</sup> both of which directly refute the advice of conduct books, which advised an inactive lifestyle. This corresponds with the opinions expressed in the *Rights of Woman*, in which she angrily criticises Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*: 'a little miss should have the correct taste as to neglect the pleasing amusement of making O's, merely because she perceived that it was an ungraceful attitude' (*Rights of Woman*, p.155). Such natural feminine coquettishness does not, writes Taylor, figure in Wollstonecraft's understanding of female children, who pre-puberty are 'psychologically genderless', lacking in 'any discernibly feminine traits'.<sup>91</sup> Rousseau's stories, Wollstonecraft declares, are 'ridiculous':

I will venture to affirm, that a girl, whose spirits have not been damped by inactivity, or innocence tainted by false shame, will always be a romp, and the doll will never excite attention unless confinement allows her no alternative. Girls and boys, in short, would play harmlessly together, if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature makes any difference (*Rights of Woman*, p.155).

It is only when a girl is 'condemned' to sit for hours, listening to the 'idle chat' of nurses, or of her mother, that she will attempt to imitate these women and amuse herself by 'adorning her lifeless doll, as they do in dressing her' (*Rights of Woman*, p.154). This, Taylor suggests, is Post-Lockean psychology, with its emphasis on acquired habits of thinking, '[s]ubliminal pathways' and 'the acquisition of

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<sup>89</sup> Godwin, p.51 and p.46

<sup>90</sup> Godwin, p.47. This physicality can be compared to the Spartan education system approved by Macaulay, which will be further explored later in the chapter.

<sup>91</sup> Taylor, p87

unconscious mental habits based on infantile sensory impressions'.<sup>92</sup> She questions nature and pre-civilized man, referring to those women who have strengthened their bodies and distinguished themselves other than through beauty, arguing that '[n]ature, or, to speak with strict propriety, God, has made all things right; but man has sought him out many inventions to mar the work' (*Rights of Woman*, p.139). The implication is that gender is not natural.

The allusion to lesbianism, however small, and this challenge to the feminine performance, anticipates two defining feminist theories. The first is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which claimed that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'.<sup>93</sup> It is explained by Butler as:

one is perhaps born a given sex with a biological facility, but that one becomes one's gender; that is, one acquires a given set of cultural and historical significations, and so comes to embody an historical idea called 'woman'. Thus, it is one thing to be born female, but quite another to undergo proper acculturation as a woman; the first is, it seems, a natural fact, but the second is the embodiment of an historical idea.<sup>94</sup>

This is to what Wollstonecraft implies when she suggests man is an 'inventor'. It is he who has undermined nature, invented employments for woman that render her a 'trifler', maintain and further enslave her (*Rights of Woman*, p.196). The frivolous accomplishments to which she is forced to return again and again, 'changes the nature of things' (*Rights of Woman*, p.175)—it is, as Wollstonecraft perceives, this very 'desire of being always woman' (*Rights of Woman*, p.224), the very 'woman' Godwin championed in *Memoirs*, that degrades the sex.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Taylor, p.88.

<sup>93</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p.293

<sup>94</sup> Judith Butler, 'Gendering the Body: Beauvoir's Philosophical Contribution', in *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), p.254

<sup>95</sup> See quote from Godwin's *Memoirs* on p.21: 'Those whom curiosity prompted to see the occasion of beholding her [Wollstonecraft], expected to find a sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago; and they were not a little surprised, when, instead of all this, they found a *woman*, lovely in her person, and, in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners' [my emphasis]. Godwin, p.76

The second, perhaps more important theory, is Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix. Butler most famously extended Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in her book *Gender Trouble*, published to great applause in 1990, arguing that sex, as well as gender, can be understood as 'performatively enacted signification'.<sup>96</sup> Crucially, she suggests that gender and sex have been regulated as 'a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term', and that this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire.<sup>97</sup> This heterosexual matrix is the underlying condition that binds sex and gender— and homosexuality, or more specifically, the lesbian, is the means to its demise. This had originally been identified by Michel Foucault, the pioneer of Queer Theory, who recognised that homosexuality 'is key to the overthrow of the category of sex'.<sup>98</sup> As outlined by Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver, Butler's view is that the heterosexual matrix 'generates a certain construction of the body as impermeable – or as penetrable or erotic in only certain predefined ways', thus, homosexual practices offer a site of resistance.<sup>99</sup> Reading Monique Wittig's theory of the "heterosexual contract", Butler identifies that a lesbian directly transcends the binary opposition between man and woman:

a lesbian [...] in refusing heterosexuality is no longer defined in terms of that oppositional relation. Indeed, a lesbian, she maintains, transcends the binary opposition between woman and man; a lesbian is neither a woman nor a man. But further, a lesbian has no sex. Through the lesbian refusal of those categories, the lesbian exposes [...] the contingent cultural constitution of those categories and the tacit yet abiding presumption of the heterosexual matrix [...] one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man. Indeed, [Butler agrees] the lesbian appears to be a third gender [...]<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990), p.37.

<sup>97</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.22

<sup>98</sup> As outlined by Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.100

<sup>99</sup> Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p.149.

<sup>100</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.112



Butler adds, that as such, the lesbian is beyond categories of sex, ‘radically problematiz[ing] both sex and gender as stable political categories of description’.<sup>101</sup> It is for this third gender that Wollstonecraft appears to reach when she rejects female passion and compulsory heterosexuality, and alludes to homosexuality in the margins of her argument and life. To her, heterosexual sex or ‘lust’ is one-sided, a ‘selfish gratification’ for men, one which they separate from ‘esteem and affection’ (*Rights of Woman*, p.341). It lends men more power because women are caught in an endless performance—to a script created by men—in which women are moved to ‘prepare themselves to excite love’, or actually put these lessons into practice (*Rights of Woman*, p.249). For Wollstonecraft, sex only strengthens men’s supremacy because it is unequal, and allows men them to manipulate women and control them, trapping them in a life of perpetual slavery: ‘Man, taking her body, the mind is left to rust; so that while physical love enervates man, he will endeavour to enslave woman’ (*Rights of Woman*, p.196).

Neither idea was new. Wollstonecraft had taken her inspiration from her friend and predecessor Macaulay, borrowing heavily from Macaulay’s *Letters*. A comparison between the texts of these two women is, perhaps, inevitable, given that critics rarely come to read Macaulay’s work, except through Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*. Unfortunately, the comparison has rarely been fair, with many critics arguing that Macaulay’s “feminist” message is a poor substitute for Wollstonecraft’s bold declaration on women’s rights. Thus, take Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos’ suggestion that while ‘the thematic commonalities are not difficult to tease out’ of the texts of both writers, Macaulay’s *Letters* makes ‘narrower claims’ and is ‘tamer’.<sup>102</sup> Likewise, Moira Ferguson has noted that on the subject of women’s rights Macaulay

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<sup>101</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.112

<sup>102</sup> Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos, *Early Feminists and the Education Debates: England, France, Germany 1760-1810* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), p.135, p.138, p.137,

is disappointingly reticent, and where Wollstonecraft is ‘much less patient—desperate even—with women’s situation’, Macaulay is ‘calmer, less rhetorically intense in her analysis, perhaps because with a certain amount of middle-class privilege in her life, the situation affected her less’.<sup>103</sup> This latter quote not only reveals the problem of biographical interpretation outlined above (Ferguson is assuming that the difference between the two writers is based on how hard each struggled financially), but also the risk a critic is exposed to each time he or she compares two or more writers—particularly those who have been systematically grouped together in this way. In a situation such as this, one writer will always come off appearing less brilliant. This idea, which I will call Dangerous Association, will be explored more fully in chapter two with respect to Hays and Wollstonecraft and Barbault and Aikin. This chapter, however, and also chapter four, will also show how close comparison can be useful, as long as it is not used to *restrict* our analysis, to create rigid boundaries within a set. In terms of Macaulay and Wollstonecraft, I will observe correlations between the texts, but, more importantly, the interesting ways in which they differ, and the consequences this has for our Fuzzy Set.

Like Wollstonecraft, Macaulay had condemned Rousseau’s *Emile*, for encouraging feminine performance, in her chapter on ‘Coquetry’ [sic] in *Letters*:

The superiority of address peculiar to the female sex, says Rousseau, is a very equitable indemnification for their inferiority in point of strength. Without this, woman would not be the companion of man, but his slave; it is by her superior art and ingenuity that she preserves her equality, and governs him, while she affects to obey. [...] I am persuaded that Rousseau’s understanding was too good to have led him to this error, had he not been blinded by his pride and his sensuality. The first was soothed by the opinion of superiority, lulled into acquiescence by cajolement; and the second was attracted by the idea of women playing off all the arts of coquetry to raise the passions of the sex (Macaulay, p.133).

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<sup>103</sup> Moira Ferguson, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery’, in *Feminist Interpretations*, ed. by Maria J. Falco, p.137

Macaulay shows how this performance is promoted by male sexuality, suggesting that it is an ‘art’, rather than natural behaviour. Man cunningly convinces woman that through sex she can attain equality, all the while undermining this by keeping her in a state of dependency. As Taylor has noticed, both realised that this ‘historic subalternity of women’ was ‘responsible for female sexual wiliness’,<sup>104</sup> and would have to be dismantled for women to be free. Macaulay, however, had already realised that this could be achieved by deconstructing notions of the female body.

Unlike the candid prose of a political treatise, *Letters* makes interesting use of fables, which have a way of appearing ambiguous and fuzzy, making curious suggestions while avoiding contention. Thus, where Wollstonecraft struggles to negotiate women’s apparent physical inferiority, reluctantly admitting in the preface to the *Rights of Woman* that ‘it is the law of nature’ that ‘the female in point of strength is, in general, inferior to the male’ (*Rights of Woman*, p.110), Macaulay does not allow for such a discrepancy and hints that it might be overcome or outdone:

What can be more contrary and opposite than the strength of the lion, and the feebleness of the hare? [...] Yet supple and indulgent nature adapts herself as well to the infirmities of the one, as to the higher perfections of the other (Macaulay, p.351).

This passage, inserted in Macaulay’s second letter ‘On the Power of God’, offers an interesting insight into the ways in which one might overcome inferiority of strength. She alludes to Aesop’s the ‘Lion and the Hare’, a fable in which a lion has a hare in its claws when it catches sight of a hart and decides to pursue this instead. The hare is then able to make its escape, while the lion returns empty handed, having been unable to catch either. Symbolically, the hare is associated with the moon, and therefore with femininity, and the lion with masculinity, so Macaulay’s subtext is clear: despite the

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<sup>104</sup> Taylor, p.120

discrepancy in strength weaker creatures are able to outdo the power of others, with or without the aid of nature, and the debilitating effects of desire can be reversed.

More interestingly, she attempts to plot the physical process of womankind, extracting an education system from antiquity, by which she exposes the flaws of modern education:

That the mental powers are affected by an union with corporal weakness; that it commonly gives a taint to the morals; and that conduct uniformly virtuous must be the joint issue of a good head and sound constitution. Bodily strength was the chief object of Spartan discipline. Their cares on this subject began with the birth of their offspring; and instead of entailing feebleness on their women for the sake of augmenting their personal beauty, they endeavoured to improve their natural strength, in order to render them proper nurses for the race of heroes (Macaulay p.16).

Spartan education was not ordinary. It emphasised physical fitness in both men and women. Girls were expected to compete with boys in javelin, discus, running, wrestling, hurling and horse-riding—activities normally reserved for a military career. Some sources even report pregnant, mature and young women wrestling and racing naked, or only partially clothed, with men.<sup>105</sup> As a result, the physical feats of these women could be extraordinary. Xenophon, a soldier and historical writer from the fourth century BC, reports that some women enjoyed hunting, and others would drag bachelors around the altar and hit them, in order to make them marry.<sup>106</sup> As Pomeroy suggests, the athletic prowess of women was understood as a high priority.<sup>107</sup> They were expected to defend themselves, their families and their land from revolts and intruders while their husbands were fighting abroad, and it was strongly believed that fit and healthy women would produce fit and healthy children. Although we cannot be sure that Macaulay was aware of the extent of Spartan women's physical ambitions, as outlined by Pomeroy, she clearly believed, as Guest notes, that the

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<sup>105</sup> Sarah Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.25.

<sup>106</sup> Pomeroy, p.18.

<sup>107</sup> Pomeroy, p.26

‘combination of moral, mental, and physical robustness’ was necessary to “‘a conduct uniformly virtuous’”.<sup>108</sup>

As Kate Davies suggests, the primary focus of *Letters* was ‘female industry and independence’.<sup>109</sup> But by promoting the Spartan education system, Macaulay was doing much more than that. She alludes to a period in history when sex (and the female body) were not as politically signified and maintained as they are today. The body was not simply an empty surface—boundaries did surround these women; they were still expected to fulfil domestic chores, give birth and bring up children—but they were not generally thought of as physically inferior. In exercising naked with men, the female body can be understood as having a degree of equivalence with the male body, or of corresponding sexlessness. It implies that women’s bodies were not grounded in passion and desire, an aesthetic pleasure for men, or the heterosexual matrix. This is a direct challenge to Burke and Rousseau’s aesthetic paradigm, which undermined the female body as a ‘paragon of beauty and the sexual’, elevating woman to the statue of ‘nature’s most perfect specimen’, but also constructing her as an object.<sup>110</sup>

The lesbian relationships of Spartan women have always been notorious. As Spartan men spent a large amount of time abroad engaged in battles, it was permitted for women to engage in sexual relationships with women, and even live with these women in their homes. Such behaviour was viewed with horror by their Roman enemies, a sentiment that was passed down through the centuries to Macaulay’s contemporaries. It is, however, Macaulay’s answer to the heterosexual matrix, her way of transcending the binary opposition between man and woman, and going

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<sup>108</sup> Guest, p.246

<sup>109</sup> Kate Davies, *Catherine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: the Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.99.

<sup>110</sup> Poovey, p.97.

beyond the categories of sex. Like Wollstonecraft, she envisages an alternative woman, a woman who is not caught in a gender binary, is not subject to cultural and historical significations, and who, thus, evades male supremacy. Despite this, however, Macaulay's "membership" into the heterosexual matrix Fuzzy Set appears more significant than Wollstonecraft's, as she more successfully manages to overcome the problem of women's apparent physical inferiority.

Thus, this first set is designed to provide a small glimpse into the range and capacity of the Fuzzy Set. It shows how two female writers, Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, shared a similar idea about the heterosexual matrix, which they believed ensnared woman, and anticipated a very modern understanding of sexual difference. The set has revealed several differences between the writers, and has noticed how Macaulay was able to overcome the problem of sexual difference by alluding to a period in time when women were able to complete the same physical feats as men. In this sense, Macaulay's "membership" in to the heterosexual matrix set has been more substantial than Wollstonecraft's. It has teased out the margins of their argument, looking to those passages which are especially fuzzy (like Macaulay's use of fables), and not just for explicit evidence. In so doing, the Fuzzy Set has noted several areas of interest which will become crucial in the proceeding chapters: the Problem of Translation, the problem of biographical interpretation (as well as biographical bias), the endurance of certain debates, and dangerous association. Indeed, this set has sought to address each of these issues by including as many facets as possible, from contemporary literary theory and criticism, to eighteenth century biography, embracing the subjectivity of these writers, while treating them with care. It has, specifically, avoided binaries and terms such as "masculine" and "radical" that might restrict understanding. In the following chapters it will continue this journey,

observing the ways in which writers such as Hays have often failed, like Macaulay, to fit the Wollstonecraft mould; writers such as Aikin have been unable to escape an association with a more successful family member; religious writers such as More have been almost consistently pigeon-holed as conservative. Each set will assess the critical problems of each writer, examining how they were received by their contemporaries, and how they continue to be received today, while constructing an understanding of their work that welcomes inconsistency and allows them to be observed simply as writers, with an individual and unique perception of the world in which they lived.

**Chapter Two: ‘From myself another self I turned’: The Representation  
of Queen Elizabeth by Unmarried Women Writers**

Writing in 1805, Hannah More recalled the education of a talented, young princess:

[Her tutor] tells us that when he read over with her the orations of Esehines and Demosthenes in Greek, she not only understood, at first sight, the full force and propriety of the language, and the meaning of the orators, but that she comprehended the whole scheme of the laws, customs, and manners of the Athenians. She possessed an exact and accurate knowledge of the Scriptures, and had committed to memory most of the striking passages in them. She had also learned by heart many of the finest parts of Thucydides and Xenophon, especially those which relate to life and manners. Thus were her early years sedulously employed in laying in a large stock of materials for governing well.<sup>1</sup>

The book, *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, had been written for Princess Charlotte, who was then nine years old. More was not describing Charlotte’s education, however, but that of another young princess who had lived and studied over two hundred and fifty years before: Queen Elizabeth. The model of Elizabeth’s education, under the direction of two learned men, William Grindal and (here) Roger Ascham, was, to More, the most befitting for female royalty, and one to which even other, ordinary women of average means might aspire. In her view, Elizabeth’s learning gave dignity to her sex and reign:

that her intellectual attainments supported the dignity of her character, under foibles and feminine weaknesses which would otherwise have sunk her credit: she had even address enough to contrive to give to those weaknesses a certain classic grace. Let it be considered also, that whatever tended to raise her mind to a level with those whose services she was to use, and of whose counsels she was to avail herself, proportionally contributed to that mutual respect and confidence between the queen and her ministers, without which, the results of her government could not have been equally successful. Almost every man of rank was then a man of letters, and literature was valued accordingly. Had, therefore, deficiency of learning been added to inferiority of sex, we might not at this day have the reign of Elizabeth on which to look back, as the period in which administrative energy seemed to attain the greatest possible perfection.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah More, *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1805), p.11

<sup>2</sup> More, p.12



It is not surprising that More promoted the model of Elizabeth's education as suitable for Charlotte, as there were very few other women, other than Elizabeth, who had found themselves in Charlotte's position— as the sole heir to the throne of England. Unlike Charlotte, however, Elizabeth's reign, and even her education, had been fortunate to say the least. Despite being declared illegitimate before her third birthday, she outlived two siblings, her younger brother Edward and older sister Mary (and a distant cousin Lady Jane Grey), to inherit the throne by the age of twenty-five. It is likely that in her younger years neither she nor anyone else must have really entertained the thought that she would one day be queen, given that her early education (at least with Ascham) seems to have lacked the same thorough study of rhetoric, which her brother Edward IV received, and was critical for a future monarch.<sup>3</sup> Thus, although as a member of court Elizabeth was expected to have a better education than most, her learning and unusual intellectual avidity appear to have been brought about by the fortunate circumstance that her tutors were excellent and because Elizabeth herself was an eager learner. According to David Loades, by the age of eighteen she was the best educated woman of her generation.<sup>4</sup> The length of Elizabeth's reign, her political successes and the literary triumphs of her court, demonstrated to More that the key to being a successful and popular sovereign was a thorough and meticulously structured education.

More was right to think that Charlotte's education required attention. Until the age of nine, it had been more than erratic as Charlotte was shifted between her father the Prince of Wales' residence at Carlton House; her mother Caroline of

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<sup>3</sup> According to David Loades, Elizabeth's education with Ascham appears to have been lacking in modern history, mathematics and cosmography, and there is no mention of the study of rhetoric, which, according to Stephen Alford, was the focus of King Edward's education. David Loades, *Elizabeth I: The Golden Reign of Gloriana* (London: The National Archive, 2003), p.73. Stephen Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.44-45.

<sup>4</sup> Loades, p.21

Brunswick's residence at Blackheath; Warwick House (an old brick building near Carlton House); Shrewsbury Lodge, which was leased for her for a period of time by her father; Montagu House, which eventually became her own residence, and Windsor, where the king, her grandmother Queen Charlotte and aunts resided. The breakdown of her parents' marriage (which had happened shortly after her birth) was undoubtedly the cause of this. Each parent would use Charlotte throughout her short life to undermine the other. Household staff, including governesses and those responsible for Charlotte's education, were also used in this manner. Her first governess, Lady Elgin, was forced to retire early for allowing Charlotte to see the king behind George's back, and the sub-governess Miss Hayman was also sacked for befriending Caroline. It was not until 1805, when Charlotte was nine years old, that the George IV put together plans for her education (suggesting that More's *Hints* were timed to coincide with this).

Biographies which poured from the grief that attended Charlotte's death in 1817 describe the princess in this early period as possessing a 'fine, natural genius'.<sup>5</sup> She was said to be conversant in several modern languages, Ancient Greek and Latin, well informed in history and politics and accomplished in music, singing and painting.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the latter accomplishments in fine arts (which More believed to be superfluous), More recommended all of these subjects in *Hints*. In reality, however, it is more likely that Charlotte's education did not emulate that of the Tudor Queen. The king had made sure Charlotte would be well versed in the Protestant faith and scripture, having appointed the Rt Rev. Dr John Fisher, Bishop of Exeter, as her tutor for that purpose. More clearly approved, and although she finished the book before the appointment was announced, she addressed the preface to Fisher. The

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<sup>5</sup> Anon, 'Memoirs of the Late Princess Charlotte Augusta; or, Wales and Saxe Cobourg' (Philadelphia: Robert Desilver, 1818) <Shaw-Shoemaker Digital Edition> [accessed 12 June 2011], p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Memoirs of the Late Princess Charlotte Augusta, p.8

emphasis on religious (Protestant) instruction in the education of both princesses, Charlotte and Elizabeth, were, however, where the similarities ended, primarily because Charlotte did not have the same thirst for knowledge that More had so highly commended in Elizabeth.

Although the Bishop certainly was pious and also a ‘connoisseur of painting and drawing’, he was also—as Chambers has outlined—‘pompous, humourless, dogmatic, wilful and absurdly old-fashioned’.<sup>7</sup> As such, his pedagogical approach was equally backward, causing arguments between him and Charlotte’s replacement governess, Lady de Clifford.<sup>8</sup> Efforts by the ‘liberal and patient’ Rev. Dr George Nott, who taught her English, Latin and ancient history, were not particularly successful, and errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation are evident throughout her private letters.<sup>9</sup> Two further sub-preceptors taught her English literature, French, German and modern history, and she had several tutors for music, dancing, drawing and writing.<sup>10</sup> Although she was fairly fluent in the modern languages, her knowledge in most of these subjects was vague. Charlotte’s education was clearly not what it ought to have been.

Despite this, there is evidence of a spirit similar to Elizabeth’s. Charlotte may not have been thoroughly educated, but she was independent, confident and determined. In a letter to her daughter, Lady Albinia Campbell, who stayed with the royal family in 1811 when the princess was seventeen years old, described Charlotte as undignified:

[She goes] swaggering about, and she twangs hands with all the men, is in awe of no one and glories in her independent way of thinking. Her passion is horses—that and mathematics are the only amusements she has. Her riding is

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<sup>7</sup> James Chambers, *Charlotte and Leopold* (London: Old Street Publishing, 2007), pp.19-20

<sup>8</sup> Chambers, p.20

<sup>9</sup> Chambers, p.20

<sup>10</sup> Chambers, p.21

beautiful—no fear of course—gallops and leaps over every ditch like a schoolboy.<sup>11</sup>

Her interest in Mathematics, a subject which most educationalists (including More) did not encourage women to pursue, is telling, and suggests that Charlotte's intellectual interests may have lain in directions other than those available to her. Clearly, her passion was to be found in the outdoors, and with those of the opposite sex. At the age of nineteen, she was described by the Grand Duchess Catherine (sister of the Tsar) as

the most interesting member of the family [...] She is full of spirit and positive character. She seems to have an iron will in the smallest things [...] [her manners] are so extraordinary that they take one's breath away... She walks up to any man, young or old, especially the older men, takes them by the hand, and shakes it with all her strength... She looks like a boy, or rather a ragamuffin.<sup>12</sup>

The following year, on her trip to Weymouth, it was reported in the newspapers that the princess had climbed the steps on the HMS Leviathan like a seaman, after rowing across choppy water to inspect the vessel. When challenged by her preceptor the Bishop, her immediate answer was “Queen Elizabeth took great delight in her navy, and was not afraid to go on board a man of war in an open boat; why then should I?”<sup>13</sup> The ‘Naval Anecdote’, as it was called by a number of biographers, was not the only time critics had found opportunity to compare the two women—the urge to uncover similarities between the future queen of England, and a Tudor queen who had enjoyed a long and prosperous reign, was strong. In his biography, Coote had compared Charlotte's ‘ample forehead, large blue eyes, and steady stately countenance’ with the portraits of Elizabeth in ‘in the days of her youth and beauty’.<sup>14</sup> He had also noticed the similarity between their signatures, describing Charlotte's

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<sup>11</sup> As quoted by Chambers, p.36

<sup>12</sup> As quoted by Chambers, p.85

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in J Coote, *A Biographical Memoir of the Much Lamented Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales and Saxe Coburg*, Fourth Edition (London: Printed for J. Bartfield, 1818), p.97

<sup>14</sup> Coote, p.90

signature as ‘by no means womanish’, but ‘firm and determinate’ in character, with a ‘bold flourishing style’:

In this, too, she most probably had some regard to her favourite model, Queen Elizabeth, whose autograph has a quaintness that could not fail to interest her youthful ambition.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, while some, like the writers of the two letters above, worried that Charlotte (like Elizabeth before her) was too “masculine”, others, like Coote, commended these similarities as pertaining to political greatness. As such, it is hardly surprising that More found occasion to link Charlotte and Elizabeth in this way.

Female education had always fascinated More, and the interest in Princess Charlotte, which can clearly be observed in these reports about her life, her excursions, interests and pleasures, provided further motivation to develop this field of study further still. A large portion of her work had (or would) tackle the subject, including *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) and *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1809). *Hints* offered More the opportunity to explore the heights to which women might aspire, if given the best education by the most learned men, while safely insisting that:

The probability of [the princess] having one day functions to discharge, which, in such exempt cases only, fall to the lot of females, obviously suggests the expediency of an education not only superior to, but, in certain respects, distinct from, that of other women.<sup>16</sup>

But More almost certainly wanted this to be an eye-opener for other women. By publishing it as a book she deliberately targeted it at her largely female readers, and much of what she outlined in *Hints* had already been discussed in *Strictures* and would be furthered in *Cælebs*, with some added extras. In *Strictures*, as well as *Hints*, she had advised that an excessive cultivation of the arts was the ‘one grand source of

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<sup>15</sup> Coote, p.142

<sup>16</sup> Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Volume I (London: Printed for T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1799), in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* [Detroit, Mich.] Gale Group <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> p.10

the corruption of [...] women'.<sup>17</sup> She also promoted unabridged versions of the scriptures in all three texts, and recommended a thorough understanding of history, from Ancient Greek to Christian history, as well as the history of England. One of the main principles in both texts was that history could be a useful tool in the study of the passions, morality, self-knowledge and religion. She suggested in *Strictures*, for instance, that the history of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's birth and Henry VIII's break from the Catholic Church, might be understood as the work of Providence:

the instructor will not lose so fair an occasion for unfolding how in the councils of the Most High the crimes of the king were overruled to the happiness of the country; and how, to this inauspicious marriage [between Henry and Anne Boleyn], from which the heroic Elizabeth sprung, the Protestant religion owed its firm stability.<sup>18</sup>

In *Hints*, she repeated this, observing that the most important end of the study of general history was the 'contemplation of divine wisdom and goodness' in the 'complicated chaos of human agency', which has been 'so over-ruled as to make all things work together for general good' (*Hints*, p.197).

*Hints* departed from *Strictures* by incorporating several interesting pieces of literature, including extracts from the writings of Bacon and Clarendon, as well as Johnson, Addison, Barrow, Butler, and Plutarch, to name but a few. All were distinguished for their work on (either) law, politics or philosophy and were not writers commonly proposed in female educational treatise, whether royal or not. *Hints* was unusual in another sense, because it provided a snippet of Elizabeth's life that blurred the line between educational treatise and biography. In fact, More devoted an entire chapter to Elizabeth, and clearly recognised that she might be the woman on whom Charlotte modelled herself. This estimation was probably accurate. Charlotte was described by biographer Robert Huish, after her death, as being

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<sup>17</sup> More, *Strictures*, p.81

<sup>18</sup> More, p.196

intimately acquainted with the life and character of Elizabeth, who was her favourite study, having ‘analyzed [her history] with an uncommon degree of acuteness’.<sup>19</sup> According to Huish she was once asked what she would have done in the case of Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, and replied: “I should, perhaps, have acted like Elizabeth, I should have forgotten the *queen* and acted like the *woman*” (my emphasis).<sup>20</sup> As such, More might not have been wrong in supposing that a study of Elizabeth’s reign and character was important to the young princess.

More had begun her biographical anecdote with a lengthy discussion of Elizabeth’s education, which naturally created a favourable impression. This was not accidental. More appears inclined towards Elizabeth for several reasons: her intelligence, her ‘administrative energy’, the value of literature and learning in her court, and her determination—all of which she attributed to her early education and discipline (*Hints*, p.12 and p.179). She lists her successes and notes the challenges she overcame:

she had prejudices apparently insurmountable, to overcome; she had heavy debts to discharge; she had an almost ruined navy to repair; she had a debased coin to restore; she had empty magazines to fill; she had a decaying commerce to invigorate; she had an exhausted exchequer to replenish.—All these, by the blessing of God on the strength of her mind, and the wisdom of her councils, she accomplished (*Hints*, p.180).

More knew that she was departing from other biographies, by insisting on such a positive representation. In previous decades, biographies and plays, like that by James Ralph (*The Fall of the Earl of Essex*, 1731), Henry Jones (*The Earl of Essex*, 1753) and Henry Brooke (*Earl of Essex*, 1761),<sup>21</sup> and even David Hume’s *History of Great Britain*, had, as I will show, focused more particularly on the relationships with

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Huish, *Memoirs of her Late Royal Highness Charlotte Augusta, Princess of Wales* (London: Printed by R Kelly, 1817), p.2

<sup>20</sup> Huish, p.2

<sup>21</sup> Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson, *England’s Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.90

her favourites, especially the Earl of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Leicester. Contemporary records of her love and jealousy became protracted, with violent scenes of passion, unsuitable for More's sober lessons. Still, they had to be addressed. More did not deny that Elizabeth was flawed, and suggested that the problem lay not in her sovereignty, but in her sex: 'If we were to estimate Elizabeth as a private individual, she would doubtless appear entitled to but little veneration' (*Hints*, p.186). Her doleful end, the 'desolated [...] closing scene of an illustrious princess', thought More, was a sure sign of corrupt morals (*Hints*, p.188). With respect to the death of Mary Queen of Scots, she agreed with contemporary accounts, blaming it on Elizabeth's vanity and jealousy (*Hints*, p.188), alluding to the popular account by Sir James Melville, a Scottish Diplomat, who, after insinuating himself in Elizabeth's company, allowed her to compare her beauty and accomplishments with those of her (apparently superior) rival. More also recalled Elizabeth's attachment to the Earl of Essex, which had played itself out in contemporary biographies and histories as the cause of her demise, a tragedy of misunderstandings, unrequited love and wounded pride. She agreed that the anecdote was a sign of Elizabeth's 'uncontrolled' temper and passion (*Hints*, p.189), and suggested that 'her ignorance of the principles of liberty' reflected her lack of respect to the 'privileges of Parliament', which allowed her to imprison whosoever she chose, without being held to account (*Hints*, p.189).

Instances like these, however, were few and far between, and More urged her readers not to look to the *woman*, for in her there was 'much to blame', but to the *sovereign*, in whom there was 'almost everything to admire' (*Hints*, p.186). In fact, More had identified the female writer's biggest hurdle with respect to Elizabeth: understandings and representations of her traditionally rested on a sex/gender binary.



If one considered her as female, which signified only her sex, this was less problematic because sex could be immaterial to political skill. But if Elizabeth was considered as a woman, denoting her gender, they could run into difficulties. This was why More wanted her readers to look to the *sovereign* rather than the *woman*, and why Charlotte had said she would have forgotten the *queen*, and acted as a *woman*. Elizabeth's sex and gender appeared incompatible, and female writers would have to undermine this binary if they were going to free Elizabeth from her gender. Importantly, More was evidently disappointed that historians continued to look only to Elizabeth's gender in this way, noting that writers had been quick to give 'the praise of liberality to James, and especially to Henry', while Elizabeth had suffered the 'imputation of avarice' (*Hints*, p.182), emotionally and financially.

Clearly, More's was not a typical biography. It was one section within a larger work, the main aim of which was to examine the education of a princess, while also encouraging less fortunate women to challenge their own education and to push themselves further. As such, the biographical excerpt could not be anything but biased. More needed to demonstrate that a rigorous education like Elizabeth's could produce fantastic results. It allowed her to become a politically powerful queen, capable of leading parliament, being careful and thoughtful towards her subjects, leading her country to military success. She appreciated that there was a discourse surrounding Elizabeth's relationship with her favourites which had to be addressed, and even this could be usefully utilised to discuss lessons in morality and religion. Ultimately, the biographical aspect of *Hints* had an ulterior motive—to triumph female education, and to examine the sex/gender binary—which made it particularly fuzzy.

## 2.1: Fuzziness: bias, language, and the representation of unmarried women

Like More, many other biographers from the period had ulterior motives, biases and prejudices, which made their approach to writing fuzzy. William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was shown in chapter one to greatly complicate our understanding of Wollstonecraft's work. It will also attract attention in chapter three, with regards to the account of Wollstonecraft's death. Of course, the idea that biographers might have an ulterior motive, alternative motivations for writing a biography (other than accurate representation), is not new. As early as 1918, Sidney Lee, himself a biographer, had recognised that the 'propriety' of the biographer's point of view, 'his attitude or perspective', was of the most concern:<sup>22</sup>

the biographer's indulgence in the partial view, the giving an unchecked rein to his idiosyncrasies [...] he suffers his private sympathies or antipathies to exclude much that is essential to completeness. Again, the writer's partialities will render his lights too brilliant and his shadows either too dark, or, as is a common experience, not dark enough.<sup>23</sup>

In Lee's view, the biggest problem with contemporary biographies was that they were very often innately biased. Even a young Jane Austen had ridiculed historians' affection of objectivity in her own *History of England* (1791), comically exaggerating her opinion in each character sketch (including Elizabeth) for satirical effect. This theory is more commonly accepted by scholars today, making both reader and biographer more cautious—allowances are made for a writer's partiality, and apply to biographies by both male and female writers. With regards to women writers in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century, however, particular care is required.

Several issues from the most prominent biographies of Elizabeth by female writers in this period make them problematic. Other than More and Austen, these

<sup>22</sup> As outlined by David Novarr, *Lines of Life: Theories of Biography 1880-1970* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1986), p.13

<sup>23</sup> Sidney Lee, *The Perspective of Biography* (English Association, 1918), pp.9-10

writers included Mary Hays, Lucy Aikin, Sophia Lee and Mary Wollstonecraft. At the time that they wrote about Elizabeth's life, each was unmarried. More, Hays, Aikin, Lee and Austen would remain so. Only Hays and Aikin would explore Elizabeth's life to its full potential, Hays in her *Female Biography: Or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries* (1803) and Aikin in *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth* (1818). Like More, Wollstonecraft and Austen would each include a small discussion of Elizabeth in a larger work. This pattern raises several questions with regards to the Fuzzy Set Theory: to what extent does their unmarried status have anything to do with their chosen subject, an unmarried queen? How, if at all, might this impact their understanding and representation of Elizabeth? The critic might have to negotiate the possibility that unmarried female writers were attracted to the subject of Elizabeth, not because they were necessarily interested in her political achievements or education, but because they were interested in her unmarried status, the ways in which it was received by her critics and how it related to their own situation. This might certainly affect their representation. As evident in Austen's *History of England*, however, it did not necessarily mean that the writer had to like Elizabeth.

The pattern of unmarried writers causes further complexity with regards to the representation of unmarried women in the eighteenth century, and, in contrast, how it was perceived in the sixteenth century (during Elizabeth's life time). It seems that it was greatly complicated by the language applied to unmarried women, and particularly Elizabeth. Words such as "chastity", "virginity", "celibacy" and "maidenhood" are subject to the Problem of Translation, having suggested different things to different people throughout the last four to five hundred years (and even before that time). For instance, the *OED* indicates that both virginity and chastity

could have (and continue to have) religious connotations. Virginity, particularly, literally meaning “unused”, has been known to apply to unmarried woman who are ‘distinguished for piety or steadfastness in religion’. However, the *OED* also notes that in 1759 Samuel Johnson used the word to apply to old women in *The Idler*, in a decidedly secular sense. Around this time, Naomi Braun Rosenthal has observed, ‘the term “spinster” became synonymous with the equally ancient, but considerably less-neutral appellation, “old maid”’, both of which were applied to a secular context.<sup>24</sup> Spinster itself is a word that has already been translated a number of times, originally meaning a woman (or even a man) who spins, which was probably the general occupation of unmarried women in the early modern period. In later years it came to be used in a derogative sense, suggesting that the denotation of these words, and the use of them, have altered alongside the perception of being unmarried: if one wanted to ridicule an unmarried woman, then one might use the word “spinster”, but if one wanted to commend her, then “virginal” or even “chaste” would be more appropriate.

Chastity is, perhaps, the most problematic of all words applied to unmarried women, and, like virginity, has often deviated from its association with religion, particularly the law of chastity taken by Catholic clergy. Calling a woman “chaste” did not, and does not, necessarily suggest that the woman in question has not engaged in sexual intercourse, though it might continue to be used in that sense. Thus, a married woman could still be considered “sexually continent” even when she was no longer a virgin. For example, in 1547, William Baldwin noted in his *Treatyce of Moral Philosophy* that ‘the first degree of chastity is pure virginity and the second faithful matrimony’ (*OED*). This not only suggests that chastity could be found in marriage, but that virginity was, or should be, a *temporary* situation before marriage.

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<sup>24</sup> Naomi Braun Rosenthal, *Spinster Tales and Womanly Possibilities* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.10

The notion that woman should aspire to matrimony was quite common post-Reformation. As Laura M Carpenter explains, after the split with Catholic Church, virginity was generally viewed as ‘a temporary stage through which a young girl passed on the way to chaste marriage’; it was, in her view, a valuable commodity, with a very limited ‘shelf-life’.<sup>25</sup> She notes that even authors such as William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, living at the time of Queen Elizabeth, encouraged young women not to protect their virginity unduly, ‘even as they applauded the virginity of their queen’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the Reformation has been seen to mark a shift in emphasis with regards to the clergy, because, according to Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, ‘celibacy was no longer privileged as the most desirable condition for God’s ministers’.<sup>27</sup> Carpenter has even suggested that religiously motivated celibacy was disdained in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as ““reeking of Popish superstition””; it was a time when sexual expression was viewed as ‘normal and desirable’ for both sexes.<sup>28</sup> Of course, all this was greatly problematic at a time when an unmarried woman was monarch.

Elizabeth Heale has explored the difficulties this caused writers working in Elizabeth’s lifetime, not least Edmund Spenser and his *The Faerie Queene* (1590), written in praise of Elizabeth. According to her, Spenser’s celebration of chastity in Book 3 should be put in the same context that informed John Donne’s view of virginity in *Paradoxes, Problemes, Essayes and Characters* (1652). In this he said:

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<sup>25</sup> Laura M Carpenter, *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences* (New York: State University New York University Press, c2005), p.20

<sup>26</sup> Carpenter, p.20

<sup>27</sup> Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, ‘Childless Men in Early Modern England’, in *Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.164

<sup>28</sup> Carpenter, p.20

I call not that *Virginitie a vertue*, which resideth only in the *Bodies integrity* ...  
But I call that *Virginitie a vertue* which is willing and desirous to yield it selfe  
upon honest and lawfull terms, when just reason requireth [...]<sup>29</sup>

Heale notes that many Protestants gave marriage precedence over virginity in this way, including John Milton (after Elizabeth's death), in his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), and Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*:

Chastity in Book 3, in spite of the preoccupation of the Proem with the example of Queen Elizabeth, is emphatically conceived in terms of the chaste and God-given desire which Milton describes. Chastity, thus conceived of as a generous but pure sexuality, was particularly associated with female virtue; indeed it was the central, indispensable female virtue.<sup>30</sup>

Further still, Spenser continued to apply the word "chastitee" to Elizabeth, as can be seen in his reference to Belphœbe, an analogue for the queen:

Ne let his fairest Cynthia refuse  
In mirrors more than one her self to see,  
But either Gloriana let her chuse,  
Or in Belphœbe fashioned be;  
In th' one her rule, in th' other her rare chastitee.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, although the word chastity was more commonly associated with women who remained virtuous within marriage, it continued to be applied to Elizabeth, as another word meaning virginity and/or virtue. Kevin Curran observes that in John Lyly's *Euphues and His England* (1580), Queen Elizabeth is said to have "the chastitee also to refuse all, accounting it no lesse praise to be called a Virgin, then to be esteemed a *Venus*".<sup>32</sup> It is chastity, notes Curran, that allows the queen "to be called a Virgin", 'leaving no room for the clerical notion of chastity as an ideal attained within marriage'.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, as Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie have explored,

<sup>29</sup> As quoted by Elizabeth Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.73

<sup>30</sup> Heale, p.73

<sup>31</sup> Edmund Spenser, 'The Legend of Britomart; or, Chastity', *The Faerie Queene: Books I to III*, ed. by Douglas Brooks-Davies (Vermont: Everyman, 1987), II.3-7

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by Kevin Curran, *Marriage, Performance and Politics at the Jacobean Court* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p.49

<sup>33</sup> Curran, p.49

the ‘cult’ of Elizabeth did not offer a ‘poetics of power’ available for general distribution to unmarried women of the Renaissance:<sup>34</sup> the language surrounding Elizabeth’s unmarried status was greatly problematised by Protestant understandings of the virtue of marriage, and simply too open to the problem of translation—both then and in the eighteenth century (and even now).

Elizabethan writers did have ways of dealing with the problem of Elizabeth’s unmarried status: they gave her special or divine qualities. Lyly depicted Elizabeth as the lunar deity, Cynthia, in his play *Endymion* (c.1588), distancing her from mortal weaknesses and desires, while Spenser’s strategy, argues Heale, was to emphasise the ‘exceptional qualities’ of Belphœbe, following Protestant thought that ‘virginity was an exceptional, undoubtedly saintly calling for the perfect few’.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, writers could only overcome the problem by making her the exception to Protestant thought. By the eighteenth century, however, writers were no longer required to pay homage to a queen who had died more than hundred and fifty years before; they were free to explore the complexities of her single status, and all the words that attended it.

A final complication began with the eighteenth century, as aspects of Elizabeth’s life, particularly her relationships, were scrutinized more closely. The popularity of the romance and even the Gothic genre were almost certainly responsible for this shift. As Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson explain, biographies in the eighteenth century were often torn between depicting Elizabeth as ‘a grief-stricken heroine of sensibility’, with ‘strikingly modernized’ femininity, secured by ‘her vaguely gothic imprisonment’, while still promoting her as a ‘more-than-adequate sovereign’.<sup>36</sup> The former representation appears to have triumphed.

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<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Ont; Cranbury; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), p.180

<sup>35</sup> Heale, p.85

<sup>36</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.88, p.85, p.88

Samuel Johnson appears to have noticed the connection between biography and romance as early as 1759, writing in *The Idler* that while a romance is nothing more than a ‘pleasing dream’, from which the reader rises and dismisses false and artful images, biography is similarly open to fanciful interpretation:

He that recounts the life of another commonly dwells most upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to increase its dignity, shows his favourite at a distance decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragic dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero.<sup>37</sup>

With its tragic dress and heroes, this style of biography is, for Johnson, very much a romance. Moreover, he believes that the only way to overcome the problem is to do away with biography completely and rely entirely on autobiography.

In many of the biographies about Elizabeth, the representation of the queen vacillates between the role of flawed protagonist and heroine of sensibility, often caught up in a tragedy with Essex, and usually incorporating the “Ring Episode”. David Hume’s *The History of England, under the House of Tudor* (1759) is typical of this genre. While also celebrating her sovereignty as a golden age of advancement,<sup>38</sup> representations of Elizabeth’s interactions with Essex are often intensely sentimental. Hume blames the ‘tenderness and passion’ of the queen on Essex’s haughtiness, highlighting the way it offends Elizabeth’s jealous pride, leading to Essex’s early death.<sup>39</sup> As Essex is condemned, Elizabeth’s own mind is filled with hesitation and grief, keeping in her ‘the most real agitation’, a ‘perpetual combat between resentment and inclination’.<sup>40</sup> It is only after his execution that Elizabeth learns that her former favourite had tried to send a ring (a previous token of her favour) to her as a plea for mercy, a sure sign of his continued love, at which point she sinks into a deep

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘The Idler’, No.84, 24 November 1759, *Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.299

<sup>38</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.80

<sup>39</sup> David Hume, ‘The History of England Under the House of Tudor’ (1759), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 18 February 2010], p.701

<sup>40</sup> Hume, p.700.



depression and dies. The Ring episode follows the convention of a number of eighteenth century biographies in being situated shortly before the queen's death. As Dobson and Watson suggest, the episode was especially important in securing Elizabeth's sentimental femininity, and, as such, 'the two years that really elapsed between the execution and her deathbed were often collapsed by eighteenth and nineteenth century historians into a much shorter period'.<sup>41</sup> In these biographies, 'her happiness and her power seemed to lie buried in the Tomb of Essex, whose absence with continued sighs and tears she bemoaned for some four months, and then was likewise laid in her grave.'<sup>42</sup>

Towards the end of the century, however, even the Essex story did not always manage to appropriately sentimentalise Elizabeth.<sup>43</sup> Increasingly, writers were becoming preoccupied with her rival Mary, who, in the guise of 'calumniated innocence of tragic susceptibility, easily assimilable to heroic and national femininity', could lay claim to the position of distressed heroine of sensibility in a much more obvious way than Elizabeth.<sup>44</sup> Lee's 1785 *The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times*, an immensely popular historical fiction, capitalised on the confrontation between these two queens (told through the narration of Mary's fictional daughters), and described Elizabeth's treatment of Mary as 'mingled with impatience, caprice, pride, and excessive vanity'.<sup>45</sup> In this, Elizabeth is like a power-wielding Abbess from the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis: she is rigid, sexually stagnant and merciless. By comparison, the eroticised Mary is 'beautiful and unfortunate', a victim of a political coup, seduced and innocently implicated in the murder of her

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<sup>41</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.94.

<sup>42</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.94.

<sup>43</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.98

<sup>44</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.99

<sup>45</sup> Sophia Lee, 'The Recess; or, A Tale of Other Times' (1791), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 29 February 2010], p.31

husband.<sup>46</sup> Lee describes Mary as ‘deserted’ and ‘betrayed’ by Elizabeth when she is requested to stand trial to prove her innocence in return for asylum, and overlooks the political turmoil that followed the murder of Mary’s second husband Darnley and her marriage to Bothwell.<sup>47</sup> According to Lee, Mary’s fatal flaw is to be more beautiful than Elizabeth: ‘the unfortunate Mary’s greatest crimes with her, [are] the graces she received from nature’.<sup>48</sup> It has little or nothing to do with the threat Mary poses to Elizabeth’s political position; rather, it is Elizabeth’s vanity and jealousy, an apparent weakness of her sex, which causes Mary’s death. After her execution Mary becomes ‘anointed’, ‘sanctified’, a ‘Royal Martyr’.<sup>49</sup> She is invoked by the narrator as a mother to her people and sister sovereign—Elizabeth’s crime is not just murder, but parricide and soricide. For writers like Hays, More and Aikin, determined to pursue their own line of thought, these popular anecdotes were particularly difficult to negotiate. As can be seen in *Hints*, they generally had to be addressed and required careful manipulation. As will be shown, for Hays they were particularly problematic, and could only disrupt a representation that deliberately avoided a gendered analysis, but for Aikin, they could be employed to further her own representation of a queen with multiple sexual characteristics.

Writers like More, Hays and Aikin, were, then, inheriting an exceptionally confused understanding of Queen Elizabeth. Not only was Elizabeth distant from them historically, but the language used to describe her unmarried status (and their own) was vast, confused and inconsistent, as was the discourse around it, which struggled with Protestant teachings. Moreover, the biographical canon surrounding Elizabeth was heavily invested in particular anecdotes that borrowed heavily from the

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<sup>46</sup> Lee, p.30.

<sup>47</sup> Lee, p.31.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, p.32

<sup>49</sup> Lee, p. 32

romance genre, either sentimentalising the queen, or placing her in opposition to her more beautiful rival, as a tyrannical, jealous woman, thus mixing and confusing biography and fiction. For the contemporary critic, these issues are greatly magnified. Alongside language, scholars not only have to negotiate the discourse surrounding Elizabeth, which has continued to grow and become ever more complex, but also have to be mindful of a biographer's potential bias, particularly with respect to women writers. With More, this is revealed in the overall aim of *Hints*, which is to outline an excellent education for women, while undermining her gender. Clearly, this was influenced by external events. In describing Elizabeth's life, More was mindful of interactions within the royal family, and probably knew, or suspected, that Charlotte's education had been neglected. As I will suggest with regards to Aikin, other writers might be even more aware of the royal family if the situation changed, as it invariably did throughout the next fifteen years or more. Indeed, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the royal family's popularity was at an all time low as King George III became increasingly insane, the marriage of the Prince of Wales and his wife broke down irrevocably, both became involved a number of (very public) scandals, and Princess Charlotte (their only child) died in childbirth. Events such as these might easily affect a biographer's opinion of royal figures, inciting them to reflect deeply on instances of similar behaviour from royal figures past. Other biases might include, as previously discussed, their perception of Elizabeth's unmarried status, and their own, political views, their engagement with other discourses, or more personal sympathies. The Fuzzy Set Theory can allow the critic to consider all this, and to incorporate it, without fear of being misled.

## 2.2: Mary Hays and the ghost of Mary Wollstonecraft

While Hays' chapter on Elizabeth was, like More's *Hints*, written as part of a much larger work, Hays was clearly determined to consider Elizabeth's life in full. Her unwillingness to compromise with respect to detail meant that *Female Biography* took three years to write and ran into six volumes before it was finally published in 1803, two years before More's *Hints*. It followed *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), a semi-autobiographical novel that was condemned by many reviewers as immoral, and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), which attacked female oppression and received harsh reviews in the wake of the Reign of Terror in France. She was well-known as a disciple of the (Joseph) Johnson sect, and a close friend of Wollstonecraft. This association, however, had become difficult to negotiate in the years following Wollstonecraft's death and Godwin's publication of *Memoirs*, and it was not surprising that when *Female Biography* finally emerged, Wollstonecraft was notably absent.

Despite this, Gina Luria Walker has suggested that Hays' own "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft" (1800), was likely meant to be the first chapter of *Female Biography*.<sup>50</sup> Certainly, it is likely that *Memoirs* inspired *Female Biography*, as it was the first time that Hays had attempted a biography, and both followed a similar format, described by Walker as a *Bildungsroman*, beginning with the woman's education, and proceeding with the development of her intellectual, religious and/or political beliefs.<sup>51</sup> The obvious links between the two texts suggest, as many have noted, that Wollstonecraft is a continuous and inescapable presence in *Female Biography*. In the chapter on Elizabeth, which dominates Volume VI, this is particularly evident.

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<sup>50</sup> Gina Luria Walker, *The Idea of Being Free*, p.18. Mary Hays, "Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft", *Annual Necrology for 1797-8* (London: R.Phillips, 1800).

<sup>51</sup> Walker, p.253

Hays could not resist turning to Wollstonecraft's *The Female Reader* when she was searching for material for the chapter on Elizabeth. From Wollstonecraft's 'The Character of Queen Elizabeth', which was less than two pages long, she pulled long passages which appear almost word-for-word in her chapter. Similarly to More, Wollstonecraft was particularly irked by the 'prejudices' of her contemporaries, who continued to view Elizabeth as a weak (gendered) woman, rather than as a successful sovereign:

The fame of this princess [...] yet lives still exposed to another prejudice, which is more durable because more natural, and which, according to the different views in which we survey her, is capable either of exalting beyond measure or diminishing the lustre of her character. This prejudice is founded on the consideration of her sex. When we contemplate her as a *woman* [my emphasis] we are apt to be struck with the highest admiration of her qualities and extensive capacity; but we are also apt to require some more softness of disposition, some greater lenity of temper, some of those amiable weaknesses by which her sex is distinguished. But the true method of estimating her merit is to lay aside all these considerations, and to consider her merely as a rational being placed in authority, and instructed with the government of mankind.<sup>52</sup>

Wollstonecraft clearly saw Elizabeth as embodying another gender, in being neither masculine nor feminine (language which, in this text, she avoids). The idea is close in principle to that found in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which, as observed in chapter one, suggested that women should be valued as "rational beings", beyond the confines of gender. Hays, too, recognised that Elizabeth's critics were transfixed by her gender:

As a monarch, even the enemies of Elizabeth will not deny her the appellation of great; but their prejudices, founded on the consideration of her sex, cannot, even by her friends, be disallowed. [...] Those who require more softness of manners, greater lenity of temper, and more feminine graces, to form the character of a *woman* [my emphasis], to whom they could attach themselves as a mistress and a wife, must be reminded, that these amiable weaknesses, which arise out of a state of subjection and dependence, are utterly

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, 'The Character of Queen Elizabeth', *The Female Reader*, in *Works of Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London : Pickering, 1989), IV, p.296.

incompatible with the situation of an absolute sovereign, and with the exercise of those qualities by which only such a situation can be maintained.<sup>53</sup>

Guided by Wollstonecraft, Hays insists that Elizabeth should not be observed as a woman, because in her there is much to be disliked. By so doing, both writers identify the same sex/gender binary observed by More, noting that those who are transfixed by Elizabeth's gender can only be disappointed, while those who look to the genderless sovereign will be appeased. In fact, all three writers are reacting to a growing consciousness, as outlined by Dobson and Watson, 'that [Elizabeth's] status as a national idol might be at variance with her personal identity as a woman'.<sup>54</sup>

Passages such as this, however— which refer to 'amiable weaknesses'— have convinced critics that Hays falls short of Wollstonecraft. Jane Rendall has suggested that Hays 'shrank from some of the consequences of [her] arguments [...] Domestic commitments had to come first'.<sup>55</sup> But, Hays' language, though perhaps not un-gendered in the same way as Wollstonecraft's, is not straightforward. Audrey Bilger has noted that Hays wrestles with questions of female identification and difference: 'she locates herself both inside and outside her own gender, as one of "us" and as one who can see how (other) women have gone astray'.<sup>56</sup> In many ways, this makes her work more Fuzzy than most—her views on gender are, perhaps, deliberately ambiguous, a tool by which she can avoid being too closely associated with Wollstonecraft. It cannot, however, be suggested that Hays' views on women were constrained by the domestic. In this passage it is clear that she urges women to be more than just wives and mistresses, for in this there can only be a state of 'subjection

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Hays, 'Queen Elizabeth', in *Female Biography or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all ages and countries* (London: Richard Phillips, 1803), IV, pp.290-92. All subsequent line references are from this edition and volume, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>54</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.79

<sup>55</sup> Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: women in Britain, France, and the United States, 1780-1860* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1985), p.65

<sup>56</sup> Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p.144

and dependence'. She, like Wollstonecraft and More, longed for women to aspire to more than just 'amiable weaknesses', and Elizabeth, who seemed to rise above her gender, offered each writer the opportunity to explore the heights of their own avid dreams for women, the towering heights she might reach if she were her own person.

All three writers saw this vision as rooted in education. For Hays, these views on education had grown out of the writings of Catherine Macaulay (who was included in her *Female Biography*), as well as Wollstonecraft, whose *Rights of Woman* she had singled out as one of the few pieces of literature possessing enlarged views, acute political reasonings and forcible arguments: 'Let the defenders of male despotism answer', she had goaded, 'the Rights of Woman by Miss Wollstonecraft'.<sup>57</sup> They were also shared by many other female writers, including More and Anna Letitia Barbauld. Education constitutes the most important part of Hays' biography on Elizabeth, and dominates her account of Elizabeth's early life and adolescence; it is portrayed as a continuous cycle of learning throughout her life. Hays focuses, particularly, on Elizabeth's education under Roger Ascham, who was well-known in eighteenth-century literary and educational circles as the writer of *Toxophilus* (1545) and *The Scholemaster* (1570), which described the teaching methods of the ideal tutor, and advocated teaching language by double translation. As evident in More's *Hints*, his praise of Elizabeth is crucial in *Female Biography*; letters to and from Ascham are recounted in detail, especially those which encourage and applaud Elizabeth's scholarly achievements: 'It can scarcely be credited to what degree of skill in the Latin and Greek she might arrive, if she should proceed in that course of study where in she hath begun in the guidance of Grindal' (*Female Biography*, p.72),

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<sup>57</sup> As quoted in Walker, p. 221

writes Ascham to Sir John Cheke, shortly after taking up his post.<sup>58</sup> Even her brother, King Edward, allows her, ‘without imposition or restraint’, to ‘choose her own principles and preceptors’ (*Female Biography*, pp.72-3) and supports her literary pursuits. Their approval is vital to the endorsement of contemporary female education.

In describing the early years after Elizabeth’s accession, Hays continues to emphasise that education should not just be an accomplishment confined to girlhood, but should be continued throughout life. During this period, Elizabeth is portrayed by Ascham as having overtaken a number of men in her learning:

Point forth six of the best given gentlemen of this court, and all they put together, shew not so much good-will, spend so much time, bestow not so many hours, daily, orderly, and constantly, for the increase of learning and knowledge, as doth the queen’s majesty herself [...] And that which is most praise-worthy of all within the walls of her privy-chamber, she has obtained that singularity of learning, to understand, speak, and write, both wittily with head, and fair with hand, as scarce one or two rare wits in both the universities had in many years reached unto (*Female Biography*, pp.103-4).

This striking passage reveals to Hays’ readers that Elizabeth had overtaken those men who were distinguished for erudition. She could not only (like Princess Charlotte), read and write Latin, Italian, French, Spanish and Greek, as Ascham went onto disclose, but was also distinguished as a ‘wit’, capable of challenging the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge. While Ascham uses this to berate the ‘young gentlemen’ of England, Hays uses it to encourage and inspire her female readers. Conscious, however, that some may consider Ascham as prejudiced in Elizabeth’s favour (he might create a more flattering portrait of her intellect because it had been inspired by his mode of teaching), Hays outlines at length the testimonies of other learned men. These included Joseph Justus Scaliger, the French religious reader and scholar, who although disappointed with the scholarly pretensions of English men, was apparently

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<sup>58</sup> William Grindall was Elizabeth’s first classical tutor, but died of the plague in 1548.



impressed with Elizabeth; Sir John Fortescue, who read to her the Greek and Latin authors; Edmund Bohun, author of *The Character of Queen Elizabeth* (1693), who praised the queen as ‘mistress of a regular, beautiful, pure, unmixed, and “truly princely style”’ (*Female Biography*, p.104).

Evidently, these praises were largely based on Elizabeth’s commitment to Classical languages and literature, although she also studied ‘civil polity, moral philosophy, physics, and political economy’ (*Female Biography*, p.104). The reader is even assured that Elizabeth was skilled in mathematics (*Female Biography*, p.104), which again might remind the reader of Princess Charlotte. The Classics were the principle areas of study in the Renaissance, if only for the male literary elite. By the eighteenth century, although education was more widely available to women (and the lower classes), Greek and Latin oration continued to be considered a predominately male literary pursuit. While middle-class women could pursue the basics as a minor accomplishment, they could not enjoy the breadth of Classical study that had been available to Elizabeth. In Vicesimus Knox’s *Essays Moral and Literary* (1779), one daughter of a Clergyman, instructed by an especially liberal father, explains in a letter that while she ‘was possessed of a power of inspecting those volumes, in admiration of which the world has long agreed’, the rest of her sex had, ‘for the most part [been] unreasonably excluded.’<sup>59</sup> More would, in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, seek to challenge this practice by allowing the virtuous and domestic Lucilla to study Latin with her father because she has a ‘strong inquisitive mind’.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly Hays agreed, and in outlining the breadth of Elizabeth’s Classical education promoted an extraordinarily broad system of education for other young

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<sup>59</sup> Vicesimus Knox, ‘On the Insensibility of the Men to the Charms of a Female Mind Cultivated with Polite and Solid Literature. In a Letter’ (1779), in *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed. by Vivien Jones (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), p.106.

<sup>60</sup> Hannah More, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* ed. by Patricia Demers (Ont, Canada: Broadview, ), p.317.

women. Elizabeth's favourite work, 'The Cyrus of Xenophon' (*Female Biography*, p.104) (taken from the prose narrative *Anabasis* in seven volumes, written by Xénophon), is, perhaps, the most interesting of those books noted by Hays.<sup>61</sup> As outlined by Wayne Ambler, Xénophon believes that knowledge and learning is the key to successful rulership; he locates 'the solution for the political problem in science of knowledge',<sup>62</sup> further insisting that: 'Ruling human beings does not belong among those tasks that are impossible, or even among those tasks that are difficult, if one does it with knowledge'.<sup>63</sup> Xénophon's text has implications for the education and future reign of seven-year-old Princess Charlotte (of whom Hays may have been mindful when she noted Xénophon). Further still, Hays intended to show that a broad education was as important to a woman domestically as it was socially. Thus, in the very first chapter she reminds her readers: 'habits of real study and application have a tendency to strengthen the faculties and discipline the imagination' (*Female Reader*, p.71).

With this protracted analysis of Elizabeth's education and learning dominating the chapter, little or no room is left for popular romantic anecdotes. Many are, in fact, conspicuously absent, suggesting that education enables woman to shed her gender, in the way that Wollstonecraft had outlined in *Rights of Woman*. Elizabeth's brief courtship with the Duke of Anjou, believed by many to be her most serious engagement, and about whom it is believed that Elizabeth wrote the poem 'On Monsieur's Departure', is significantly underplayed in *Female Biography*. It is referred to as a 'temporary inclination' (*Female Biography*, p.169), over which 'her permanent habits of prudence and ambition' easily triumph (*Female Biography*,

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<sup>61</sup> Describing the expedition of Cyrus the Younger against his elder brother Artaxerxes II, in which Xénophon also took part.

<sup>62</sup> Wayne Ambler, ed., *The Education of Cyrus* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), p.2.

<sup>63</sup> Ambler, I.1.3, p.22.

p.169). This is strongly reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, and Hays' own *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), both of which recommend education as a mode by which women might avoid excessive passion (as well as the restrictions of gender), which they criticise as enfeebling: 'knowledge has a direct and natural tendency to promote the love, and the consequent practice of virtue,—to improve the mind,—to exercise and strengthen the judgement'.<sup>64</sup> In the portrayal of Elizabeth's courtship with Anjou, this is particularly evident. The Duke leaves the court of Elizabeth ungraciously muttering 'curses on the mutability of women' (*Female Biography*, p.169) and Hays congratulates Elizabeth on avoiding the calamities 'which must have followed so unsuitable and imprudent a connection' (*Female Biography*, p.169).

The similarities between *Female Biography* and *Appeal* reveal that Hays' primary aim, like More, was to prove that, with the correct education, women could be (and indeed were) as rational and politically skilful as men. As stated in *Appeal*:

[...] did women receive equal advantages in education, there is every reason to suppose, they would equal men in the sublime science of politicks; which as it includes the whole art of governing the multitude well in the liberal sense of the word, requires not only such talents, as the one sex is allowed to possess in common with the other; but includes likewise those, which men are fond of arrogating exclusively to themselves. Such as strength of mind,—extensive foresight,—genius to plan schemes of importance,—and resolution, and stability to put them into execution [...].<sup>65</sup>

No other historical character could offer Hays the same opportunity to display the political skill of a woman. It is not surprising therefore, that *Female Biography* is packed with anecdotes in which Elizabeth's wisdom and rationality are emphasised. Many occur when an attempt has been made on her life, thus revealing her self-possession in moments of threat and crisis. In one episode, a number of gentlemen

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<sup>64</sup> Mary Hays, 'Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women' (1798), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 21 February 2010], p.163.

<sup>65</sup> Hays, 'Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women' (London, 1798), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 4 January 2010], p.38

are brought to trial for conspiring to withdraw into France, with a view to aid the cause of Mary. Even though they are found guilty by the jury, they receive a pardon from Elizabeth (*Female Biography*, p.98). Later, as the queen is rowed in her barge on the Thames, a shot is fired, and one of her bargemen wounded (*Female Biography*, p.164). Again, the queen magnanimously offers liberty to the person without any further punishment. She appears to combine compassion (a trait which is often considered to be “feminine”), with statesman-like mercy, thus escaping a gendered analysis.

Her tolerance towards the Catholic faith is also justly praised by Hays. Religious toleration was important to Hays (she was brought up as a rational dissenter in the Blacksfields Particular Baptist Chapel), and she reminds the reader of Elizabeth’s sister Mary I of England, who had governed in the five years before Elizabeth and after their half-brother’s demise. Protestant England was still greatly prejudiced against Mary, and the executions carried out under her reign were listed in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, which appeared five years after Mary I’s death, and was widely available across England into the nineteenth century. Hays, too, capitalised on the opportunity to contrast Elizabeth with the violent oppression of Mary: ‘[t]he reign, the bigotry, and the butchery of Mary, who, to do God service, amused herself by burning and torturing her people’ (*Female Biography*, p.75). In fact, the Catholic queen did not kill any more people in the name of religion during her reign than did Henry VIII or Elizabeth.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in spite of the praise for Elizabeth for her religious toleration, those connected to the Catholic faith are, paradoxically, often portrayed by Hays as stubborn and petulant, especially the pope: ‘[his] precipitate temper, insolent reflections, and extravagant demands, determined her [Elizabeth] to persevere in the

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<sup>66</sup> As outlined by Judith M. Richards, *Mary Tudor* (London; Routledge, 2008).

plan she had already embraced' (*Female Biography*, p.78). This, of course, makes Elizabeth's patience and understanding towards Catholics especially admirable; she even retains eleven of her sister's Catholic counsellors, determined 'to adopt the party which education and political wisdom equally inclined in her favour' (*Female Biography*, p.79). Her actions in religious matters are always founded on 'policy', the 'art' or 'practice' of government (*OED*), a type of administrative flair, and 'knowledge of humankind'. She 'wisely' resolves to proceed gradually by 'safe and progressive steps' (*Female Biography*, p.79), which is achieved by restricting Catholic preaching, and allowing special dispensations for those of the Protestant faith, or the 'temperate and the wise' (*Female Biography*, p.157). Thus, while anti-Catholic sentiment may suggest that Hays was absorbing contemporary anxieties about the Catholic Church (there had been riots following the Catholic Relief Act in 1778, and struggles against oppression had continued since then), by incorporating anti-Catholic sentiment Hays was able to highlight Elizabeth as particularly liberal, succeeding where her father and sister had failed before her, as a popular and tolerant monarch, and an able politician:

[...] frank in her address, and, on all public occasions, affable, conciliating and easy of access, she appeared delighted with the concourse that crowded around her; entered, without forgetting her dignity, into the pleasures and amusements of her subjects; and acquired a popularity unknown to her predecessors (*Female Biography*, p.81).

The constant presence of her father and sister in this part of the chapter serve as a useful yardstick by which Elizabeth's actions can be judged. In Elizabethan England, the clergy, Catholic or otherwise, were expected to accept the supremacy of the crown over the Church. Any attempt to deny this could result in heavy penalties. Hays, however, attempts to diminish the severity of these injunctions by drawing the reader's attention away from Elizabeth, towards her father and sister, thereby

emphasising her modernity: ‘These punishments, however rigorous, were less severe than those inflicted, in similar cases, during the preceding reigns’ (*Female Biography*, p.83). Similarly, Henry’s financial recklessness acts as a benchmark by which Elizabeth’s love of ornamental dress might be taken into perspective. Like More, Hays portrays Elizabeth as frugal and just, avoiding heavy taxes and making ‘progress in paying the debts which pressed heavily upon the crown, and in regulating the coin, which had been debased by her predecessors’ (*Female Biography*, pp.95). Though her sensible government in this matter might not be counted amongst the glorious victories of England, Hays admits, it is rational: ‘it reflects on the memory of the monarch a more solid and lasting glory’, and as such, Elizabeth ‘must ever stand high in the rank of sovereigns’ (*Female Biography*, p.158).

This strength and rationality extends in moments of national crisis, with the threat of the Spanish Armada. Elizabeth is indeed a war-monarch, capable of commanding armies, instilling patriotism and strength in her knights and subjects. In every aspect of the preparations for the expected invasion of Spain she plays a primary role in Hays’ biography. She demonstrates foresight and awareness in predicting the Spanish plans (*Female Biography*, p.206), and she beholds ‘without shrinking a power by which all Europe was persuaded she must necessarily be overwhelmed’ (*Female Biography*, p.206). Elizabeth’s appearance on horseback, clad in armour, at the camp in Tilbury, is her most triumphant moment. In this instance her sex does not hold her back, as one might expect, but actually lends her more power—the troops enquire of each other ‘whether it were possible that Englishmen could abandon this glorious cause, and shew less courage than appeared in the female sex’ (*Female Biography*, p.211).

Dror Wahrman has argued that Hays' account of the scene at Tilbury was typical of late eighteenth century accounts that either tried to erase the gender-unsettling aspects of Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury, or, like Hays, emphasise Elizabeth's femininity:

In Hay's hands Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury became an apologetic declaration of 'her intentions, *though a woman*, to lead them herself against the enemy': the heart of a king was no where to be found. This declaration, moreover, naturally brought forth the manly protective instincts of those around her, resolved to perish in 'the defence of their heroic queen. Indeed, sympathetic and admiring as this portrait was, penned by an erstwhile 'Wollstonecraftian', it even close to pronouncing the virgin and childless queen as unnatural ("as a woman, [she was] cut off... from the sympathies of nature).<sup>67</sup>

Wahrman is right to notice that Elizabeth's sex can be observed in this passage, just as it was at the beginning of the chapter. Here, however, it is possible to observe that the omnipresence of Wollstonecraft is not at all helpful. The problem that Wahrman appears to have with Hays is that she is not as "radical" in this as Wollstonecraft might have been; he seems surprised that a Wollstonecraftian is unable to provide an ungendered representation. While I have suggested that Wollstonecraft can be useful to Hays' critics, and should not be excluded from critical analysis, she should also not be used to *limit* our understanding of Hays: this is Dangerous Association. If we remove Wollstonecraft from this passage, and specifically our view of what scholars have called her "masculine rhetoric", Hay's Tilbury scene appears in a different light. Elizabeth's sex may be visible (and affirmed by the queen herself), but she also appears physically as a man: she has 'spirit' and 'courage' (*Female Biography*, pp.211) and rides on horseback, amongst her soldiers. Like Macaulay's Spartan women, Hays' Elizabeth assumes male privileges, and thus continues to evade a gendered analysis: as a sovereign, she is free from gender, and even sex.

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<sup>67</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven ;London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.17

Just as sovereignty allows Hays to avoid (to some extent) questions about Elizabeth's gender, Elizabeth's unmarried status allows Hays to play with it. In contemporary editions of Elizabeth's first speech to parliament on the subject of her marriage in February 1559, there is little allusion to her sex:

And to the first part, I may say unto you that from my years of understanding, sith I first had consideration of myself to be born a servitor of God, I happily chose this kind of life in which I yet live [...] constant have I always continued in this determination [...] I trust God, who hath hitherto therein preserved and led me by the hand, will not now of His goodness suffer me to go alone [...] And in the end this shall be sufficient: that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin.<sup>68</sup>

In this it appears that Elizabeth has always determined to remain single, and there is little in her speech to suggest otherwise. Moreover, she is a servant of God, tied to him, led by his hand and thus dependent on him. As Helen Hackett has indicated, this strongly suggests that God is himself fulfilling the role of spouse—Elizabeth is, essentially, married to God.<sup>69</sup> The conclusion of her speech explicitly (and prophetically) indicates that Elizabeth will live and die a virgin. The statement is bold, decisive and provocative; there is no explicit reference to her sex. As previously mentioned, virginity is not necessarily a state attached to sex. By contrast, in her summary of Elizabeth's speech, Hays emphasises Elizabeth's maternal language:

[Elizabeth replied that] even as a private person, and exposed to great perils, she had declined such an engagement [marriage], which she regarded as an incumbrance; much more at present, when charged with the care of a great kingdom, devoted to the interests of religion, and to the happiness of her people, should she persevere in this sentiment. *England was the husband which she had betrothed her; Englishmen were her children: while employed in rearing and governing such a family, she could not deem herself sterile, or her life useless* [my emphasis] [...] [She desired] to have this inscription, when she should pay the debt of nature, engraven on her tomb: "Here lies queen Elizabeth, who lived and died a *maiden queen*" (*Female Biography*, p.85).

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<sup>68</sup> Queen Elizabeth's First Speech Before Parliament, Feb 10, 1559, 'Speeches 1558-1572', *Elizabeth I Collected Works*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp.56-8

<sup>69</sup> Helen Hackett, 'A New Queen' from *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1995), p.54



Initially, critics might be tempted to suggest that Hays is feminising Elizabeth, taking away all that is bold and masculine from her speech, and picturing her as a mother, a wife, and a maiden. Maternal symbolising, however, does not necessarily have to be feminising. As Coppélia Kahn has suggested, the image of Elizabeth as a ‘bountiful mother’, and the reference to her as a ‘maiden’ (which Hays has translated from original word ‘virgin’), might encourage a useful comparison with the Virgin Mary, who was also often referred to as a maiden. Although Hays makes no explicit reference to the Virgin Mary, other than through her interesting choice of words, the implied “marriage” to God might also support this.<sup>70</sup> While clearly this would encourage Elizabeth’s subjects to look up to her as a spiritual leader with divine qualities, from Hays’ point of view it could also unsettle Elizabeth’s gender. Françoise Meltzer has outlined the ways in which the Virgin Mary could be problematic as a feminine gender exemplum ‘precisely because she [the Virgin Mary] falls outside any notion of pollution [having conceived as a virgin], Mary helps very little in the image of the feminine or, indeed, of gender imagining in general’.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Kahn has noted that even God was frequently figured in maternal language, ‘the Word being His milk, flowing from the preachers, His breasts’.<sup>72</sup> He, too, was also often perceived as genderless, but referred to in distinctly masculine terms: “His”, “He”, and “Him”. Thus the emphasis on Elizabeth’s maternity comes to incorporate all of these complex and vague meanings of gender and genderless divinity. Indeed, this is just one example of how fuzzy Hays’ Elizabeth actually is—

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<sup>70</sup> Coppélia Kahn, “‘Magic Bounty’: *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage and Maternal Power’, in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), p.162

<sup>71</sup> Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Jan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.49

<sup>72</sup> Sprengnether, p.162

sliding between masculine, feminine and androgynous representation, as Hays continually shifts her gendered scope.

Elizabeth is not, therefore, a woman of romantic sensibility in Hays' biography, the feature of prolonged anguished scenes, divided in love: there is no male partner to whom Elizabeth must be subservient, no phallus to which her sex can be compared. Instead, she is, from the outset, determined 'never to divide her power' (*Female Biography*, p.97). Far less straightforward for Hays, however, is Elizabeth's peculiar adversity to marriage, especially the marriages of her favourites which were often conducted in secret. Many biographers suggested that Elizabeth's anti-marriage stance was prudish and unnatural, or, more importantly an absurd female jealousy. Biographers were, and indeed still are, fascinated by the idea that Elizabeth separated couples out of sheer, hysterical envy. In his *History of England*, for example, Hume suggests that while Elizabeth may have been 'afraid that any pretender to the succession would acquire credit by having issue', her 'extreme severity' might also be attributed to 'malignity', which led her to envy in others 'those natural pleasures of love and posterity, of which her own ambition and desire of dominion made her renounce all prospect of herself'.<sup>73</sup> In Hume's opinion, in giving up her 'natural' role as mother and wife, Elizabeth is consumed with inevitable resentment towards all other women, and their domestic happiness. But for Hays, Elizabeth's aversion to marriage is more about her behaving "as a man", with all the fuzziness that evokes, choosing not to marry at a time when women had little choice, and arguing that Elizabeth was simply protecting her position and preventing those who had claim to the crown from continuing their succession. One particular passage describes the secret marriage and pregnancy of the Lady Catherine Grey, last remaining heir of the

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<sup>73</sup> Hume, p.444

house of Suffolk and younger sister of Lady Jane Grey. On discovery of her pregnancy, Elizabeth throws her into the Tower of London, and summons her husband Edward Seymour, the Earl of Hertford, to account for his actions. When neither can produce witnesses for the marriage, their marriage is declared unlawful and the two are held in durance.<sup>74</sup> Despite this, the couple find means to meet by bribing their keepers, thus producing a second child. As a result, the queen fines Hertford fifteen thousand pounds, and his confinement is ‘rendered more rigidly severe’ until the death of his wife nine years later, when he is freed (*Female Biography*, p.98). Although Hays does not deny the austerity of the sentence, she is careful to highlight that the marriage is a threat to the queen: as the younger sister of Lady Jane Grey, grand-daughter of Mary Tudor and great grand-daughter of Henry VII, she had a strong claim to the throne. Indeed, after the execution of Lady Jane Grey, Catherine’s claim was seriously entertained by those who considered Elizabeth’s birth to be illegitimate. According to Hays, it is through fear (of this threat) that Elizabeth is caused to act more ruthlessly.<sup>75</sup> She thus encourages her readers to put aside their assumptions, and view Elizabeth’s actions as politically motivated, rather than motivated by her position as a woman in an “unnatural” situation. Immediately after, the episode is tempered by a lighter anecdote portraying Elizabeth’s mercy, with the intention of exhibiting Elizabeth in a ‘fairer light’ (that is, more balanced and temperate) (*Female Biography*, p.98).

This method of contrasting Elizabeth’s dubious actions with more flattering anecdotes is frequently employed by Hays. With respect to Elizabeth’s more serious transgressions, it is particularly useful. It is thus that Elizabeth’s interactions with the

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<sup>74</sup> It is thought that Catherine lost the document that proved their marriage was lawful, and the only witness, Jane Seymour (Edward Seymour’s sister), died of tuberculosis soon after. Thus, neither husband nor wife was able to prove the legitimacy of their marriage.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth may have believed that the marriage was part of a wider conspiracy.

Queen of Scots are portrayed in a far more flattering hue. Her common sense, as a learned monarch, surpasses any fleeting moments of jealousy.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, while most other biographies did not incorporate Elizabeth's repeated intercessions on behalf of Mary (which complicated Mary's role as a heroine of sensibility, deserted by all and vulnerable), Hays is not afraid to explore this complication in full:

Elizabeth, after the final overthrow of the unfortunate queen of Scots, seemed touched with real compassion [...] she reflected on the instability of human affairs, and of regal greatness; she perceived the danger of encouraging a nation to revolt, and resolved to employ her power to alleviate the calamities of her fallen sister queen. She expressed her reprobation of the late conduct of the unfortunate Mary, yet mingled these expressions with pity and concern (*Female Biography*, p.118).

Although she agrees that the 'all the glories of her [Elizabeth's] reign are insufficient to efface the stain thrown on her character by her behaviour towards the queen of Scots' (*Female Biography*, p.113), Hays nevertheless attempts to sympathise with Elizabeth's position, requiring her readers to understand that Elizabeth was capable of putting the needs of the state and country ahead of her own personal quarrels and resentments. The relationship is therefore much more equal, with the faults of both outlined and explored in detail (they are, perhaps, even slightly more sympathetic towards Elizabeth), thus avoiding gendered behaviour in the representation of either queen. Thus, in the preceding description of Mary's flight from Scotland following her escape from imprisonment and the defeat of her army in the Battle of Langside, Elizabeth renews her offer of aid to the Scottish queen, but stops short of 'generous and magnanimous behaviour' in offering her unconditional asylum (*Female*

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<sup>76</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that Elizabeth's jealousy is far more pronounced in Hays' chapter on Mary Stuart in volume five of *Female Biography*. While insisting that Elizabeth was superior to Mary in 'political talent and the arts of government', she suggests that she was inferior in terms of personal graces, that this 'prey[ed] on her mind', tarnishing 'the lustre of its qualities' (Hays, *Female Biography*, V, p.20). This implies that Hays alters the tone of each chapter to appear more flattering towards its subject— in this case, Mary Stuart. The aim of *Female Biography* may therefore have been to represent the life and achievements of each woman from a pleasing perspective, even if this risked inconsistency between chapters.

*Biography*, p.121). This, however, is justified: '[generous and magnanimous behaviour] were her first sentiments, till by the sagacious Cecil she was induced to suspend these laudable feelings, and duly weigh the *policy* of the case' (my emphasis) (*Female Biography*, p.121). In episodes such as this Elizabeth's understanding of her political obligations, her reason and strength of mind nearly always overrule matters of the heart, and even of the family.

Addressing Elizabeth's apparent vanity and jealousy towards Mary, Hays insists that these errors are not due to some flaw of character, but a conflict between Elizabeth's own aspirations and what was expected of her by men; she is, ultimately, forced into a binary, which Hays attempts to break down:

before *men* presume to triumph, let them call to mind how, in their own conduct and behaviour towards woman, they lay the necessary foundation, for her anxiety to be thought possessed of external advantages and frivolous accomplishments (*Female Biography*, pp.111-12).

This, of course, she had outlined extensively in *Appeal*, arguing that 'those frivolous, but expensive, amusements, in which they [women] place their chief delight [...] are but too well kept in countenance by the men'.<sup>77</sup> *Appeal* had, in turn, responded to a number of texts from the 1790s, including Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, which had explicitly condemned men as tyrannical for keeping women in this state of subjection, beholden to an 'artificial character', and trapped in an endless performance for male sexual benefit.<sup>78</sup> At moments such as this in *Female Biography* it becomes clear that Hays is not just engaging with the discourse surrounding Elizabeth's life but also several others, including women's rights. Her views on female education (or the lack of it), as discussed, were part of this, and responded to a male-constructed ideology that kept women in a perpetual state of helplessness.

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<sup>77</sup> Hays, p.168

<sup>78</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, 'The Vindications of the Rights of Woman' in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 1997), p.156

Hays, however, does not see women's rights as a battle between the sexes, and avoids Wollstonecraft's fierce rhetoric to argue that

A little reflection and philosophy would on this, as on most subjects, teach us candour and forbearance. The sexes, reciprocally, by their errors, their vices, and their prejudices, corrupt and debase each other. Mutual sarcasm may embitter, but mutual wisdom can only reform (*Female Biography*, p.112).

This reflection looks to unite the sexes in order to reform them, and Hays was not the only writer to believe that the sexes could be brought together in this way. Barbauld, too, in her poem 'The Rights of Woman' derided the 'separate rights' of men and women and highlighted a natural affiliation between them: 'In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught, | That separate rights are lost in mutual love.'<sup>79</sup> The passage moves Hays away from Wollstonecraft, exorcising the Dangerous Association that exists between them, and allowing Hays' approach to Elizabeth, and her struggle with gender, to become more transparent: Elizabeth is the embodiment of both sexes, united in one body. Instead of producing a struggle between Elizabeth's "softer" and more daring inclinations, it only improves her as a sovereign—allowing her to moderate her excesses and vices and become a more rounded and balanced figure, a character to which others might aspire.

As such, *Female Biography* is especially Fuzzy, particularly because Hays was a writer with her pen in many fields. She was, as Walker has explained,

an innovative thinker who promoted advanced notions of toleration to include women; [...] a religious controversialist who entered the theological fracas of the day; [...] an educationalist who broke new ground for female autodidacts; [...] a philosophical commentator who translated Enlightenment ideas for a burgeoning female audience; [...] [and] a Dissenting historiographer'.<sup>80</sup>

While her works appear to tackle each of these specifically, Hays' personae can be traced throughout, and perhaps more so in *Female Biography* which was a large,

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<sup>79</sup> Anna, Letitia Barbauld, 'The Rights of Woman' *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poems* ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Canada: Broadview, 2000), pp.130-1, ll.29-32.

<sup>80</sup> Walker, p.21

varied work, incorporating the records of many women who had often led dramatic, tragic and controversial lives. It allowed Hays to ask many questions and make many diversions, all of which are incorporated in the chapter on Elizabeth. The effect this has is to create a very favourable impression of Elizabeth. By emphasising her learnedness, Hays represents a woman who is rational, compassionate and tolerant. In contrast to her father and step-sister she is frugal and popular, politically astute and modern. Elizabeth is able to reign as sovereign, with her sex rarely, if ever, being an encumbrance, and enjoys her independence without regret, leading her court through a period of peace and growth unlike any of her predecessors. The absence of popular anecdotes, and an alternative version of the downfall of Mary Queen of Scots which is more balanced and fair, attributing blame to both sides, is particularly different to other eighteenth century biographies and frees Hays from many constraints, allowing her to explore the heights that woman might reach if unrestrained by marriage, properly educated, and placed in a position of responsibility. Of course, this did not necessarily make it an accurate representation of Elizabeth.

### **2.3: Lucy Aikin and the many faces of female sexuality**

While Hays' chapter on Elizabeth remained free of those anecdotes that related to female sexuality, a new style of biography was emerging that was fascinated by the sexual intrigues of the rich and famous, both past and present. By the twentieth century, accounts of Elizabeth's life were dominated by anecdotes that speculated about her relationships with men, especially those which undermined her "virginal" status. In 1934, J. E. Neale published his own highly successful *Queen Elizabeth*. It began by dissecting the incidents that led to Thomas Seymour's arrest, who was husband of the Dowager Queen, Catherine Parr, step-mother and guardian of

the fourteen-year-old Elizabeth and her cousin Lady Jane Grey, both of whom were in her care:

They were unconventional in an age when conventions were not exactly prim. From the first weeks of his marriage Seymour frequently went into Elizabeth's chamber first thing in the morning. If she were up, 'he would bid her good morrow and ask how she did, and strike her upon the back or the buttocks familiarly' [...] [and with his wife Catherine] if they found Elizabeth in bed when they entered the room, they would both tickle her. They romped together on occasions. Once, in the garden, Catherine held Elizabeth while her husband cut the girl's gown into a hundred pieces.<sup>81</sup>

The incident is described by Neale as 'innocent enough fooling' until Elizabeth becomes self-conscious, and aroused. He describes her heart beating faster, feelings of pleasure in Seymour's attentions, blushing in his presence.<sup>82</sup> The "turn" of the relationship Neale attributes to Elizabeth: it is she who is responsible for transforming the relationship—from one of frolic, to sexual intrigue. Moreover, in Neale's description of the following investigation, it becomes clear that Elizabeth is accountable for orchestrating a secret silence between herself, Katherine Ashley (her governess) and Thomas Parry (her Cofferer). She maintains her obstinate silence until Parry confesses that Seymour was sexually forward with the Princess, and—even then—Elizabeth resists the investigator Thomas Tyrwhitt's questions, and writes a letter to the Lord Protector Edward Seymour.<sup>83</sup> In Neale's version of these events, by the time Seymour was executed in March 1549, the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth had demonstrated that she was wilful and wily (in a specifically feminized way); she was not only capable of manipulating her staff into secrecy, but also encouraging sexual advances.

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<sup>81</sup> J.E. Neale, 'The Seymour Episode', in *Queen Elizabeth* (London; Toronto, Jonathan Cape: 1934), pp.29-30.

<sup>82</sup> Neale, p.30.

<sup>83</sup> Edward Seymour, 1st Duke of Somerset: Thomas Seymour's elder brother was elected by the executors of Henry VIII's reign to be the Lord Protector while King Edward was an infant. This is despite the fact that Henry's will did not actually allow for the appointment of a protector. It is understood that Edward Seymour may have bribed the other executors. Thomas Seymour opposed this, and began smuggling money to the young King in an attempt to secure his trust and affection, whilst all the time planning a coup d'état—which eventually led to his downfall.



While this incident became extremely popular in the twentieth century, with several biographies, like Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), 'reinvent[ing] Elizabeth as a post-Freudian text-book hysteric, the guilty sexual obsessions and incapacabilities of the old woman traced to childhood and adolescence',<sup>84</sup> it can be traced back to the previous century in Edward Walford's *Greater London: A Narrative of its History, its People, and its Places*, published in 1885, and Richard Warner's *Illustrations, Critical, Historical, Biographical, and Miscellaneous of Novels*, published in 1824. Both included a short biographical excerpt relating to Elizabeth's life, which largely focused on her relationships, particularly her relationship with Seymour. Each appears to have pulled their information from the same episode related by Lucy Aikin. In a footnote, Warner quotes Aikin's version of these events in full,<sup>85</sup> while Walford relies almost entirely on Aikin's *Memoirs*, often quoting long passages, especially that relating to the Seymour episode, and coming close to plagiarising, even if Aikin is cited. Both texts reveal just how crucial Aikin's incorporation of this particular anecdote in *Memoirs* had become to the next generation of biographers.

Indeed, alongside Neale's biography, these accounts of the Seymour episode suggest that Aikin's version of this anecdote was employed more frequently than any other, becoming re-used and re-worked so many times throughout the next century that it began to take on a life of its own. Historians and critics began to make all kinds of speculations, often concluding that Elizabeth had chosen to remain unmarried because she had been sexually abused.<sup>86</sup> Hume had alluded to the relationship in his

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<sup>84</sup> Dobson and Watson, p.222

<sup>85</sup> Richard Warner, *Illustrations, Critical, Historical, Biographical, and Miscellaneous of Novels*, II (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, Pater-Noter-Row), p.378

<sup>86</sup> Note, for example, Elinor Kapps' report in *The Times* in 1996 that 'the mere expressions in the eyes of the portrait of Elizabeth as a thirteen year old, now at Windsor Castle, "reveals a childhood of abuse"'. As discussed by Dobson and Watson, p.222

*History of England*, suggesting in a footnote that ‘the curious passages between her and admiral Seymour, contained in Haynes, render her [Elizabeth’s] chastity very suspicious’.<sup>87</sup> Like Hume, Aikin had read and gathered the material from *A Collection of State Papers*, which had been compiled by Samuel Haynes and published in 1740, and it appears that she was one of the very first writers to pay the episode any particular attention. In *Memoirs*, it is given primary standing, coming before Elizabeth’s education and any other significant detail. At first, Elizabeth attempts to repel Seymour when he makes advances, but Aikin suggests that these attempts were only cursory. The significant, licentious details of the altercation between Elizabeth and Seymour are kept out of the main narrative and are consigned to the footnotes, but in these Aikin is especially daring, detailing the overtly sexual scenes that took place between Seymour, Elizabeth and Catherine Parr:

It seems that on one occasion the queen held the hands of the princess while the lord-admiral amused himself with cutting her gown to shreds; and that, on another, she introduced him into the chamber of Elizabeth before she had left her bed, when a violent romping scene took place, which was afterwards repeated without the presence of the queen.<sup>88</sup>

Critics must, however, be aware of Aikin’s language. The word ‘romping’, as described by the *OED*, is now more frequently used to describe those who engage in sexual activity, especially that of an illicit nature. In the eighteenth century, however, it was used to describe those who engaged in ‘a piece of lively, boisterous play; a merry frolic’, and was frequently applied to ‘a lively playful girl or young woman’.<sup>89</sup> Fanny Burney frequently employed the word in her letters. In this context, however, and accompanied by the word ‘violent’, in the intimate space of Elizabeth’s chamber who is otherwise alone and often in bed, it is charged with erotic meaning, even if its

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<sup>87</sup> Hume, p.593

<sup>88</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, Paternoster Row, 1818), I, pp.78-9. All subsequent line references are from this edition and volume, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>89</sup> It is used by Wollstonecraft to describe a spirited, active young girl. See chapter one, p.46.

definition remains unclear. This is yet another instance where the Problem of Translation is particularly evident. Elizabeth's characteristic caution and fierce independence, so evident in Hays' biography, is, in this particular episode, lost.

Moreover, Aikin also intimates that Elizabeth's sexual encounters may not have ended here. Like Neale, she goes on to suggest that the young princess may have possessed the cunning to bribe Katherine Ashley for keeping 'in her possession some important secrets respecting later transactions between the princess and Seymour' (*Memoirs*, I. p.84), implying that there was much more to these romping scenes (sex) than anyone would confess. This section of the *Memoirs* reveals much more about its writer than it does about its subject. It outlines the ways in which Aikin was anticipating biographies from the twentieth century, becoming embroiled in a series of anecdotes that were exploring the complexity surrounding Elizabeth's unmarried status and her relationships with men throughout her life, and exposing Aikin—an unmarried writer—as knowing. This unusual openness with regards to sex from an unmarried writer adds a further layer of complexity to Aikin's representation of Elizabeth.

There are, however, several other reasons why Aikin is an ideal candidate for the Fuzzy Set. The most important of these is that Aikin (just like Hays), was haunted by a "shadow" in the form of her more successful aunt, Barbauld. As the daughter of Barbauld's brother John Aikin and his wife Martha Jennings, Aikin was born into a learned, middle class background. Although she was too young to benefit from the society of Warrington (known for progressive pedagogical methods) from which they removed when she was three, Aikin was encouraged to write and was taught by both her father and paternal grandmother. Aikin's biographer Philip Hemery Le Breton describes her grandmother as being unreasonable in her expectations of Aikin's

progress, given the ‘extraordinary precocity’ of Barbauld and Aikin’s father. She apparently once referred to Aikin as a “‘Little Dunce’”.<sup>90</sup> “‘The pain that gave me” [recalled Aikin], “was inexpressible; it filled me with a mournful sense of hopeless deficiency””.<sup>91</sup> Le Breton also comments that

the cast of [Aikin’s] own mind fitted her better for sympathising with the strong practical sense, the liberal views, and the literary diligence of her father, than with the sensibility and poetical elegance of her aunt.<sup>92</sup>

These views belie the complexities of both writers, simultaneously re-gendering Barbauld as a harmless poetess, burdened with sensibility, and undermining Aikin as ‘strong’ and ‘practical’, seemingly without room for aestheticism. Even her poem ‘Epistles on Women’ is described by Le Breton as ‘terse’, ‘compact’, ‘smooth in versification’, ‘but not aiming at the higher qualities of imagination or invention’, and he almost entirely overlooks her work of fiction, *Lorimer, a Tale* (1814).<sup>93</sup>

The urge to compare these two women has continued long into the twentieth century, with unfortunate consequences for Aikin. As with Hays and Wollstonecraft, few can examine Aikin without referring to Barbauld, even when it does not appear to be particularly relevant. Thus, note the introduction of the Cambridge Library Collection edition of *Memoirs*, which begins ‘[Lucy Aikin] was a highly educated woman influenced by her aunt, the educationalist and writer Anna Letitia Barbauld’.<sup>94</sup> This influence cannot be observed in a biography about a queen in whom Barbauld showed little interest. Observe also William McCarthy’s suggestion that in Aikin’s *Epistles on Women* there are a ‘few details—most notably a

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<sup>90</sup> Philip Hemery Le Breton, *Memoirs, Miscellanies and Letters of the Late Lucy Aikin* (London: Longman, Green, 1804), p.x.

<sup>91</sup> As quoted by William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p.22

<sup>92</sup> Le Breton, pxx.

<sup>93</sup> Le Breton, p.xx.

<sup>94</sup> Anon, Introduction to *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.1

passage in honour of “fierce Bonduca”, the ancient British warrior queen—[which] may have fed into Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*’.<sup>95</sup> It is, however, hardly surprising that critics view Aikin through a Barbauld-shaped lens given that, in current research, many do not discover Aikin until they come to read her 1825 edition of Barbauld’s poetry, complete with a memoir. From this they are shocked to discover that she burnt a large portion of Barbauld’s works and letters, which she appears to have considered indelicate or inappropriate, manipulating the record of Barbauld, in McCarthy’s view, to such an extent that it had ‘the effect of making her aunt appear hostile to women’s education, to the disgust of twentieth-century feminists’.<sup>96</sup> It is with this in mind that McCarthy imagines that ‘Aikin’s feminism was largely defensive’.<sup>97</sup>

While Aikin may not have waded into the debate surrounding women’s rights, which, by the 1810s had waned considerably since the excited atmosphere of freedom in the 1790s, that is not to say that she did not rebel in her own quiet way. Anne Laurence has categorised Aikin alongside a group of female historians from this period who failed to fundamentally challenge ‘patriarchal assumptions either in their writings or in their lives’.<sup>98</sup> But Aikin did challenge patriarchal assumptions in her life, whether consciously or not, by remaining unmarried. As Nina Auerbach has suggested, a free woman could be dangerous because she was

mobile, self-defined, free to establish [her] own boundaries; beneath the social straitjacketing [...] a disturbingly commanding figure precisely because she evaded family definition. Potentially at least she was an authentic hero.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, p.499

<sup>96</sup> McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, p.141

<sup>97</sup> Aikin, p.499

<sup>98</sup> Anne Laurence, *Women, Scholarship and Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.138

<sup>99</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters* (foreword), ed. by Laura L. Doan (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.ix

It is not, however, clear why Aikin never married— Le Breton offers no explanation, and does not even address the subject (notable, given the relative rarity of remaining single). One might be tempted to suggest that she, like Elizabeth, made a conscious decision to remain unmarried, preferring an independent life to pursue her ambitions. Aikin did, according to Le Breton, enjoy intimate, intellectual friendships with a number of distinguished men:

[s]he enjoyed with keen relish, and thoroughly appreciated, the company of literary men, and of the eminent politicians and lawyers, with whom she delighted to discuss questions of interest.<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, it is clear from her personal letters that she kept up a lively correspondence with a number of men, which might again be compared to Elizabeth's (platonic) relationships with the learned men within her court. In spite of this, however, Aikin appears to have led a fulfilling life apart from men and marriage.

*Memoirs*, Aikin's first biographical work, written in 1818, was the only female biography (besides the memoir for Barbauld) that Aikin wrote. Other biographies included *Memoirs of the Court of King James the First* (1822) and *Memoirs of the Court of King Charles the first* (1833). It followed a number of translations, reviews and articles, as well as her *Epistles on Women*, published in 1810, and *Lorimer; a Tale* published in 1814. *Epistles on Women* is, perhaps, the work for which Aikin is most well known. It was praised by many nineteenth-century critics as dignifying to the female sex:

[W]e are happy to see a woman asserting the proper dignity of her sex, and envincing by her own example that female pretensions are well founded. It is quite time that the doctrine of natural inequality of the sexes should be exploded: indeed we imagine that the most *sensible* people are of this opinion, especially when they recollect, among many others, the names of [Anna] Seward, [Joanna] Bailey, Maria Edgeworth, ([Anna Letitia]) Barbauld [...].<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Le Breton, p.xxvii.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted by Stephen C. Behrendt, 'The Gap that is Not a Gap: British Poetry by Women: 1802-1812' in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception* ed. by Harriet Kramer Linkin, Stephen C. Behrendt (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), p.38

As both Stephen C. Behrendt and the author of this review have noticed, Aikin's own work could be ambitious.<sup>102</sup> *Epistles on Women* looks back to Mary Hays' *Female Biography*, and anticipates Felicia Hemans's *Records of Woman* (1828), in being a 'frankly contestatory poem that explicitly engages the entire history of humankind and radically realigns along gender lines both its accomplishments and disasters'.<sup>103</sup> This is not the "defensive feminism" described by McCarthy.

While, then, Aikin does explicitly distance herself from Wollstonecraft in *Epistles on Women* ('No Amazon, in frowns and terror drest, | I poise the spear' ([*Epistles on Women*, ll.33-4]), a tactic not altogether surprising given Wollstonecraft's posthumous vilification, it has several unusual and telling characteristics. It is in this that she attacks marriage as belittling:

Resign we then the club and lion's skin,  
And be our sex content to knit and spin;  
And good and bad obey, and wise and fool;  
Here a meek drudge, a listless captive there,  
[...]  
Scorned and caressed, a plaything and a slave,  
Yet taught with spaniel soul to kiss the rod,  
And worship man as a delegate of God.<sup>104</sup>

As Aikin notes in the introduction, the 'plan' of *Epistles on Women* was to 'mark the effect of various codes, institutions, and states of manners [...] [on the] elevation or depression of woman in the scale of existence'.<sup>105</sup> The inequality to be found in the institution of marriage undoubtedly constituted one of these, and, perhaps, throws some light on Aikin's own reasons for remaining unattached. In this she also attacks John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1761), an action which, ironically, closely aligns her with Wollstonecraft, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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<sup>102</sup> Behrendt, p.38

<sup>103</sup> Behrendt, p.38

<sup>104</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Epistles on Women* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), ll.51-60

<sup>105</sup> Aikin, p.4

(1667), which also connects her to Hannah More, whose criticism of *Paradise Lost* I will discuss in chapter four.<sup>106</sup> Both details demonstrate that Aikin was engaging with a wide rhetoric on women's rights.

More importantly, it was in *Epistles on Women* that Aikin first began to explore Elizabeth's life. In Epistle IV, she opens the stanza with, 'The Dread Eliza bids. Wake, O my strain! | Wake the long triumph of the Maiden Reign',<sup>107</sup> suggesting that, to Aikin, Elizabeth is both formidable and unavoidable. Aikin also immediately draws attention to Elizabeth's unmarried status, employing the word "maiden" to emphasise her gender (and also possibly linking her, like Hays, to the Virgin Mary). This illustration, however, will not flatter Elizabeth. She may have been triumphant, '[r]eviving France'; offering refuge to Belgia; foiling Philip's Armada,<sup>108</sup> but Mary's 'vengeful spectre' spoils the image, highlighting Elizabeth's 'envy', 'treacherous art', and baring the 'meanness of her selfish heart'.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Essex bows 'his neck to death' and seems to cry "'Relentless Mistress, see, despair, and die!'"<sup>110</sup> If Elizabeth has one redeeming feature, it is her ability to inspire '[w]isdom and wit' in the learned men of her court: 'Blest orb, that flashed on Spenser's dazzling sight [...] | Twinkled on Shakespeare's lowly lot, and shed | A smile of love on Bacon's boyish head'.<sup>111</sup>

In *Epistles on Women*, it is, then, possible to trace the beginnings of Aikin's representation of Elizabeth: her unmarried status will be important, her political and

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<sup>106</sup> 'The politic father will not then leave as a "legacy" to his daughters the injunction to conceal their wit, their learning, and even their good sense, in deference to the "natural malignity" with which most men regard every woman of a sound understanding and cultivated mind; nor will even the reputation of our great Milton himself secure him from the charge of a blasphemous presumption in making his Eve address to Adam the acknowledgement, "God is thy head, thou mine;" and in the assertion that the first human pair were formed, "He for God only, she for God in him."' (Aikin, p.3).

<sup>107</sup> Aikin, ll.367-8

<sup>108</sup> Aikin, ll.373-8

<sup>109</sup> Aikin, ll.383-386

<sup>110</sup> Aikin, l.390

<sup>111</sup> Aikin, ll.394-8



military successes will be incorporated and popular anecdotes will be crucial. It will not flatter, it will not admire; it will probe her private life, her relationships, her characteristics—her ‘art’, her ‘meanness’ her ‘envy’, her ‘pride’. This appears to have been a common theme throughout Aikin’s career. In 1834, a review of Aikin’s *Memoirs of the Court of King Charles the First* in the *British Critic* criticised Aikin for producing what is now termed “sensational literature”:

In a word, she seems to have written under a decided bias towards what is esteemed the public interest: And as always happens in similar cases, she has not hesitated to twist the facts so as to answer her purpose; and to select such anecdotes as might darken the reputation of Charles and his household [...] and, generally, to sum up the historical evidence with so partial an intent as to lead the judgement of her readers to the least merciful verdict.<sup>112</sup>

The *Critical Review* attacked *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth* in a similar way, taking issue with choice of episodes and anecdotes, which, the reviewer believed, lacked coherence and appeared gaudy, like a stage set:

it is not particular enough for a chronicle, it is not lofty enough for a history; as collection of anecdotes it wants spirit, as a narration it wants continuity; by moulding her original authorities into her own forms [...] she has destroyed the character of her work, the varnish has spoiled the picture, and her book resembles a lath and plaister Gothic villa, in which propriety of architecture is sacrificed to internal domestic convenience [...].<sup>113</sup>

The critic’s struggle appears to have been with the memoir genre, which, he suggests, lends itself to a variety of interests, containing ‘food for every taste’, from the ‘philosopher and politician’, to the ‘mere amateur of magazines and the curiosity-mongering lounge’, as well as the ‘fairest novelo-sentimentalist’.<sup>114</sup> Memoirs are by nature, continues the critic ‘rambling and digressive’,<sup>115</sup> and thus, distinct from biography and yet often used in a similar sense. The *OED* describes a memoir as a

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<sup>112</sup> Anon, “Art II: Memoirs of the Court of King Charles the First. By Lucy Aikin”, in *The British Critic* (Printed for C. & J. Rivington, & J. Mawman, 1834) <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SEQ-AAAAYAAJ&dq>> [accessed 4 June 2011], p.48

<sup>113</sup> Anon, “Art VII: Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth by Lucy Aikin”, in *The Critical Review* (London: Printed for J Mawman, 1811) <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=XeTQAAAAMAAJ>> [accessed 5 June 2011], p.419.

<sup>114</sup> *The Critical Review*, Art VII, p.419

<sup>115</sup> *The Critical Review*, Art VII, p.419

testimonial or record of events, written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer, suggesting that it is unusual to write a memoir about someone other than oneself. More importantly, as Aikin's reviewer suggests, the memoir might often be informal, focusing on particular events rather than seeking to encompass all the facts and records. As such, it was often inaccurate. Biography, on the other hand, was formal and thorough, seeking, like the "history", to record, narrate, recount in detail. This distinction might account for the many differences between the structure of both Hays' and Aikin's narratives.

But Aikin's use of the memoir genre speaks of more than just a "loose" and sensational history, with dubious facts; as a traditionally personal genre, it is an opportunity for her to weave observations about her own life and society into the narrative, even if it is about a woman from a historically distant period. Thus, Aikin might be free to explore the situation of an unmarried woman and the freedom it might afford her, to observe the problems that might arise if the role was not fulfilled wisely (particularly with respect to romantic attachments), and, crucially, to criticise the decadence of contemporary royal figures—all through the guise of a memoir about Queen Elizabeth. This final aspect of the Fuzzy Set Theory must, therefore, examine the events that had rocked the royal family in the years following Hays' *Female Biography*.

By 1803, when Hays' *Female Biography* was published, the Prince of Wales and Caroline of Brunswick had already been separated for six years. The marriage had been doomed from the start. George had only agreed to marry Caroline because he was heavily in debt, and struggling to maintain his indulgent lifestyle. Parliament had insisted on a suitable marriage in order for his allowance to be increased. The queen, his mother, had been in favour of her niece Princess Louise and did not

approve of the match with Caroline, writing to her brother that Caroline's conduct was rumoured to be indecent:

They say her passions are so strong that the Duke himself said that she should not be allowed even to go from one room to another without her Governess [...] There, dear brother, is a woman I do not recommend at all.<sup>116</sup>

As the niece of the king (Caroline was the daughter of George IV's sister), however, Caroline was favoured. Chambers has also suggested that the Prince of Wales may have been influenced by his mistress Lady Jersey, who had promoted the marriage between George and Caroline because she saw her as the least formidable rival.<sup>117</sup> Lord Malmesbury, an English diplomat, was sent as envoy to Brunswick to convey Caroline to England. He, too, was concerned with her behaviour, referring to it as 'very *gauche*', 'improper' and 'missish', though he commented on her good humour and friendliness.<sup>118</sup> He attempted to advise her, but evidently, when she arrived in England, the Prince of Wales was very displeased. On being forced to embrace her he seemed unwell and requested a glass of brandy.<sup>119</sup> At dinner that evening Caroline, apparently hurt by the reception she had received, and conscious of the relationship between George and Lady Jersey (which they did not hide), affected 'raillery and wit, throwing out coarse, vulgar hints'.<sup>120</sup> This appears to have cemented George's dislike, and, three days later at their wedding, he arrived drunk to the service. George considered Caroline to be unhygienic (she was described by several of those who came into contact with her as slovenly), and he was disgusted by her sarcasm, indecorum and 'flamboyant sensuality'.<sup>121</sup> As consequence, he performed his marital duty only a handful of times in the early weeks of his marriage, and never again after

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<sup>116</sup> Correspondence of Queen Charlotte, as quoted by Christopher Hibbert, ed., 'Princess Caroline', *George IV Prince of Wales* (London: Longman, 1972), p.135.

<sup>117</sup> Chambers, p.8

<sup>118</sup> Hibbert, p.137.

<sup>119</sup> Hibbert, p.144.

<sup>120</sup> Chambers, p.14

<sup>121</sup> Hibbert. p.149 and Chambers, p.15

the birth of his daughter Charlotte. Caroline moved out just over a year later. At her residence at Montagu House, she began to adopt children from disadvantaged backgrounds, fostering them out to other families. In 1802 she adopted a little boy, William Austin, whom she took into her own home, but was often restricted from seeing her own daughter. Gossip soon began to spread about Caroline and her life at Blackheath. ‘Lurid stories’ about dinner parties that ended in ‘blind man’s buff’, ‘gentlemen guests’ and a secret love child circulated in the press.<sup>122</sup> In 1805, things took a turn for the worse when Caroline fell out with her neighbours, Sir John and Lady Douglas, who retaliated by writing to the Prince of Wales with the proof that he needed for a divorce. Caroline, they insisted, was ‘insatiable’; she had embarrassed Lady Douglas by making ‘intimate advances towards her’,<sup>123</sup> and had loudly professed that she could have a bedfellow whenever she liked: ‘nothing is more wholesome’.<sup>124</sup> More damagingly, they could apparently confirm that Caroline had actually given birth to William Austin. As a consequence of this, in 1806, the king gave orders for an enquiry into Caroline’s private life which became known as ‘The Delicate Investigation’. A few months later it concluded that although there was no evidence that Caroline had borne a child, there were ““other particulars respecting the conduct of her Royal Highness, such as must, especially considering her exalted rank and station, necessarily give occasion to very unfavourable interpretations””.<sup>125</sup>

The public, although largely sympathetic to Caroline, whose open nature they found appealing (and whom they viewed as a wronged woman, shamed by an increasingly unpopular prince), were also perturbed by her behaviour. Scandal would continue to surface throughout her life, inviting censure and dismay from the public.

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<sup>122</sup> Chambers, p.25

<sup>123</sup> Chambers, p.26

<sup>124</sup> Hibbert, p.209

<sup>125</sup> As quoted by Chambers, p.28

This increased throughout the following years as Princess Charlotte appeared, in the public eye at least, to grow up into a young woman of promising character. There is always, of course, a discrepancy between reality and the representations of those who are distant from their subject, and the public perception was clearly biased in favour of Charlotte. In her they saw young woman caught between her parents' fighting, and bullied by her father (reports of her escape from Warwick House after her father dismissed her entire household and hold her in isolation at Cranbourne Lodge were eagerly seized upon by the press). Moreover, as the only heir, she was their hope. As such, she was often portrayed as everything an heir should be: learned, domestically skilled, maternal, faithful and virtuous— even though aspects of this representation (as previously explored) may not have been entirely accurate. When she married in 1816, her relationship with her husband Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld embodied the virtues of Protestant marriage, and her death, from post-partum complications (explored more extensively in chapter three), immortalised the people's admiration. As the veneration of Charlotte increased, however, anxiety and disgust about Caroline's behaviour increased in proportion, fuelled by her absence (she had travelled abroad since 1814) and the scandal that continued to haunt her. Speculation about her relationships with men in her company was endemic, and as she cruised around the Mediterranean in 1816, she even attracted the attention of Lord Byron, who wrote to his publisher from Venice that Caroline and her servant Bartolomeo Pergami were lovers and were upsetting the locals by 'overstepping the modesty of marriage'.<sup>126</sup> She was, according to Jane Robins, often observed 'in the most disgusting state of undress, along with Pergami', and one priest 'earnestly exhorted

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Jane Robins, *Rebel Queen: How the Trial of Caroline Brought England to the Brink of Revolution* (London; Sydney: Simon and Schuster Ltd., 2006), p.73

his flock to abstain from entering it [her house], for fear of contamination'.<sup>127</sup> Many were also worried about her increasingly “masculine” appearance, with the artist John Constable noting that he had heard that Caroline had been spotted wearing a ‘man’s hat and a had a coloured handkerchief around her neck [...] her appearance was very masculine’.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, Joseph Farington remarked in his diary that the Princess of Wales had been observed ‘assuming the dress of a man—[she] has discharged petticoats and wears trousers’.<sup>129</sup> The stark divide between Caroline and Charlotte trapped them in a sexual binary, much like the one Caroline already inhabited with George: Charlotte represented the epitome of female goodness while Caroline became known as the “Immoral Queen”. When Caroline attempted to enter Westminster Hall during George’s coronation in 1821, she was jeered: public support for her had finally collapsed—Dangerous Association had claimed its victim. Caroline died just over three weeks later.

Thus, in 1818, when Aikin came to write *Memoirs*, the tide had already begun to turn against Caroline. For the past few years, as she continued to travel, details of her private life had swamped the public sphere and endlessly fascinated the general public, as well as writers, who were bound to draw their inspiration from these events. With regards to biographies about Elizabeth, the sexual binary between Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots, which might in many ways be seen to resemble that between the “Immoral Queen” (Caroline) and the epitome of female excellence (Charlotte), became particularly popular. Fascination surrounding Elizabeth’s dubious chastity (as observed in Hume) also increased, and portrayals of romantic clinches between Elizabeth and her various favourites increased. But Aikin’s *Memoirs* alone would capture the complex sexual dimension of Elizabeth’s life and representations of it,

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<sup>127</sup> Robins, pp.73-4

<sup>128</sup> Quoted by Robins, p.71

<sup>129</sup> Quoted by Robins, p.71

exploring in detail her relationships and passion, contrasting this with her views on marriage and establishing a sexual character that was diverse and changeable.

Unlike *Female Biography*, *Memoirs* begins with an extensive critique of Elizabeth's sexually transgressive mother, Anne Boleyn. As can be observed in More's suggestion that the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn was a necessary evil, Elizabeth's scandalous conception— although morally reprehensible— could be excused as having brought about the birth of the Protestant faith. As such, Anne assumed a dubious and ambiguous position in eighteenth and nineteenth century thought. Hume, for example, had suggested that Henry's fall-out with Anne was merely the 'effect of his violence and caprice', rather than any mistake on her part.<sup>130</sup> The crimes of incest and adultery, not to mention treason, however, were not easily overcome in the nineteenth century. For Aikin, Anne's sexual character was a precursor for Elizabeth's. Nor is it flattering: Aikin is unable to see Anne as victim, describing her as of a 'lower' class, from more 'humble origins' (*Memoirs*, I. p.2), lacking the 'high mind' of Catherine of Aragon (Henry's ex-wife) and condemned as 'vain, ambitious and light-minded', greedy of the undue homage afforded by her new position (*Memoirs*, I. p.2). Aikin is not coy about the particulars surrounding Elizabeth's conception, describing them as 'dubious', 'inauspicious' and 'disgraceful' (*Memoirs*, I. p.2) and, without appearing to support or contest the rumours, proceeds to detail the contrasts between the "virtuous" Catherine, with the "immodest" Anne, trapping them both in a sexual binary similar to that of Caroline and Princess Charlotte. In Aikin's *Memoirs*, mother-daughter binaries, such as those between Caroline/Charlotte and Elizabeth/Anne, are the most persistent, almost entirely

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<sup>130</sup> Hume, p.409

eclipsing the binary that exists between Elizabeth/Mary Stuart, as evident in Hays' *Female Biography*. They also focus almost exclusively on female sexuality:

The unblemished reputation and amiable character of Henry's 'some time wife,' had long procured for her the love and respect of the people; her late misfortunes had engaged their sympathy, and it might be feared that several unfavourable points of comparison would suggest themselves between the high-born and high-minded Catherine and her present rival, once her humble attendant; whose long-known favor with the king, whose open association with him at Calais, whither she had attended him, whose private marriage of uncertain date and already advanced pregnancy, afforded so much ground for whispered censures (*Memoirs*, I, p.3).

She speculates that Elizabeth may have been conceived at Calais, where Anne appears to have assumed the role of wife, and refers openly to Anne's illicit pregnancy. The details of Anne's sexual impropriety, forced on the reader in no uncertain terms, trouble Aikin's *Memoirs*, shrouding Elizabeth's conception in suspicion and intrigue. Moreover, Anne's sexual character is called to mind several times throughout the narrative, serving as marker for Elizabeth's behaviour, and prompting the reader to continually compare and contrast the sexual behaviour of the daughter with the mother's—just as the nineteenth century public contrasted Caroline and Charlotte.

It is not surprising, then, that in *Memoirs* the Seymour episode comes so soon after Anne's execution—despite the lapse of twelve years—establishing Elizabeth as sexually open, just like her mother (and even without her influence). Unlike Hays, Aikin does not dwell extensively on Elizabeth's education, but does quote passages from the letters of Ascham to reveal that Elizabeth was an avid learner. Interestingly, even this is interrupted with a discussion about Lady Jane Grey, another favourite nineteenth century heroine. Thus bypassing much of her early life (except those incidents which shed light on Elizabeth's sexual character), Aikin reflects on the relationship between the two sisters Mary I and Elizabeth, which creates yet another binary in which Elizabeth can appear, briefly, in a more favourable light next to the



violence of Mary's reign. Following her death, Aikin quickly moves to the atmosphere of Elizabeth's court, immediately emphasising her romantic and sentimental inclination, which is often eroticised. The court is characterised by Aikin as a *cour d'amour*, endowed with 'a romantic kind of charm, comparable to that which seizes the imagination in the splendid fictions of chivalry' (*Memoirs*, I. p.248). Elizabeth encourages those around her to address her in a passionate language, a species of flattery 'grossly preposterous' which depraves her taste, and infects her disposition, reducing her affection to that 'of a [disgusting] heroine of [a] French romance' (*Memoirs*, I. p.294). Aikin is keen to avoid mixing her memoir with elements of the romance genre, which she clearly dislikes, and seems to discourage her readers from viewing it as such, while using the comparison. Despite this, however, the atmosphere of Elizabeth's court is entirely distinct from that observed in *Female Biography*. The learning, literacy, intellectual discussions and artistic endeavours of Elizabeth's court celebrated by Hays are derogated by Aikin's representation, and although still visible in places, are greatly undermined by a giddy and impetuous Elizabeth, who values flattery above serious study.

This condemnation does not, however, emerge from a kind of pre-Victorian prudery, but from Aikin's disappointment that Elizabeth does not enjoy and protect her independence. In Elizabeth's response to her sister Mary's request that she marry, Aikin acknowledges the romantic image of a 'maiden queen' which 'dazzled all eyes, subdued all hearts, inflamed the imaginations of the brave and courtly youth with visions of love and glory' (*Memoirs*, I. p.230). But the reference to 'maiden' here is particularly fuzzy. As before, it seems to connect Aikin's Elizabeth with Hays' *Female Biography* and the Virgin Mary, incorporating all the complex meanings of gender that this entails. However, in the context of Aikin's representation of

Elizabeth as sexually open, it appears ironic, suggesting that, in Aikin's view, Elizabeth's portrayal of herself as a "maiden" (that is, in Aikin's view, virginal) was an illusion—nothing more. Indeed, this irony seems more concerned with Aikin's own opinions on female independence, and her anger that Elizabeth does not (initially) protect hers more cautiously, than it is with accurate biographical representation.

In later passages, where Elizabeth begins to enjoy being unattached, this is ever more apparent:

[...] she felt too all the pride, as well as the felicity of independence; and looking around with a cheerful confidence on a people who adored her, she formed at once the patriotic resolution to wear her English diadem by the suffrage of the English nation alone; unindebted to the protection and free from the participation of any brother-monarch living [...] (*Memoirs*, I. p.262).

She agrees with Hays that in this state, Elizabeth is able to achieve great triumphs unequalled by her ancestors, and as Elizabeth moves into middle age, she begins to take on more promising character traits. Like Hays' Elizabeth, at Tilbury, the queen is prudent, vigilant, and confident, commanding an army 'like a second Boadicea' against the Armada,<sup>131</sup> a link with the British warrior queen that is shrewd and intriguing.<sup>132</sup> Resemblances between Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury and records of Boadicea's brave and daring speech at The Battle of Watling Street are glaring, but had often been overlooked by other biographers. As Jodi Mikalachki suggests, both women are famous for their 'exceptional use of the masculine art of oratory', especially with regards to inspiring nationalist sentiment and inciting their people

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<sup>131</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), II. p.228. All subsequent line references are from this edition and volume, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>132</sup> Interestingly, Boadicea's fame was largely forgotten until the Victorian period (apart from one or two biographies by Hays and Hume), when it was revived by the accession of Queen Victoria who was seen to be Boadicea's namesake. Aikin's *Memoirs* curiously precedes this, but it was a link which Hays overlooked.

against foreign invaders.<sup>133</sup> In her speech, outlined by the Roman historian Tacitus, Boadicea had similarly assumed a male privilege, at the head of her army: ‘Win the battle or perish, this is what I, am woman will do! – let the men live in slavery if they will.’<sup>134</sup> Unsurprisingly, therefore, the legend of Boadicea had come to be associated with a denial of womanly duty.<sup>135</sup> Mikalachki has studied several early modern representations of Boadicea as ‘contemporary anxiet[ies] about gender reversal’.<sup>136</sup> Many of these, including one by Spenser, drew complex comparisons between Boadicea and their own queen, Elizabeth, registering masculinist concerns about female authority.<sup>137</sup> Thus, Elizabeth’s gender is called explicitly into question for the first time in *Memoirs*, aligning Hays and Aikin more closely. Aikin’s representation at this point in the narrative is perhaps even more compelling, particularly because Elizabeth’s speech is not paraphrased (as in *Female Biography*), but outlined in all its complexity. In this, she is both the ‘warrior and the queen’, ‘inspired with that impressive earnestness of look, of words, of gesture’ (*Memoirs*, II. p.228). The full complexity of her gender is restored by the words ‘I know I have the *body* of a weak and feeble *woman* [my emphasis], but I have the heart of a king; and a king of England too’ (*Memoirs*, II. p.229). Here Aikin outlines the same sex/gender binary tackled by More, Wollstonecraft and Hays. The word ‘woman’, referring to Elizabeth’s gender appears again, while the word ‘body’ refers to her sex. But the binary is confused. While her body is of a weak and feeble woman, her heart, the essence of her being, rises above both her sex and gender. Moreover, she, like Hays’

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<sup>133</sup> Jodi Mikalachki, ‘The Domestication of the Savage Queen’, *The Legacy of Boadicea: Gender and Nation in Early Modern England* (London : Routledge, 1998), p.116.

<sup>134</sup> Tacitus, as quoted by Richard Hingley and Christina Unwin, eds., ‘The Classical Sources, *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen* (London: New York: Hambledon and London; Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.51.

<sup>135</sup> Eighteenth and nineteenth century biographies of Boadicea appeared in Mary Hays’ *Female Biography* and Hume’s *History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688*.

<sup>136</sup> Mikalachki, p.116.

<sup>137</sup> Mikalachki, pp.116-7.

Aikin, has assumed the outward trappings of a male body, thus evading a gendered analysis. Moreover, Aikin's description of her dress 'with a general's truncheon' and a 'corselet of polished steel' (*Memoirs*, II. p.228), recalls the Farrington and Constable's observations of Caroline's dress, suggesting that both women have the power to break down the sex/gender binary.

Tilbury marks a turning point in the *Memoirs*, presenting a new, asexual, Elizabeth, distinct from the sexual vivacity of the young princess with which she began. This is particularly apparent with respect to Elizabeth's denunciation of all matrimony, which dominates the mid-section of *Memoirs*. Aikin outlines at length instances where Elizabeth thwarted the marriages of those around her. In her description of William Cecil, First Baron Burghley's second marriage to one of the learned daughters of Anthony Cook (Mildred Cook), Aikin imagines that he enjoys 'that exalted species of domestic happiness which sympathy in mental endowments can alone bestow' (*Memoirs*, I. p.237), suggesting that although she herself remained single, Aikin still believed, alongside Wollstonecraft, Macaulay, Barbauld, More, that a successful marriage might be achieved through companionship and intellectual equality. Elizabeth's denial of this domestic felicity for others is, therefore, comparatively disturbing. It begins with her refusal to authorise the marriages of the clergy, being as she is, according to Aikin, strongly disposed to insist on celibacy (this is described by Aikin as 'harshness, if not cruelty' ([*Memoirs*, I. pp.316-9])). As Hackett has explained, the 'Protestant line was that celibacy on Catholic priests and nuns had produced secret fornication and perversion; and it was less hypocritical to aspire to virtuous matrimony'.<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth risked associating herself with the Catholic faith and history of superstition that surrounded nuns and convents,

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<sup>138</sup> Hackett, p.54

promoted even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Gothic genre. Unlike Hays, Aikin does not see Elizabeth's toleration towards Catholicism as a sign of leadership and strength; instead, she creates an ambiguous amalgamation of the contemporary and the historical, appearing to compare Elizabeth to George and Caroline, both guilty of de-sanctifying marriage and undermining its importance within the Protestant tradition.

More importantly, she soon goes on to 'to treat the institution of matrimony itself with a satire and contempt which filled Dr. Parker [a chaplain and eminent protestant divine] with horror' (*Memoirs*, I. p.324): 'all matrimony [becomes] offensive to the maiden queen' (*Memoirs*, I. p.404). Where Elizabeth separates husbands and wives from each other, Aikin ignores the suggestion, outlined by Hays, that Elizabeth may have separated these couples out of fear of them laying claim to her crown, and portrays it as either out of jealousy, or more frequently, a hatred of marriage. Aikin's Elizabeth demonstrates an intense loathing or fear of marriage and its sexual virtues. On the secret marriage of Leicester in volume II, for instance, she recounts the queen's reaction:

The rage of the queen on this disclosure transported her beyond the bounds of justice, reason and decorum. It has been remarked that she was habitually, or systematically, an open enemy to matrimony in general; and the higher any persons stood in her good graces and the more intimate their success to her, the greater was her resentment at detecting in them any aspirations after this state; because a kind of jealousy was in these cases superadded to her malignity; and it offended her pride that those who were honoured with her favour should find room in their thoughts to covet another kind of happiness of which she was not the dispenser (*Memoirs*, II. pp.68-9).

Is Aikin offering a pre-Freudian psychoanalysis of Elizabeth's reasons for remaining unmarried? She speaks of Elizabeth being 'systematically', and perhaps pathologically, against marriage, and of a 'malignity', which had little to do with jealousy, and more to do with an irrational revulsion, even phobia, of sex. Aikin's

analysis is certainly unusual, distant not only from Hays, but also from those who wanted to represent Elizabeth as a *woman*, with female weaknesses of vanity and jealousy, and even hyper-sexuality. Passages such as this with Leicester, and also Hays' account of the secret marriage of Lady Catherine Grey, were prime opportunities for biographers to emphasise such weaknesses, or, as in Hays' *Female Biography*, defend Elizabeth from these accusations, by emphasising the threat to her person and position. Aikin, however, did neither. Instead, she denatured Elizabeth, in the same way as Caroline was being denatured in the public eye, offering the first psychosexual analysis of her aversion to marriage, a reading which would not become current until the twentieth century and the advent of psychology.

In light of this, Elizabeth's courtships, most significantly with Charles II, Archduke of Austria, and François, Duke of Anjou, are dismissed by Aikin as political charades. With the Archduke, a courtship that lasted several years and was (officially at least) dissolved on religious grounds, Aikin surmises that not even the total sacrifice of his religion would have exempted Elizabeth's suitor from final disappointment, as she was, 'from the very beginning', 'insincere', as the 'dissimulation of her character permits us to believe' (*Memoirs*, I. p.432). With respect to the Duke of Anjou, the possible subject of Elizabeth's poem 'On Monsieur's Departure', and a suitor widely believed by many (though not Hays) to be the queen's most serious match, Aikin describes the marriage negotiations between his mother Catherine de Medici and Elizabeth as a mere diversion: 'these two ingenious females continued for months, nay years, to amuse themselves and one another with the representation of a carrying on of negotiations for a treaty of marriage' (*Memoirs*, I. p.451). She goes on to condemn it as trickery and political folly, a petty manoeuvre by which each queen might tip the political balance in her

favour. Elizabeth's personal struggle, evident in her poem, in which she speaks of having to suppress her emotions—love and desire—is entirely absent from Aikin's version of events.<sup>139</sup> Thus, according to Aikin, when Elizabeth is in her prime, she is sexually unavailable, preferring political play (as opposed to Hays' rational *policy*), to sexual release.

In the latter part of *Memoirs* as Elizabeth's beauty begins to fade, her sexual character transforms again. She is no longer uninterested and sexually stagnant, but, ostensibly, sexually perverse. Public interests are surrendered in slavish deference to the fond fancy of a romantic woman, 'caught by the image of passion which she was no longer of an age to inspire, and which she ought to have felt it an indecorum to entertain' (*Memoirs*, II. p.74). This extravagance has a pernicious effect, influencing Elizabeth's dress and carriage, making it ever more ostentatious, making her vain, and even influencing her ability to reason. In the nineteenth century, she would, in this guise, have been ridiculed as a sexually frustrated, irrational "spinster". The Earl of Leicester's fall is attributed not only to his obvious crime of a *coup d'état*, but also for referring to her age—'to remark to her the progress of time', muses Aikin, 'was to wound her in the tenderest part' (*Memoirs*, II. p.368). It appears to reinforce Elizabeth's anger, leading to Essex's death.

This overbearing sexuality, and sense of frustration, not only affects Elizabeth's judgement, but also ultimately leads to depression and death:

It has been a thousand times remarked, that she was never able to forget the *woman* [my emphasis] in the sovereign; and in spite of that preponderating love of sway which all her life forbade her to admit a partner of her bed and

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<sup>139</sup> 'On Monsieur's Departure' is characterised by Peter C. Herman as a private poem, written not for public readership but personal reflection. According to him, there is no evidence for its circulation between 1579 and 1781, the time at which it was composed, suggesting that Elizabeth did not intend for it to be read by anyone other than herself. Peter C. Herman, *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.117. As such, it is likely that Elizabeth was more candid and open in this than in her other public poems.

throne, her heart was to the last deeply sensible of the want, or her imagination of the charm, of loving and being beloved. (*Memoirs*, II. p.239).

According to Aikin, Elizabeth's keen sexuality has become a constant intrusion upon her reason and rule. Unlike Hay's Elizabeth, she is unable to live separate from it, powerless to subdue it, and in the remaining weeks of her life this sexual depression intensifies. In the Ring episode, when she discovers that the late object of her desire, Essex, had remained faithful to her to the end, this frustration finally reaches a head. The Countess of Nottingham, on her death-bed, requests an audience with the queen so that she might confess to her a secret. On her arrival, she produces a ring, apparently sent to her by Essex with a request that she would deliver it to the queen 'as a token by which he implored her mercy' (*Memoirs*, II. p.498). The Countess, however, had withheld it at her husband's request. On sight of the ring, Elizabeth is '[t]ransported at once with grief and rage', shakes the dying countess violently in her bed, and surrenders herself 'without resistance to the despair which had seized her heart' (*Memoirs*, II. p.498). Thereafter she waits for death, lying sleepless on the floor, refusing medicine and food, supported only by her ladies-in-waiting.

Aikin borrows heavily from Hume's *History* and several other eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biographies, including the description of the scene, with its immortal line: 'That God might forgive her, but she never could' (*Memoirs*, II. p.498).<sup>140</sup> As always, the time between Essex's execution and Elizabeth's death is curiously short. Aikin, in fact, follows the anecdotes about Essex and Elizabeth in Hume's *History* very closely in this final part of *Memoirs*, and they dominate the narrative, pointing to her death. The first of these is a sexually violent encounter following an argument about the choice of governor for Ireland. In Hume's *History*, after being *boxed* (once) around the ear by the queen, Essex '[claps] his hand on his

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<sup>140</sup> Hume's *History* reads: 'That God might pardon her, but she never could'. Hume, p.713



sword’, exclaiming that ‘he would not bear such usage, were it from Henry the eighth himself’.<sup>141</sup> In this version of events Elizabeth does not speak. In Aikin’s *Memoirs*, however, Essex turns his back on the queen with a laugh of contempt, ‘an outrage which she revenged in her own manner, by *boxing* [my emphasis] his ears and bidding him “Go and be hanged”’ (*Memoirs*, II. p.403). Aikin’s Essex also reaches for his sword. The obvious phallic symbolism of the sword, sheathed, but close to being withdrawn is evident in both narratives. In Aikin’s, however, accompanied by direct speech and repetitive boxing of Essex’s ears, the encounter is clearly more violent and passionate.

The second Essex-Elizabeth incident comes after Essex’s disastrous attempt to end the rebellion in Ireland. Ignoring the queen’s express command to stay in Ireland, Essex secretly returns and bursts into Elizabeth’s bed-chamber. Here, as in Hume’s *History*, he finds her ‘newly risen, with her hair about her face’ (*Memoirs*, II. p.440). He kneels and kisses her hands, and she returns the affection. The eroticism of the scene is inescapable—the loose hair being a symbol for wanton female behaviour, the proximity of the two, in a private and solitary room, being especially close.<sup>142</sup> It reminds the reader of the Seymour episode, the bewildered Elizabeth, confused from having just woken up, seems young and naïve. Essex, like Seymour, takes advantage of her situation, being over-familiar with Elizabeth in the intimate space of her bedroom. Thus, the young princess is tied with the old queen: sexually open at a time when she should be sexually guarded.

The two encounters with Essex are clearly physical and awaken Elizabeth’s dormant sexuality. They, likewise, are connected to Elizabeth’s death; the violence of her grief matches the violent passion of the lovers’ previous engagements, thereby

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<sup>141</sup> Hume, p.673

<sup>142</sup> The reader is perhaps reminded of Edmund Burke’s description of the near-rape scene involving Marie Antoinette in her own chamber, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

suggesting that Elizabeth's demise is more closely related to a lack of sexual fulfilment. When Elizabeth is finally unable to recover the relief that she found previously in the physical presence and sexual proximity of either Seymour or Essex, she is overcome by 'heart-rending symptoms of incurable and mortal anguish' (*Memoirs*, II. pp.498-9), and immediately expires. Aikin can thus be seen to weave the Essex-Elizabeth sections together much more closely than Hume, unpacking each moment in detail. The emphasis placed on Elizabeth's relationship with Essex also clearly alludes to Caroline's inappropriate relationships with younger men—particularly that with her servant Pergami—and nineteenth century readers would not have missed similarities between the final years of both queens. Moreover, as before, Aikin offers a psychosexual reading of Elizabeth's behaviour and subsequent death, which precedes Freudian understandings of sexual frustration, explained by Frances Vaughan as 'contribut[ing] to increased anger and aggression, and [...] emotional numbing or psychic death'.<sup>143</sup> Elizabeth's violence towards the countess and especially Essex (the object of her passion), can therefore be observed as a symptom of this frustration, brought about by her sudden sexual attraction to Essex, who was some thirty-two years her junior and, as she neared infirmity, out of her reach.

Aikin's representation of Elizabeth is thus distinct from Hays' in many ways. It explores three contrasting periods of her life: adolescence, middle age and old age. Where Hays relies on Elizabeth's *political* character, Aikin draws out Elizabeth's *sexual* character—beginning with her early sexual transactions with Seymour, which highlight her as sexually knowing and open at a very young age. In the prime of her life, Aikin's Elizabeth then becomes hostile to sexuality, bringing her into close contact with Hays' representation of Elizabeth as a pragmatic monarch, powerful,

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<sup>143</sup> Frances Vaughan, *Shadows of the Sacred: Seeing Through Spiritual Illusions* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), p.45

popular and often without gender—blurring the line between the sexes. As Elizabeth moves into middle age, however, sexual frustration begins to overtake, and she becomes unguarded, open to flattery, susceptible, as before, to powerful sexual attraction. Moreover, it is ultimately responsible for her demise. Aikin is also clearly influenced by events within the contemporary royal society; links between Elizabeth and Caroline, particularly, allowed her to reflect on female sexuality and its perception within the public sphere, and incorporate pre-Freudian psychosexual analysis. As such, it offers a challenge to the prevailing view that unmarried women should remain sexually unknowing.

The representation of Elizabeth in the *Fuzzy Set* is especially complex, engaging with a wide variety of biographies and memoirs, political and social context, elements of the Problem of Translation, as well as contemporary theory and psychology. Despite this, it reveals several interesting observations. The first is that those women writing about Elizabeth were almost exclusively unmarried, and while they may have been writing to support themselves, this did not dictate their choice of literary subject. Clearly, however, this cannot be used as a boundary by which we must restrict our understanding. There is little consensus between these writers, other than some similar ideas. Thus, while Wollstonecraft and More concentrate on Elizabeth's education, Hays goes much further, emphasising Elizabeth as an especially learned monarch, asexual, as well as politically astute and modern, while Aikin takes a slightly different route, drawing out Elizabeth's sexual character and dissecting her relationships. Binaries of sex and gender are a key concern in both texts, primarily because Elizabeth does not fit easily into either. Both see Elizabeth's appearance at Tilbury, the moment when she finally manages to free herself from gender, and even momentarily from sex, as a triumph; other scenes, such as those

with Essex, are not so easily negotiated. Writing about Elizabeth offers Hays and Aikin the opportunity to explore this fuzziness with regards to Elizabeth's gender and the sex/gender binary to which she is confined, and their own comfort/discomfort with it. Hays takes full opportunity, deliberately drawing out the gender-unsettling elements of Elizabeth's character and confusing them further still, while overlooking anecdotes which might have made her appear feminine, while Aikin, who tries to incorporate these anecdotes, finds Elizabeth's fuzziness more of a struggle. There are other binaries too, as writers and public figures find themselves restrained by forced comparisons. This is particularly evident with respect to Hays, whose work, when compared against Wollstonecraft's, always appears to some to fall short, but it is also apparent with respect to Aikin and Barbauld. Similarly, Caroline/Charlotte and Elizabeth/Mary are trapped in sexual binaries. Caroline and Charlotte are made to fit pre-conceived roles, so the young, boisterous Charlotte becomes the fairy-tale princess, in contrast to her mother. Likewise, Elizabeth shifts between both roles, as the good daughter of a bad mother, the good sister of a bad queen and the bad sister-cousin of a beautiful, distressed princess. Importantly, this shifting between roles in varying accounts, and the continual regendering that this often entails, situates Elizabeth as a marker, or key to the scheme of binarizing. As such, she herself becomes a Fuzzy Set, because she is, as a symbol, open to this continual manipulation. She allows critics (and very often More, Hays and Aikin) to negotiate the binaries in which many others, including Caroline and Charlotte, find themselves confined. The useful parallels between Elizabeth and Caroline, specifically feeds into the work of Aikin, allowing her to comment on the behaviour of the "Immoral Queen" and demonstrates the ways in which biographical writers, of both sexes, were unable to keep contemporary events and discussions out of their work. In chapter

three, this will be crucial, as we observe the ways in which writers adopted and revised the midwifery debate, interpreting it in their own way through a variety of different genres, and begin to look more closely at the tragic demise of Princess Charlotte—the ‘more than virgin queen’.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Conal O’Riordan, *Yet Do Not Grieve* (C. Scribner’s Sons, 1928), p.358

**Chapter III: A Fuzzy Debate: Man-Midwives, Old Women, Women Writers and  
the Case of Nature verses Medicine**

In February 2002, public inquests into the deaths of two infants at separate hospitals revealed troubling similarities. The first, at Coventry's Walsgrave Hospital, was that of a baby girl, who died from a fractured skull following a forceps delivery. When the child was discovered to be facing the wrong way in the womb, the male consultant obstetrician applied a suction cap in an attempt to rotate her head. When this failed, he applied forceps. The child's mother was unaware that forceps were being used until, under local anaesthetic, she found herself being dragged down the bed by force, indicating that the obstetrician was applying more than the twenty kilogram of "gentle" pressure recommended'.<sup>1</sup> During the post-mortem examination, the pathologist accordingly discovered

a 4.5cm mark where her head met the neck, which indicated the use of forceps and pressure on the skull. There was also a 2cm-thick layer of blood between the scalp and the bone plus bleeding from one of her ears, suggesting the "high likelihood" of severe cranial trauma. She had a vertical fracture on the left of her head, a complex break on the right side with a further fracture on the temple bone and to the back of the skull, near the visible external mark. There was also some damage to the ligaments inside the skull and an examination of the thymus gland in the neck indicated recent stress.<sup>2</sup>

Both he and a colleague agreed that these wounds could have been caused by the 'misapplication' of forceps, which had slipped in Watson's hands several times during the procedure.<sup>3</sup> Although the inquest eventually returned a verdict of accidental death, the obstetrician would find his use of forceps under investigation again almost three years later, when, in an almost identical case, undue pressure resulted in the death of a baby boy.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Forceps birth "killed baby"', BBC News (2002) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1801755.stm>> [accessed 24 June 2010] (para. 14 of 26).

<sup>2</sup> 'Forceps birth "killed baby"' (para. 15-19 of 26).

<sup>3</sup> 'Forceps birth "killed baby"' (para. 23 of 26).

The second inquest brought to the public's attention was that of a baby boy, born at Torbay Hospital in Devon. The mother had endured a protracted and traumatic labour, and a decision was made by the locum obstetrician to apply forceps. As before, the mother was not informed of this decision, and only became aware of it when she was 'yanked up off the bed'.<sup>4</sup> She described the obstetrician sweating profusely, and felt her baby was being 'dragged' and 'ripped' from her by the forceps.<sup>5</sup> To a national newspaper, the mother described the injuries that her son sustained:

[he was] deathly white [...] He looked shocked. His eyes were wide with fright: he was staring, not blinking at the light as a newborn should. The shawl he was wrapped in covered his head and body. All I could see was his face, but I could see that his head was badly misshapen - it was long, dragged out to a point. And it was flat [...] At the side of his face I could see bruising and he was bleeding from a cut on his head [...] what appalled me was the horrendous black bruising across his head and all down his neck and shoulders [...] He was howling and was clearly very distressed when touched. Although he was big - 8lbs 12oz - he was a pitiful sight.<sup>6</sup>

The baby suffered a brain haemorrhage, and his organs began to fail. The following day his ventilator was switched off. As before, the South Devon coroner indicated in his report that the forceful use of forceps had caused the baby's death, but returned a verdict of accidental death.

In a national newspaper, the mother of the baby boy described the forceps as unnecessary, an 'instrument of torture', 'heavy, cumbersome [and] outdated'. Indeed, the instrument is over three hundred years old, having first been invented in seventeenth century by Peter Chamberlen and guarded as a family secret until the early to mid eighteenth century, when it became very popular. Its principals have remained relatively unaltered since then. More specifically, the mother attacked the

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<sup>4</sup> Olga Craig, 'Mother tells of the forceps torture that killed her son', *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 2002, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1384336/Mother-tells-of-the-forceps-torture-that-killed-her-son.html>> [accessed 24 June 2010] (para. 23 of 29)

<sup>5</sup> Craig (para. 23 and 28).

<sup>6</sup> Craig (para. 3-7)

obstetrician himself, accusing him of using ‘brute force’, suggesting that in the wrong hands, particularly the hands of men who are ‘heavy-handed’, forceps could be fatal.<sup>7</sup>

Although infant deaths rates during birth have declined significantly, it appears that children (and in fact women) are still dying of complications related to childbirth. The most recent European Mortality Database figures for 2009 reveal that approximately three hundred out of one-hundred thousand newborn infants died either during or shortly after childbirth from various complications including birth asphyxia, birth injury to scalp, respiratory distress and blood loss. Nearly twenty women out of one hundred thousand died from pre- and post-partum haemorrhages, complications relating to anaesthesia, puerperal sepsis and obstetric embolism.<sup>8</sup> The very public nature of the inquests in 2002 suggest that the public is just as concerned with figures such as these, as they were in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the accusation that male obstetricians are too heavy-handed and interventionist—employing instruments without good cause—has been reappearing intermittently for nearly three hundred years, from the time when man-midwifery and mechanical intervention became popular. Thus, our understanding of midwifery clearly has its roots in the eighteenth century—the problems and furious debates that began back then, still thrive today. Very little, it appears, has changed regarding the discourse in that time, despite the advances in medicine.

The midwifery debate is exceptionally broad and contentious, and, moreover, is very much alive (and similarly controversial) today. It is a debate in which society is, and nearly always has been, heavily invested, laden with a rich and diverse history, and very much subject to our own understandings and beliefs. When we read that a doctor might not have thought twice about applying a cranioclast if the labour was

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<sup>7</sup> Craig (para. 29 and 28)

<sup>8</sup> European Detailed Morality Database < <http://data.euro.who.int/dmdb/> > [Accessed 15/04/11].



proving difficult, how might we react?<sup>9</sup> We would understandably be shocked and horrified. Why?—because contemporary understandings are very much the reverse. Two to three hundred years ago, obstetricians like those from Coventry and Torbay would not have been criticised (and might even have been praised) for their decision to use blunt force. When a difficult labour commenced, the main objective was to save the life of the mother, and in the case of these contemporary accounts, this was, at least, achieved. So how might contemporary values such as these impair a critic’s judgement?

In his *The Making of Man-Midwifery* written in 1995, Adrian Wilson argues that those questions regarding the rise in man-midwifery (and subsequent decline in female midwifery) in the eighteenth century have particular interest today, because

in recent years the medical management of childbirth has come increasingly under attack. Advanced obstetrics, which has made childbirth vastly safer than ever before, finds itself in tension with modern feminism, which has given women the confidence to challenge the male control of obstetrics and to demand that childbirth be turned back from the high technology to personal experience.<sup>10</sup>

He makes reference to the case of Wendy Savage, a consultant at London Hospital, who, in 1983, attempted to give her patients greater choice over practical obstetric decisions, but was dismissed for malpractice—a decision that was overturned a few years later on appeal (widely supported by a number of women). Wilson is clearly aware of the importance of his study within the wider context of contemporary understandings regarding obstetrics. Unfortunately, however, *The Making of Man-Midwifery* is not aware of its subjectivity: it clearly attempts to defend contemporary man-midwifery, or the “masculine” side of midwifery (as it has become), by repeatedly stressing that the new man-midwife created a “revolution in obstetrics”—

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<sup>9</sup> A cranioclast was used to crush the skull of a foetus during an obstructed labour.

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.2

vast achievements that could be starkly contrasted with the ‘female exclusiveness’ of the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Wilson is evidently surprised that mothers had confidence in their female midwives before this period because he believes that all the evidence points to them being ‘unskilled’; to him, their practical experience is a mere ‘fragile gain’.<sup>12</sup> Despite several enlightening ideas, which I will explore, Wilson’s main objective appears to have been to undermine the personal female experience that women in the late 80s and early 90s were beginning to demand. As Mary Wilson Carpenter has suggested, ‘the questions we ask, the subjects we choose to research and the way we put together our findings about the past, all proceed from our position in the present’.<sup>13</sup> Our approach to a debate such as midwifery cannot, therefore, be anything but subjective, because by being so heavily invested in our own society, being so broad and so contentious, the discourse is itself inherently fuzzy. Where in chapter two I have discussed the problem of biographical bias, this chapter will observe the critic’s own bias, suggesting that it is unavoidable in cases which continue to have significance today. It will contend that while it is useful to have an opinion, it is finding an appropriate vehicle within which to appreciate this opinion that is the problem.

Several other characteristics also make the midwifery discourse ideal for the Fuzzy Set Theory, particularly the involvement of women. Today, midwifery is a branch of medicine, a scientific arena. But it had not always been such. The eighteenth century saw the first constructive movement to make midwifery an official branch of medicine, and with it, a professional occupation for medical men. Not unreasonably, these men came to the conclusion that there was a need for theoretical

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<sup>11</sup> Wilson, pp.1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, p.33 and p.32.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Health, Medicine and Society in Victorian England* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2010), p.1

study and education, a more consistent and methodical approach to childbirth. Instead, however, of improving the system that was already in place, adding to female midwives' extensive experience with education, they sought to take it over completely: they had, as Wilson suggests, 'gratuitously criticized female midwives, and they had offered no means of help or instruction to those midwives', instead pushing themselves forward as independent practitioners.<sup>14</sup> This made women's participation within the field particularly ambiguous. On the one hand, it was now a scientific arena, and thus an improper subject area for female study. Moreover, the material could be graphic, describing sex and genitals in minute detail, requiring intimate knowledge of another's body— and therefore considered highly unsuitable for women. On the other hand, no man could escape the fact that this had extraordinary consequence for women, as it was their lives, exclusively, that were at risk. There was also the issue of decorum: these men would have access to the bodies of women, other than their wives. They needed women's approval and co-operation probably more so than in any other professional field. Thus, for the first time in the eighteenth century, a compromise had to be exacted: men and women had to operate side by side. As Irvine Loudon has noted, although (by the nineteenth century) there is little evidence to suggest that middle-class women preferred female midwives to male doctors, they still liked 'a well-trained woman, preferably of middle-class origins, to attend their lying-in'.<sup>15</sup> The extent of their involvement in the birth itself varies from case to case, but it suggests that male and female midwives were working together. The boundaries of this compromise were especially uneasy, producing a barrage of literature from all angles—from those on the inside and outside of the profession.

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<sup>14</sup> Wilson, p.111

<sup>15</sup> Irvine Gordon, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.180

As Wilson has realised, not all female midwives before the eighteenth century were uneducated and illiterate, and it appears that most midwives could at least read at a time when female literacy was very low.<sup>16</sup> Some, like Jane Sharp in 1671, could also write intelligent and constructive books about their profession. She had recognised that there was a gap in midwives' knowledge, a need for education and careful training:

I have often sate down sad in the Consideration of the many Miseries Women endure in the Hands of unskilful Midwives; many professing the Art (without any skill in Anatomy, which is the principal part effectually necessary for a Midwife) [...].<sup>17</sup>

In her view, a midwife's knowledge must be 'twofold': '*Speculative* [theoretical]; and *Practical*', the lack of either one being a handicap. Despite this, she is adamant that midwifery should remain a female occupation:

for though we women cannot deny, that men in some things may come to a greater perfection of knowledge than women ordinarily can, by reason of the former helps that women want; yet the holy Scriptures hath recorded Midwives to the perpetual honour of the female sex [...] Yet we find even that amongst the *Indians*, and all barbarous people, where there is no Men of Learning, the women are sufficient to perform this duty: and even in our own Nation, that we need go no farther, the poor Country people where there are none but women to assist [...] the women are as fruitful, and as safe and well delivered, if not more fruitful, and better commonly in childbed than the greatest Ladies of the Land.<sup>18</sup>

The implication is that women are possessed of an inherent understanding of childbirth: a gift from God which men lack. As Sharp recounts, ancient chronicles indicated that women were only ever assisted by other women in childbirth. In her own society, even 'barbarous' people, and the very poor—all of whom are excluded from even the most basic of educations—are able to survive childbirth with only women in attendance. As she suggests, 'it is not hard words that perform the work

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<sup>16</sup> Wilson, p.30

<sup>17</sup> Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book, Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered*, ed. by Elaine Hobby (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Sharp, p.6

[...] words are just the shell'.<sup>19</sup> This intuition would become the female midwives' central argument in the proceeding century, as the discourse divided and took on the appearance of a battle between the sexes.

Sharp's *The Midwives Book* is remarkably perceptive for a text from this early period, and although operating under some mistaken understandings of physiology, offers intriguing insight into the relationship between female midwives and 'Men of Learning'. Pre-1700 female midwives were in charge of nearly all births, only calling for a surgeon when the labour had become very difficult and the child was already dead. The surgeon's role was merely to extract the child, and attempt to save the life of the mother. As Sharp's text indicates, this relationship was already particularly uneasy: men were apparently already attempting to usurp the position of female midwives, alarming Sharp enough for her to feel it necessary to put her concerns on paper.

Sharp also clearly felt it necessary to defend female midwifery, and also to improve its image at a time when society was becoming suspicious of women working in this way. She understood that her education and standing was not common, and the lack of it exposed other practising midwives to gossip and allegation. Under some circumstances it could even lead to allegations of witchcraft. Several critics have noted the connection between midwifery and witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and although this connection has recently been contested by historians, it is not inconsequential to note that out of the sixty-thousand people executed for witchcraft (globally), eighty percent were women and anything up to half of those may have assisted, if not practised, as midwives (including, for

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<sup>19</sup> Sharp, p.6

example, Ursula Kemp (1525-1582) in England).<sup>20</sup> As Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English have discussed, the women employed as midwives were mature, often unmarried or widowed, lay healers, serving the lowest classes, relying on midwifery to supplement their income.<sup>21</sup> Everything they knew had been garnered through experience, and, like most doctors during this period, they dealt in herbs and home-made medicines. Fungi such as Ergot could be used to treat postnatal bleeding and Belladonna to encourage labour; others could be used to ease pain. But, as will be observed in next chapter, the pain of childbirth was seen as a punishment given to Eve (and therefore women) by God, and any attempt to make childbirth easier could be seen as defiance of God's will. This, alongside their poverty and the unpredictable (and dangerous) nature of early medicine, meant that midwives were vulnerable to accusations. Quakers Jane Hawkins and Anne Hutchinson were two such midwives from Massachusetts who, in 1637, found themselves in a tenuous position after assisting a woman, Mary Dyer, who gave birth prematurely to a deformed stillborn baby girl. As the deformity of a child was seen as a sign of God's disfavour (if not a pact with the devil), all three women defied law and buried the child in secret. When the burial was discovered, Hutchinson had already been excommunicated along with her husband for heresy (after her conversion from Puritanism to Quakerism, she had been arguing for civil liberty and religious toleration), and was supported by Mary Dyer. Both women, their husbands, and (soon after) Jane Hawkins, were banished. Anne Hutchinson was killed by Native Americans and Mary Dyer was eventually executed for heresy in 1660. Jane Hawkins lived in exile.

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<sup>20</sup> David Harley has argued that midwives were generally immune from prosecution and, along with Wilson, suggests that the myth has been used to create a multitude of imaginary martyrs for the modern women's health movement. David Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife-witch', *Soc Hist Med Journal*, 3 (1990), 1-26

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York; The Feminist Press, 1973), p.6

Needless to say, not all midwives were associated with witchcraft. Some could achieve an important social position within their community, with respect and prestige, like Sharp. Midwifery was, however, intimately connected with religion, and there was evidently some anxiety that the two might become detached. Another popular work in use at the time of Sharp's *A Midwives Book* was the anonymous *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, which appeared sometime towards the end of the seventeenth century and was still in circulation (albeit revised and supplemented) into the nineteenth century. It is pickled with religious anecdotes, reflections and biblical quotations, occupying a sphere somewhere between a piece of pornographic literature and a religious text. Presumably, the author feels it necessary to emphasise the connection between religiosity and reproduction, and, curiously, to illustrate the midwife as a woman who is performing God's work on earth. Biblical references indicate that the superstitions surrounding witchcraft were at the forefront of the author's mind and it includes references to "monster" births (infants born with four arms or covered in hair). The earliest editions of this text, as Robert P. Maccubbin discusses, 'lapse into misogyny', and suggest that the mother might have copulated with an animal, or a demon, or that it might be a product of the woman's imagination.<sup>22</sup> It is indubitably the midwife's responsibility to detect these signs on the baby, and to report them to the authorities. As with the case of Hutchinson, Dyer and Hawkins, however, women brought together through childbirth were more likely to protect each other. As Wilson notes, the ceremony of childbirth reflected and maintained 'a *collective culture of women*', conferring on the midwife her authority

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<sup>22</sup> As outlined by Robert P. Maccubbin, "*'Tis nature's fault': unauthorized sexuality during the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.11

over the birth and maintaining women's collective control over the sphere.<sup>23</sup> How, then, did man-midwifery break down this sphere?

In the early nineteenth century it is evident that something quite dramatic was taking place within the field of midwifery, attracting the interest of several interested writers. George Crabbe, a clergyman, had himself trained as a doctor, but his passion was verse writing, which he took up full-time after he had completed his medical training. He attracted the interest of Edmund Burke, who helped him to publish his poem *The Library*. Both this, and a number of his later poems, including *The Parish Register* (1807), detailed observations from his life—those he encountered, and problems, causes and interests that engaged his fellow men. In one chapter of this latter poem, 'Burials', Crabbe specifically engages with the midwifery discourse. It is the tale of a female midwife who is exiled from her community by a man-midwife, eventually dying in poverty, and outlines the arguments of both sides of the discourse. It also appears to sympathise most particularly with the midwife, stressing the woman's commitment to nature and God: 'heaven was her help and nature her guide'.<sup>24</sup> She has long been trusted, and employed by all the women in her village, until a 'Town-Dame', a 'gay vain bride' sends for a male doctor, Dr. Glibb,<sup>25</sup> suggesting that male doctors were a new fashion, brought into the country by the middle class from the cities and suburbs. The woman subsequently endures a difficult labour: 'Two days he waited, all his art applied, | To save the mother when her infant died'.<sup>26</sup> Like many man-midwives, Glibb is unable to save the life of the child, and there is a suggestion that forceps—or at least force— may have been applied. The

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<sup>23</sup> Wilson, p.38

<sup>24</sup> The name of the male doctor recalls the word 'glib', implying that the doctor is slippery. George Crabbe, 'Burials', *Tales, 1812, And Other Selected Poems* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967), 1.648.

<sup>25</sup> Crabbe, ll.649-651.

<sup>26</sup> Crabbe, ll.655-6



woman survives, however, and Glibb arrogantly insists that this is because he was in attendance. Through word-of-mouth, other woman soon flock to the male doctor—‘fashion [sends] the varying sex to him’.<sup>27</sup> A direct confrontation between the doctor and the female midwife then ensues. She attempts to defend her position by drawing attention to the doctor’s inexperience: “So successful in my art,” she cried, | ‘And this proud man, so young and so untried!’<sup>28</sup> More specifically, she draws attention to his talent for maiming and killing infants:

Has this pale Doctor more than life to give?  
 No stunted cripple hops the village round;  
 [...]  
 Can this proud leech, with all his boasted skill,  
 Amend the body, wit or will?  
 [...]  
 If not, this stranger from your doors repel,  
 And be content to *be* and to be *well*.<sup>29</sup>

In response, the man-midwife scorns female midwife’s preference for nature and her ignorance of anatomy and medicine:

dare you trust your wives,  
 The joy, the pride, the solace of your lives,  
 To one who acts and knows no reason why,  
 But trusts, poor hag! to luck for an ally?—  
 [...]  
 And what is Nature? One who acts in aid  
 Of gossips half asleep, and half afraid:  
 With such allies I scorn my fame to blend,  
 Skill is my luck and courage my friend:  
 No slave to Nature, ‘tis my chief despite [...]<sup>30</sup>

The passage accurately summarises the debate as it appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, associating the female midwife with maturity and experience and the man-midwife with confidence and science. It was a discourse that was indeed materialising in a variety of genres, and spilling over into other public

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<sup>27</sup> Crabbe, ll.666.

<sup>28</sup> Crabbe, ll.673-4

<sup>29</sup> Crabbe, ll.706-718

<sup>30</sup> Crabbe, ll.675-690

quarters. It also outlines a series of caricatures that had appeared in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759), in the clumsy and imprudent character of Dr. Slop, and would climax in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), with the female midwife represented in the character of Sarah Gamp, an alcoholic midwife and nurse.

As Crabbe's poem outlines, there are several reasons why man-midwifery might have become popular. Wilson has suggested that the rise in man-midwifery was the result of word-of-mouth: those women who called male surgeons only when the labour had become difficult, began to call for them earlier, especially if they were expecting a difficult labour. As male doctors began to deliver more live babies, it broke down the fear of men and their association with craniotomy and death:

The more it was known he could deliver a living child, the less women would fear him; the less they feared him, the earlier they would call him; the earlier they called him, the more often he could deliver the child alive; and the more often this was so, the further it would be realized that he could achieve this.<sup>31</sup>

Ehrenreich and English agree that accusations of witchcraft appear to have stemmed from a wider struggle to suppress women as healers, and the creation of a new male medical profession.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Loudon, quoting Jonathon Toogood's 1844 *On the Practice of Midwifery*, argues that the rise of man-midwifery was a systematic movement; men were taking on as much midwifery as possible for professional gains:

general practitioners took all the midwifery they could get because of the conviction that 'the successful practice of midwifery at the outset of life as surely establishes a professional man's reputation as the contrary retards his progress'.<sup>33</sup>

Like Crabbe, some have suggested that it was a fashion brought in from Europe, emulated by those who could afford it and those who aspired to wealth and prestige. Others have noted that it was the very mechanics themselves that made man-

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<sup>31</sup> Wilson, p.97

<sup>32</sup> Ehrenreich and English, p.6

<sup>33</sup> Loudon, p.185

midwifery popular, particularly the forceps, which (possibly because of its mysterious beginnings, and the way in which it was guarded as a family secret), came to be seen as indispensable by some. Wilson has noted that the advent of the forceps ‘turned [midwifery] into a sphere of contest as never before’.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that man-midwifery arose because of all these issues, and, perhaps more importantly, because for the first time, midwifery had become a science—a branch of medicine—and with that the position of women within the field had to change accordingly.

Many writers both in and outside the field realised midwifery was being subsumed by medicine. Sarah Stone, an experienced midwife who had been trained by her mother for six years before she was allowed to play deputy, recognised that what female midwives lacked, their male counterparts had access to: theoretical instruction. In her *A Compleat Practice of Midwifery* (1737), Stone emphasises anatomical study, believing it to have an important position within the profession, and admits (unusually for a woman) that she has observed dissections, ‘seen several women opened’ and read anatomy.<sup>35</sup> By so doing, she reveals and asserts that women can master fields of study as proficiently as man-midwives. Clearly, however, she is angry that the field is being dominated by men, and, more importantly, by surgery, which she believes is invasive and unnecessary. She insists that practical knowledge should be paramount, advising that midwives ‘should employ three years at least, with some ingenious woman practising the art’.<sup>36</sup> Her aim is to properly instruct female midwives in this way, to prove to them that practical wisdom will help mother and

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, p.111

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Stone, ‘A Compleat Practice in Midwifery’ (London, 1737), p.xv, in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 29 June 2010].

<sup>36</sup> Stone, p.xvii.

child safely through childbirth. Women, she suggests, have ‘natural Sympathy’ and ‘compassion’, ‘which no man can be a judge of’.<sup>37</sup>

Stone is clear that the female midwives currently operating in the profession (without theoretical instruction or experience) are not qualified or competent to do so, and highlights at length their ignorance, laziness, prejudices and dangerous practice. For instance, in ‘Observation XXXIV: *A Woman being brought into great Pains and Danger before her Time by her Midwife [...]*’ she describes the way in which a midwife mistook a woman to be in labour, when it had been less than nine months since the birth of her first child, and she had clearly not reached full term. This midwife had attempted to force labour by stretching the woman’s uterus, and was ready to drag the child out. Luckily, Stone was able to intervene before any significant damage was done, and, three weeks later, the woman gave birth to a live baby girl.<sup>38</sup> From this, Stone concludes that ‘I am sure, many Women would fare much better, if they committed themselves to God and Nature, than to employ *ignorant* Midwives’ (my emphasis).<sup>39</sup>

The medicalization of midwifery, however, is as harmful to mothers and children as an incompetent midwife. It is based on an imperfect science, born out of books, rather than knowledge teamed with practical experience:

But these young Gentlemen-Professors put on a finish’d assurance, with pretence that their knowledge exceeds any Woman’s, because they have seen, or gone thro’, a Course of Anatomy [...] those young Gentlemen pretenders, who undertake the Practice of Midwifery with only the knowledge of dissecting the Dead.<sup>40</sup>

If we are to believe Stone, then many young men are serving their short apprenticeships with a “barber-surgeon” (an early, archaic, version of the surgeon,

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<sup>37</sup> Stone, p.xvi

<sup>38</sup> Stone, pp.116-9

<sup>39</sup> Stone, p.119

<sup>40</sup> Stone, pp.vi-vii

with little or no proper medical training), before immediately setting up as a man-midwife. Instruments, were, of course, meant to be used only as a last resort, but in Stone's opinion they were being used by men far too easily, for complications that could easily be resolved by a deft woman's hands and gentle encouragement (as opposed to the "natural" heavy-handedness of men outlined by the mother of the stillborn baby boy delivered in 2002). Stone notes:

yea, infants have been born alive, with their brains working out of their Heads: occasioned by the too common use of instruments: which I never found but very little use to be made of, in all my practice [...] For dissecting the Dead, and being just and tender to the Living, are vastly different; for it must be supposed that there is a tender regard one Woman bears another'.<sup>41</sup>

She suggests the man-midwife's attitude is based on ignorance and assumption—not education and practise—but was protected from scrutiny by a bias towards men who were well-read. This, in her view, was a dangerous and potentially fatal prejudice.

Observing Stone's views on training and education, Wilson has suggested that Stone is an unparalleled example of a skilled female midwife:

Mrs. Stone's views at large were *intermediate in character between those of typical female and male practitioners* [...] In short, Sarah Stone's proclaimed attitudes and her practical methods harmonized with the social form of her obstetric practice: in each of these respects she was poised between the traditional midwife and the traditional obstetric surgeon.<sup>42</sup>

She is, in his view, somewhere between a male and female midwife. It could be suggested, however, that Stone was an example of just how skilled female midwives were, or could have been, combining the ancient art form of midwifery, with its emphasis on practical experience and intuition, with a more modern approach to education and expertise. Unfortunately, few manuals by female midwives survive (or indeed were written). Men had the wealth and prestige to publish medical treatises,

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<sup>41</sup> Stone, pp.xiii-xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, p.59

whilst women did not—and female midwives were, therefore, rarely able to defend themselves.

Now and again, however, a male writer might find reason to speak on behalf of female midwives. Philip Thicknesse, author and eccentric aristocrat, found himself trumpeting the cause of female midwives in his *Man-Midwifery Analyzed; or the Tendency of that Indecent and Unnecessary Practice Detected and Exposed* (1764).<sup>43</sup> Written primarily as an attack on man-midwifery, which he saw as paramount to sexual misconduct, if not abuse, the text followed the publication of *A Letter to a young Lady on her Marriage* (1764), which specifically attacked the prominent obstetrician William Smellie. *Man-Midwifery Analyzed* turned its attentions to John Ford, and included a number of colourful plates which left the reader in no doubt of the author's views. The opening plate was of a fashionable, high-class woman, with her gown open at the chest and lifted to the knee. A doctor knelt at her feet, one hand on her exposed breast and the other up her skirt, grinning, riding whip discarded on the floor (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Engraving taken from *Man-Midwifery Analyzed* (1764). Artist unknown.



<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note that Thicknesse's second wife, Lady Elizabeth Tuchet, had died less than two years before this publication, during (or shortly after) childbirth.

His “revelations” with regards to men-midwives are startling. He identifies the reason why men have shown such a growing interest in obstetrics and gynaecology as seated in sexual urges, referring to these men as *touching doctors*:

That some of these *touching* gentry have been prosecuted, and severely punished for their lustful conduct in *touching* their patients, is notorious. That hundreds of them daily get off, and that many succeed undiscovered, cannot be doubted.<sup>44</sup>

Man-midwifery is, to Thicknesse, ‘an outrage to sense, dignity, love, and virtue’, and can lead to extra-marital affairs, rape, and perverse types of sexual intercourse, even when a woman is giving birth:

I know it may be objected, and said, that a woman, under such circumstances, must be disgusting, and remove every sensual appetite: but this I deny. A woman is like a riddle, nothing in her when *found out*; but a fine woman, *unfound out*, can appear in no situation, no even in the act of death, but such as has stirred the most unconquerable of all passions.<sup>45</sup>

In a footnote, as evidence for this, he refers to the Ancient Egyptian embalmers, who sometimes ‘violated’ young, beautiful women, brought to them for mummification, and asks ‘if, therefore, death cannot restrain it, can any circumstance whatever in life?’<sup>46</sup>

Thicknesse cites several known cases where male doctors had apparently assaulted their patients in this manner. The first is one of his own opponents, John Roabard, who had written a response to his *Letter to a Young Lady* the same year. This man, by Thicknesse’s account, was soon after forced to go into hiding because of an accusation by a ‘reputable Maltster’s wife’ that ‘he had availed himself of his *touching qualifications*, and had actually ravished her’.<sup>47</sup> Roabard is acquitted, according to Thicknesse, by the number of other female patients who come forward to protest, and swear under oath, that ‘[Roabard] had often *laid them*, without *lying with*

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<sup>44</sup> Philip Thicknesse, *Man-Midwifery Analysed* (London: Printed for R Davis, 1764), p.23

<sup>45</sup> Thicknesse, p.34

<sup>46</sup> Thicknesse, p.34f

<sup>47</sup> Thicknesse, p.ix

*them*’, speaking of him with ‘a kind of enthusiastic ardour!’,<sup>48</sup> further assuring Thicknesse of Roabard’s guilt. He imagines the way in which these man-midwives are able to carry out their attack, and to make their female victims complicit, by using a variety of potions and medicines, to stimulate their passion: ‘he may not only touch her with his *lubricated pomatum fingers*, as Smellie directs, but he may add a small quantity of *cantharides* to the composition, and create in the woman a temporary furor.’<sup>49</sup> The female patient is subsequently shamed by her actions, and forced to keep quiet. Thicknesse even believes that women may have died from these seduction techniques (not impossible, as cantharides, a poison, could be very harmful). He cites ‘a well-known fact’ that a very beautiful merchant’s wife had been ‘debauched’ in this manner, by the ‘*touches of cantharides*’, and had died of the effect, but not before confessing the whole affair to her husband.<sup>50</sup>

The use of medicines immediately indicates that Thicknesse sees man-midwifery as incorporating chemical science, the danger of which the unsuspecting female had no defence against. While these are, of course, eccentric views, Thicknesse’s *Man-Midwifery Analyzed* is not without its serious and thought-provoking points. His anxiety regarding the qualities of some medicines, used haphazardly on vulnerable women during childbirth, reveals a distrust of a very new, and therefore untested, branch of medicine. Anxieties regarding unnecessary invasion of the female body by male doctors were very real, and stemmed from a larger issue with the use of instruments. Despite the obvious theatrics of Thicknesse’s writing, the treatise does, therefore, share some remarkably similar ideas with Stone’s manual. Thicknesse, too, deplores the use of instruments, charging them as dangerous to ‘the

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<sup>48</sup> Thicknesse, p.xii

<sup>49</sup> Cantharides were made from the crushed powder of the Spanish fly. They irritated the urethral passages in humans causing inflammation in the genitals, and were therefore thought to have aphrodisiac qualities. They were very fashionable in the eighteenth century. Thicknesse, p.12

<sup>50</sup> Thicknesse, p.25



life of the child, or mother, or both', adding that the damage rendered by these instruments also makes the woman's person 'disagreeable, if not disgusting, to her husband'.<sup>51</sup> He even includes an illustration of one of them, a 'horrid hook', the pointed end of which could be inserted into the eye socket of foetus, in order to drag it out. He is also wary of men-midwives who have little practical experience when they embark upon their careers, calling them '*Book-Midwives*'.<sup>52</sup>

Like Stone, Thicknesse promotes nature, or, in his words, 'GOODY NATURE', 'a lady who practised Midwifery from the beginning of time, in every corner of the earth, with perfect success, till she was stifled to death between two feather-beds at Paris'.<sup>53</sup> He has observed nature in the animal kingdom and found that other creatures do not die when giving birth because they are compelled to leave the process to nature, remarking that, left to herself, nature 'scarce ever errs'.<sup>54</sup> If assistance *is* needed, he continues, then it should be left to women, who have for thousands of generations fulfilled this role, and who can more patiently 'wait the course of nature, receive her hints, and gently assist her efforts'.<sup>55</sup> Nor does he believe that this role should be anything other than gentle assistance, declaring that 'she, who does more, is ignorant of the little they have to do'.<sup>56</sup> God, he insists, has given the same 'faculties to a woman in labour as he has given to mankind, for every other NATURAL EVACUATION'.<sup>57</sup> Some of these ideas are, of course, misinformed. Childbirth could, and did, go wrong—with or without the intervention of a man-midwife. As Loudon notes, Thicknesse could be thought of as an 'extremist', part of 'a sort of lunatic

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<sup>51</sup> Thicknesse, pp.18-19.

<sup>52</sup> Thicknesse, p.vi

<sup>53</sup> Thicknesse, p.3

<sup>54</sup> Thicknesse, p.20.

<sup>55</sup> Thicknesse, p.20.

<sup>56</sup> Thicknesse, p.20

<sup>57</sup> Thicknesse, p.86.

fringe'.<sup>58</sup> But he did possess some enlightened ideas, advocating the education of female midwives, and contending that it would be more suitable to have women properly instructed, than to risk using man-midwives. Moreover, he is in favour of female physics, and promotes the cunning of Athenian matrons, who stole and developed the skill of midwifery from men.

Thicknesse and Stone are unlikely as a pair fighting the same battle. Both realised that a new understanding of midwifery was coming into effect, one which employed science and medicine, acquiring new trappings—techniques, instruments and theories—and one which shut out female midwives. They agreed that the use of mechanical instruments was often brutish and unnecessary, leading to death, deformities and severe damage in either child or mother, or both, and also that female midwives were more sensitive, patient and careful, but their instruction in the field of anatomy and medicine was lacking, often leading to mistakes. Both authors therefore advocated practical and theoretical education for women, allowing them to become *au fait* and even specialised. Their “natural” deftness was, in the eyes of these writers, the answer to men’s “natural” heavy-handedness, and the only way to prevent injury and loss of life.

However, the steady appropriation of midwifery in the spheres of science and medicine could not be prevented by Stone and Thicknesse. The eighteenth century had developed a new thirst for information, and above all, detailed and accurate representations of the human body. While *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* celebrated symbolism, religious allegory and speculation, creating plates that were more imaginative than precise, anatomists such as William Hunter were doing away with this in favour of detailed, factual representation. Man-midwives thus realised that

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<sup>58</sup> Loudon, p.189

prestige within the profession was to be found in the publication of their research—research that valued the learned, educated and eloquent. One such writer, Alexander Hamilton, was a man of considerable influence. As Professor of Midwifery at the University of Edinburgh and a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, his *A Treatise of Midwifery* (1781) was just one of a series of medical texts he published. It followed *Elements of Midwifery* (1775), which went through several editions, and *Treatise on the Management of Female Complaints* (1780). *Outlines of the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* appeared a few years later, in 1784, and *Letters to Dr William Osborn, Teacher and Practitioner of Midwifery in London* was published in 1792. In his post as Professor of Midwifery at the College of Edinburgh (a post that he shared, for a period of time with Thomas Young, until the latter died), Hamilton attempted to make the midwifery class compulsory for the Doctor of Medicine.<sup>59</sup> Although this was not achieved until after his death in 1802, Hamilton clearly intended to make midwifery respectable and prestigious as a field of study. His aim, alongside a number of other male doctors during this period, was to medicalize midwifery; and this he began with *A Treatise of Midwifery*.

The text begins with an extensive introduction to female anatomy, from head to pelvis, contrasted, at various moments, with the male body. This, Hamilton explains, is vital for a midwife, who should demonstrate ‘proper attention to those things most nearly connected with [that part of the body which is the subject of the midwife’s operations]’.<sup>60</sup> Where *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* begins with a digression on the ‘Matrimonial State considered’, ‘False steps in Matrimonial Alliances’, ‘The Happy State of Matrimony’, which contains no medical information and muses on the

<sup>59</sup> John Kay, ‘CXXXIV: Alexander Hamilton’, in *Kay’s Originals: Biographical Sketches* <<http://edinburghbookshelf.org.uk/volume8/page471.html>> [accessed 02 February 2011], p.332

<sup>60</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A Treatise of Midwifery, Comprehending the whole MANAGEMENT of FEMALE COMPLAINTS, and the TREATMENT of CHILDREN in EARLY INFANCY* (Edinburgh: J.Dickson, W. Creech and C. Elliot, 1781), p.1

birth of Adam and Eve and the ‘divine appointment’ of marriage,<sup>61</sup> Hamilton’s treatise produces a step-by-step description of the structure and figure of a child’s head, female pelvic region, female gynaecological complaints and diseases, complications during pregnancy and the management of pregnant women. The final section of the book relates to diseases that can occur in women after birth, the management of newborn infants and forms of medicine. This overwhelms the reader with information, and appears factual and knowledgeable. In fact, the discussion directly relating to childbirth itself only constitutes about one hundred and fifty pages of a four hundred and sixty-four page book. It is a book to study, by which one can become acquainted with the latest developments and discoveries in science and anatomy, not one that can be used for quick reference (as, perhaps Stone’s), or practical purposes.

In his new, improved medicalized version of midwifery, Hamilton leaves no room for female midwives: ‘we have better reason to prove that the confinement of midwifery to the hands of women was formerly injurious to the art and to the public’.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he does not believe that education will improve them:

In the instruction of women, however, I found numerous obstacles. Verbal instructions were liable either to be misunderstood, or were soon effaced: Books were often confused and uninteresting in their details, abstruse, imperfect, and unintelligible in their principles. Even those which were designed for women, are filled with technical terms, and specious, though delusive theories.<sup>63</sup>

Women, he has found, are not able to keep up with advances in learning. The nuances of science and medicine elude them. In order to educate them sufficiently for the profession, books would have to be re-written in order to be appealing, simple and accessible to the unrefined, obtuse female mind.

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<sup>61</sup> *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* (New York: Printed for the United Company of Flying Stationers, 1788), p.14

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, p.xviii

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton, p.xx

His views echoed that of one of his contemporaries, Thomas Denman, whose influential *Introduction to Midwifery*, first published in 1762, went through five editions. In his preface, Denman had similarly characterised the sphere of midwifery as a man's world. In his extensive survey of medical history, he links the new field of man-midwifery with ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, the great discoveries of blood circulation (William Harvey), the identification of prominent diseases (Thomas Sydenham) as well as anatomical discoveries and revelations in the natural world, amongst many others. Female midwives are all but written out of this extensive history, apart from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (who introduced inoculation against the small-pox to England), and Queen Caroline, who were added to later editions.<sup>64</sup>

Referring to the period before man-midwifery, Denman can only surmise that:

long before the establishment of systems, there must have been a time, when means were used for the cure of diseases, and the relief of accidents. There must also have been a time, when the rude but well meant endeavours of one friend to relieve another in distress, ceased, and application was made to those who were supposed to have more information, or greater skill.<sup>65</sup>

Female midwives are undoubtedly those of 'rude' skill. Denman believes midwifery to be the sphere of men, of 'systems', science and mechanics. There can be no place for women.

Hamilton agrees: 'male practitioners [are now] employed to give that assistance for which their improved knowledge, their courage, presence of mind, and, frequently, their bodily strength, had particularly qualified them.'<sup>66</sup> Here Hamilton utilises several arguments that had been, and would continue to be, employed against female midwives—that of intelligence and bodily strength, which, it was believed,

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Denman, 'An Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery', vol I (Brattleborough: William Fessenden, 1807), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 25 April 2012] p.xxv

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Denman, 'An Introduction to the Practice of Midwifery', vol I (London: T. Bensley; J. Johnson, 1788), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 25 April 2012], p.ii

<sup>66</sup> Hamilton, p.xviii.

were only afforded to men, and which enabled them to utilise new scientific methods and instruments more effectively. Female midwives did, as we have seen, use these same arguments against men-midwives to demonstrate that men did not value practical intelligence and could be too brutish and forceful in the use of bodily strength. Hamilton, however, was speaking from well-documented, extensive experience. It is likely that his opinions were welcomed as important and highly credible.

Nevertheless, Hamilton appears somewhat confused about the position of women within the field. On the one hand, he suggests that the book might ‘more extensively useful to the softer sex’, whose role should be as assistants for male doctors, and, in a London edition, it is added that the text is ‘DIVESTED OF TECHNICAL TERMS AND ABSTRUSE THEORIES’ for this purpose.<sup>67</sup> In their ‘delicacy’ and ‘prejudice’ (by which he means partiality/sympathy for the female cause)<sup>68</sup> women make excellent carers, and are able to supervise the nursing of women before and after birth: the attendance of lying-in women being, after all, ‘by no means, so difficult a matter as many have represented’.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, Hamilton also implies that women might be able to take a more central role in the birthing process, there being such extensive accounts of the complexities and problems that might arise in childbirth and how to ease them, in the text. He suggests that while women are not suitable as *independent* midwives, they should be afforded some basic instruction in anatomy and medicine. He is clear that where a delivery requires anything other than gentle assistance, a woman should not hesitate to send for a man:

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A Treatise of Midwifery, Comprehending the Management of Female Complaints and the Treatment of Children in Early Infancy* (London: J. Murray, J. Dickinson and C. Elliot, 1781), p.i.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, p.xxiii.

<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, pp.287-8

If the head should be actually separated [in circumstances where the foetus has died and putrefied in the womb] and left behind in the womb, it will scarcely be advisable for a female practitioner to attempt the extraction, for there is little chance of success. Her interference is only allowable if [...] a surgeon cannot soon be procured.<sup>70</sup>

He does then, nevertheless, proceed to explain how the extraction might be attempted by a woman. The point is further emphasised in a following chapter, wherein the female midwife is advised:

When other [diseases/complaints] unavoidably occur, the midwife should neglect no opportunity of having early recourse to proper advice [...] She ought to consider herself in the character of the friend and nurse of her patient, and should never presume to give an opinion in cases which appear to be out of the line of her own province.<sup>71</sup>

At times, Hamilton tries to be explicit about the role of women midwives. They are there to sympathise and to comfort, not to operate. They are not to have the responsibility of making decisions and supervising (except in extreme circumstances), having not the intelligence or strength to protect both mother and child. Yet, he demonstrates how women can be useful in other, more complicated labours, describing how they might break a woman's waters, or pull a child out by the feet. This is clearly not the inactive role he initially intends to prescribe, even if it is limited to emergencies only.

Hamilton's repeated references to female midwives indicates that he was one of a number of man-midwives who realised that they were sharing their profession with women, and, ultimately, relying on their help. If they were to maintain this alliance, they needed to make allowances. Wilson has identified one other doctor who came to this same conclusion. Edmund Chapman, author of *An Essay on the Improvement of Midwifery, chiefly with regard to that operation* (1733), and similarly included 'several flattering remarks' towards female midwives, suggesting that they

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<sup>70</sup> Hamilton., p.257

<sup>71</sup> Hamilton, p.289

‘were the very audience he wish[ed] to persuade’.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, the very fact that Hamilton was obliged to write a book directly addressed to female midwives implies that he not only understood that he had to work alongside them, but that they were a very necessary aspect of his work. Even as assistants, female midwives appear to play quite an important role in Hamilton’s text, procuring medicines and attending to women who are suffering from post-natal diseases and infections. As such, while he maintains the hierarchy between man-midwives and female mid-wives, Hamilton is adamant that women should understand advancements in scientific understanding, devoting an entire chapter to the qualifications that they should procure, amongst which he places bodily strength, good constitution, ‘strong firm and flexible’ joints at the foremost, further remarking that they should be ‘virtuous and prudent’, ‘well-bred’, ‘easy and engaging’.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, while Hamilton suggests that women are not likely to understand the nuances of science— ‘the want of science and philosophy may prevent her knowing the reason of some facts’—he nevertheless insists that female midwives should be ‘thoroughly acquainted with the facts themselves’ and ‘well informed of every circumstance relating to her profession’.<sup>74</sup> Like Stone and Thicknesse, Hamilton clearly believes that the education of female midwives has been woefully neglected, the theoretical side of which is of the utmost importance. His manual takes the first, albeit reticent, steps towards the reformation of women’s education in the subjects of science and medicine.

### **3.1: Fear and nature: midwifery and the literary public**

The first half of this Fuzzy Set, which incorporates the work of two practising midwives (one male, one female) and an interested male writer, demonstrates that the

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<sup>72</sup> Wilson, p.110

<sup>73</sup> Hamilton, pp.422-3

<sup>74</sup> Hamilton, p.423



midwifery debate cannot be binarized: this is not simply a battle between man-midwives and female midwives, or indeed a battle between the sexes. The debate itself is much fuzzier than that, as midwives and the general public struggled to make sense of the information before them, and failed to reach any consensus. Overlapping ideas between the texts of Hamilton, Denman and Stone reveal that there is very much more to the debate than meets the eye, which is characterised by confusion and inconsistency. But how much of this debate did the public observe? How aware were they of the changes happening in the field, and, more importantly, did they feel its effect (good or bad) in their own lives?

Jane Austen was one who expressed little but contempt for maternity, midwifery and motherhood. Her letters are littered with references to women around her whom she either pitied or scorned for breeding. To her sister Cassandra she was particularly candid on the subject. These letters are nearly always irreverent on the subject of childbirth, and are often witty or scurrilous. Her casual remarks, however, often betray a deep anxiety about pregnancy and birth, and may even have been responsible for her decision to remain single. Several of her acquaintances died in child-bed, amongst them her sister-in-law Elizabeth Austen Knight, who died twelve days after giving birth to her eleventh child (at the age of thirty-five). It would be a subject of constant anxiety to Austen throughout her life—portrayed in the character of Emma who defers the announcement of her engagement until she can be assured that her friend Mrs. Weston is ‘safe and well’, after the delivery of her daughter Anna.<sup>75</sup>

To women who she did not like, or with whom she was not intimately acquainted, Austen’s attitude appears to have been one of contempt: ‘Mrs. Hall of

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<sup>75</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma*, ed. by Kristin Flieger Samuelian (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 2004), p.381

Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright.—I suppose she happened unawares to look at her husband.<sup>76</sup> In a later letters she ‘laments’ that a Mrs. Deedes, a distant relation, is about to have another child (her twelfth of nineteen children), and on hearing from Cassandra that another woman is also pregnant she remarks: ‘but poor woman! how can she be honestly breeding again?’<sup>77</sup> Where family members are involved, she is often horrified. Just a few months before her death, Austen writes to Fanny Knight that another niece, Anna Lefroy, is pregnant for the third time in just over two years: ‘Anna has not a chance of escape; her husband called here the other day, & said she was *pretty well* but not *equal to so long a walk* [...] Poor animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty.—I am sorry for her.’<sup>78</sup> In another letter, to the same niece, she teasingly regrets that she might soon be married, and given up to motherhood: ‘Oh! What a loss it will be, when you are married. You are too agreeable in your single state, too agreeable as a Niece. I shall hate you when your delicious play of Mind is all settled down to conjugal & maternal affections.’<sup>79</sup> As Vivien Jones argues, ‘Austen’s sensitivity to the constraints on women’s lives, and her satisfaction with her own identity as a single woman and a writer, are never more evident than in this moment of serious family gossip’.<sup>80</sup> It is in these letters she is most candid. In others, she even reveals a distrust of female midwives. On a visit to her sister-in-law, Mary Lloyd, who is about to give birth to her first child, Austen and her father discover the midwife already in residence:

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<sup>76</sup> Jane Austen, *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.17

<sup>77</sup> Jane Austen *Letters*, p.119 and p.140

<sup>78</sup> Austen, p.336

<sup>79</sup> Austen, p.329

<sup>80</sup> Vivien Jones, ed., *Jane Austen Selected Letters* by Jane Austen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.xxxiv

Her nurse is come and has no particular charm either of person or manner; but as all of Hurstbourne would pronounce her to be the best nurse that ever was, Mary expects her attachment to increase.<sup>81</sup>

This comment, perhaps, betrays a distrust of female midwives, and coincides with Crabbe's characterisation of midwives as from a lower class.

Others, however, could appreciate the miracle of childbirth, and the comforting presence of female midwives. Anna Letitia Barbauld, renowned for her poems about domestic scenes and subjects, was also an avid writer for children, producing a number of hymns, lessons and poems on religious and educational subjects, using them as the basis, and inspiration, of her teaching at Palgrave Academy, with her husband Rochemont Barbauld. Despite this, however, the Barbaulds were themselves unable to have children. On the subject herself, Barbauld only ever remarked that ““Providence ha[d] hitherto denied”” them children.<sup>82</sup> Such reticence led to some doubtful (and unkind) assumptions—that Barbauld was sexually cold or timid, for example—an idea that would eventually mutate into an assumption that she was a timid writer. This indicates that Barbauld is required to *be* conservative, so as to explain this apparent anomaly in her life (which is, of course, a type of biographical interpretation). As William McCarthy has argued, the erotic charge that lingers behind Barbauld's poetry makes this highly unlikely, and he indicates that Rochemont Barbauld's manic or near manic phases may have made him ‘impetuously sexual’, so much so, that he frightened his wife.<sup>83</sup> Equally, Rochemont's mental illness, which appeared during his late teens and lasted until his suicide in 1808, may have made him sexually impotent. As McCarthy admits, these are intimacies that none but husband and wife can know, and which will never be

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<sup>81</sup> Austen, p.20

<sup>82</sup> As quoted by William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), p.186.

<sup>83</sup> McCarthy, p.186

discovered. In under a year of marriage, however, Barbauld had decided that she would (or could) not have children, and arrangements were made to adopt a nephew.

Childlessness was not unusual in the eighteenth century. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster have estimated that between five and thirteen percent of couples were infertile in the early modern period, which carried with it a social stigma, particularly for men.<sup>84</sup> Alongside the Barbaulds, William Blake and his wife were also unable to conceive, as were Ann Radcliffe and her husband. It was problematic not least because, as Berry and Foyster have explored, religious attitudes understood the main aim of marriage to be the procreation of children.<sup>85</sup> Before the eighteenth century, childlessness (alongside dead or deformed infants, as previously discussed) was considered to be a sign of God's disfavour. Although superstitions such as these were disappearing, couples would still go to desperate attempts to overcome infertility problems, and it is unsurprising that midwifery manuals are littered with remedies and techniques to cure or overcome infertility. Sharp's *The Midwives Book*, for instance, paid particular attention to diseases relating to the 'yard', or penis, and emphasised sexual compatibility between partners. Berry and Foyster have argued that there is evidence to suggest that men were more likely to consult a male surgeon or physician in reproductive matters, rather than a midwife.<sup>86</sup> But how important was this childlessness to Barbauld, and did it alter her understanding of childbirth?

It appears to have been very much on her mind, and Barbauld was drawn to subjects of pregnancy and childbirth throughout her career. McCarthy recognises that a 'pleasing feature of her poetry, early and late, is [...] a keen interest in giving

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<sup>84</sup> Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster have explored how children were demonstrable proof of a man's sexual success and fertility. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.182.

<sup>85</sup> Berry and Foyster, p.164

<sup>86</sup> Berry and Foyster, p.175

birth'.<sup>87</sup> Images of fecundity, he describes, are prevalent in many poems, even those written for children.<sup>88</sup> A number of these were written as poems to other women who were either expecting a child, or had recently given birth. These could be celebratory or pensive, betraying a keen interest and excitement at the wonder of giving birth— or perhaps quiet longing. Amongst those most notable is 'To a Little Invisible Being who is expected soon to become visible', written in 1799 for her friend and neighbour Frances Carr.<sup>89</sup> The child was her first born, allowing both women to reflect calmly and happily on the miracle unfolding before their eyes.

This is for Barbauld a shared experience, between women, a female-only experience. As she urges the developing foetus, she talks only of 'nurses' preparing lulling songs,<sup>90</sup> and 'eager matrons' who count the lingering days of pregnancy ('To a Little Invisible Being', p.148, l.14). Barbauld herself appears to take on the role of female midwife, coaxing the baby, almost as if she were deftly assisting the birth itself: 'Haste, little captive, burst thy prison doors! | Launch on the living world, and spring to light!' ('To a Little Invisible Being', p.148, ll.29-30). She sympathises with the mother, appears to instinctively understand her longing: 'She longs to fold to her maternal breast | Part of herself, yet to herself unknown' ('To a Little Invisible Being', p.148, ll.21-22). She insists that if 'charmed verse', 'favouring spells', or 'muttered prayers' had power, she would gladly offer these up ('To a Little Invisible Being', p.148, ll.33-34), and acknowledges that she anxiously prays, or 'bid[s] [her] beads each passing hour' ('To a Little Invisible Being', p.148, l.35). The reference to spells links the scene to traditional female midwifery, complete with ritual and

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<sup>87</sup> McCarthy, p.186

<sup>88</sup> McCarthy, p.186

<sup>89</sup> The poem was written in 1799 but remained unpublished until 1825.

<sup>90</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, 'To a Little Invisible Being Who is Expected Soon to Become Visible', in *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ont, Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), p.148, l.13. All subsequent line references are from this edition, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

ceremony, which, as Wilson has suggested, ‘both reflected and helped maintain a *collective culture of women*’.<sup>91</sup> Barbauld appears to see traditional midwifery as companionable and soothing to a woman: the scene is calm, controlled and protected by women, with little need for a male practitioner.

The absence of men-midwives, or any allusion to them, betrays nervousness with regards to modern techniques and advancements employed by male doctors. Barbauld, however, was not anti-progressive where science and medicine were concerned. In a much earlier poem, ‘To Dr. Aikin on His Complaining That She Neglected Him’, she regrets being excluded from a profession such as his (he was training to be a surgeon),<sup>92</sup> calling medicine and science ‘nobler labours’ and ‘shining toils’ (*To Dr. Aikin*, p.57, ll.51-53). It is clear to Barbauld that women could have an important role to play within occupations such as this, if they were allowed to improve their education. In her essay ‘On Female Studies’, a piece often criticised for its reticent feminism, Barbauld hints at this need:

The great laws of the universe, the nature and properties of those objects which surround us, it is unpardonable not to know [...] Under this head are comprehended natural history [which incorporated biological sciences], astronomy, botany, experimental philosophy, chemistry, physics. In these you will rather take what belongs to sentiment and utility than abstract calculations or difficult problems (*On Female Studies*, p.480).

As McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft suggest, Barbauld regarded science as a means to the knowledge and worship of God.<sup>93</sup> Her emphasis on ‘utility’, however, speaks of a longing to be included in fields outside the traditional domestic scope: midwifery, which was performed within the home, might be considered a necessary practice by Barbauld. In this, a woman might put her understandings of biology (albeit limited), and her inherent knowledge as a woman to better use—taking what ‘belongs to

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<sup>91</sup> Wilson, p.38

<sup>92</sup> It is possible that John Aikin may have encountered man-midwifery during this time.

<sup>93</sup> William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, eds., *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Ont, Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), p.480f.

sentiment and utility’—without appearing to transgress beyond this. Ultimately, Barbauld’s understanding of female education offered more scope in areas such as this than might be realised.

Female midwives, however, do not offer an escape from the danger of childbirth. The word ‘tomb’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, l.20) has been chosen, perhaps, because it resonates with ‘womb’ (the sentence of which is expanded in the original MS, but omitted in some editions: ‘Fruit of the swelling womb, which ripening’ [‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, n.]). Clearly, it is of a womb that Barbauld speaks in this verse: ‘nature’s sharpest pangs her wishes crown, | That free thee living from thy living tomb’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, ll.19-20). The reference to ‘crown’ also alludes to the crowning of a baby’s head in the final stages of childbirth. The word tomb, however, jars within the verse, creating an uncomfortable paradox with ‘living’, and suggesting that the child might not be born alive—that the womb will indeed become its tomb. Stillbirth was, and still is, more frequent than might be hoped. In 2011, it was estimated that four thousand infants were stillborn in England every year.<sup>94</sup> In the late eighteenth century, research done on a particular parish in St. Martin-in-the-Fields reveals that it was approximately five percent.<sup>95</sup> A woman might therefore expect that at least one of her children would be stillborn. As Stone had graphically described in *A Compleat Practice of Midwifery*, if the child had been dead for more than a day, it would begin to putrefy, thus poisoning and killing the mother. The womb would then not only become a symbol of death for the child, but also the mother. In ‘To a Little Invisible Being’, the mother asks only

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<sup>94</sup> Sarah Boseley, ‘Stillbirth rate in UK one of Europe’s highest, Lancet finds’, *The Guardian*, 14 April 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/apr/14/stillbirths-babies-uk-lancet-report>> [accessed 16 March 2011].

<sup>95</sup> This may have included early neo-natal deaths. Romola Davenport, ‘The relationship between stillbirth and early neonatal mortality: evidence from eighteenth century London’, *Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure*, <<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/people/davenport/davenport9.pdf>> [accessed 16 March 2011].

‘to lay her burden down’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, l.17), so that the child’s smile might ‘o’erpay’ the ‘pangs’ of labour (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, l.36), but suggesting that the woman’s ‘burden’ is not just the weight of the child, but also the fear of childbirth.

The word ‘tomb’ makes another appearance in Barbauld’s poem, ‘To Mrs P[riestly], With Some Drawings of Birds and Insects’. In this, ‘tomb’ and ‘Entomb’d’ (‘To Mrs P[riestly]’, p.47, l.78, l.75) applies to a butterfly trapped in its cocoon:

Entomb’d, beneath the filmy web they lie,  
And wait the influence of a kinder sky;  
When vernal sun-beams pierce their dark retreat,  
The heaving tomb distends with vital heat;  
The full-form’d brood impatient of their cell  
Start from their trance, and bust their silken shell.  
(‘To Mrs P[riestly]’, p.47, ll.75-80).

The comparisons between these images of nature and those in ‘To a Little Invisible Being’ are numerous. The first part of this latter poem could, in fact, be describing the development of anything from the natural world, including that of the caterpillar above:

Germ of new life, whose powers expanding slow  
For many a moon their full perfection wait, —  
Haste, precious pledge of happy love, to go  
Auspicious borne through life’s mysterious gate.  
(‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.147, ll.1-4).

Other than an allusion to the parents of the child, ‘precious pledge of happy love’ (an interesting reference to passion), the foetus appears more like a seedling or creature than a human. It, too, is trapped in a cocoon, slowly transforming, waiting ‘full perfection’ and ready to ‘burst [its] prison doors’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, l.29). In the third stanza, it becomes a ‘bud of being’, soon ‘to blow’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.147, l.12), as though a young sapling or rose bud. Also like the caterpillar or the barren sapling, the foetus appears to await warmer weather. While



the child develops, ‘Fresh younglings shoot, and opening roses glow’, ‘Swarms of new life’ fill the air (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.147, l.10-11). Spring is, for Barbauld, a time of rebirth and growth, an exciting season that reveals miraculous moments. In ‘Ode to Spring’, images of expanding buds, ‘blooming wilds’ (‘Ode to Spring’, p.93, l.15), gentle breezes, freshness, newness and warmth are as equally profuse. Its delights are of ‘simplest promise’, its ‘influence’ is but soft breath on each ‘joy and new-born hope’ (‘Ode to Spring’, p.94, ll.49-52), it is thus gentle, but knowing and instinctive, giving aid to life where it is needed. In ‘To a Little Invisible Being’, by associating this season with the child in its mother’s womb, Barbauld frames pregnancy and childbirth as equally natural, as part of this cycle of life. Nature is, as in ‘Ode to Spring’, intuitive and encouraging. It knows when to act and when to relieve, but it interferes only when needed and only in moderation. She can thus be seen to celebrate the intimacy of childbirth amongst women—celebrating female midwifery, emphasising the naturalness of childbirth, whilst admitting that nature can err, and that childbirth could be dangerous.

Nevertheless, employing a female midwife independent of a male physician was, by the late eighteenth century, a fairly unusual step to take. Not surprisingly, the repeated publication of manuals by man-midwives such as Hamilton had had their effect—female midwives were being sidelined. Mary Wollstonecraft was therefore in the minority when she chose a female midwife for the birth of her second daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. According to William Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft’s decision was influenced by ‘ideas of decorum’, which he criticised as mistaken female delicacy (which might be seen as another way in which Godwin tried to “feminize”

Wollstonecraft, as explored in chapter one).<sup>96</sup> While he clearly believed that Wollstonecraft should have employed a male midwife from the outset, Wollstonecraft felt confident with her choice of a female midwife, having employed one for the birth of her first daughter Fanny, illegitimate daughter of Gilbert Imlay, in Le Havre during the revolution. As Godwin outlines:

She was sensible that the proper business of a midwife, in the instance of natural labour, is to sit by and wait for the operations of nature, which seldom, in these affairs, demand the interposition of art.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Wollstonecraft had intimated as much in the description of her labour with Fanny in a letter to her friend Ruth Barlow, less than a week after giving birth, which it is worth quoting in full:

Here I am, my Dear Friend, and so well, that were it not for the inundation of milk, which for the moment incommodes me, I could forget the pain I endured six days ago. – Yet nothing could be more natural or easy than my labour –still it is not smooth work—I dwell on these circumstances not only as I know it will give you pleasure; but to prove that this struggle of nature is rendered much more cruel by the ignorance and affectation of women. My nurse has been twenty years in this employment, and she tells me, she never knew a woman so well – adding, Frenchwoman like, that I ought to make children for the Republic, since I treat it so slightly – It is true, at first, she was convinced that I should kill myself and my child; but since we are alive and so astonishingly well, she begins to think that the *Bon Dieu* takes care of those who take no care of themselves.<sup>98</sup>

At this first birth Wollstonecraft had opted for an experienced female midwife, relying (as Stone had advised) on nature and gentle assistance. It is likely, however, that during this period in France, at the height of the revolution, female midwives were in greater supply than man-midwives, and child-bearing women would have had little choice. William E. Burns has suggested that French medicine was brought to its knees during the French Revolution as medical faculties and universities, including

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<sup>96</sup> William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 2001), p.112

<sup>97</sup> Godwin, p.112

<sup>98</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘To Ruth Barlow [Le] Havre, May 20<sup>th</sup> [17]94’, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* ed. by Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp.252-3

the Paris Academy of Surgeons, were dissolved as aristocratic remnants.<sup>99</sup> Even so, Wollstonecraft appears to have preferred female midwives, and employed one even for the birth of her second child. Evidently, the ease of this first birth had surprised both mother and midwife, and, like Barbauld, Wollstonecraft was forced to acknowledge the danger and trepidation that both felt. As before, it appears to have been a tender female experience, between mother, midwife and daughter.

Not so the second time. Despite her instance on a female midwife, and a relatively uncomplicated labour, the placenta, or afterbirth, did not spontaneously deliver. Perhaps following the advice of Hamilton or a treatise by a similar doctor, the female midwife in attendance— identified as Mrs E. Blenkinsop— informed Godwin that she did not want to proceed further in extracting (or waiting) for it, and a man-midwife was accordingly sent for. Mr Louis Poignand, a French surgeon, then attempted to extract the placenta manually, an excruciating procedure that made Wollstonecraft believe that ““she should have died””.<sup>100</sup> A Dr George Fordyce was sent for soon after, against the advice of Poignand, and in spite of the fact that he had no training in midwifery, but he ‘perceived no particular cause of alarm’.<sup>101</sup> Godwin’s fear appears to have been placated by this, but less than two days later he was informed that his wife was displaying alarming symptoms, indicating septicaemia. Poignand and Fordyce were consulted, the latter bringing with him a Dr. Clarke (a distinguished surgeon and man-midwife from Bedford Square). Despite a desperate attempt to treat her, Wollstonecraft succumbed to one of the most common and dangerous child-bed diseases in the eighteenth century—puerperal fever.

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<sup>99</sup> William E. Burns, *Science in the Enlightenment: an Encyclopaedia* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p.192

<sup>100</sup> Godwin, p.113

<sup>101</sup> Godwin, p.114

Wollstonecraft's death was, however, certainly preventable. As Loudon has outlined, few women died in labour. Most, like Wollstonecraft, lived long enough to see their newborn before dying, often with brutal abruptness, 'leaving their newborn (and frequently other small children) without a mother, and their husbands without their wives'.<sup>102</sup> These deaths came about for a variety of reasons, some natural—that is, unpreventable (and untreatable) injury caused by a difficult labour—or the interference of an inexperienced, untrained, or misinformed midwife of either sex. The manual extraction of the placenta is questionable, because, as Wilson has observed, after about 1750 the delivery of the placenta was increasingly left to nature.<sup>103</sup> It is tempting to suggest that it might naturally have been expelled, if Wollstonecraft had been left.

As Vivien Jones has rightly noted, however, accounts of Wollstonecraft's death tend to take sides within polarised positions (man-midwives against untrained, unregulated women).<sup>104</sup> I, too, can detect my own tendency to blame the man-midwife for "interfering", and in noting that Fordyce was untrained as a midwife—though I cannot help but note that the idea of emergency extraction originally came from Blenkinsop. Indeed, according to Jones, the finger is most commonly pointed either at Blenkinsop or Poignand, 'though they are often positioned as simply the agents in a drama played out between Wollstonecraft's feminist politics and Godwin's belief in men of science'.<sup>105</sup> These polarised opinions are, argues Jones, merely more subtle versions of Richard Polwhele's 'vengeful' suggestion that 'she [Wollstonecraft] died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by

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<sup>102</sup> Loudon, pp.2-3

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, p.168.

<sup>104</sup> Vivien Jones, 'The Death of Mary Wollstonecraft', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 2 (1997), 187-205 (p.191).

<sup>105</sup> Jones, p.192

pointing out the destiny of women, and the diseases to which they are liable'.<sup>106</sup> It is however, as Jones suggests, tempting to look for evidence of mismanagement, the more so because the history of midwifery is (as I have already suggested), 'part of still urgent debates around the gendered politics of childbirth and obstetric practices'.<sup>107</sup> What Jones has realised is that accounts of Wollstonecraft's death, and the obstetrical debate surrounding them, are fuzzy—filled with subjectivity, contention, confusion. Godwin's memoirs—the only first-hand account of Mary Wollstonecraft-Godwin's birth (Wollstonecraft was not well enough to write of it herself; her last note was sent to Godwin just before she gave birth on August 30<sup>th</sup>)—attempts to narrate the event, while giving it a simple coherence, and undermining any fuzziness. It is he who pits himself against the female midwife, and surrounds Wollstonecraft with male physicians, and describes it as a clash between man-midwives and female midwives. Thus, our longing to understand the reasons why women, especially those who are young, died in childbirth, does not necessarily come from ourselves, but from those who were left behind, and who explored and documented their grief in writing. In the case of Wollstonecraft, this is Godwin, who unwittingly drew the midwifery debate raging around him into his own personal experience, simultaneously placing himself and his wife on opposing sides of the debate. As Wood has observed, this is partly responsible for subsequent critical analysis of Wollstonecraft's death, suggesting, as in chapter one and two, that biography must be treated with care.

The account of Wollstonecraft's death ultimately offers not only a glimpse of how fuzzy the midwifery debate really is, but also a snap-shot of the ways in which the Fuzzy Set can operate around that fuzziness. The account of Wollstonecraft's death can be seen to incorporate biography, man-midwives and their medical treatise,

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<sup>106</sup> As quoted by Jones, p.192

<sup>107</sup> Jones, pp.150-1

female midwives, husbands and contemporary critical study. The critic must absorb each, avoiding partiality for one over the others, and must appreciate his or her own subjectivity. When an account concludes with the death of a woman, one must avoid, however tempting, the tendency to investigate the cause and to ask: was it the intervention of the man-midwife? The inexperience of the female midwife? Wollstonecraft's own dependence on nature? The Fuzzy Set cannot answer questions such as these. What it does indicate is that reality is far more fuzzy than many can comprehend, and moreover, our urge is, like Godwin, to simplify this fuzziness. With Barbauld, we saw that while she tried to emphasise benevolence and nature—to force herself into one end of the man-midwife/female midwife binary—she unwittingly undermined this by highlighting the danger. Likewise, Wollstonecraft tried to rely on nature, but was outwitted by the reality of childbirth and the complexity of the obstetric debate which surrounded her.

### **3.2: When nature errs: the second obstetrical debate and two deaths**

Against this complex backdrop—the apparent raging debate between man-midwives and female midwives—a second debate had begun amongst man-midwives themselves, creating further fuzziness. The beginnings of this can be traced in Hamilton's *A Treatise in Midwifery*. In this he had indicated that he was not pro-instrument, prescribing instruments such as the forceps or vectis only in extreme circumstances, such as “cases where Nature is insufficient to perform her office and where the hand of the operator is not able to assist her”.<sup>108</sup> These include forceps, or, in more ‘desperate’ cases, ‘those which destroy the child, in order to preserve the

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<sup>108</sup> Hamilton, p.227

mother’, which the reader later discovers includes the crotchet or blunt hook.<sup>109</sup> Unusually, he views childbirth as an intensely natural process requiring only minimal interference. After appearing to condemn female midwives, as seen above, his preface moves swiftly to attack man-midwives for this very fault—of intruding on nature too much—being careful to assert that this is more a fault of early man-midwifery:

they attributed too much to art, and seldom waited for those exertions of nature; but this distrust of Nature rather proceeded from the imperfection of the art, than from the fault of the artist [...] A more perfect state of science was necessary to show what Nature could perform, as well as what she could suffer and to demonstrate that her boasted perfection is sometimes fallacious.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike Thicknesse, Hamilton does not allow that nature works in the same way for humans as it does for all other creatures—that it is simply a process of evacuation. He does, however, agree that women are more likely to be injured or killed by unnecessary interference than they are from simply leaving nature to its own devices.<sup>111</sup> ‘Thousands of women have fallen sacrifice’, he states, ‘[to] the high opinion we have entertained of our own skill, and the little attention hitherto paid to the operations of nature.’<sup>112</sup>

Hamilton’s view was not unique amongst man-midwives. As Wilson has explored, ‘a new form of practice was pulling men-midwives in the opposite direction—towards reliance on the natural powers—for delivering births by the head’.<sup>113</sup> Denman had similarly rejected the over-use of instruments, paying particular

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<sup>109</sup> Hamilton, pp.227-9. As indicated earlier in this chapter, it seems to have been generally agreed by medical practitioners and midwives that in problematic labours the child should be sacrificed in order to preserve the life of the mother. Hamilton is explicit on this point later in the chapter, remarking that ‘the mother ought always to be attended in preference to it’. Hamilton, p.291

<sup>110</sup> Hamilton, pp.xx-xxi

<sup>111</sup> Although man-midwives were always more willing to employ instruments, this re-evaluation of the central role of nature appears to have become steadily more popular in the proceeding decades, especially around the time of Princess Charlotte’s delivery—as will be further explored.

<sup>112</sup> Hamilton, p.287

<sup>113</sup> Wilson, p.167

attention to natural labours (that is, labours requiring no more than gentle assistance), in his *Essay on Natural Labours* (1786). Denman admitted that a natural labour had been the last thing ‘well understood in the practice of [man] midwifery’, as ‘scientific men’, who had not been ‘formerly employed in the management of common labours, had no opportunities of making observations upon them’.<sup>114</sup> Clearly, he believed that knowledge in this field was still lacking, and devoted an entire treatise to the subject. More importantly, he was concerned that these scientific men were interfering in labour unnecessarily, and seemed to be promoting the “natural” deftness normally attributed to female midwives:

In everything which relates to the act of parturition, Nature, not disturbed by disease, and unmolested by interruption, is fully competent to accomplish her own purpose. She may be truly said to disdain and to abhor assistance.<sup>115</sup>

*Essay on Natural Labours* had followed Denman’s *Remarks on Dr. Leake’s Paper on the Use of His Forceps* (1773), in which he had angrily rebuffed (man-midwife and midwifery lecturer) John Leake’s reinvention of the forceps, dismissing it as a ‘complicated instrument’ which ‘will do great mischief’.<sup>116</sup> Denman was clearly reluctant to prescribe the use of instruments, only allowing them in exceptional circumstances. In his 1783 *Aphorisms on the Application of Forceps*, he had emphasised that the use of instruments was (or should be) extremely rare, suggesting that the practice was already outdated:

It has long been established as a general rule, that no instruments are to be used in the practice of midwifery; the cases in which they are used are therefore to be considered merely as exceptions to this rule [...] But such cases can very seldom occur in the practice of any one person; and when they

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas Denman, ‘Essay on Natural Labours’ (London 1786), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 29 March 2010], p.19

<sup>115</sup> Denman, p.19

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Denman, ‘Remarks on Dr. Leake’s Paper on the Use of his Forceps’ (London 1773), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>> [accessed 29 March 2010], p.7



do happen, neither the forceps or any other instrument is ever to be used in a clandestine manner.<sup>117</sup>

But there were those who, like Leake, were taking a greater interest in instruments, adapting and improving them for greater and more varied use. It was not until 1817, however, that the public impact of this secondary debate would be revealed with tragic consequences.

Denman's influence in this field was far greater than he might have imagined. It was under his guidance that his son-in-law, Sir Richard Croft, began his career, undoubtedly learning from him that nature scarce ever errs, and that instruments are generally superfluous. In 1817, however, Croft was called upon to attend the pregnant Princess Charlotte, a role of enormous consequence and responsibility, the likes of which Denman, who died two years previously, had never witnessed. As always, Croft stuck steadfastly to the rules by which he had been taught—perhaps more so, because much more was at stake. Croft was a good candidate for this distinguished position. He had begun his medical training in London under the direction of John Hunter (the renowned anatomist and surgeon) before completing it with Denman, graduating as a surgeon from Oxford in 1789, before specialising in midwifery. He had been recommended by Dr. Matthew Baillie, another of Hunter's pupils and a fellow physician and pathologist, and soon after, became physician to King George IV. A year before Princess Charlotte gave birth, he succeeded to the title of VI Baronet Croft, his brother having died without an heir. Croft's appointment, therefore, was also influenced by his aristocratic connections.

Ultimately, Princess Charlotte's life ended as ignominiously as it had begun. As explored in chapter three, she was the offspring of a particularly turbulent and short-lived marriage. Her father, who would become King George IV, had been

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<sup>117</sup> Denman, p.12

forced to marry in order for his allowance to be increased. He had been almost instantly disgusted with his wife, Caroline of Brunswick, from the moment they met, and it is thought that the couple only ever engaged in sexual intercourse a few times. This, however, did not prevent Princess Caroline from becoming pregnant almost immediately, and Princess Charlotte Augusta, the Prince of Wales' only legitimate child, was born on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1796. Since her mother had little trouble conceiving, or, it seems, giving birth, the British public were understandably optimistic: if the Prince of Wales did not produce a male heir, Charlotte might. Expectation heightened as she grew older, and an avid interest in her pursuits, character and constitution ensued. Confirmation of her engagement was attended with great excitement. Her groom, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, was well received, having distinguished himself in the campaign against Napoleon, particularly in the Battle of Kulm. He brought with him an advantageous alliance with Germany. The couple married in May 1816.

In the first few months of marriage, however, Charlotte suffered two miscarriages, which made her physicians nervous. As a result, when she conceived for the third time in February 1817, they determined upon a cautious route. In the latter half of her pregnancy, when Croft was brought in, her diet was greatly restricted and her blood was systematically let. Her pregnancy was, however, fairly unremarkable. She was said to be in good health, taking frequent walks with her husband, attending church locally, and supervising renovations of Claremont House, where she and Leopold now resided. It was not until the latter part of her confinement that she limited herself to walking in the grounds of their estate. That her labour should have been difficult, let alone fatal, was, then, of great surprise, and the man-midwives, therefore, made easy targets.

Biographies published after Charlotte's death were particularly invested in the details of the labour itself. They poured over the inquiry, the decisions of the man-midwives and contemporary medical treatises. The treatises themselves were highly critical of Croft and his reputation was sorely damaged. He was attacked by well-known and important men such as W. M Ireland, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, surgeon to the British Army, and writer of *An Inquiry into the Most Proper Means to be Adopted in the Management of Lying-In Women with Critical Remarks on the Medical Report and the Death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales* (1818). In his preface, Ireland remarks that the medical report is itself very confused, a 'demi-official', 'lame, unconnected and unintelligible account, which has disgraced the pages of our profession'.<sup>118</sup> This implies that the physicians, including those who conducted the independent inquiry, simply do not understand what went wrong. Ireland proceeds to pull apart the report section by section, criticising Croft for not taking notice of certain details that appear alarming, deriding John Sims (another attending physician brought in by Croft) for not assessing Charlotte himself, concluding that too many physicians were involved and that 'too many cooks spoil the broth!'<sup>119</sup> He also criticises the physicians for neglecting the mother and striving to reanimate the infant, and attempting to revive both when they were clearly already dead: 'it evidently appears, that much more was done, for the recovery of the child and the mother, after they were dead, than was thought necessary to prevent their dying'.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, despite the vehemence of Ireland's attack, there appears to be very little else that he can propose as way of improvement. His remarks follow very much in

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<sup>118</sup> W. M. Ireland, *An Inquiry into the Most Proper Means to be Adopted in the Management of Lying-In Women with Critical Remarks on the Medical Report and the Death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales* (New York: James Eastburn & Co.; Abraham Paul, 1818), p.4

<sup>119</sup> Ireland, p.14

<sup>120</sup> Ireland, pp.15-16

the vein of Hamilton's *Treatise on Midwifery*, recommending the central position of nature: '[nature] will be abundantly adequate to fulfil her intentions with respect to delivery; and therefore, all additional excitement must not only be superfluous, but mischievous and dangerous'.<sup>121</sup> Like Hamilton, he admits that interference is sometimes necessary:

If, on the other hand there has been a malformation, either on the part of the mother or the child, science has endowed the profession with the means of assisting nature, and affording relief. But this is to be done, not only with as little interference with her laws as the nature of the circumstance will admit, but with means which are the most mild, and the most easy to be performed.<sup>122</sup>

Note, however, that he does not explicitly advocate the use of instruments; this is only implied as a 'science'. Therefore, other than small suggestions, such as the application of bandages and bloodletting, Ireland appears to advocate only greater vigilance and is unable to recommend any special techniques in order to relieve conditions such as that suffered by Princess Charlotte. Nature, it appears, and perhaps even desperate prayer, still have the strongest hold.

Three months after the princess' death it is supposed that Croft committed suicide, and the event became known as "the triple obstetrical tragedy". It was in the light of his death, in 1818, that Robert Huish published *Memoirs of her late Royal Highness Charlotte Augusta*. Keenly interested in obstetrics and the decisions that motivated Charlotte's physicians, Huish's *Memoirs* is not so much a biography, as a treatise—treating the subject of Charlotte's pregnancy and labour with detailed interest. Crucially, he appears to consider the princess's death to have been inevitable. Charlotte herself, he notes, had a feeling of impending doom, of 'melancholy forebodings'.<sup>123</sup> As her pregnancy advances, death already has her

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<sup>121</sup> Ireland, p.23

<sup>122</sup> Ireland, p.23

<sup>123</sup> Robert Huish, *Memoirs of her late Royal Highness Charlotte Augusta* (London: Printed for Thomas Kelly, Paternoster-Row, 1818), p.388

within its sights: ‘In the very core the worm was gnawing, which was to lay this lovely floweret low, and death, “grinning his ghastly smile” sat in anticipation, triumphant over his victim.’<sup>124</sup> Charlotte is here pictured in the very tomb described by Barbauld.

Huish’s description of the birth itself is less theatrical. He incorporates large sections of the medical report, published as an independent inquiry in the *London Medical Repository*, omitting only certain details that might have been deemed improper by his readers.<sup>125</sup> He notes that the slowness of the labour ‘did not much add to the ordinary danger resulting from cases of this kind’.<sup>126</sup> Drawing reference, perhaps, from Hamilton’s treatise, and certainly to the medical report, he also observes that her lingering labour prompts Croft to believe that there is an irregular action of the uterus, or that she may be carrying twins.<sup>127</sup> The labour pains themselves are so inefficient that they scarcely evacuate her waters (which had broken at the beginning of the labour). This, however, he expertly concludes, is a circumstance ‘which every accoucheur knows prognosticates nothing of an untoward issue’.<sup>128</sup> Sims is soon sent for, but is not admitted to the princess’s chamber, for fear of distressing her. Baillie is also in attendance. Sims agrees with Croft ‘that everything should be left to nature’.<sup>129</sup> The intricacies of the proceeding fifty hour labour, however (the first stage of labour lasted twenty-four hours) are largely passed over in the medical report and are, therefore, perhaps unknown to Huish, but it is suggested

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<sup>124</sup> Huish, p.437

<sup>125</sup> These include the important detail that the Princess Charlotte discharged a large amount of blood shortly after birth, and the after-birth had to be forcibly removed from her thereafter. Her case was thus very similar to Wollstonecraft’s.

<sup>126</sup> Huish, p.517

<sup>127</sup> Huish, p.520. For Hamilton’s explanation of lingering or laborious labours see *Treatise on Midwifery*, pp.192-281. The report of Princess Charlotte’s death (written by independent physicians and drawn from the testimony of the Croft and Baillie) was published in full in W.M. Ireland’s *An Inquiry into the Most Proper Means to be Adopted in the Management of Lying-In Women* (above).

<sup>128</sup> Huish, p.520.

<sup>129</sup> Huish, p.521

that still the physicians did not use instruments, preferring to mould the head of the child rather than force its ‘expulsion’.<sup>130</sup> Evidently, this was not just any child that might be dragged out by a hook, in order to save the life of the mother— the physicians appear to have been keenly aware that this was a future heir and possibly king of England. The first of several bulletins follow, indicating that the labour pains have finally become efficient and that the birth is expected within a few hours. Although little is known of the birth itself, including how much force had to be employed by the man-midwives, the report insists that only ‘natural efforts’ are applied.<sup>131</sup> Some three and a half hours after the first bulletin, a second is dispatched, at nine o’clock in the morning, admitting that the child is still-born. According to Huish, the physicians attempted to re-animate the infant, but it is probable that the child died nine hours previous to this, as it was first suspected to be dead at twelve o’clock in the afternoon of the same day, thus recalling the paradox of Barbauld’s womb/tomb. (This, however, is later contradicted by Huish who notes that some ascertained the child to be alive only a few minutes before its birth.<sup>132</sup>) Princess Charlotte herself initially seems to do well. The after-birth is forcibly removed, like Wollstonecraft, and she is allowed to sleep for an hour. Soon after, however, she finds it difficult to swallow some gruel:

at the same time complaining of being chilly, and of a pain in her chest. Her quiet left her, she became restless and uneasy, and the medical attendants felt alarmed. [...] From that time the fatal issue advanced rapidly; a slight difficulty in swallowing which soon subsided, added to the sickness, was all that previously occurred. But from this time, pain in her chest, great difficult in respiration, and extreme restlessness increased.<sup>133</sup>

These symptoms were almost certainly caused by internal post-partum haemorrhaging, an injury that her physicians could do little to treat. Princess

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<sup>130</sup> Huish, p.521

<sup>131</sup> Ireland, p.8

<sup>132</sup> Huish, p.523

<sup>133</sup> Huish, p.527

Charlotte, her husband and attendants can only pray (though, in reality, Leopold had taken an opiate following the birth and could not be roused from his sleep), while her physicians try desperately to save her. Less than six hours after the delivery, Charlotte was dead.

Huish's *Memoirs* reveals midwifery to be a very inexact science. Doctors are seen to grapple with a multitude of conflicting ideas from a complicated discourse, leaving as much as they can (perhaps too much) to nature, but also approaching the situation from a scientific, medical stand point—they were, of course, partly selected to attend the princess because of their prestigious positions within the field of anatomy. This nature/science binary was seen, therefore, to transform, moving further away from a debate between female midwives and man-midwives, and applied (inexactly) by man-midwives themselves to a variety of different situations, becoming particularly fuzzy. In the case of Charlotte there was, perhaps, too much for the doctors to contend with—making Charlotte's death the result of a lack of consistency with how to manage fuzziness—a host of conflicting ideas and the valuable lives of both the mother and her heir. As such, in spite of Loudon's suggestion that a woman's death was dependent on the interplay of a wide range of factors, 'the type of birth-attendant, the quality of the birth-attendant's training and experience, the place of delivery, and the social class of the mother',<sup>134</sup> Princess Charlotte's death reveals that even with prestige and wealth childbirth could still go wrong. Charlotte was attended by (supposedly) the best male physicians in the country, in a situation of every comfort, and was of the very best class; yet she still succumbed to accident. Perhaps because of this, Huish's biography suggests that many viewed childbirth as a frightening and uncontrollable event. Women are marked from the beginning by

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<sup>134</sup> Loudon, p.3

death, making their early demise entirely unpreventable, leading, like Austen, to feelings of inescapable danger, fear and grief.

### **3.3: Fear and childbirth: inescapable fuzziness**

These were undoubtedly Charlotte Smith's feelings when her daughter Anna Augusta revealed that she was pregnant with her first child. As the deaths of Wollstonecraft and Princess Charlotte reveal, reality—or lived experience—did not necessarily correspond with the representation of childbirth in medical treatise: nature could err and mechanical intervention did fail. Indeed, the final aspect of this fuzzy debate shows how women, like Smith, who had first-hand experience of the danger and terror of childbirth, could not glean any sympathy from the obstetric debate, which offered nothing but confusion and contention, nor could she capture Barbauld's vision of a miraculous and gentle nature. Instead, she concentrates almost exclusively on the dark, desperate reality of childbirth, the sense of despair, helplessness and horror.

It is likely that Smith had come to realise this from a very young age, when she lost her own mother in childbirth.<sup>135</sup> She had good reason to be afraid. Smith's biographer Loraine Fletcher notes that Anna Augusta's pregnancy was difficult from the outset, prompting Smith to enlist the help of Denman, who although semi-retired, agreed to assist Smith, seemingly at great expense.<sup>136</sup> Although she had employed female midwives for herself, Anna Augusta's ill health clearly impelled Smith to turn to someone with an established reputation in the field of obstetrics. Her choice suggests that she viewed childbirth as a medical issue, and she repeatedly refers to

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<sup>135</sup> Smith's mother, Anna Towers Turner (after whom, ironically, Anna Augusta was named), died from complications following the birth of her third child, Smith's younger sister.

<sup>136</sup> Anna Augusta died less than a year before Princess Charlotte was born and twenty-one years before Denman died. Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke; Macmillan, 1998), p.214.



Anna Augusta's pregnancy and post-birth situation as an "illness" throughout her letters and poetry. In her view, when problems emerged, pregnancy could not be left to chance or nature—it required all the scientific intervention available, even if this ultimately offered little relief.

On 24<sup>th</sup> July 1794, after a difficult and lingering labour, Anna Augusta gave birth to a boy, which was described by Smith in detail to her solicitor James Upton Trip:

My dear Unhappy girl, after being attended by two of the most eminent accouchers here [Thomas Denman and Caleb Hillier Parry] & being seventy hours in the greatest peril & in the most excruciating tortures, was deliver'd on thursday night of a very fine boy, but it was so bruised & injur'd that it lingered till this morning [about two days after birth] & then died in my arms – A victim I think of what happened at Storrington & another victim of the Trustees.<sup>137</sup> She is so weak that we keep from her the death of the infant. What the effect will be when she must know it, I tremble to think of. Perhaps I shall lose her too. [...] The great expenses to which this unfortunate illness will expose me, as I cannot give the two Surgeons for such an attendance less than seven guineas a piece, will reduce me to dreadful straits.<sup>138</sup>

The baby's bruising and injuries, so similar to those described by the mother in the inquest report at the beginning of this chapter, suggest that instruments had almost certainly been applied during delivery: even Denman, it appears, had seen their necessity during a labour that had lasted seventy hours.

To Smith's surprise Anna Augusta herself survived the birth, lingering on for some nine months until 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1795. She is, unusually, always referred to as having died *in* childbirth—the time between the birth of her son and her death is nearly always collapsed. This, however, complicates our understanding of the postnatal period which, as Loudon notes, was defined as six weeks after delivery. As

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<sup>137</sup> The Trustees were those in charge of executing her father-in-law's will, which was not resolved until some years after Smith's death. In this letter, Smith clearly holds the Trustees partly responsible for the death of her grandson and the perilous position of her daughter, believing, perhaps, that she might have been more able to help them if she had access to the money that was owed to her from Richard Smith's will.

<sup>138</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 2003), p.140.

such, Anna Augusta's death can only be characterised as an 'associated' or 'indirect' death, brought about by a chronic disorder which reduced the strength and ability of the patient.<sup>139</sup> In Anna Augusta's case this was almost certainly consumption, having been treated at Clifton Hot Wells before she died, which was noted for its treatment for consumptives. For Smith, however, Anna Augusta's death could only be attributed to childbirth, which was, for her, not only perilous but *unnatural*.

Anna Augusta's death would feature in a number of Smith's poems throughout the rest of her career. Jacqueline M. Labbe notes that she is willing to use her dead daughter as an opportunity to 'strengthen her poetic persona', her poetry becoming the vehicle by which she can express and explore her grief.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, as she poeticizes her daughter 'she also composes that daughter, textually recreating a connection broken by death, but which lives beyond physical decomposition'.<sup>141</sup> This process continues in her letters, with language (describing Anna Augusta as being 'torn' from her) that 'suggests that Smith's grief mirrors the birth process itself'.<sup>142</sup> The process is violent. It is as savage and as terrible as grief itself.

Smith's Anna Augusta poems vie between this bitter grief, sometimes violent, sometimes pensive and mournful, and anger. She frequently employs the seasons to frame this narrative—in particular April—the anniversary of the death of her child. In 'Written in October', composed a few short years after Anna Augusta's death, she unequivocally rejects spring for this very reason, indicating that the mournful sounds of autumn are more soothing to her because they reflect her own sorrow: 'Nature delights me most when she mourns, | For never more to me the Spring of Hope

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<sup>139</sup> Loudon, p.28

<sup>140</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, poetry and the culture of gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.66

<sup>141</sup> Labbe, p.75

<sup>142</sup> Labbe, p.70

returns'.<sup>143</sup> By contrast, spring is, for her, perverted and cruel. In her poem 'April', one of only a few poems explicitly written for her daughter some years after Anna Augusta's death, Smith reflects on her grief. She acknowledges that spring is for many (like Barbauld) a time of re-birth, bringing 'infant buds', 'half-blown flowers', 'new-sprung grass' ('April', p.119, l.4, l.11, l.14). Moreover, she agrees that spring should be a time of looking forward, of excitement:

More blest! To whom the *Time*, fond thought is bringing,  
Of friends expected, or returning love.

The pensive wanderer blest, to whom reflection  
Points out some future views that sooth his mind  
( 'April', p.120, ll.15-18).

The scene would be re-created in her final novel *The Young Philosopher*, in which the pregnant Laura Glenmorris (who eventually loses her child), reflects on the month of May:

It was now the month of May, every where save in the place I was confined to; but hardly any additional verdure, or even a reluctant flower, marked to me the progress of summer—cold and joyless was all around me—cold and hopeless as my own sad heart! (*The Young Philosopher*, p.140)

So, while Smith fondly remembers spring from her childhood in the poem 'April', a time when she was happy to rove wild-wood banks and sought out 'Nature's charms' ('April', p.120, ll.25-32), now it can only remind her of death and decay— like Laura's passage, images of new life are constantly juxtaposed with images of death. Like Huish's account of the early days of Princess Charlotte's marriage, marred by the conniving creep of death, in 'April' while the sun displays its vernal rays ('April', p.120. l.37), 'dire disease' prays on those she loves. Both writers believe that nature fixes itself upon an object and is relentless in its persecution, working against its

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<sup>143</sup> Charlotte Smith, 'Written in October', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* ed. by Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.75, ll.13-14. All subsequent line references are from this edition, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

victim at every turn. Later, pleasant spring afternoons only remind her of ‘scenes of agony and mourning, | Of baffled hope and prayers preferr’d in vain’ (‘April’, p.120, ll.35-36), recalling the agonising scene of Anna Augusta’s death, and also, perhaps, the moment she gave birth, when it had seemed she might die. Where Barbauld refers only to nature’s sharp ‘pangs’ (‘To a Little Invisible Being’, p.148, l.19), Smith depicts an event of excruciating pain and desperate prayers, a turmoil of hope and fear.

The reference to scenes of agony is one of several indicators that link spring with childbirth in ‘April’. Unlike Barbauld’s ‘To a Little Invisible Being’, childbirth is not miraculous. For her it can only be linked with death. The word ‘tomb’ appears again. While Smith describes herself as trapped in a tomb of grief, she also conjures up an image of her daughter’s injured body: ‘Lost in the tomb, when Hope no more appeases | The fester’d wounds that prompt the eternal sigh’ (‘April’, p.121, ll.49-50). ‘[F]ester’d wounds’ allude to the wounds of childbirth, injuries sustained by, perhaps, mother and child. It is clear to Smith that although Anna Augusta was suffering from consumption, the complications she suffered from childbirth were ultimately responsible for her death. It is possible that the nine months which followed the birth were attended by excruciating pain. In a later letter to Tipp, Smith indicates that even months after the birth Anna Augusta was unable to walk and was seized by fevers, suggesting that her subsequent illness was significantly exacerbated by the trauma she had undergone.<sup>144</sup> Childbirth is, then, for Smith a war, likely to inflict injury and mortification, consigning the victim to the tomb. At best, it is an “illness”, as she describes to her publisher Thomas Cadell.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, just like a tomb, it is an imprisonment, tying a woman to pain and possibly death, and, like herself, to perpetual sexual enslavement.

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<sup>144</sup> Smith, p.172

<sup>145</sup> Smith, p.149

While, then, ‘April’ shares some similarities with Barbauld’s poem—in connecting spring with pregnancy and childbirth—it is very unlike ‘To a Little Invisible Being’, particularly in its understanding of nature in this process. Nature is, for Smith, simply beside the point of *human* grief and pain, refusing its own symbolism. Warm sunlight nourishes flowers, but they grow only to be strewn on the grave of her child (‘April’, p.120, l.40). The vernal sun, as previously mentioned, seems only to distract her, while ‘dire disease’ creeps up unawares (‘April’, p.120, ll.37-9). Hope, that should go hand-in-hand with spring, refuses, cruelly, to extend ‘her influence’ (‘April’, p.120, ll.21-23). This sentiment had appeared in the sonnet ‘Written in Farm Wood, South Downs, in May 1784’, in which Fletcher notes that the ‘cyclical processes of Nature have no healing power’.<sup>146</sup> Nature appears to lull Smith into a false sense of security, only to ultimately destroy those she loves. It works against her—its outward appearance is a façade, concealing deeper, ugly scenes. This scepticism is easily recognised in the decisions she made with respect to Anna Augusta’s confinement. Yet, Smith herself employed a female midwife at least once, for the birth of her own, last child, a scene graphically recounted by Fletcher:

To her surprise the midwife wanted her to walk up and down as the pains grew stronger [...] She went into the last stage more quickly than she expected, and only just had time to get back on the bed before the head was out, then, to her almost equal relief, the afterbirth [...] [The midwife] wrapped the afterbirth, helped Charlotte squeeze her bladder dry again and pinned her linen carefully around her. She had been extraordinarily kind and deft, Charlotte thought [...] He [the baby] was alive and so was she.<sup>147</sup>

Although Fletcher notably fictionalises parts of this narrative, it is clear that Smith had enough know-how and experience of childbirth to feel confident about relying on a female midwife, but the relative ease of the birth is more surprising given that Smith was, at this time, destitute, exiled in France with her husband who was on the run

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<sup>146</sup> Fletcher, p.64

<sup>147</sup> Fletcher, p.74

from his creditors. Like Wollstonecraft in Le Havre, she had little other option than to employ an inexpensive female assistant.

At the time of this birth Smith was nearly thirty-six years old. As she grew older, each birth appeared more dangerous than the last, and could never be the special experience imagined by Barbauld in 'To a Little Invisible Being'. Fletcher indicates that Smith was almost sure that the birth of her last child (her twelfth) would kill her, and considers it to have been the deciding factor in the separation from her husband:

Charlotte, though she never says so, was probably determined to avoid a thirteenth confinement [...] Whatever the secrets of her relationship with Benjamin, to stay with him was to have sex with him, and she would no longer risk it.<sup>148</sup>

Clearly, Fletcher's idea is (as she acknowledges) based on conjecture. There is no evidence to suggest that this was the reason behind Smith's decision, other than, perhaps, allusions in her letters, poetry and novels, which sometimes indicate that she had grown tired of the sexual subjection she experienced by her husband. *Desmond* (1792), written less than five years after Smith had left her husband, is one such text. As Janet Todd observes, as Geraldine travels to Paris to meet the Duc de Romagnecourt, to whom her husband Verney has sold her, she

equates her husband's power over her body with that of plantocrat's over his slave: to her sister she admitted to feeling such a (sexual?) dread of her husband that there was no 'humiliation' to which she had 'not rather submit' than that of considering herself as 'his slave'.<sup>149</sup>

It is a theme that reoccurs in several novels, and is clearly a matter of some significance to Smith. Thus, although we cannot, like Fletcher, argue that Smith's decision to separate from her husband was based on feelings of sexual subjugation,

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<sup>148</sup> Fletcher, p.77

<sup>149</sup> Janet Todd, ed., *Desmond* (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 2001), p.32

and the fear of childbirth that came with this, we can note the way in which both themes play an important part in her work.

Smith's final pregnancy was indeed a time of reflection and pain for her, as one particular poem appears to imply. When 'To spring' was written in the spring of 1784, she might just have just discovered that she was pregnant with George, who was born in early February 1785.<sup>150</sup> Like 'April' and Barbauld's poem 'Ode to Spring', the poem once again alludes to birth and growth, drawing parallels between the season and pregnancy. 'Young leaves' slowly unfold ('To spring', p.17, l.3), almost like a creature forming in the womb. The 'half-form'd nest | of finch or woodlark' ('To spring', p.17, ll.4-5) reminds the reader that this is a period of breeding and reproduction; birds will soon lay their eggs, other creatures are awakening from hibernation in order to generate. The opening of this poem is indeed more hopeful: primroses and cowslips are 'wildly scatter'd round' ('To spring', p.17, l.6) and lend 'their sweet spirits to the singing gale' ('To spring', p.17, l.7). It is, the speaker admits, a 'season of delight' ('To spring', p. 17, l.8). Yet, it offers no comfort and provides nothing to soothe the pain of the speaker:

Of Sorrow's rankling shaft to cure the wound,  
 And bring life's first delusions once again,  
 'Twere surely met in thee!—thy prospect fair,  
 Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,

Have power to cure all sadness—but despair.  
 ('To spring', p.18, ll.10-14)

Just as in 'April', the pregnancy of nature brings no sense of hope for Smith. It seems to speak only to remind her of her isolation, and, perhaps, her approaching confinement, which fills her with despair—an acknowledgement that nature's fecundity is not inherently hopeful. '[L]ife's first delusions' allude not only to the

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<sup>150</sup> The poem does not describe early spring, but late spring, as the cowslip does not flower until April-May. At this time, Smith may have been one to two months pregnant.

blithe delusions of childhood now lost to her, and those that will be experienced by the child—the ‘life’—inside of her, but also the delusions of her first pregnancy, perhaps, when she might, like Barbauld, have reflected more happily on the miracle of life. The word ‘wound’ appears again, anticipating the ‘fester’d wounds’ of ‘April’ (‘April’, 1.50), which, as previously discussed, appear to describe Anna Augusta’s excruciating labour. Here it speaks of the wounds inflicted on Smith’s own body by repeated pregnancies and births. Smith was right to feel afraid: this pregnancy would have been particularly dangerous. Like Mrs. Deedes, who Austen had called ‘poor woman’,<sup>151</sup> Smith had endured eleven previous births, which had undoubtedly put a strain on her physically and emotionally. In a letter to an unnamed friend, written sometime after George’s birth, in spring 1785, she described her anxieties, heightened by her forced exile in France:

In the situation I then was [around five months pregnant], it was little short of a miracle that my constitution resisted, not merely the fatigues of the journey, with so many little beings clinging about me (the youngest [Harriet], whom I bore in my arms, scarce two years old), but the inconveniences that awaited my arrival at our new abode, in which no accommodation was prepared for my weary charges.<sup>152</sup>

Catherine Anne Dorset, too, notes that she was in a state of heightened unease, filled with forebodings that she would not survive.<sup>153</sup> Fletcher concurs that the arrival of the female midwife at the end of January must have felt like the arrival of an executioner.<sup>154</sup> In *Public Characters*, Mary Hays notes that ‘for several weeks [before the birth] she never parted with her children of an evening without the presage that

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<sup>151</sup> See 75f

<sup>152</sup> Smith, p.6

<sup>153</sup> Catherine Anne Dorset, ‘Charlotte Smith’, in *Miscellaneous Prose Works, in Six Volumes. Volume IV: Biographical Memoirs*, ed. by Sir Walter Scott (Boston: Wells and Lilly-Court-Street, 1829), p.19.

<sup>154</sup> Fletcher, p.74



they should meet no more'.<sup>155</sup> This fear seems evident in 'To Spring' and also 'Written in Farm Wood', which must have been written around the same time in 1784. Both speak of fear—'Written in Farm Wood', particularly, of 'coming dread' ('Written in Farm Wood', p.34, l.10). Images of spring offer no hope in either poem.

The vulnerability of mothers is another recurrent theme in Smith's poetry. In the natural world she notices many instances where nature appears to work against those rearing young, appearing at times to be merciless and unforgiving. 'The Lark's Nest' is one such poem that speaks of this injustice. The poem is based on Aesop's *The Lark and Her Young Ones*, a fable in which the lark, nesting in a ripe wheat field, with her brood about her, wisely predicts that the farmer will only reap his field when he recognises that he cannot trust his friends to help him and will have to hire in labourers. When she realises this is imminent, she moves her young to safety. The lark itself can almost certainly be linked to Smith, as a symbol of song and creativity, but a large part of the poem focuses not on the fable, but on the defencelessness of the mother lark and the fickleness of her mate. The poem begins by describing the relentless labour of the lark to build a nest where she can protect and nurse her eggs:

While she, with bents, and wither'd grass collected,  
 Their humble domicile prepar'd;  
 Then by her duty fix'd, the tender mate  
 Unwearied press'd  
 Their future progeny beneath her breast,  
 And little slept and little ate,  
 While her gay lover, with a careless heart,  
 As is the custom of his sex,  
 Full little recks  
 The coming family [...]  
 ('The Lark's Nest, p.269-270, ll.21-30)

As a consequence of the lover's carefree and reckless nature, he forgets to feed his patient mate, who cannot leave the nest unprotected, until hunger drives her out. On

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<sup>155</sup> Mary Hays, "Mrs Charlotte Smith" in 'Public Characters of 1800-1801', Appendix D.3: Life, in *Emmeline: the Orphan in the Castle*, by Charlotte Smith, ed. by Loraine Fletcher (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003), p.45.

her return, the nest has been destroyed by a setter, a hunting dog, and her ‘half-existing young’ crushed (‘The Lark’s Nest’, p.270, l.51). Although the lark and her mate eventually rebuild the nest and again raise their young (before the poem turns to the Aesop fable), this aspect of the poem speaks strongly of the helplessness of the pregnant or nursing mother, the danger that surrounds her, and the irrelevance of nature. The death of the lark’s ‘half-existing young’, still cocooned in their eggs like Barbauld’s butterfly in ‘To Mrs. Priestly’, can clearly be compared to a foetus in its mother’s womb, susceptible to accident.

The loneliness of the female is also apparent. Where Barbauld reflects on the benefits of the female-only experience of pregnancy and childbirth, Smith resents that women are ultimately abandoned when they are most vulnerable. The lark’s lover is frequently absent, ‘like a dart | From his low homestead with the morning springs’ (‘The Lark’s Nest’, p. 270, ll.30-31), leaving her very much to fend for herself and at risk. This reflects Smith’s own personal experience with her reckless husband (whom she knew to be sexually errant and who was frequently on the run from his creditors), but also suggests that like animals in the wild, women are ultimately isolated, operating blindly in the dark, prone to misadventure.

‘To Dr. Parry of Bath with some botanic drawings which had been made some years’ is also indicative of this helplessness. The poem had been written by Smith to her daughter’s obstetrician in the months before Anna Augusta’s death. As Labbe has explored, in one sense the word ‘Amaranth’ (‘To Dr. Parry, p.57, l.14), an immortal flower of paradise, allows for the possibility of cheating death—at this point, there was still hope that Anna August might survive<sup>156</sup>—but it also suggests that Anna Augusta’s death was very much on Smith’s mind. The botanical artist in the poem

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<sup>156</sup> Labbe, p.72

could be either Smith or Parry, who are equally unable to conjure up ‘Spring’s soft blooms’ (‘To Dr. Parry’, p.57, l.4), or ‘visionary garlands’ (‘To Dr. Parry, p.57, l.10), which speak of health and vigour. Hope is slipping away. The ‘lovely family of flowers’, shrinking from the ‘bleakness of the Northern blast’ (To Dr. Parry’, p.57, ll.5-6), highlight’s Smith’s fear that her family is being destroyed by approaching winter. So while, then, she notes her eternal gratitude to Parry—‘Still I one flower of deathless blossom mine [...] | The unfading Amaranth of Gratitude’ (To. Dr. Parry, p.57, ll.12-14)—she is painfully aware that his powers are limited, that he can offer her no assistance, and that she, and her daughter, are ultimately alone, facing mortality.

It is a theme that would appear in Smith’s novel *Montalbert*, written after the death of her daughter in 1795. It is in these later novels that Smith is most candid on the subject of childbirth, observing the danger that surrounds women during this period, and the loneliness and helplessness of their situation. Initially the birth of Rosalie’s child is ‘so dreaded, yet so desired’ by both mother and father,<sup>157</sup> and the hours are ‘heavy’ in waiting.<sup>158</sup> Childbirth passes, however, and her health is soon re-established, making ‘her beauty more brilliant than before her confinement’.<sup>159</sup> Soon after Rosalie’s husband is tricked into leaving his wife and new-born son unprotected. Just as his return is expected an earthquake strikes, and Rosalie is barely able to escape with her own life and that of her baby son. Her home is reduced to rubble. Alone, with only a frantic maid for company, she wanders with her child in her arms, at the mercy of starvation and ambush:

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<sup>157</sup> Charlotte Smith, *Montalbert: A Novel* (London: S. Low for E. Booker, 1795), II, p.153

<sup>158</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p.155

<sup>159</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p.157

Could I but save my child! (exclaimed Rosalie, little encouraged by her companion).—Could I but know whether Montalbert lives!—O Montalbert where are you—if you exist?<sup>160</sup>

The vulnerability of the infant, and the way in which Rosalie will not let him go—she is pictured constantly throughout this scene with her ‘infant in her arms’, ‘clasping her boy to her breast’—pressing him to her as if she is still pregnant, blurs the pre- and post-natal periods, which, for Smith, are the most perilous. Imitating her own experience with Anna Augusta, Rosalie’s hopes, and the hopes of those around her, are raised, only to be dashed when least expected, threatening to take both mother and child. The novel pictures nature as monstrously dangerous for childbearing women, leaving them isolated and vulnerable. There is no sense of support, particularly from men (husbands or otherwise) and the entire picture is one of abject fear and loneliness.

It is a theme to which Smith would return again with her penultimate novel *The Young Philosopher*, published in 1798, eight years before her own death. In this, Smith reflects more explicitly on the fear and danger endured by child-bearing women, manifested in the menacing figure of the widow Lady Kilbrodie. Like Rosalie, Laura Glenmorris is separated from her husband during a crucial period—while pregnant with their first child. She is captured by a hypocritical, zealous Catholic Lady Kilbrodie shortly after, and imprisoned in the Gothic abbey of Kilbrodie. Laura’s feelings of melancholy and foreboding, which, like Huish’s Princess Charlotte, begin with her pregnancy even before the separation from her husband, escalate into sheer terror as she is maltreated and taunted with superstitious visions of her death in childbirth:

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<sup>160</sup> Smith, *Montalbert*, p.176

As the time of my lying in approached, she [Lady Kilbrodie] caused the superstitions of the country to be brought forward, to alarm me with ideas of danger and dread of death.

Sometimes portentous sounds were heard in the air; and at others the corpse candle was seen to go from my chamber to the burial ground of the abbey[.]<sup>161</sup>

Laura is already convinced that she will die, admitting shortly after her imprisonment that ‘I hoped and believed my wretchedness was nearly at an end’,<sup>162</sup> but this is strengthened most specifically by the appearance of a female midwife (identified thus by the word ‘howdie’,<sup>163</sup> an ‘old witchlike-looking woman’, Meggy Macgregor, engaged by Lady Kilbrodie.<sup>164</sup> This ‘frightful creature’ takes the appearance and manner of a traditional midwife pre-1700, strongly associated with superstition and witchcraft, the fear of which Macgregor uses as a weapon against the heroine.<sup>165</sup> Laura is convinced that this woman will do her yet more harm: ‘the cruel impressions [...] would have had little effect, had I not known that the persons who prophecied, had the means of assuring the truth of their predictions’, and endeavours to bear the labour without assistance and in silence.<sup>166</sup> The woman in childbirth is left, as in Smith’s other portrayals, almost entirely alone and without help, with only a faithful female servant to attend her, resulting in the death of her three-day old premature baby boy. Laura’s fear stems not only from her suspicion that Lady Kilbrodie and the midwife are plotting to deliberately kill her and her child, but from a deep seated distrust of midwives. It is, to Smith, a field that is steeped in ignorance and superstition, a profession that offers little comfort to women.

Smith’s understanding of childbirth is, then, starkly opposed to Barbauld’s.

After losing her mother young, enduring a total of twelve pregnancies and births

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<sup>161</sup> Charlotte Smith, ‘The Young Philosopher’, in *The Works of Charlotte Smith* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), X, pp.136-7.

<sup>162</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p.136

<sup>163</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p.138

<sup>164</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p.137

<sup>165</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p.137

<sup>166</sup> Smith, *The Young Philosopher*, p.137

which tied her to a husband she did not love, and witnessing the death of her daughter, Smith simply did not view pregnancy and childbirth as anything other than dangerous, frightening and lonely. It is important to remember that Smith did not seriously start writing poetry until after the birth of her eleventh child, at a time when she had almost certainly lost any appreciation of the miracle of conception, such as that depicted by Barbauld in 'To a Little Invisible Being'.<sup>167</sup> While Barbauld celebrates the intimacy of childbirth and the ways in which it draws women together (from midwives and nurses, to female relatives and friends), Smith can only reflect on the peril to which women are exposed, the isolation they feel and the little assistance afforded them by a very inexact science. But medical men are also absent from scenes of childbirth in her work; modern medicine, too, offers little relief. For her, there is no help or sympathy to be gleaned from the obstetrical world: childbirth is uncontrollable. Both writers understand the role of nature in this process as taking centre stage. For Barbauld this is a sacred role and one to be trusted. She looks to the natural world for evidence of its talent and facility, and observes childbirth through the same lens. Smith also looks to the natural world, but sees only death and danger. For her, nature is violent and dangerous, lulling women into a false sense of security and taking away life abruptly and often violently. Both engage with a discourse that they believed had personal significance for women. Smith, especially, is unable to escape its consequence in her own life, while Barbauld's interest in childbearing women around her can also be traced. She does not fail to map the importance of the discourse for women such as her friend Frances Carr. Similarly, in the following chapter it will be possible to observe how women writers (like Smith and Barbauld) incorporated their lives into their work. In her scriptures, Joanna Southcott cast herself as the leading

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<sup>167</sup> However, Smith clearly enjoyed being a mother, remaining involved in many of her children's lives, even as they grew up and had children of their own.

role, using her visions and writings to explore society and the lives of those around her. By doing so, she made it impossible for her readers to separate the woman from her work, causing her to be sidelined as a prophetess, rather than a literary woman. Like Southcott, both Smith and Barbauld draw the reader into their lives, offering information (including dates and footnotes) about the context of their poetry. The role of women writers in this debate is, therefore, particularly important: they are not just discussing the medical theories and practices of midwifery, but testing and questioning them also. But rather than elucidating the meaning and allowing for greater comprehension, this has the effect of further fuzzifying their work. The more information the reader is given, the more complex their understanding becomes.

This is why the midwifery discourse is, itself, fuzzy. The sheer volume of information and literature available has the effect of obscuring a definitive understanding, or an accurate summary of the discourse. So while it appears to begin with a debate between man-midwives and female midwives, this is soon greatly complicated by the way in which understandings of the role of nature began to change, and, again, with the understandings of women, like Smith, who represented reality, or lived experience. The nature/science binary, is, in fact, more predominant than the man-midwife/female midwife binary, and it is with this that Barbauld and Smith seem particularly concerned. But it also weaves its way through the birth stories of many women, including Smith, her daughter Anna Augusta, Wollstonecraft and Princess Charlotte, while playing out in the works of Crabbe and the medical treatises of man-midwives during the second midwifery debate. The critic must therefore draw from a large variety of genres and fields—biography, poetry, novels, medical treatise, letters—as well as negotiating historical and contemporary changes and personal bias. But this fuzziness should not be treated as a problem: it reveals

just how deeply invested society is, and always has been, in this important field. The subject of childbirth can be traced in so many aspects of so many different cultures: the need to improve the field of midwifery, to make sense of its history and understand the mistakes that have been made, has spilled over the realm of science, despite, perhaps, the best efforts of those who wished it to remain within a professional context. The midwifery discourse is not, then, simply a branch of medicine, but a discussion that has polarised people from all social classes, with or without their knowing and even against their will: those who have found themselves grieving for a princess, a wife, a mother, a daughter or son; those who have longed for a child; those who have traced the discourse in their observations of society; those who have been taught anatomy and wanted to know more; and those who have simply had to earn a living. Each one brings a further level—another understanding, another problem, another interpretation—of fuzziness, making the discourse of midwifery a truly colourful and dramatic field of study, of inescapable consequence.



**Chapter IV: ‘To Bruise the Serpent’s Head’: Hannah More,**

**Joanna Southcott and the New Eve**

SATAN A woman's tongue no man can tame. God hath done something to choose a -- of a woman, that will down-argue the Devil, and scarce give him room to speak—for the sands of a glass do not run faster than thy tongue. It is better to dispute with a thousand men than with one woman. Thy assurance and ignorance protect thee. Thou payest no more regard to the greatness of Satan, than thou wouldest to a chattering woman like thyself. So I must confess I was a fool there, ever to enter into dispute with thee, knowing what a chattering fool thou art; all men are tired of thy tongue; and now thou hast tired the Devil's also. Therefore, do shut up, and say no more for thy own shame; but I know there is no shame in thee, if the Devil do not shame thee now. Pomeroy said, thou toldst too fast; Manley said, thou toldst too fast; Mossop said, thou toldst too fast; and Bruce said the same: and men and women have tried to shame thee out of it. But I hope, if none else can't shame thee, the Devil will shame thee, as not to answer again. For, as thy paper is nearly ended, I will get ahead of thee now, if thou answerest again; unless thou art like a mad fool without any shame at all. So I will see what thou hast got to say, and answer in a few words: for I hate so many as thou answerest—one word of a sort is enough.

JOANNA One word of a sort I will answer. If man can't tame a woman's tongue, how shall the Devil? If God hath done something to choose a woman to dispute with Satan at last, Satan did something to dispute with the woman at first; if Satan down-argued the woman at first, she ought to down-argue him at last. If Satan scarce gave the woman room to speak or think at first, the woman ought not to give him room to speak or think at the last. If Satan thought fit to dispute with the woman at first, he hath thought it fit to dispute with her at last. If Satan thought it better to dispute with twenty men than with one woman, why did he not appear when there were but three men, to plead for himself? If Satan paid no regard to the weakness and ignorance of the woman at first—the weakness and ignorance of the woman will pay no regard to him at last. If he took the advantage of her weakness, she will take the advantage of her strength. If Satan pleaded the promises of God against her, she will plead the promises of God for her. If Satan repents of his folly at last, he ought to have repented at first, that ever he entered into dispute with her. If he knew what a weak ignorant creature she was at first to believe in his words, he might know when the voice of the Lord came to her, to bid her claim the promise, to be as Gods, knowing good from evil, she would be as ready to believe the latter as the former, and rely on that promise, and claim it. If the woman's fall has tired men, I hope it will tire the Devil also. If a Devil could not shame her at first, how shall he shame her at last? If he was not ashamed to enter into dispute with her, why should he be ashamed of her words? If they are right, they cannot shame the woman; and if they are wrong they cannot shame the Devil. For he glorieth in what the woman doth, that is wrong; so if the Woman is not ashamed of herself, the Devil cannot shame her. If she is not ashamed to say much before men she does regard, she cannot be ashamed to say much to the Devil, that she does not love, nor fear, but despise. (To this Satan made no answer for several hours: But Joanna heard a whispering to this

purpose, Christ is in her, or she would have never made so ready an answer, and we may as well leave her.)<sup>1</sup>

Joanna Southcott's eleventh book, *A Dispute Between a Woman and the Powers of Darkness*, appeared in August 1802. This text was a clear departure from Southcott's previous revelations, written as conversations between herself and God. In the opening pages she addressed this disparity:

THIS book may appear strange to some of my readers, to say, it is a Dispute between me and the Powers of Darkness [...] Some disputed with me, saying they could not believe it was the command of the Lord, that I should pen the words of the Devil, after I had been writing by the Spirit of (God) the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

The previous year, Southcott had achieved great notoriety with the publication of *The Strange Effects of Faith: with Remarkable Prophecies*, revelations assembled over the last nine years, while she was working in domestic service. This had attracted the attention of seven men, "seven judges", as Southcott called them: Peter Morrison (a cotton-printer), John Wilson (a coach-maker), Reverend Thomas P. Foley, Reverend Thomas Webster, Reverend Stanhope Bruce, George Turner (a self-professed prophet and missionary) and William Sharp (an engraver). Of these, six were followers of a man named Richard Brothers, who over the course of several years had released a series of ever more extravagant revelations, culminating in the disclosure that he was God's chosen one, and that George III should surrender his crown.<sup>3</sup> Brothers was eventually arrested in 1795 and incarcerated for insanity for eleven years, leaving his followers in urgent need of a new leader. In December 1801 they travelled to Exeter to interview Southcott and to put her to the test. They soon proclaimed her visions to

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<sup>1</sup> Joanna Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Mike Sanders (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.104-105.

<sup>2</sup> Southcott, 'Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness', <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK11.htm>> [accessed 5 November 2010]

<sup>3</sup> Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Brothers, Richard (1757-1824)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3573>, accessed 2 April 2012]

be real, and moved her from Exeter to London, where they set about promoting her work.

Yet men were Southcott's greatest opponents, and, as Barbara Taylor has noted, her revelations provided Southcott with the 'rather less cosmic', but 'equally satisfying task' of defying them.<sup>4</sup> The four men that Satan alludes to in the above passage, Pomeroy, Manley, Mossop and Bruce, had each questioned, or otherwise publicly and personally attacked Southcott. Reverend Joseph Pomeroy had initially shown support for Southcott's cause, but had hastily withdrawn it on publication of her *Strange Effects of Faith*; Southcott and her supporters would continue to hound Pomeroy for the rest of his life.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Manley, described by Southcott as a 'young gentleman of the army', had apparently observed to Southcott that if her writings had come from God, Methodists would have had no problem believing her because they were possessed of the Spirit of Christ and could thus recognise God's truth. Although she was grateful for Manley's patience with her ('He took more pains than all the rest'), the doubt of a pious man wounded her, and she was compelled to write a spirited reply in *The Second Book of the Sealed Prophecies* (1796), and even more explicitly in *Answer to Mr. Manley, a young Gentleman in the Army* (1797).<sup>6</sup> Even one of the original "seven judges", Bruce, had apparently one time wavered in his conviction, and more recently, she had defended herself against the remarks of Reverend Mossop, who had branded her writings as 'rubbish':

Now this Dream to thee I'll answer,  
And let Mossop to appear,  
He shall find I AM thy Master,

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983), p.163.

<sup>5</sup> James K. Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p.59

<sup>6</sup> Southcott, 'The Second Book of the Sealed Prophecies an Address to the Public, February 20, the Fast Day, 1805', <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK36.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2010]

And the Mysteries will make clear:  
 Both, thou didst see were placed by Me  
 To show the perfect Sign,  
 And close to it the whole did Stick,  
 But here the Truth they'll find.<sup>7</sup>

In *Dispute Between a Woman and the Powers of Darkness*, Southcott assumes that these men disapprove of her because she is a woman, and a 'woman's tongue no man can tame'.<sup>8</sup> As Anna Clark has argued, Satan himself exemplifies this masculine ill-treatment of women.<sup>9</sup> He appears to speak on behalf of, and ultimately represent, the entire male sex. He clearly resents her precocity, her ability to 'down-argue the Devil, and scarce give him room to speak'.<sup>10</sup> He mocks her 'assurance' and 'ignorance',<sup>11</sup> and yet cannot get ahead of her; she literally talks him into silence. As Taylor has also noted, these are recognizably 'masculine prejudices',<sup>12</sup> and only further fuel Southcott's anger. Woman, she says, has at last been anointed by God to do his work: 'God hath done something to choose a woman to dispute with Satan at last'.<sup>13</sup> She acknowledges that women have hitherto been portrayed badly in religious history, referencing Eve's temptation in the Garden of Eden: 'Satan did something to dispute with the woman at first; if Satan down-argued the woman at first, she ought to down-argue him at last,'<sup>14</sup> but contends that through her, they have the chance to redeem themselves. In Eve, Satan may have found woman's flaw, but Southcott can provide their power: 'If he [Satan] took advantage of her weakness, she will take

<sup>7</sup> Southcott, 'The Answer of the Lord to the Powers of Darkness, verse 83-84', <<http://www.thethirdtestament.org.uk/page512.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2010].

<sup>8</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.104

<sup>9</sup> Anna Clark, 'Joanna Southcott and the Prophetesses', in *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London: Rivers Oram, 1995), p.110.

<sup>10</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.104

<sup>11</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.104

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, p.163

<sup>13</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.104

<sup>14</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.104

advantage of her strength'.<sup>15</sup> She ridicules Satan for not having realised that woman is as susceptible to God's words of persuasion as she had been Satan's; Southcott herself would be 'as ready to believe the latter as the former'.<sup>16</sup>

It appears that Southcott's primary concern is to defend women from their base representation within the Bible and, more particularly, to reinstate them as a necessary force in the battle between good and evil. Woman has met and conversed with Satan before, and now has the experience and knowledge to oppose him. It is, therefore, not surprising that Southcott attracted such a large female following. As James Hopkins has outlined, sixty-three percent of the Southcottian movement were women, due to its emphasis on women's rights: 'God had selected a woman, not a man, through which to reveal Himself'.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, he notes that Southcott offered women emancipation from the burden of the Fall, distance from Eve's role in tempting Adam to sin.<sup>18</sup> It was, as Hopkins perceives, an idea she had first sketched in *Strange Effects of Faith*, when she suggested that woman 'at first plucked the fruit, and brought the knowledge of the evil fruit; so at last she must bring the knowledge of the good fruit'.<sup>19</sup> In *A Dispute Between the Powers of Darkness*, she formulates the argument more precisely, going back to the moment when woman was first tempted, putting herself in Eve's shoes, and successfully opposing Satan's enticing invitations: ultimately conjuring a new Eve from the old, in contradistinction to all the old Adams.

Six years later, Hannah More would also attempt to vindicate Eve, and thus womankind, from the encumbrance of Original Sin. *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* (1806) would begin with John Milton's pre-Fall Eve from *Paradise Lost* (1667), the

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<sup>15</sup>Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.105

<sup>16</sup> Southcott, 'A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness: The Fourth Day's Dispute, Friday, August 6, 1802', in *Women and Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century*, p.105

<sup>17</sup> Hopkins, p.85

<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, p.85

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Hopkins, p.85

epitome of feminine domesticity. As More admits, Milton's emphasis on the virtues of domesticity had caused some to assert that Milton must be a 'harsh domestic tyrant', as it was undignified and derogatory to insist that perfection was to be found in the study of 'household good'.<sup>20</sup> Yet this, in the view of More's idealistic young hero Cœlebs, is the most 'appropriate branch of female knowledge' (*Cœlebs*, p.42), and one that, far from implying degradation, infers 'a degree of influence'— if only over her husband and family (*Cœlebs*, p.43). But More's plan was not simply to appropriate woman within the private sphere. Her bigger project was to create an Eve more perfect than Milton's: Cœlebs' love interest, Lucilla, would be domestic, yes, but also bright, with an independent, questioning spirit and cultivated mind. More importantly, she would be without faults and flaws, secure in her devotion to God, thus subverting the perceived understanding of Eve: her association with the Fall and Original Sin.

This reinvention of Eve is not exclusive to More and Southcott. It is a theme that appears time and again in novels by Romantic women writers, even those who have no particular religious persuasion. Saba Bahar has noted that Mary Wollstonecraft is similarly drawn to the story of Eve, recognising that centuries of women were 'denied a decent life on earth as well as the promise of future redemption because of Eve's purported role in paradise'.<sup>21</sup> Wollstonecraft is clearly troubled by Milton's Eve, distancing her Eve characters from his, and assuring women, as Bahar suggests, more agency than the 'enslaved' Eves of Moses, Milton

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<sup>20</sup> Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, ed. by Patricia Demers (Ont, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2007), p.41. All subsequent line references are from this edition, and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Saba Bahar, 'An Eve to Please Me', in *Mary Wollstonecraft's Social and Aesthetic Philosophy* (Hampshire; MY: Palgrave, 2002), p.14.

and (Henry) Fuseli.<sup>22</sup> Milton's representation, particularly, appears to have had a lasting effect on literature, and, more importantly, on the portrayal of Eve, which is perhaps why More tackled this text most particularly in *Cælebs*.

Lack of correlation between religious understandings of the Bible, and the association of female writers with the radical/conservative binary, allows for a further extension of the Fuzzy Set theory. Specifically, it admits the study of a female writer who has typically been excluded from literary analysis, confined to the label of 'prophet' (a word that can be diversely interpreted), and pushed to the margins of political discourse. Southcott has rarely been explored as a writer, one who engaged with the literature she came into contact with, questioned her society and explored her observations—yet, she was prolific. Why might this have happened? Southcott may have compounded the problem by portraying herself, as Susan Juster has argued, as 'the defender of the underprivileged classes', offering them redemption through the agency of a "poor illiterate woman", and scorning learned and civilized society.<sup>23</sup> Few have recognised the value of her verses and letters, rugged and rudimentary though they might be, as useful and perceptive literature.

As Juster has recognised, Southcott's communications were intended to confuse and unsettle, 'to "stumble", in her words—those who read them'.<sup>24</sup> Hers was a 'very archaic, and very authoritarian, understanding of literacy to the British Public', which insisted that only 'true believers' could understand the Word of God, and only after it had 'been channelled through the interpretive faculties of an inspired

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<sup>22</sup> Bahar, p.15. Bahar's chapter explores Wollstonecraft's relationship with the uncompleted edition of Milton's collected works, commissioned by Joseph Johnson in 1792, edited by William Cowper and illustrated by Fuseli.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of the Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2003), p.175

<sup>24</sup> Juster, p.173.

prophet', through the method of reading scripture randomly.<sup>25</sup> Southcott's archaic language was also, as Juster has further explored, a mark of rebellion: it constituted an effective challenge to democratic politics, which was bound up in a specific reasoned discourse.<sup>26</sup> This may have caused some to shy away from what could be, at times, arduous reading. But critics have not struggled as much with the works of John Clare, whose rural archaisms have been received positively, as the 'immense, creative volubility' of a serious author.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that there are different standards for male and female authors, and that Southcott's sex is used a defining characteristic. In terms of the Problem of Translation, however, it produces further ambiguities and inconsistencies, making Southcott an ideal writer for the Fuzzy Set.

In sharing the value of *New Eve with More*, Southcott might be reappropriated within the realms of mainstream Romantic writing, moving her towards an understanding that is more comprehensive and detailed, incorporating close textual analysis. In previous chapters I have shown how close comparison between writers such as Catherine Macaulay and Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Wollstonecraft, has often been unhelpful, and have suggested that those who are compared to Wollstonecraft sometimes appear to fall short on subjects such as women's rights. In this chapter, I will show how a close comparison can be useful, particularly for writers (like Southcott) who are distanced from the Romantic canon. This will equally influence the analysis of *More*, a writer who has proved problematic for critics, despite being considered much more "conventional". Indeed, it is this very alliance with conservatism that has impaired contemporary understandings of *More's* work, causing her to be used either as a stick to beat other female writers, or otherwise

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<sup>25</sup> Juster, p.174

<sup>26</sup> Juster, p.175

<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Summerfield, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips, *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.146.



observed as an anomaly—a moral glitch in a canon of liberal female writing. Given their contrasting statuses in the field of religious writing, the study of Southcott and More's *New Eve* will have the effect of counterbalancing the two writers, allowing critics to observe ambiguities and subjectivity within the context of the limited shared value of "New Eve"—one small aspect of their work—which is open to further analysis and interpretation, and tolerant towards writing that is uncertain and imprecise.

#### **4.1: Representation of Eve from Genesis to Milton and religious female agency**

In the eighteenth century, the Creation story was central to the religious readings of any good Christian, and most commonly pursued in the opening chapters of The First Book of Moses, Genesis. Eve's life in the Garden of Eden begins as ignominiously as it ends:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her to the man. And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.<sup>28</sup>

Born of Adam, Eve's submission to man is taken for granted. As Pamela Norris suggests, 'it lends itself to interpretations of inferiority', which critics have been quick to exploit.<sup>29</sup> The very act of naming Eve as 'Woman' implies that Adam has the same authority over Eve as he has over every other living creature God brings to him: it is, essentially, an act of ownership. Despite this, there are alternative interpretations of the creation of Eve. St Augustine, for instance, thought that the rib story was symbolic of the loving union between man and wife, and Norris indicates that as Eve

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 2: 19-20 (KJB).

<sup>29</sup> Pamela Norris, 'The Garden of Eden', in *The Story of Eve* (London: Picador/Macmillan, 1998), p.19.

is part of Adam, she cannot be inferior to him.<sup>30</sup> Misogynistic readings of Eve have, however, endured, most particularly because it is Eve who is portrayed as initiating mankind's decline into Original Sin:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? <sup>2</sup>And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: <sup>3</sup>but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. <sup>4</sup>And the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die: <sup>5</sup>For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes will be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. <sup>6</sup>And the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat.<sup>31</sup>

As Norris outlines, it is significant that Eve is alone when she encounters the serpent; it was thought that independent women were more likely to get into trouble, without masculine authority.<sup>32</sup> Yet, as Norris has suggested, the serpent represents not only Satan (as a “tempter”), but also man—or more particularly—the phallus: ‘there is something undeniably phallic about the slippery, upright serpent’.<sup>33</sup> Although often occupying a sexually ambiguous position throughout literary history, as the symbol of fertility, the womb and even menstruation, in Genesis the serpent clearly takes the form of a male seducer, tempting Eve with luscious, ripe fruit, thus symbolic of sexual organs and sexual desire. In *Dispute*, Southcott had capitalised on the representation of Eve as a victim. According to Clark, she rewrote the story of the Garden of Eden, portraying it as the ‘primal betrayal of women by man’, appealing to women who felt ‘sexually victimized’, and ‘blaming sin on an outside source—masculine villainy’.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, however, by taking up the role of Eve in *Dispute*,

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<sup>30</sup> Norris, pp.19-20.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 3: 1-6

<sup>32</sup> Norris, p.21

<sup>33</sup> Norris, p.26

<sup>34</sup> Clark, pp.110-111

Southcott can also be seen to subvert this representation by testing the serpent (in the form of Satan) herself, rather than being fooled, and victimized, by him.

Likewise, in many versions of the Fall Eve was more than just a victim. From Genesis, it is clear that she in turn tempts (the willing) Adam, and their eyes are opened to their nakedness—they become sexually aware. Eve thus plays two roles, that of the seduced and the seducer. She takes the form of a Fallen Woman, a whore, one whose innocence is destroyed, and is accordingly compelled to prey on the purity of others. This transgression would become the heart of male anxieties about excessive female passion and social order, reimagined and recreated in the figure of Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1604) and in poems such as Christina Rossetti's *The Goblin Market* (1862), where Laura sells her innocence (a lock of her hair) for the goblins' forbidden fruits.

Pre-Fall, however, Eve could also be depicted as the bringer of conjugal and domestic harmony. These domestic virtues, while they redeem her in one sense, also help to cement her inferiority to Adam, and her responsibility for the Fall, in another. Milton can be seen as the pioneer of pre-Fall Eve, duly emphasising her feminine beauty and domestic virtues. In Book IV, she is '[n]ot equal' to Adam 'as their sex not equal seemed', but is of 'softness and sweet attractive Grace'.<sup>35</sup> As Cœlebs will later notice in More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, she is attentive to domestic needs:

She turns, on hospitable thoughts intent  
 What choice to chuse for delicacy best,  
 What order, so contriv'd as not to mix  
 Tastes, not well joynd, inelegant, but bring  
 Taste after taste upheld with kindest change.<sup>36</sup>

She instinctively understands the needs of her guests, and of her husband, and endeavours to provide for each. Whilst Adam entertains guests, she assumes a lowly

<sup>35</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Barbara K. Lewalski (Oxford; Blackwell Publishing, 2007), IV. 296-312.

<sup>36</sup> *Paradise Lost*, V.331-336.

seat and rests in the background.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, she is careful to retire from the company after dinner, when the conversation turns to ‘studious thoughts abstruse’.<sup>38</sup> As Mandy Green explains, however, although Eve manages the domestic arrangements single-handedly, she is no “domestic drudge”: ‘her sphere of agency is not confined to the bower alone [...] [she] takes a full and active part of all aspects of life in the Garden’.<sup>39</sup> Green suggests that Milton can thus be regarded as a “misogynist” and “male supremacist” on the one hand, and [...] [a] proto-feminist “the first great feminist in Western culture” [...] on the other’, indicating, as Green goes on to argue, that Eve is as ‘intriguingly multifaceted as her author’.<sup>40</sup> These are ambiguities that More herself would adopt and exploit in her characterisation of Lucilla, making her simultaneously a forerunner of the Angel in the House, and also a spirited, intelligent woman, of independent pursuit.

One aspect of Eve’s agency, which has been extensively critiqued, is her cultivation of the flowers in the Garden. She leaves Adam and his ‘studious thoughts abstruse’ only to pursue her own interests: ‘and went forth among her Fruits and Flours, | To visit how they prosper’d, bud and bloom, | Her Nurserie’.<sup>41</sup> As outlined by Kent Lehnhof, Eve is given an unprecedented amount of governance over the flowers of Eden.<sup>42</sup> She is even allowed to name them: ‘O flours, | [...] which I bred up with tender hand | From the first bud, and gave ye Names’.<sup>43</sup> As he suggests, the two meanings of “nursery”, a site to culture plants and a site to nurture children, are conflated; thus, the plants take on the role of Eve’s children as the fruits of her womb,

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<sup>37</sup> *Paradise Lost*, VIII.41-2.

<sup>38</sup> *Paradise Lost*, VIII.40.

<sup>39</sup> Mandy Green, *Milton’s Ovidian Eve* (Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p.15.

<sup>40</sup> Green, pp.15-16 & p.16

<sup>41</sup> *Paradise Lost*, VIII.44-46.

<sup>42</sup> Kent R. Lehnhof, “‘Nor turnd I weene’: Paradise Lost and Pre-Lapsarian Sexuality’, *Milton Quarterly*, 34.3 (2000), 67-83 (p.70).

<sup>43</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Book XI, ll.274-277, p.293.

demonstrating the ‘indivisibility between Eve and the garden itself’.<sup>44</sup> She appears as Earth Mother, who in several mythologies was the goddess of the fertile earth and motherhood. Eve’s unique relationship with the flowers also emphasises her link with chastity,<sup>45</sup> and leading up until the Fall they accompany almost her every move. As the serpent spies Eve working alone, she is ‘Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood, | Half spi’d, so thick the Roses bushing round’, the roses glowing with innocence.<sup>46</sup> As I will observe, More will also make use of this symbolism, surrounding Lucilla with a bower full of flowers, placing her in the position of chief gardener, and complicating our understanding of this innocence. In *Paradise Lost*, however, Eve’s loss of chastity is evident in the withering and fading of the roses, which have been wreathed into a garland by Adam, and fall from his hands as he realises her mistake (quite literally symbolising the “Fall”).<sup>47</sup> Significantly, Adam instantly recognises that Eve has been ‘defloured’,<sup>48</sup> implying loss of virginity,<sup>49</sup> which complicates our understanding of their marriage, while emphasising the link between purity and flowers, and drawing on Norris’ interpretation of Genesis: Eve has been physically seduced by the serpent, and denatured.

More does not explore Milton’s version of Eve’s Fall— her Eve will not Fall, though she will be tempted. *Paradise Lost*, however, does not miss the opportunity to explore the sexual dimension of Eve’s temptation. In Book IX, the serpent seizes his opportunity. As can be found in Genesis, Eve has been separated from Adam from a desire to fulfil God’s work independently. She is aware of a ‘foe’ who wishes them

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<sup>44</sup> Lehnhof, p.70

<sup>45</sup> Note here the reoccurrence of the problem of translation with respect to the words “chastity” and “virginity” as discussed in chapter two. It is interesting to note that Lehnhof uses the word “maidenhood”, which is equally problematic. In this chapter, the word “chastity” will encapsulate the fuzziness of Eve’s marriage to Adam, which may have been *sexual*, but also *pure*.

<sup>46</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.425-7.

<sup>47</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.892-3.

<sup>48</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.901.

<sup>49</sup> See 42f.

harm, but is disappointed that Adam ‘shouldst [her] firmness doubt’.<sup>50</sup> Finding her alone, the Serpent first appeals to Eve’s vanity, admiring her ‘Celestial Beautie’, ‘[w]ith ravishment beheld’, then turns to her thirst for knowledge, or female independence, claiming that the fruits of the tree will give her ‘Life| To knowledge’.<sup>51</sup> These words into her ‘heart too easie entrance won’, they ‘impregn’d’, impregnate, her mind (with obvious phallic connotations), and, her mind awakened to sexual possibilities, she fixes her eyes on the fruit:

Mean while the hour of Noon drew on, and wak’d  
 An eager appetite, rais’d by the smell  
 So savorie of that Fruit, which with desire,  
 Inclinable now grown to touch or taste,  
 Sollicited her longing eye [...]<sup>52</sup>

Eve’s awakening sexuality pervades the scene, as botanically natural and inevitable. She looks with ‘longing’ eye, her senses are heightened, ripened, her appetite aroused. The chaste characteristics that have hitherto accompanied her marriage to Adam are lost.<sup>53</sup> As Green suggests, Eve’s chastity is not ‘plucked’—she is not raped, or forced, like the nymph Proserpina, to whom she is compared (in Book IX)—but ‘shed’.<sup>54</sup> It is she who eagerly takes the fruit, and devours it, and, importantly, without regret:

Such delight till then, as seemd,  
 In Fruit she never tasted [...]  
 Greedily she ingorg’d without restraint,  
 And knew not eating Death: Satiated at length,  
 And hight’nd as with Wine, jocund and boon[.]<sup>55</sup>

The words themselves hint at sexual undertones, she is ‘ingorg’d’, unrestrained and ‘hight’nd’, the passage focusing on her obvious sexual delight—no moment of

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<sup>50</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.279-80.

<sup>51</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.540-1 & IX.686-7.

<sup>52</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.739-743.

<sup>53</sup> As Green suggests, accepting that sexual intercourse took place before the Fall was not without difficulties. But by accentuating virginal features in Eve, Milton sidesteps these, quietly assuming that Adam and Eve did not have sex until after the Fall. Green, pp.150-1.

<sup>54</sup> Green, p.153

<sup>55</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.787-793.

hesitation or guilt disrupts the revelation of her sexuality. Nature itself, however, responds to this breach with an audible groan: ‘Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat | Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe, | That all was lost’,<sup>56</sup> a movement that marks Eve’s transgression as unnatural and dangerous. Unconscious of this, however, Eve’s feelings of merriment, of ecstasy, continue sometime after, until she returns to Adam, who instantly recognises her culpability and suggests that she has ‘violate[d]’ the sacred fruit, a fruit that was sacred to ‘abstinence’ or to chastity.<sup>57</sup> Not wishing to be parted from her, and ‘fondly overcome with female charm’, he is easily persuaded to eat the fruit.<sup>58</sup> Their eyes now opened to lust, the two are enflamed with ‘[c]arnal desire’: ‘hee on *Eve* | Began to cast lascivious Eyes, she him | As wantonly repaid; in Lust they burne’.<sup>59</sup>

Despite his ready temptation, Adam is quick to accuse Eve when they awake the next day, the veil of innocence lifted from their eyes. Borrowing from Genesis, and the idea that female independence could be dangerous,<sup>60</sup> Adam considers his mistake to have been to allow his wife too much freedom, referring to her ‘strange | Desire of wandering’.<sup>61</sup> Guilt, too, has entered Eve’s mind and she, like Adam, covers herself in fig leaves to ‘hide | Thir guilt and dreaded shame’,<sup>62</sup> and blames her husband for not being more authoritarian—he could have commanded her not leave, and insisted that she stayed with him. Even God appears to find fault in Adam for not restraining his wife: ‘Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey | Before his voice [...] that to her | Thou did’st resigne thy Manhood’.<sup>63</sup> The punishment is therefore

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<sup>56</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.782-4.

<sup>57</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.903.

<sup>58</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.999.

<sup>59</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.1013-15.

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 29.

<sup>61</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.1135-6.

<sup>62</sup> *Paradise Lost*, IX.1113-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Paradise Lost*, X.145-8.

more severe for Eve, establishing a new order, commanding woman to submit ‘to thy Husbands will [...] hee over thee shall rule’,<sup>64</sup> and insisting on traditionally gendered hierarchical roles, where before these were less essential. More importantly, Eve’s new-found sexual pleasure is punished with pain and distress: ‘Children thou shalt bring | In sorrow forth’. In fact, the word sorrow is subject to the Problem of Translation, sometimes meaning affliction, pain, sadness or mischief and imprecation. It could be even be employed with respect to the devil (*OED*). In this context, it appears to hint at the grief and pain suffered by women in labour, as explored in chapter three, and even, perhaps, evokes the tortures of hell.<sup>65</sup>

Despite this, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and his understanding of Original Sin is more complimentary to Eve than the account in Genesis. Her character is developed more fully, she is afforded more agency and independence, yet also possesses many domestic virtues, providing both for her husband and for her guests. Milton also draws out her innocence and purity before the Fall, exploring the ambiguity of her sexual marriage to Adam and attempting to reconcile marital love and passion with purity. Milton’s Eve has, nevertheless, remained a problematic figure for many, not least because it is she who is ultimately responsible for the downfall of mankind, as God’s severe punishment of her indicates. Moreover, her potent sexuality appears incompatible with a life that must be devoted to God—it is as if she is born to fall. It is this that causes a rupture in the Garden of Eden, prompting a physical reaction in nature and inciting God’s wrath, leading to the exile of Adam and Eve. This undermines one of the better aspects of Milton’s representation of Eve—female independence—as it is because of Eve’s ‘strange desire of wandering’ that she becomes distant (physically and metaphorically) from Adam, and thus from God.

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<sup>64</sup> *Paradise Lost*, X.195-6.

<sup>65</sup> *Paradise Lost*, X.194-5.



This distance provides the opportunity for Eve's desire to awaken and come to fruition, and the only way for God to correct this is to have her submit to man.

God's reaction is perhaps not surprising given that female transgression appears to be a recurring theme in the Garden of Eden. Adam's first wife, Lilith, who first appears in the Hebrew Bible Genesis 1.27 and in some versions of Isaiah 34.14—translated as 'screech owl' in the King James Bible—can be linked to postlapsarian Eve.<sup>66</sup> A variant of the 'screech owl' appears in *Paradise Lost*, described as a 'night-hag', notably female and an evil child-murderer or vampire:

Follow the night-hag, when, called  
In secret, riding through the air she comes,  
Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance  
With Lapland witches, while the labouring moon  
Eclipses at their charms.<sup>67</sup>

This, and the painting *Night-hag visiting the Lapland Witches* (1796) by Fuseli which was inspired by the scene from *Paradise Lost*, relates to the Jewish tradition, in which Lilith is described as a female demon. In the Talmudic period, Jews imagined that Lilith had been cast out of Eden, or had fled, after an argument with Adam over equal sexual rights, and lived in the region of the Red Sea, giving birth to evil spirits.<sup>68</sup> As Norris has suggested, her 'monstrous fertility' links her to women who 'combine sexuality with prodigious motherhood', 'dangerous seductresses' who were irresistibly 'beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch, and deadly to keep'.<sup>69</sup> In the Romantic period, she appeared in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, as an alluring 'Pretty Witch':

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<sup>66</sup> Many have noted that God appears to create man and woman together, 'in his own image', in Genesis 1:27, before he creates Eve in Genesis 2:21-22: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.' Although one must remember that the Bible is a translated text, and thus open to the problem of translation, the passage does not appear to refer to Eve, and might therefore allude to a previous wife.

<sup>67</sup> *Paradise Lost*, II.662-66

<sup>68</sup> Norris, p.330

<sup>69</sup> Norris, p.330-1

MEPHISTOPHELES Adam's wife, his first.  
 Beware of her.  
 Her beauty's one boast is her dangerous hair.  
 When Lilith winds it tight around young men  
 She doesn't soon let go of them again.

[...]

THE PRETTY WITCH Ever since the days of Eden  
 Apples have been man's desire.  
 How overjoyed I am to think, sir,  
 Apples grow, too, in my garden.<sup>70</sup>

The connection between Lilith and Eve can be found in the reference to apples, which again alludes to nature and to sexual desire. She is extremely beautiful and thus a deadly siren, the original fallen woman— and a hyperbole of sensual, post-Fall Eve, ambiguously connected to her, and difficult to identify. The Romantics were particularly fascinated by her association with Eve, and various understandings of their relationship began to emerge, with Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Scenes from Goethe's Faust* (1822) and John Keats' 'Lamia' (1819). Some, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, described her as Adam's jealous ex-lover, who plots Eve's destruction. In his poems 'Lilith' (1864) and 'Eden Bower' (1869), Rossetti gives 'full sway to typical Romantic ambivalence concerning her attractions and her destructiveness', as David L. Jeffrey has suggested.<sup>71</sup> In 'Eden Bower', she stands on the outskirts of the Garden of Eden and convinces the snake to tempt Eve. It appears as though she has once been a snake herself ('A snake was I when thou wast my lover. | I was the fairest snake in Eden'),<sup>72</sup> but was transformed by 'earth's will', to be a wife for Adam.<sup>73</sup> With serpent imagery, she describes the entwining of their bodies as they 'lay sighing and pining', and the way in which they cultivated their flowers, their 'bright babes',

<sup>70</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. by Walter Arndt, ed. by Cyrus Hamlin, 2nd edn (W.W. Norton, c2001), ll.4206-4223

<sup>71</sup> David L. Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, c1992), p.455.

<sup>72</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'Eden Bower', in *Poems* (Roberts Brothers 1870) <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KBUPAQAAIAAJ>> [accessed 10 December 2010], ll.12-13, p.31.

<sup>73</sup> Rossetti, 'Eden Bower', in *Poems* <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KBUPAQAAIAAJ>> [accessed 10 December 2010], ll.15-16, p.31

into ‘Shapes that coiled in the woods and the waters’.<sup>74</sup> Lilith and the snake are still like lovers, as she attempts to sooth his bitterness at their separation: ‘Take me thou as I come from Adam: | Once again shall my love subdue thee | The past is past and I am come to thee’, and promises to remain devoted to him once she has achieved revenge.<sup>75</sup> As Galia Ofek notices, Lilith’s golden tresses and the serpent’s coils entwine as ‘the figuration of woman’s sexuality’.<sup>76</sup> Hair is a motif that will also complicate our understanding of the Stanley sisters in *Cælebs*.

This representation of Lilith, driven by her sexuality, would become increasingly popular over the nineteenth century, climaxing with George MacDonald’s *Lillith* in 1895.<sup>77</sup> For More, Southcott and the Romantics, she was an ambiguous and complex shape-shifter, who simultaneously embodied post-Fall Eve, and also appeared to victimize her, preying on Eve’s innocence and fidelity to Adam. Her close association with Eve would have further implications for More and Southcott, who wanted to distance woman from the Fall. It had the effect of fuzzifying Eve, making her more indistinct, more imprecise, harder to handle. They, too, would have to find a way to manage a subject that was fluctuating and uncertain, to assess the subjectivity of contemporary understandings of Eve and the inconsistencies in the Bible, and to forge their own perception that encompassed all, while problematizing woman’s own sense of guilt.

Given these understandings of Eve (and her association with Lilith), it is not surprising that women’s agency in and outside of a religious context was greatly restricted. The religious public had been led to understand women as inherently prone

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<sup>74</sup> Rossetti, ‘Eden Bower’, in *Poems* <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KBUPAQAAIAAJ>> [accessed 10 December 2010], ll.31-32, l.33 & l.35, p.32.

<sup>75</sup> Rossetti, ‘Eden Bower’, in *Poems* <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KBUPAQAAIAAJ>> [accessed 10 December 2010], ll.17-20, p.32.

<sup>76</sup> Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p.79

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey, p.455

to transgression and liable to induce others to err. It was thought that they were too weak, too susceptible to evil, a force to which they would be regularly exposed as God's missionaries. But, by the eighteenth century, women were becoming impatient with their perception within the religious arena. Despite the split from the Catholic Church after the Reformation, the Church of England had retained many of the Catholic doctrines and beliefs and offered no escape from Eve. It was, as Mark Knight and Emma Mason have argued, 'rooted in ritualism and medieval liturgical tradition'.<sup>78</sup> Eve's guilt within the Fall of Man remained. As such, there was little scope for Anglican women to play anything other than a very minimal role within worship. Sarah Apetrei has outlined the ways in which female piety was linked with 'chastity, submission and sobriety' during this period, suggesting that religious texts were therefore hardly concerned with a revolution in women's rights.<sup>79</sup>

With the Established Church offering little flexibility, those women who wanted to enjoy a more prominent religious position turned to Dissent, and to the Evangelical Revival which characterised the religious atmosphere of the eighteenth century. As Apetrei indicates, prophetic and spiritualist groups which promoted female leaders and visionaries had emerged post-Civil War, in the seventeenth century.<sup>80</sup> Over the course of the eighteenth century, these gained considerable influence, coalescing into recognisable religious denominations, which included Presbyterianism, Baptism, Methodism, Congregationalism and Quakerism. Full rights to worship were eventually reinstated to all believers in 1828.<sup>81</sup> The Revival represented a sharp break from the absolute power of the Church of England, towards

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<sup>78</sup> Mark Knight and Emma Mason, 'Dissent', in *Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.18.

<sup>79</sup> Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.i

<sup>80</sup> Apetrei, p.8

<sup>81</sup> Knight and Mason, p.19

a more liberal and philosophical religiosity, heavily influenced by John Locke (1632-1704). Locke's philosophy was, according to David Bebbington, 'the greatest motor of change'.<sup>82</sup> His work on individual rights included (some) equality for women: he considered that women could reason in the same way as men, which was all that was required for liberty. As such, communities of Dissent which incorporated Locke's philosophy often adopted his liberalism towards women. Further still, as the majority of these congregations had a greater number of women, leaders were obliged to rely on their female followers to spread the initial message, suggesting that they were the driving force behind recruitment in any new religious sect. More often than not, however, as these denominations became more prominent, they would slip back into more conservative ways, and begin to take back the positions granted to women.

Methodism provides one such example of this trend. The faith began with John Wesley's conversion in 1738, which prompted him and his brother George to engage in a 'conversion' project, impacting over half a million people from then until 1840.<sup>83</sup> As Knight and Mason have highlighted, Methodism had managed to free itself from the 'rigid, unbending orthodoxy of a male-dominated Anglicanism', and 'readily embraced female believers', even encouraging them as female preachers.<sup>84</sup> These preachers included Wesley's mother Susanna Wesley, whose sermons were renowned; Sarah Crosby (1729-1804); Mary Bosanquet-Fletcher (1739-1815) who founded the Methodist Society and School for Orphans in Leeds; and Elizabeth Tonkin, who began preaching at the tender age of nineteen. In one spirited sermon, Wesley defended and encouraged this female ministry:

But may not women as well as men, bear a part in this honorable service? Undoubtedly they may; nay, they ought—it is meet, right, and their bounden

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<sup>82</sup> David W. Babbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.74.

<sup>83</sup> Knight and Mason, p.31

<sup>84</sup> Knight and Mason, p.32

duty. Herein there is no difference: ‘there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.’ Indeed it has long passed for a maxim with many that ‘women are only to be seen, not heard.’ And accordingly many of them are brought up in such a manner as if they were only designed for agreeable playthings! But is this doing honor to the sex? Or is it a real kindness to them? No; it is the deepest unkindness; it is horrid cruelty; it is mere Turkish barbarity. And I know not how any woman of sense and spirit can submit to it. [...] Yield not to that vile bondage any longer. You, as well as men, are rational creatures. You like, like them, were made in the image of God: you are equally candidates for immortality.<sup>85</sup>

In this strikingly progressive sermon, Wesley refers to woman’s submission to man as ‘unkindness’, ‘cruelty’ and ‘barbarity’. Women are instead placed on equal footing to men. Relying on Genesis 1:27, rather than Genesis 2:21, woman was not made of man, but made together with man in the image of God (‘male and female created he them’<sup>86</sup>)—one and the same as her male counterpart. Readings such as this advocated and welcomed freedom for women, encouraging them to do God’s work autonomously. In this capacity, women in this early period were able to found Methodist societies, chapels and day schools; they led Sunday Schools, spoke at meetings, counselled and preached, as well as worked within a more typical philanthropic role. It was for liberalism (or “enthusiasm”) such as this that Methodism was attacked relentlessly throughout the eighteenth century, through a range of satirical and direct anti-Methodist publications. Six hundred of these were eventually compiled by the Reverend Richard Green in his aptly-named 1902 bibliography *Anti-Methodist Publications Issued During the Eighteenth Century*. The freedom within Methodism was, of course, limited, confined to a faith created and delineated by men. Theoretically speaking, women were only supposed to preach to other women and to do so required the written permission of the District Superintendent (a clergy person who supervised a district of churches). Nevertheless,

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<sup>85</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3, Sermons III: 71-114*, ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), pp.395-6.

<sup>86</sup> Genesis 1.27

according to Knight and Mason, Wesley's Methodism 'fostered a new image of woman that emphasized her role as guardian of moral standards and piety, rather than as a licentious Eve'.<sup>87</sup> Milton's pre-Fall Eve, and even the Lilith of Genesis, with all their spirited independence, could thus triumph above post-Fall Eve, with her aggressive sexuality and subsequent submission to man.

In 1870, Catherine Booth, wife of the Salvation Army founder William Booth, looked back on the early Methodist movement and reflected on the influence early women preachers had realised: 'these women have been amongst the most devoted and self-denying of the Lord's people, giving indisputable evidence by the purity and beauty of their lives that they were led by the Spirit of God.'<sup>88</sup> The aim of her pamphlet *Female Ministry; or Women's Right to Preach the Gospel* was to distance women from their association with Eve's immorality, and to emphasise her 'purity and beauty'. In a later passage she would directly attack the anti-feminist notion that woman was made of man and therefore must submit to him, as a 'false application', an 'unscriptural barrier', urging women to study and investigate for themselves.<sup>89</sup> As this pamphlet shows, the liberality of early Methodism did not last. Like William Godwin and several other influential male philosophers of the period, Wesley moved steadily towards traditionalism as he grew older. After his death in 1791, and perhaps in an attempt to appease those who continued to persecute them, the leaders of the Methodist movement returned to a more conservative view of religious female activity, barring women from many of their former roles, especially preaching.

More consistent in their approach to women were the Quakers, who had begun with an earnest (and perhaps more comprehensive) desire to include women. The

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<sup>87</sup> Knight and Mason, p.33

<sup>88</sup> Catherine Booth, 'FEMALE MINISTRY or Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel', <<http://www.crivoice.org/cbooth.html>> [accessed October 18 2010].

<sup>89</sup> Booth, <<http://www.crivoice.org/cbooth.html>> [accessed October 18 2010].

Society of Friends took for granted that they were all equal, joining and sharing in the Word of God. The movement appears to have stemmed from a defiant will to oppose traditional religious and social practise in the seventeenth century. The founder, George Fox, and his Society of Friends were regularly arrested throughout the mid-1600s for organising and attending unauthorised worship. This made them ever more determined to create and promote a religious organisation based on equality and freedom. Alongside the theologian Robert Barclay, they insisted that religious truth could be attained only through the individual and conversation with God, rather than through ordained ministers and consecrated houses of worship.<sup>90</sup> Women, therefore, quickly took up this opportunity, working openly as ministers, preachers and even publishing.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, they were fundamental in spreading the Word, making up the majority of Quaker missionaries.<sup>92</sup> Knight and Mason have described the equality found in early Quakerism as remarkable: ‘asserting as they did that the Holy Spirit recognized no difference between the sexes’.<sup>93</sup> This, in a sense, suggests that the Quaker reading of the story of Adam and Eve corresponds very much with the idea that as Eve was made of Adam, she must thus be equal to him; moreover, her calling to God’s work was irreprehensible and necessary. Unlike Methodism, Quakerism managed to more or less hold on to this Testimony of Equality throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Fox had, however, been forced to make some compromises when facing opposition as leader. These had included a separate meeting place for women (like the Methodists

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<sup>90</sup> Knight and Mason, p.61

<sup>91</sup> Knight and Mason have suggested that sixty-six percent of Quaker women were literate. Knight and Mason, p.61

<sup>92</sup> Coleen Clark indicates that the woman preacher would have typically travelled as one of a pair, usually with another woman. Coleen Clark, *The Role a Female Traveling Minister Played in Spreading Quaker Beliefs*, <[http://www.cornellcollege.edu/english/Blaugdone/essays/spread\\_beliefs.htm](http://www.cornellcollege.edu/english/Blaugdone/essays/spread_beliefs.htm) > [accessed 19 October 2010].

<sup>93</sup> Knight and Mason, p.60



women could therefore only preach to each other). As Mullet suggests, even they succumbed to a ‘creeping paralysis that effects even dissenting churches—oligarchic leadership, crypto-clericalism, legalism and formalism’,<sup>94</sup> which undoubtedly affected the participation of women.

With Quakerism and Methodism pushed to the fringes of society, and trying but failing to achieve any significant gender equality, women were still largely marginal within the religious sphere. As Chris Jones has highlighted, Dissent did not really undermine patriarchal authority:

Their claims for freedom of worship and equality of representation were accompanied by an emphasis on the hierarchical relationships of the sexes and the family even stricter than the aristocratic norm’.<sup>95</sup>

Yet, in spite of this, the French Revolution had shown that women were always prepared to take matters into their own hands, if things did not go as they wished. With the Reign of Terror, religion had become virtually outlawed in France. The state no longer provided financial aid or churches for any religious organisation. Moreover, no ministers could appear in public wearing religious garments and religious services were under strict surveillance.<sup>96</sup> The Protestant and Catholic faiths, especially, had suffered from this collapse and a large majority of the clergy from both had been executed. Religion had been forced underground, and many religious organisations would never recover. With no religious community, no religious instruction for their children and nothing dependable in a largely fractured society, French women found themselves compensating for this loss by taking on the role of

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<sup>94</sup> Mullet, p.202

<sup>95</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.7. See also Ann Frank Wake, ‘Indirect Dissent: “Landscaping” Female Agency in Amelia Alderson Opie’s Poems of the 1790s’, in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany, State University New York Press, 2001), p.264

<sup>96</sup> Burdette C. Poland, *French Protestantism and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.89

religious instructor within their own homes. As Winfred Stephens has argued, these women felt lost in this ‘giddy spiritual world’.<sup>97</sup> So while their husbands conformed to a new atheism, they were looking back to ‘the old faith and the old ritual’, practising ancient rites in secret while appearing to outwardly conform.<sup>98</sup> Family prayers and Bible study were at the forefront of this new religious movement, but religious rituals, such as the Sign of the Cross (a Catholic ritual), might also be incorporated. Eventually, as they had done at the beginning of the French Revolution when their families were threatened with starvation, these women began to organise and fight back. They refused to attend service with the Clergy that had been sworn in by the new constitution, they rioted, and, in one constituency, a new clergyman was mobbed by several angry women hurling stones.<sup>99</sup> These women were, essentially, fighting against a regime dictated to them by men. They were not prepared to recognise a man-appointed clergy; they demanded those that had been anointed only by God, effectively refusing to subordinate their faith to masculine power.

While the British sought to distance themselves from events in France (Linda Colley suggests that the British ‘regularly defined themselves in opposition to what they saw as French characteristics and manners’, and, as Stella Cottrell indicates, were constructing the French as ‘Other’),<sup>100</sup> British women were also quietly undertaking a religious revolution of their own. Looking across the Channel, and at the efforts of Methodism and Quakerism in their own land, they saw that religion could provide them with a platform from which to speak, a powerful tool that could be used and exploited to question their society and their own subordinate position

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<sup>97</sup> Winifred Stephens, *Women of the French Revolution*, (Kessinger Publishing, 2005)  
<<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=gomCZIEa-kwC>> [accessed January 2010], p.205

<sup>98</sup> Stephens, p.205

<sup>99</sup> Stephens, p. 205

<sup>100</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation: 1701-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.250. Stella Cottrell, ‘The Devil on Two-Sticks: Franco-phobia in 1803’, in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), p.269

within it. They could not escape the fact that religion had tremendous consequence for their own lives and the lives of their children and families—it affected the way in which they lived; it guided the laws of their society; it was everywhere they looked and in virtually everything that they read or heard. With the influence of religion so extreme and far-reaching, how could they ignore their degraded position within it? Furthermore, with its strong links to conservatism, they saw that religion afforded them more opportunity than they might otherwise achieve, and that they occupied a strong moral position, as virtuous guides to their husbands and families. The problem of Eve and Original Sin, however, kept getting in the way.

Surprisingly, hope had originally come from the Roman Catholics. It was in this tradition that a Second Eve could be found, a woman who was as pure and good as Eve was sexually errant and sinful—the Virgin Mary. The connection between her and Eve had come from the early theologians who had explored the ways in which Mary could be viewed as a New (or Second) Eve. Between 103 and 165AD, St Justin (Justin the Martyr) indicated in his *Dialogue with Trypho* that God had become incarnate of the Virgin, ‘in order that the disobedience caused by the serpent [and by extension Eve] might be destroyed in the same manner in which it had originated’.<sup>101</sup> More explicitly, also in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Irenaeus of Lyons, a Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, wrote *Adversus Haereses*, or *Against Heresies* (c.180AD), an attack on Gnosticism.<sup>102</sup> *Adversus Haereses* emphasised the traditional aspects of the Church, especially scripture, and developed the Eve-Mary parallel. The First Epistle to the Corinthians (thought to be a letter written by Paul of Tarsus/Paul the Apostle) had made a connection between Jesus and Adam (‘The first man Adam was made a

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<sup>101</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. by Thomas B Falls, ed. by Michael Slusser (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 100:4, p.152

<sup>102</sup> Gnosticism stemmed from Christianity. It was the belief that the cosmos had been created by an imperfect God, and incorporated other divine beings; it was the biggest threat to the early Christian Church.

living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit<sup>103</sup>), a suggestion that Irenaeus developed to incorporate Eve, so that he could explore the relationship between these two female figures:

With the seduction of that betrothed virgin Eve dissipated by the truth announced by the angel to Mary, also a betrothed virgin—as the first one was seduced by the word of an angel<sup>104</sup> to escape God and lie about his word, so the second was given the good news by the word of an angel to bear God and obey his word; and as the first was seduced into disobeying God, so the second was persuaded to obey God so that the virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve.<sup>105</sup>

Irenaeus recognised that the sins of Eve could be redeemed by the purity of Mary, expanding this further in Book III of the same text: ‘So too, the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by Mary’s obedience, for what the virgin Eve had bound by her unfaith, the virgin Mary loosed by her faith.’<sup>106</sup> Thus Mary became known as the New Eve.

By the Middle Ages, as Norris explains, the ‘contrasting images of Eve and Mary had long been established as touchstones for female behaviour’.<sup>107</sup> In the eleventh century, Saint Peter Damian (1007-1072 AD), a cardinal and reforming monk of Pope Gregory VII, would further the link between Eve and Mary, by use of their names:

That angel who greets you with ‘Ave’  
Reverses sinful Eva’s name.  
Lead us back, O holy Virgin,  
Whence the falling sinner came.<sup>108</sup>

By reversing the Latin equivalent of Eve’s name, Eva, and comparing it to ‘Ave’, the name with which the Angel Gabriel greeted Mary, Damian reinforced the idea that the

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<sup>103</sup> Corinthians 1.15: 45

<sup>104</sup> This corresponds with the idea that the devil is a fallen angel, a concept which was also incorporated into *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>105</sup> Robert McQueen Grant (ed.), *Irenaeus of Lyons* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.170-1

<sup>106</sup> Grant, p.141

<sup>107</sup> Norris, p.235

<sup>108</sup> As quoted by Norris, p.236

Virgin had come to represent the ‘obverse of all those negative characteristics that had become attached to the idea of woman, a chaste, selfless, benignly maternal influence in place of Eve’s self-seeking greed and sexuality’.<sup>109</sup>

The “cult” of the Virgin Mary, however, undoubtedly became more complex after the Reformation. As explored in chapter two, the new Church of England sought to distance itself from the chastity that had characterised the Catholic Church, which it considered unnatural and likely to produce perversity, but I have also suggested that the Virgin Mary could be used to unsettle gender boundaries: in being “unpolluted” (having conceived as a virgin) she is inadequate as a feminine exemplum.<sup>110</sup> As will become apparent, this complication is something that Southcott would take full advantage of in her own construction of New Eve. In Protestant thought, however, the virtue of marriage had become more appropriate, making Mary’s virginity problematic. According to Clark, ‘Eve rather than the Virgin Mary was the most potent archetype of woman, a symbol whose roots lay deep in religion and popular culture’.<sup>111</sup> As such, Protestant doctrine focused on the Virgin Mary’s unique position as the mother of God, and her obedience, turning her into little more than a domestic role model.

#### **4.2: Joanna Southcott’s New Eve**

In reading the scriptures so closely, Southcott undoubtedly discovered one very important thing: unlike the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the churches of Dissent lacked a female figurehead. There were martyrs such as Joan Waste, Margaret Polley, Agnes Prest and Agnes Silverside, burnt or hanged for

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<sup>109</sup> Norris, p.236

<sup>110</sup> See Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Jan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.49.

<sup>111</sup> Clark, p.111

refusing to denounce transubstantiation or for reading the New Testament, but other than Eve and Mary Magdalene (whose position as a prostitute was equally problematic), they did not have their own version of the Virgin Mary. Southcott saw the opportunity, and began to forge her own, with subtle allusions to a connection between Eve, herself and the Virgin Mary:

And didst thou not provoke the woman to wrath at first, when thou deceives her with lies and brought misery upon her? Didst thou not provoke the woman to anger and indignation against thee, when thou workest in the hearts of men by thy hellish power to crucify her Son?<sup>112</sup>

In this answer to Satan in *Dispute*, Southcott makes no distinction between the woman Eve and the woman Mary. They are, effectively, one and the same person—the connection between them is deliberately fuzzy. In similar passages, it is never really clear whether Southcott is discussing the birth of Christ, the Second Coming (her own Shiloh), or both.<sup>113</sup> Certainly, Shiloh’s birth can be plotted throughout the prophecies, from *Strange Effects of Faith*, up until her revelation of her pregnancy, suggesting that Shiloh had been on her mind from the very beginning. This greatly obscures her explanation and thoughts concerning the birth of Christ:

For thou’lt rejoice to see the Man-Child born,  
Some men thou’lt pity, others thou wilt scorn;  
But thou wilt find that thy revenge is sweet,  
To see the serpent fall before thy feet,  
And see the glittering stars appear to shine;  
Thy travail pains no longer then thou’lt mind [...]<sup>114</sup>

Here in *Strange Effects of Faith*, the fifth book, Southcott refers to Revelation 12.1-5, largely believed to be the prophecy of Jesus’ (the man child’s) birth:

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<sup>112</sup> Southcott, ‘Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness’, <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK11.htm>> [accessed 5 November 2010]

<sup>113</sup> “Shiloh” comes from Genesis 49:10: ‘The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*’, and refers to the coming of the Messiah.

<sup>114</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; with Remarkable Prophecies, made in 1792, &c., of Things Which Are to Come: Fifth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/Book5.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2010]

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered [...] And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.<sup>115</sup>

Southcott's version, however, is set in the future tense, as though it has not yet occurred. Moreover, the Messianic vision of the 'woman clothed with the sun', would be an image to which Southcott would return repeatedly, casting herself in the role of the woman, the mother of the Messiah. Some religious believers did (and still do) believe in the Second Coming, looking to passages such as Revelation 12 to confirm this. In *Strange Effects of Faith* however, the image of the fallen serpent, trodden under foot, is a clear reference to Mary who was typically depicted with the serpent beneath her feet in art. As such, there is little distinction between Southcott and Mary—both are represented as the Second Eve—it is, as before, consciously fuzzy.

Even this is not consistent. At other times, Mary is only implicit—her presence is felt, but she is never identified. In the third book of *Strange Effects of Faith*, Eve can be traced in the line 'she did the serpent first obey', while Mary is only alluded to in the word 'Mother'. Moreover, she and *Eve* seem to be the same person:

'Twas by a woman first the deed was done;  
Because she did the serpent first obey,  
To bring it back must turn the other way;  
The Mother she was surely of the Jews,  
But now the Bride I'll of the Gentiles choose.<sup>116</sup>

In point of fact, there are three women in this passage: Eve, the fallen woman and mother of mankind (but not necessarily known as mother of the Jews); Mary the mother of God, a Jewish mother, and known as 'Mary, our Mother' to Christians; and Southcott herself—the bride of God and future mother of Shiloh. Just as Eve gave

<sup>115</sup> Revelation 12.1-5

<sup>116</sup> Southcott, 'Strange Effects of Faith: Third Part'

<<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK3.htm>> [accessed 3 November 2010]

knowledge of sin, Southcott will give knowledge of redemption, and just as Mary was the mother of God, so Southcott will be. She simultaneously connects herself to, and considers herself to be more important than both. But, importantly, Mary can not really be distinguished from either.

By aligning herself with the Virgin Mary, Southcott undoubtedly caused confusion and concern. Some years later, Southcott published a collection of letters she had sent to various people who examined her writings. In this, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications’, Southcott responds to a letter from a woman who had read the above passage from *Strange Effects of Faith*, and ‘having come to the part where Joanna is mentioned as the Bride in Revelations, was afraid to read further’.<sup>117</sup> Similar letters reveal that readers were afraid of reading prophecies which appeared blasphemous— by suggesting that she was God’s bride, and later, the mother of God, it is not difficult to see why some might have been anxious. In response, Southcott replies that ‘it was not more wonderful for the Lord to visit the Virgin Mary to bear a Son, than to visit a Woman by HIS SPIRIT to claim the PROMISE made in the Fall to bruise the Serpent’s head’.<sup>118</sup> Her account in *True Explanation*, written to allay these fears outlines her ambiguous position to Mary:

But I do tell you that I was here—  
And perfect like the Jews  
Do men begin in every thing,  
For all they judge to high;  
And so MY MOTHER they condemn’d  
And judg’d that she did lie[.]<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* (London: Printed by S. Rousseau, Wood Street, Spa Fields, 1804), <http://www.googlebooks.co.uk> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.87

<sup>118</sup> Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* <<http://www.googlebooks.co.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.87

<sup>119</sup> Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* <<http://www.googlebooks.co.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.88



Further arguing that ‘if they say I came that way, | [...] Then can men blame, or will they shame, | If I stoop’d so low, | Of the mean Virgin to be born’.<sup>120</sup> Here Southcott does acknowledge Mary as the mother of God, but more importantly, the passage provides justification for her own visitations: if God had visited a lowly Jewish girl, why could he not visit a mature woman of sixty-three, from an equally obscure background? Mary’s humble beginnings provided Southcott with a useful comparison with which she could measure the doubts of her followers, and the accusations of the unbelievers, with the condemnation Mary (and her son) had received. Christians had hitherto enjoyed a sense of superiority over the Jews, who were accused (and persecuted) for putting the Messiah to death— Southcott realised that the Gentiles would not want to find themselves in a similar perilous position.

In the same verse, however, Southcott returns once more to Revelation, to suggest that although Mary may have been the Mother of God, she is not the ‘woman clothed with the sun’, or the Promised Woman from Genesis 3.15, who will bruise the head of satan.<sup>121</sup>

From her I did appear;  
 And though the MAKER of you all,  
 I called her MOTHER there.  
 Then Mother see if she must be,  
 The Mother plac’d by Heaven,  
 If you weigh deep the Trinity,  
 The Woman must be given;  
 To free you all from ADAM’S FALL.  
 Her PROMISE she *must claim*,  
 I made a MOTHER for you all,  
 And called so to Man;  
 Then know, the BRIDE must be applied,  
 That I have known so here,  
 To claim the PROMISE as I’ve said  
 And then the PERFECT HEIR  
 She makes of ME, all flesh shall see,

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<sup>120</sup> Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* <<http://www.googlebooks.co.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.88

<sup>121</sup> Genesis 3.15

A MOTHER then for all!<sup>122</sup>

While Southcott did not deny that the Virgin Mary was significant in the sense that she was the Mother of God, she did not believe that she was the mother of mankind, the woman who would free mankind from the Fall. In her view, the Adamic Covenant (the “seed” covenant of Adam and Eve, known as the Covenant of Grace) had yet to be fulfilled—and could only be fulfilled by herself. Clearly, however, Southcott was uneasy about calling herself ‘Mother’ (possibly in fear of appearing blasphemous), and employed the alternative word ‘Bride’. Usefully, the term ‘Bride’ also invoked Revelation 21:9-10, in which St. John is shown ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife’<sup>123</sup>—suggesting that Southcott was the literal embodiment of the Christian church. The more she wrote, the more daring she became with this idea, and by the eighth book of *Strange Effects of Faith*, she had reported that Jesus himself was effectively proposing marriage: ‘And to the bride I’ll surely cleave, | Father now I’ll leave; | For to complete my Father’s will, | The woman shall the serpent chill’.<sup>124</sup>

As early as 1799, in a letter to a ‘reverend gentleman’, she had hinted at this possibility, again invoking *The Book of Revelation*:

I shall begin with the wonders John saw in heaven. Are they to be fulfilled in heaven, or on earth? If you say, on earth; I answer, then the wonder of the woman travailing in birth, and crying to be delivered, must take place on earth; and the wonders which were seen in heaven by John, must come on earth to men. If you say nay, they are past already, as some simply dispute of the Virgin Mary and our Saviour; I ask, when was this vision seen, was it before our Saviour was born, or since? Your answer must be, since. Then I ask, if Satan could appear in heaven to Christ to destroy him there, or the Virgin Mary could be travailing with child after Christ ascended into glory and

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<sup>122</sup>Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* <<http://www.googlebooks.co.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.89.

<sup>123</sup> Revelation 21:9-10

<sup>124</sup> Southcott, ‘Strange Effects of Faith: Being a Continuation of Joanna Southcott’s Prophecies of Things Which Are to Come’ <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK8.htm>> [accessed 3 November 2010].

all was finished? Then if you cannot make it good that it is passed, it must be to come.<sup>125</sup>

Southcott takes the view (aforementioned) that the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ has yet to appear, which explains the use of the future tense in the fifth book of *Strange Effects of Faith*. As such, her plan was not to dispute with the Virgin Mary, or to suggest that her son was not the Son of God, but to show that as she had not freed mankind from Original Sin, or ‘bruise[d] the serpent’s head’, she had done little to improve the reputation of women or to distance them from Eve. In *Strange Effects of Faith*, book three, her suggestion that Mary and Eve were almost the same, would further compound this view: Southcott believed herself to be the ‘TRUE MOTHER’, come to ‘free the whole for MAN’.<sup>126</sup>

Hopkins has suggested that the revelation that she was pregnant with the Second Coming in the sixty-fifth year of her age was a last desperate attempt to galvanize her following, which had waned considerably after the initial flurry of support.<sup>127</sup> Although this is certainly possible, Southcott’s pregnancy represented much more than just desperation. It was the culmination of all that she had been working for, the triumph of woman over Satan and over man. It would be a woman who would herald the Second Coming, of a boy, Shiloh; and he would be ‘preferred as a PRINCE and a SAVIOUR’.<sup>128</sup> This episode in Southcott’s writing appears like the moment of Eve’s awakening after she has tasted the fruit which opens her eyes: Southcott’s understanding of religious female agency, her mission as a woman, was coming to fruition.

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<sup>125</sup> Southcott, ‘Strange Effects of Faith: Third Part’

<<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK3.htm>> [accessed 3 November 2010]

<sup>126</sup> Southcott, ‘True Explanation of the Bible, Revealed by Divine Communications, Part One’, in *Life and Works* <<http://www.googlebooks.co.uk>> [accessed 10 October 2010], p.92

<sup>127</sup> Hopkins, p.199

<sup>128</sup> As quoted by Hopkins, p.200

There had been no coincidences in Southcott's life. It had been no accident that she took up her new profession in the 1790s, as Methodism descended into conservatism, and women fought for their right to religious expression in France. In this early period, Southcott was still working in domestic service, in her home town of Gittisham, near Exeter. Hopkins has described her sudden departure from the conventional, into the world of prophesying as something of a mid-life crisis, when she was forty-two years old.<sup>129</sup> Even throughout childhood, however, she had always been interested in scripture and often sought spiritual significance in everyday events. It is also possible that Southcott could not find religious expression in conventional congregations, and looked further afield for inspiration. She had been brought up Anglican, and in the early 1790s she had attempted to convert to Methodism, but was met with rejection from the Exeter society, who were uneasy about her visions. Throughout her career, Southcott would also appeal to the clergy of the Church of England, but, as the Church of England was often the site of male resistance, she was regularly rebuffed.

Despite a number of suitors, Southcott had never married, apparently failing to reconcile her strong religious scruples with her sexual urges.<sup>130</sup> She could also not overcome the sense that she had fallen beneath her proper station in life, a feeling that she inherited from her father.<sup>131</sup> By 1792 she was regularly hearing voices and seeing visions. This might have gone unnoticed, had it not been for the fact that a series of her prophecies were actually fulfilled. In the late 1790s she accurately predicted several bad harvests and then blamed the communities for not taking her prophecies seriously: 'as men had refused to hear the words of the Lord, so he would refuse to

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<sup>129</sup> Hopkins, p.17

<sup>130</sup> Hopkins, p.12

<sup>131</sup> According to Hopkins, William Southcott felt that he had 'fallen a long distance from his rightful place in the world', telling his children an extraordinary sequence of misadventures which 'had blighted his prospects of a large inheritance from his grandfather'. Hopkins, p.4

hear their prayers.’<sup>132</sup> By 1800, Southcott had achieved a reputation of such magnitude ‘that farmers based all their plans on her prophecies’.<sup>133</sup> Soon after, she accurately predicted the death of Bishop Buller, who had received a letter from Southcott in 1792, and ignored it.<sup>134</sup> Unsurprisingly, those that did not believe that her prophecies were from God accused her of witchcraft: prophecies of bad harvests and deaths must have come from the devil. She remained a notorious local celebrity until 1801, when she took her savings to a printer in Exeter and published *Strange Effects of Faith*, a collection of communications, ‘messages with which the Spirit bombarded her ceaselessly—bolstering her new self-awareness, transmitting information about future events, annotating daily occurrences.’<sup>135</sup> This first publication was initially only circulated amongst selected acquaintance, but over the next thirteen years Southcott would publish over sixty-five pamphlets and books, and hundreds more manuscripts.

These publications caused an even deeper division between Southcott and the Established Church. Her followers agreed that the objection was not with Southcott’s prophecies, but with her person: ‘An untutored female to be the conveyance of divine truths was repugnant to worldly wisdom, repugnant to learned pride.’<sup>136</sup> As Milton’s interpretation of Genesis had shown, the Bible could and would be used as a patriarchal tool to keep women in their place. It was at this point, in the early 1800s, that Southcott published her conversation with the devil—her most articulated feminist vision to date. *Dispute Between a Woman and the Powers of Darkness* was first and foremost written as an attempt to quiet Southcott’s critics, particularly those which believed her words came directly from the devil. More importantly however,

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<sup>132</sup> As quoted by Hopkins, p.27

<sup>133</sup> Hopkins, p.28

<sup>134</sup> Hopkins, p.28

<sup>135</sup> Hopkins, p.33

<sup>136</sup> As quoted by Hopkins, p.59

she appears to go back to the Garden of Eden, put herself in the position of Eve, and recreate the scene between Eve and the serpent. She recognised that if women, like herself, were going to achieve any credibility within the religious community, they would have to shake off the “sins” of Eve and embrace the independence of Lilith.

Other than *Dispute*, Southcott’s writings are saturated with references to Adam and Eve—it is clearly a subject to which she found herself repeatedly drawn. In *Dispute*, Southcott sought to distance herself from Eve, by recreating the Temptation, but in other publications she felt a need to address the problem more explicitly. In *Strange Effects of Faith*, part 5, she interprets a vision seen by Morrison (one of the original men sent to interrogate Southcott). The vision was of a fiery serpent, which twisted and turned in the dark, and a golden or fiery sword, which had two stars on either side of the point, and gleamed in different colours. Morrison was afraid of the serpent, but soon found the courage to bid it go behind him; which it did, and was soon lost.<sup>137</sup> The obvious connection between this serpent and the devil (it is as if from the fires of hell), allowed Southcott to address Eve’s temptation directly:

And now my Father’s words I’ll surely clear;  
 He said a helpmate he’d for man prepare,  
 That in the end she should complete his bliss;  
 And can my Father’s just decrees e’er miss?  
 No—earth and hell may now combine in vain:  
 The fiery serpent may in *man* [my emphasis] contain;  
 But soon you’ll find my glittering sword appear,  
 And the two stars upon the top see clear,  
 That at my coming I’ll the woman free—  
 She cast her blame on Satan; not on me;  
 Then sure upon her I’ll not cast the blame.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; with Remarkable Prophecies Made in 1792, &c., of Things Which are to Come: Fifth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com~joannasouthcott/Book5.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2010].

<sup>138</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; with Remarkable Prophecies Made in 1792, &c., of Things Which are to Come: Fifth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com~joannasouthcott/Book5.htm>> [accessed 6 November 2010].

Southcott pictures herself as the sword, produced by God to fight evil on earth. This is, specifically, a male evil, witnessed by a man, Morrison. Reading Genesis, she outlines the promise made to Adam that he would have a ‘helpmate’ in the Garden of Eden. Of course, general interpretation of Genesis, as outlined in *Paradise Lost*, suggested that Eve had not been as helpful as was hoped. But Eve was more astute than might be realised, insists Southcott, and her understanding holds the key to man’s release from Original Sin: whereas Adam had blamed Eve for the Fall (and by extension God, because He created her), Eve had seen the truth of the Temptation and blamed only Satan. This wisdom, Southcott suggests, separates woman from man, and releases her from the burden of the Fall. Man, on the other hand, continues to operate under the same delusion: ‘Had he told the truth, he had then shamed, cast, and bound the devil: but alas! His prosperity have felt the falsehood [...] The devil has reigned to this time triumphant’.<sup>139</sup> By contrast, woman could, according to Southcott, be more useful, more crucial, than man could ever be in the fight against evil.

In book six, she continues with the same theme, and takes advantage of a flaw in Adam’s (and man’s) suggestion that Eve was to blame for their downfall. Drawing attention, once again, to the idea that Eve was ‘the bone taken from man, and made [...] in man’s likeness’, Southcott argues that Eve was the same as Adam, and therefore did not act entirely independently:

Here is appears the man cast the blame wrong, by blaming the Lord in saying, “the woman thou gavest me deceived me.” He ought to have gone further, and laid the axe of truth to the root of the corrupt tree; and said, “The serpent beguiled *us* and *we* did eat it”.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; With Remarkable Prophecies, Made in 1792, & c., Of Things which are to come: Sixth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/Book6.htm>> [accessed 20 November 2010].

<sup>140</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; With Remarkable Prophecies, Made in 1792, & c., Of Things Which are to come: Sixth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/Book6.htm>> [accessed 20 November 2010]

The implication is that Eve cannot be held accountable, because she was made entirely of Adam, and they are therefore mutually accountable. They are, as husband and wife, a unified being, indistinct from each other. Here, Southcott alludes to the idea of true companionship and mutuality between men and women. As Christine Roulston explains, a new vision of marriage was emerging in the Romantic period, born out of the Enlightenment, in which the values of love, companionship and mutuality were paramount:<sup>141</sup> it had the power to undo the language of obedience and inequality in critical ways.<sup>142</sup> Romantic women writers repeatedly emphasised mutuality in their work as a way of undermining female subordination. As explored in the introduction, Anna Letitia Barbauld had done just that in her ‘The Rights of Woman’. Thus, at the heart of Southcott’s argument lies the idea of unity; the Fall caused a breach between men and women that has never healed. Through her, the Promised Woman, there is hope that ‘order and unity’ will once again be manifested in the ‘man-woman’.<sup>143</sup>

Southcott foresaw the possibilities if an understanding of equality between men and women could be introduced: if men and women could be equal, mankind would have greater access to heaven. In the second book of *Strange Effects*, she had reinterpreted St. Athanasius’s creed to this effect, highlighting the “bone of his bone” argument, and inserting mankind into the doctrine of the Trinity:

The Godhead of the Father and the Son,  
And of the Holy Ghost, these three are one  
[..]  
And woman by the Holy Ghost shall come  
To full perfection, equal with the man;  
Bone of his bone, and flesh like his become,

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<sup>141</sup> Christine Roulston, *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth Century England and France* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), p.209

<sup>142</sup> Roulston, p.50

<sup>143</sup> Southcott, ‘The Strange Effects of Faith; With Remarkable Prophecies, Made in 1792, & c., Of Things which are to come: Sixth Part’ <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/Book6.htm>> [accessed 20 November 2010].



Dividing substance, but in heart as one;  
 The seed that's planted in the virgin's womb,  
 Not of herself, doth to perfection come;  
 Nor no perfection could there be in man,  
 Till by God's wisdom they were join'd as one;  
 Made heirs of God and Christ, and heirs of heaven  
 Shall be their seed, when the whole lump is leaven'd.  
 So now your Saviour's words you plainly see,  
 They are made perfect in this Trinity;  
 None is before nor after, either then,  
 Because in God they are all perfect men.<sup>144</sup>

Southcott uses the wisdom of the Trinity, the idea that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons in one God (they share the one essence), to demonstrate how woman, made of man's rib, is of the same essence as man. It is, of course, the same fuzzy notion—'male and female created he them'<sup>145</sup>—noted by the Methodists and Quakers in their bid to undermine the marginalisation of women in religious spheres. Crucially, this appears to bring us back to chapter one of this thesis, as it offers an alternative way of avoiding gender other than through the heterosexual matrix (as observed in Macaulay's *Letters on Education* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*): if man and woman are united in this way, as one and the same person, both can be seen to evade gender, thus releasing woman from subordination and man from domination. Southcott is clearly engaging with a discourse beyond the theological. As a further complication, Southcott looks to the birth of God's son, the moment where God becomes man, as the moment when man might also become part of the Holy Trinity. Christians, particularly those of the Catholic and Protestant traditions, believed that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, had, in assuming human nature, become both God *and* truly human. Moreover, as man was created in God's image, his spirit, or soul, could be thought of as a triune being. Man and God were, therefore, inextricably connected. Woman's

<sup>144</sup> Southcott, 'The Strange Effects of Faith: Second Part'  
 <<http://www.btinternet.com/~joannasouthcott/BOOK2.htm>> [accessed 20 November 2010]

<sup>145</sup> Genesis 1:27

role within this is, thought Southcott, was equally, if not more important. It is through her that God had (or would) become man: she was the enabler. Southcott can thus be seen to shift the position of women several times: she is of man; she is the same as man; she is God's vessel and thus above man.

Southcott's reinvention of Eve is distinct from More's. It engages with scripture, manipulating the properties of the Bible, interpreting prophecies, psalms and revelations, often to her own advantage. It specifically tackles understandings of the Virgin Mary as the Second Eve, finding ways to undermine her status, and confuse her relationship with Eve and Southcott herself. Her aim is to justify the position of women (like herself) within religious spheres, to distance woman from the Fall, and to redeem her. This ambition is shared with More. Each approach is, however, different. In the second half of the set, More's New Eve, I will show how, unlike Southcott, More engages almost solely with intellectual representations of Eve, concentrating on *Paradise Lost*, and indirect understandings of the Bible, thus critiquing those who rely on interpretations of scripture. Her New Eve will be a fictional character, created as a role model for young women, who will explore the prejudices and limitations of the men who guide her religious education and understanding of Eve. In so doing, the New Eve set will measure the ways in which Southcott and More move within this shared value towards a common goal; to forge a new position for women as spiritual leaders, to fuzzify Eve so that traditional understandings of her role within the Fall are lost, and thus bruise the head of the serpent.

### 4.3: Hannah More's New Eve

The fuzzification of women writers in eighteenth century is often confounded by their attitude towards each other. Disputes can be traced between Wollstonecraft and More, Yearsley and More and Barbauld and Wollstonecraft.<sup>146</sup> Southcott and More did not engage in a public dispute, and undoubtedly mixed in very different circles. It is likely that they were never even introduced. Yet, Southcott is conspicuous by her absence in More's (surviving) letters and work. More hated controversial literature, both religious and secular, and had spoken privately of those who 'advance dangerous absurdities' which blight the truth of scripture.<sup>147</sup> In January 1817, she had written to a friend that she had been given some religious tracts which she read aloud to her sisters:

they were so disturbed that they would not hear another word [...] There it stopt, and nothing, no not even the wish to answer, could make me wade through another line of such unparalleled blasphemy. Is there no power in magistrates to punish the venders?<sup>148</sup>

The tracts in question might have come from one of Southcott's 'seven judges' and an ardent supporter, George Turner, and his *Book of Wonders*, which had been published around this time. It had continued in the same vein as Southcott, repeating and developing aspects of her visions, concentrating on the coming of Shiloh. Two years had passed since Southcott's death, and her supporters' initial disappointment had abated, prompting them to begin preaching and publishing once again. More's abhorrence of such religious sects is unmistakable. In a passage from *Cælebs* she might even be seen to allude to Southcott, describing one female character who often

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<sup>146</sup> More is known for refusing to read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and for her argument with Ann Yearsley, whom she helped to raise from obscurity to be a poet but who later accused her of siphoning off some of the income from her poetry. Many have suggested that Barbauld's poem 'The Rights of Woman' is a direct attack on Wollstonecraft.

<sup>147</sup> Hannah More, Letter to Mr Harford, Barley Wood, Feb 22, 1816, in *Memoirs of the life and correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, by William Roberts (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1835), III, p.445

<sup>148</sup> More, IV, p.5

misread scripture: ‘she was ill informed, governed by feelings and impulses, rather than by the plain express rule of scripture [...] she interpreted it [scripture] her own way; built opinions on insulated texts; did not compare scripture with scripture’ (*Cælebs*, p.68). This was an accusation regularly utilised against Southcott, who appeared to lack a more rigorous understanding of the Bible, and did not explore the nuances of scripture in the way that More approved. It is highly likely, therefore, that More sought to distance herself from Southcott’s publications, and the surrounding controversy.

That is not to say, however, that Southcott and More did not share radical views. Like Southcott, More was born an Anglican. Her father, a schoolmaster, had been brought up Presbyterian (from the Calvinist theological tradition), but had converted to the Church of England before More was born. As More’s biographer, William Roberts, notes, she had received an extensive education alongside her five sisters, which included Latin and Mathematics. Jacob More had recognised his daughter’s keen intellect but had been somewhat nervous of her flair for Mathematics (like Princess Charlotte and Queen Elizabeth), and had soon ended these lessons.<sup>149</sup> Such an ambivalent approach to female education would have implications for More in later life, when she would often struggle to reconcile her thirst for knowledge with domesticity—a feeling that women ought to be more retiring. Indeed, the contradictions that surface in More’s writing, make everything about her—from her thoughts on education to her religious beliefs—difficult to pinpoint, and many of her contemporaries, and even critics today, have struggled to define her. Despite this, scholars have almost consistently pigeon-holed More as conservative—unable to recognise the reasons for these contradictions, her inherently Fuzzy nature as a

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<sup>149</sup> Roberts, I, p.12

religious writer and feminist. Anne Stott, one critic who has contributed to an important re-evaluation of More's life, has noted that More's founding of the Bristol Auxiliary in 1810 gave her views of female philanthropy (particularly that advocated in *Cælebs*), practical application. But as these 'spawned' into Ladies' Associations, conservatives fretted at this 'Amazonian' conduct, a 'blatant display of the unfeminine qualities of "zeal and boldness", rather than [...] softened diffidence and female modesty'.<sup>150</sup> More recently, however, Robert Hole has suggested that it is kinder to dismiss anything More wrote after 1806, because it is characterised by religious conservatism.<sup>151</sup> Yet More courted controversy again and again in this latter period, regularly engaging in politics and often derided as too "Methodist", or liberal, in her religious views and activities.

As Southcott's history has shown religion could provide women with great influence and prestige, a powerful social position, albeit within a conventional framework. In More's case, the religious revival which characterised her later years did not diminish her feminism: the two came together to produce a character that was both pious and enlightened. There is no doubt, however, that religion transformed More's life. In the 1780s, her mild Anglican convictions were rejuvenated by Evangelicalism, although she never relinquished the orthodox doctrines of the Church of England. Thereafter, her works took on a clear religious quality, and she shied away from the colourful lure of London, in favour of a more quiet and retired life in Cowslip Green, Somerset. From here, she continued to engage in public life, most famously as an active abolitionist, and, where her religious convictions permitted, she continued to write on political and otherwise controversial subjects. It was post-1780 when More finally addressed female education in her hugely successful *Strictures on*

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<sup>150</sup> Anne Stott, *Hannah More: the first Victorian* (Oxford; New York; Oxford University Press, 2003), p.289

<sup>151</sup> Robert Hole (ed.), *Selected Writings of Hannah More* (London: William Pickering, 1996), p.xv.

*the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), which, in spite of its aversion to Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman*, encouraged an extensive education for women. As outlined in chapter two, *Hints towards forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805), written for Princess Charlotte, went even further, promoting an education system that included some study of the law, philosophy, politics and rejected the 'pretty avocations which occupy a modern lady's time'.<sup>152</sup> Further writings engaged with the French Revolution (though in a strictly anti-Jacobin vein) and the education of the poor.<sup>153</sup>

Unsurprisingly, More's interest in controversial subjects and active participation in public life caused argument within some religious circles. In the late 1790s she and her sisters had established twelve charity schools across the Mendips in Somerset. Evening classes for adults often included scriptural readings and sermons, which led to accusations of Methodism from the local communities. In 1800, Thomas Bere, a curate of Blagdon, published a vicious attack on More's schools, accusing her of Methodism, which, given the fierce satire that surrounded Methodism, was perceived by many as a vicious insult. There followed a further attack by two clergymen, William Shaw and Edward Spencer, who dubbed More a "She-Bishop", a symbol of Evangelical aggression. As Juster has outlined, those women who dabbled in religious controversy faced a formidable alliance of writers who had the will and resources 'to bury genuine discontent under an avalanche of hearty condescension.'<sup>154</sup> The few who did manage to break through into the popular press were subjected to 'vicious commentary', 'that denied the very possibility that a woman might

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<sup>152</sup> Hannah More, *Hints towards forming the Character of a Young Princess* (London, printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1805), p.18 & p.25.

<sup>153</sup> More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* have been highlighted as a badly masked attempt at social control, but Bebbington has defended William Wilberforce and More from this, by suggesting that the tracts did not just outline the duties of the poor, but the obligations of the more wealthy, (Bebbington, p.69).

<sup>154</sup> Juster, p.217.

legitimately act or speak for others, God included'.<sup>155</sup> As a self-professed prophetess with a large following, Southcott had, like More, received a large amount of this commentary. *The Imposter or Obstetric Dispute*, drawn by George Cruikshank in 1814, highlights the disdain with which she was treated by the press and the controversy which surrounded her (fig. 4).

Fig. 4: 'The Imposter, or, Obstetric Dispute', by George Cruikshank (NLM).



Stott has attempted to explain the controversy that surrounded More's seemingly traditionalist ideology, which was distinct from Southcott's apocalyptic Scripture-writing, yet still treated with equal derision. In her view, although 'More's commitment to Evangelicalism was total and unquestioned, her instincts were for tolerance and inclusiveness'.<sup>156</sup> In July 1803, following the Blagdon controversy, More would encapsulate this problem in her diary:

My soul is sick of religious controversy. How I hate the little narrowing names of Arminian and Calvinist! Christianity is a broad basis. *Bible* Christianity is what I love; that does not insist on opinions indifferent in

<sup>155</sup> Juster, p. 217

<sup>156</sup> Stott, p.283

themselves; – a Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance, and faith in Christ, and which after summing up all the Evangelical graces, declares that the greatest of these is charity.<sup>157</sup>

The ‘instinct’ of which Stott speaks, or the ‘charity’ as it is called by More herself, includes not only religious toleration, but also equality for women, and even, to some extent, for the poor. As she admitted to her friend Frances Boscawen, ‘I desire to embrace all mankind as my brethren, and cordially wish all kingdoms, nations, languages and individuals were united by the ties of human affection and of Christian charity’.<sup>158</sup> It would, unfortunately, lead time and again to misinterpretation.

By 1808, at the age of sixty-three, More was far from retiring from public life. Her career was, conversely, taking quite a different direction, into the realms of fiction writing. *Cælebs* came three years after *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess*, which had been more in keeping with character of previous works. It describes the journey of a wealthy young bachelor, Cælebs, who seeks a wife, an ideal woman who will be both intellectual and domestic. Much of the narrative is set in Hampshire, at the house of Mr. Stanley, one of the daughters of whom he chooses as his wife. The move into novel writing was surprising. More had for many years attacked novels for the ‘frightful’ ability to influence women with their ‘passion and intrigue in bewitching colours’, which lay ‘too intensely on the feelings’.<sup>159</sup> In *Cælebs*, too, she touches on this through the character of Mrs Stanley, who laments that ‘novels, with a very few admirable exceptions [...] [have systematically taught the reader] unresisting submission to feeling, because the feeling was commonly represented as irresistible’ (*Cælebs*, p.146). More was far

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<sup>157</sup> Quoted by Roberts, p.202. Also quoted by Stott, p.284

<sup>158</sup> Roberts, II, p.201

<sup>159</sup> As quoted by Patricia Demers, ‘Introduction’, in *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*, by Hannah More, ed. by Patricia Demers, p.8.



from the only critic to think so. Anna Letitia Barbauld had similarly argued that the novel produced wasted emotion, emotion with no proper object:

in these writings our sensibility is strongly called forth without any possibility of exerting itself in virtuous action, and those emotions, which we shall never feel again with equal force, are wasted without advantage. Nothing is more dangerous than to let virtuous impressions of any kind pass through the mind without producing their proper effect.<sup>160</sup>

More knew that any attempt to write a novel would have to avoid, at all costs, passion and intrigue. It would have to be moral, chaste, pious and unadventurous. It was, as she put in her preface, to show how ‘religion maybe brought to mix with the concerns of *ordinary life*’ [my emphasis] (*Cælebs*, p.39). Unfortunately for More, this meant that she risked tedium. A reviewer in *The Christian Observer*, an Anglican Evangelical magazine associated with the Clapham Sect, was one of many to recognise that *Cælebs* was not really a novel, lacking a proper ‘hero’ and ‘defective in variety’, a fault felt in the dialogues, ‘where the whole company old and young, belles and beaux, gentle and simple, talk as if sentences, cut into lengths, had been delivered out to them from a magazine.’<sup>161</sup> Her style is thus comparable to Southcott’s writings, which were similarly written as dialogues, and reminded the reader of conversational prayer.<sup>162</sup> More might have felt able to forgive the reviewer for his criticism, had it not been that the critic then went on to say that he found *Cælebs* ‘given to prosing... not very delicate... apt to be vulgar’.<sup>163</sup> More damagingly, the critic had also suggested that one passage seemed to verge on the indecent.<sup>164</sup> The criticism wounded More deeply, and, despite the success of *Cælebs* (it made her two thousand

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<sup>160</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, *An Inquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite Agreeable Sensations* (1773) <<http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/womenpoets/barbauld/inquiry.html>> [accessed 2 December 2010].

<sup>161</sup> ‘Christian Observer, 8’ (Feb 1809). As quoted by Demers, p.401.

<sup>162</sup> Dialogues were a defining feature of the Enlightenment, as seen in the works of David Hume, Gottfried Leibniz and Adam Smith.

<sup>163</sup> As quoted by Stott, p.279

<sup>164</sup> As quoted by Stott, p.279

pounds in the first year alone), she never wrote another novel. Indeed, Stott has described *Cælebs* as first and foremost a ‘work of religious controversy’,<sup>165</sup> implying that More’s sentiments were not simple, Christian values, but something much more contentious. Conversely, however, More had suggested in her preface that she was content only ‘with the humble hope that no part of these volumes will be found injurious to the important [religious] interests’ (*Cælebs*, p.40). So what was it in *Cælebs* which seemed thus questionable? At the very heart of this lay a vision of New Eve.

Demers has recognised that the Hampshire home of the Stanleys is More’s own version of a nineteenth century Eden, with Cœlebs and Lucilla re-cast as Adam and Eve.<sup>166</sup> More importantly, she has indicated that Lucilla is a new type of ‘Eve’: intellectual, philanthropic, domestic.<sup>167</sup> In the opening pages of the book, through the character of Cœlebs, More signals to the reader that this allusion is deliberate:

I confess, that as the Sophia of Rousseau had her young imagination captivated by the character of Fenelon’s Telemachus, so I early became enamoured of that of Milton’s Eve. I never formed an idea of conjugal happiness, but my mind involuntarily adverted to the graces of that unfinished picture (*Cælebs*, p.40).

Of these ‘graces’ Cœlebs selects Eve’s domestic virtues as the most essential: ‘To study household good, | And good works in her husband to promote (*Cælebs*, p.41), which require of Eve a ‘large and comprehensive scheme of excellence’, ‘tranquillity, smoothness, and quiet beauty’ (*Cælebs*, pp.41-2). Quoting Milton, Cœlebs notes her modesty and dignity, her hospitality towards their guest (Raphael), ‘Her dispatchful looks, | Her hospitable thoughts’ and ‘cheerful obedience’ (*Cælebs*, p.43). He particularly approves of the way in which she retires from the company, ‘instructed of

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<sup>165</sup> Stott, p.285

<sup>166</sup> Demers, p.11

<sup>167</sup> Demers, p.11

what was right and delicate’, when Adam appears to be entering ‘on thoughts abstruse’ (*Cælebs*, p.44). The reader is in no doubt of Cœlebs’ expectations.

Like Milton’s eighteenth century critics, Cœlebs, too, perceives that Milton’s Eve is not merely a ‘domestic drudge’ or an ‘unpolished housewife’ (*Cælebs*, p.45). He attempts to justify Milton’s apparent anti-feminism by exploring her ‘intellectual worth and polished manners’, highlighting Adam’s compliment that she is ‘accomplished’ and dignified (*Cælebs*, p.45). Cœlebs is not, however, a mouthpiece for More’s own opinions, and as a narrator he is highly misleading. The title itself suggests this: *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* implies a journey—one of self-discovery. Cœlebs is not a mature man, worldly wise and experienced; he is young, not yet twenty-four, and the story is just as much about his journey into adulthood, as it is about him finding a suitable wife. He has lived a relatively retired life (something that he soon wishes to correct) and has been carefully moulded by his doting parents, as an only child. It is quickly apparent that Cœlebs is not even sure what he wants in a wife, his ideas have been so heavily influenced by his parents. His initial thoughts on the subject are, consequently, expected to be immature and naïve, guided by a clearly fanciful approach to literature:

My father had left me a copious library, and I had learnt from him to select whatever was most valuable in the best species of literature, which tends to form the principles, the understanding, the taste, and the character (*Cælebs*, p.47).

As Demers has suggested, ‘More delights in parades of quotations, recalled from memory and deliberately retaining occasional errors of recollection’.<sup>168</sup> These quotes, initially at least, are conveyed largely through Cœlebs himself, and allude to works by William Cowper, Alexander Pope, Shakespeare, as well as Joseph Johnson’s *Anecdotes*, John Donne’s *Progress of the Soul*, Thomas Addison’s *Cato: A Tragedy*,

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<sup>168</sup> Demers, pp.10-11

Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, and, of course, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The important point is that direct quotations from the Bible are largely absent from Cœlebs' preliminary conversations. At Stanley Grove, he will learn from Mr. Stanley that adaptations of the Bible and theological writings are not enough—interpretations can be biased, the memory can err—the Bible *itself* should be consulted (*Cœlebs*, p.205).

Given Cœlebs' mistaken understanding here, it is of little surprise that Lucilla does not compare easily with his understanding of Milton's Eve. The very name 'Lucilla' is significant. While perhaps reminding the reader of 'Lucifer', and thus alluding to Eve's encounter with the serpent in the Garden of Eden, it comes from the name Lucia or Lucy, meaning 'light' (the names share a root, *Luc*, with the Latin word for 'light', *Lux*). This connection stems from the legend of Saint Lucia, a wealthy young girl from Sicily in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, who refused to marry her pagan bridegroom, consecrated her virginity to God, and distributed her dowry amongst the poor. When her rejected suitor denounced her as a Christian to the governor of Sicily, she was condemned to prostitution. She was, however, miraculously saved from this, and being burnt at the stake, because the men who came to arrest her were unable to physically move her. She was finally killed by being stabbed through the throat. Later stories described her as being tortured by eye-gouging and paintings regularly depict her holding her eyes on a golden plate. As such, Saint Lucia soon became the patron saint of those who are blind. Milton's own blindness and his personal struggle with this affliction are well documented. Even in *Paradise Lost* he reflects: 'but thou | Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain | To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn', and light is regularly invoked throughout.<sup>169</sup> It is unlikely, then, that More

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<sup>169</sup> *Paradise Lost*, III. 22-4

chose the name 'Lucilla' by accident. The link not only encourages the reader to contrast Milton's Eve and her own, but also, in one sense, suggests that Lucilla is the light to Milton's blindness, particularly his lack of sight with respect to women.

The virginal connotations of both Lucilla (signified by her namesake) and Cœlebs (whose name means 'unmarried' or 'chaste') are especially important. These too are clearly associated with Adam and Eve, pre-Fall. Crucially, however, Cœlebs is determined to see Lucilla as a *Miltonic* pre-Fall Eve. Through his eyes, she is at once modest and delicate, gentle and retiring: 'neat as the strictest delicacy demands, and as fashionable as the strictest delicacy permits [...] [she is] veiled with scrupulous modesty' (*Cœlebs*, p.123). Drawing from Milton's Eve, Cœlebs also emphasises Lucilla's association with flowers and gardening. Attending to her flowers is, admittedly, the employment Lucilla enjoys above all else and it occupies the majority of her time, a passion which she confesses she has acquired from reading *Paradise Lost* (*Cœlebs*, p.341):

Her gardening work so fascinated her, that she found whole hours passed unperceived [...] Even when she tore herself away, and returned to her employments, her flowers still pursued her, and the improvement of her mind gave way to the cultivation of her Geraniums (*Cœlebs*, p.267).

What charms Cœlebs most is that Lucilla is so easily pleased—he is delighted with such a woman who possesses such 'simplicity of taste [...] [making] her resemble my favourite heroine of Milton in her amusements, as well as her domestic pursuits' (*Cœlebs*, p.268). She is, for him, the recreation of Milton's Eve, the subject of a poem made flesh and blood. As such, he is unable to see the elements of her character which disturb the representation, characteristics that make her more compatible with eighteenth century society, and with Southcott's equal Eve—and less *Miltonic*.

The love-struck Cœlebs is even more enchanted when he sees Lucilla's bower, decked with flowers in full bloom:

The purple clematis twisting its fragile branches with those of pale woodbine, formed a sweet and fragrant canopy to the arched bower, while the flowery tendrils hung down on all sides. Large bunches of roses, intermixed with the silver stars of the jessamine [jasmine], were stuck on the inside as a temporary decoration only (*Cælebs*, pp.200-1).

The flowers on the bower each represent Lucilla's chaste virtues: purple clematis symbolises piety and mental beauty; jasmine denotes grace and elegance, and the rose is often the symbol of virtue and purity. As both Coelebs and Sir John (a guest of the Stanleys') instantly recognise, the beauty of the bower immediately evokes Milton's Garden of Eden, particularly the bower that Adam and Eve share: 'Hesperian fables true, | If true, here only' (*Cælebs*, p. 201). Milton's bower is also interwoven with flowers, including 'Gessamin' (jasmine) and roses. Thus, while More emphasises Lucilla's virginal characteristics through the flowers, she also recalls the description of Adam and Eve's nuptial bed. Depending on their colour, however (a detail which More perhaps deliberately keeps to herself), both jasmine and roses are often also associated with sensuality and love, and their incorporation into Lucilla's bower is evermore suggestive, distancing it from Milton's. Indeed, Lucilla is undoubtedly sexually animate, decking her hair with the roses that Cœlebs gives to her and blushing whenever he speaks to her—both visible, if discreet, signs of desire. Moreover, the word 'bower' is itself an unusual choice. While it appears to refer to an arbour or pergola, a wooden garden feature decked with vines and flowers, it also might refer to a folly, a nest built by Bowerbirds to attract mates. These allusions to intimate places, often the seat of sexual activities, further detach Lucilla from Milton's prelapsarian Eve.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Rachel Crawford has explored the genre of bower poetry in the Romantic period (in the works of John Keats, Samuel Coleridge and Felicia Hemans), which located an enclosed green space—contained spaces which are both 'sexualized and feminized'—as the site of a tryst between a man who enters it and a female character. Rachel Crawford, *Poetry Enclosure and the Vernacular Landscape: 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.225 and p.212.

Given the way in which Cœlebs is determined to see Lucilla as a version of Milton's Eve, it is not surprising that he considers her Fall to be imminent. Despite being assured of her innocence, he assumes that she has been corrupted by a suitor, Lord Staunton. A casual remark from his servant, that Staunton is expected to marry Lucilla and that she sometimes meets him at the Carltons (a neighbouring family), immediately causes Cœlebs to imagine that Lucilla is having an affair: 'This shocked me beyond expression. Lucilla meet a man at another house! Lucilla carry on a clandestine engagement! Can Mrs. Carlton be capable of conniving it!' (*Cœlebs*, p.161). Although he seeks reassurance from her father (simultaneously making a rash offer of marriage in the process), his doubts are not satisfied. At the mere mention of Staunton's name his fears instantly revive, and he eagerly questions any acquaintance about her admirers and suitors. More can, in fact, be seen to play with a typical Romantic novel plot. Drawing from novels such as Charlotte Smith's *The Young Philosopher* (1798) and Frances Burney's *Camilla, or a Picture of Youth* (1796) she explores the ways in which the morality of young women is constantly called into question, even by those who love them, thus highlighting the inevitability of an association with Eve. For Cœlebs himself, this inevitability stems from his insistence on reading Lucilla through Milton's Eve. Even he recognises that he has a deep seated expectation that all women will be inconstant, like Eve: 'A young and handsome peer seemed so redoubtable a rival, that for a moment I only remembered that she was a woman, and forgot that she was Lucilla' (*Cœlebs*, p.238). The sins of Eve have cast such a shadow over the perception of women, that it seems almost impossible for them to extricate themselves.

But Cœlebs is not wrong to assume that Lucilla will come into contact with a tempter. Satan does indeed appear in the guise of Staunton. He is described by Mrs

Carlton, as exerting ‘every art and faculty of pleasing [Lucilla], which it must be owned he possesses’ (*Cælebs*, p.253). His talent for leading women to their downfall is already known—it is he who has seduced and abandoned the daughter of a tenant.

With Lucilla, he appeals to her vanity:

He found us in my [Mrs Carlton’s] dressing-room reading together a *Dissertation on the power of religion to change the heart* [...] and glancing at the title, he said, laughingly, “This is a foolish subject enough; a good heart does not want changing, and with a bad one none of us there have anything to do.” [...] I attempted to assert the power of the Almighty to rectify the mind, and alter the character. Lord Staunton treated my assertion as a wild chimera [...] professing at the same time a vague admiration of virtue and goodness, which he said, bowing to Miss Stanley, were natural where they existed at all; and a good heart did not want mending [...] (*Cælebs*, p.253).

Given that Lucilla believes in the practise of ‘self-examination so that she may learn to watch against the first rising of bad dispositions’ and constantly scrutinises the ‘state’ of her mind (*Cælebs*, p.239), the idea that she might be intrinsically good is a tempting claim. Staunton here attacks the very essence of Evangelical doctrine: the idea of Original Sin. Whether or not More believed that Eve was responsible for the Fall of Man, she still did believe in Original Sin—that men and women were born tainted, and that they must atone for this throughout their lives. To highlight this, she is careful to criticise Lady Belfield, a woman whom Cælebs visits on the way to the Stanley’s, for her failure to recognise that children are born corrupt: ‘she never suspected that [her children] had all brought into the world with them any natural tendency to evil; and thought it cruel to suppose that such innocent little things had any such wrong propensities’ (*Cælebs*, p.78). As such, Staunton’s words pose a considerable risk to those who are susceptible. Lucilla, however, is not. It is a threat that she quickly perceives in refusing him, when he again appeals to her vanity in suggesting that she might be able to improve him:

this from *you*? From you, who declared only this morning that the work of changing the heart was too great for the Almighty himself? You do not now



scruple to declare that it is in *my* power. That work which is too hard for Omnipotence, your flattery would make me believe a weak girl can accomplish. No, my Lord, I will never add to the number of those rash women who have risked their eternal happiness on vain hope. It would be too late to repent of my folly, after my presumption had incurred its just punishment (*Cælebs*, p.254).

Just before this encounter, Lucilla is alone in the summer-house, having retired from the company in order to read her book. Like Eve, she is ripe for the taking, alone and unaided, with nothing to rely on but her own understanding and principles. It is a scene that not only recalls the moment Eve is tempted by the serpent in *Paradise Lost*, but Southcott's own debate with Satan in *Dispute*. Like Southcott, Lucilla is able to outwit Satan, relying on her detailed understanding of the scriptures to challenge and elude him.

Lucilla is also tested in less obvious ways. The character of Miss Sparkes, an unmarried woman of independent means, despises domesticity and marriage, and is, alternatively, 'something of a scholar, and a huntress, a politician, and a farrier' (*Cælebs*, p.255). She believes that domestic and religious instruction can only 'cramp the genius, degrade the intellect, depress the spirits, debase the taste, and clip the wings of imagination' (*Cælebs*, p.296), and challenges Mr Stanley's educational methods, which, she believes, might 'break the child's spirit', 'curb her genius', and 'subdue the independence of her mind' (*Cælebs*, p.256). She is, as Mr Stanley notices, 'shining', 'shewy' and 'amusing' (*Cælebs*, p.260), and thus a threat to his daughters. Phœbe, who appears more predisposed to error than Lucilla ('the lively Phoebe [...] her father says, has narrowly escaped being a wit herself' (*Cælebs*, p.260)), is soon lured by these unusual characteristics, and declares (to her father's dismay) that she is entirely 'agreeable' (*Cælebs*, p.260).

In being characterised as a 'wit and an Amazon' (*Cælebs*, p.255), Miss Sparkes is clearly based on the public stereotype of Wollstonecraft (observed by

Godwin), and more particularly, on the models of female behaviour promoted in the *Rights of Woman*. It is, therefore, quickly apparent that she might also evade the heterosexual matrix outlined in chapter one. Like Macaulay's Spartan women, she is physically strong and fearless as a huntress, who can 'outride' men in her neighbourhood and 'excels in drawing four in hand' (*Cælebs*, p.255), and like Hays' Queen Elizabeth, she has also remained unmarried, while engaging in intellectual companionships with men. Thus, Miss Sparkes can be seen to embody a third gender—not lesbian exactly, but a woman of (somewhat indefinable) independent female authority—similar to that noted by Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, which allows her to escape subordination and encourage women around her to do the same. "Spark" (on which Miss Sparkes' family name is clearly based) could mean to 'play the gallant', to flaunt oneself, or show off (*OED*), but from the early nineteenth century it also meant to engage in courtship or to play the suitor (*OED*). As such, if Lucilla is Eve, then Miss Sparkes is Lilith, living beyond the bounds of the Stanley Eden, rarely admitted, but sexually transgressive, and quick to lure Stanley's daughters when she is given opportunity. But, while she may be used as a figure of temptation, her very presence is used by More to unsettle the restrictive gender boundaries of Stanley Grove. As Demers suggests, Miss Sparkes is not just 'a parodic lesson by negative example', she also articulates 'Morean hints', that are 'daring and deliberately subversive'.<sup>171</sup>

Lucilla, however, is not open to temptation, sexual, political or otherwise. More's New Eve is a truly modern woman, who has been well-educated, receiving particularly extensive religious instruction. She is scripturally informed, having been encouraged to read the Bible itself, rather than any abridged version, and thus exposed

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<sup>171</sup> Demers, p.25 and p.26

to the ‘divine sentiments’, ‘holy precepts’, ‘devout ejaculations’, ‘transports of praise’ and ‘touches of penitential sorrow’, woven into the scriptures (*Cælebs*, p.205). She lives in a ‘regular habit of prayer’, reading scripture and avoiding controversy, adopting doctrines even if they are convoluted (*Cælebs*, p.239), and has been taught to be humble, ‘to preserve an inward conviction of unworthiness’ (*Cælebs*, p. 240), and above all to be charitable for selfless reasons. This careful religious training does not mean that Lucilla is unable to engage in other intellectual pursuits. As Demers highlights, she is ‘entirely able to hold her own in every circumstance’.<sup>172</sup> Her opinions on matters of ‘business, as well as of taste’ are welcomed and encouraged by her parents (*Cælebs*, p.337). She is practical, direct, shrewd and intelligent, has learnt Latin and reads widely (even if both of these interests have been cautiously guided by her father), including *Paradise Lost*. With this text, she is able to appreciate ‘the construction of the fable, the richness of imagery, the elevation of the language, the sublimity and just appropriation of the sentiments, the artful structure of the verse, and the variety of the characters’ (*Cælebs*, p.342). Her desire of wandering—intellectually at least—is chiefly independent (only ‘guided’ by her parents), but does not threaten her morality, in the same way that independence does in Genesis and

*Paradise Lost*:

[she is] from nature—a woman, gentle feeling, animated, modest.—She is by education, elegant, informed, enlightened.—She is, from religion, pious, humble, candid, charitable (*Cælebs*, p.144).

This is an alternative autonomy for women, one that can be compared to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*: if you expand a woman’s mind, you only strengthen her principles, and distance her from error. It fleshes out the Eve of Genesis, filling in the gaps, and modernising her.

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<sup>172</sup> Demers, p.26

It also provides Lucilla with the insight and authority to question and critique Milton's Eve. In the passage above, the use of the word 'fable', meaning a fictitious narrative not founded on fact (*OED*) (and therefore, in religious terms, not on the Bible), hints at a habit of independent enquiry. Then, by focussing on Eve's good features, pre and post-Fall, Lucilla indicates that she is 'affronted' with the poet:

that while, with a noble justness, he represents Adam's grief at his expulsion, as chiefly arising from his being banished from the presence of his Maker, the sorrows of Eve seem too much to arise from being banished from her flowers (*Cælebs*, p.341).

For the first time, More explicitly acknowledges her difficulty with Milton's Eve. While *Cælebs* has hitherto defended and endorsed Milton's *Paradise Lost*, More here begins to reveal the poet's failings with respect to his perception of women. Lucilla is, as Demers rightly suggests, the only 'defender' of Eve.<sup>173</sup> She sees that Milton's Eve is superficial, lacking depth. Like Southcott, More realises that Eve was equally, if not more, grief-stricken at being expelled from the Garden of Eden as Adam, and, moreover, that the grief she feels towards her flowers is 'rather too exquisite', or contrived (*Cælebs*, p.341). It is not an accurate representation of the Fall, and it is more appropriate to consider it as a piece of poetry, or a fabulous fable, 'beautifully eloquent' (*Cælebs*, p.341), and containing *some* useful morals, rather than as an adaptation of the Bible and a suitable source for one's conduct.

Lucilla's independence does not just extend to her studies. Like the dissenting women of the Quaker and Methodist faiths, she is trusted with a prominent role within religious life and actively participates in the religious community at Stanley Grove. She is an obvious leader to her younger sisters, leading by example and helping to correct their faults. She has a hand in their religious instruction, and takes the initiative in philanthropic duties. Philanthropy is undoubtedly emphasised in *Cælebs*,

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<sup>173</sup> Demers, p.27

and Mrs Stanley is quick to apportion it to the care of women: ‘I have often heard it regretted that ladies have no stated employment, no profession. It is a mistake. *Charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession* (*Cælebs*, p.228). More had herself taken great pains in her philanthropic duties, which had included the charity schools at Cheddar, as well helping to launch the career of Yearsley. She had also used her literary skills to write a series of simple Christian tales, the Cheap Repository Tracts, which were distributed to the poor every month for four years—eventually selling over two million copies. As many have noticed, these tales had a political message, and directly responded to Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* and the discourse surrounding the French Revolution. In the guise of philanthropy, they provided her with a political and social voice, and, as Stott has noted, allowed her to replace the ‘accommodating female ideal with an activist model’.<sup>174</sup> Charitable work did not have to be confined to the domestic sphere, and in the Stanley household More meant to show how women might take advantage of this loophole.

As Stott has noticed, confining women to philanthropy was not without its problems:

More’s influential argument that philanthropy was a woman’s profession had its weaknesses as well as its strengths. While it validated female activism and subtly undermined the ideology that sought to confine women to the purely domestic sphere, it remained a one-size-fits-all model that could never do justice to the diversity of their needs and abilities.<sup>175</sup>

There is, however, a huge potential for female agency in the character of Lucilla. She has, for example, something to say to Dr. Barlow, the learned country curate, on being humble, when he blames her for being backward in expressing her opinion:

I always feel diffident in speaking on these subjects, not only lest I should be thought to assume, but lest I really should assume a degree of piety which may not belong to me [...] My dear father has so carefully instructed me, and I live

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<sup>174</sup> Stott, ‘Hannah More and the Blagdon Controversy, 1799-1800’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), 319-346.

<sup>175</sup> Stott, p.334

so much in the habit of his pious sentiments, that I am often afraid of appearing better than I am [...] (*Cælebs*, p.240).

Lucilla's thoughts on Christian humility distance her from her father's and Dr. Barlow's confident (some might say condescending) judgement of others. Unlike them, she believes in a more unassuming Christian principle, based on rigorous self-examination, rather than the scrutiny of others. Moreover, her words hint at a difficulty to comply with her father's systematic indoctrination; she appears more at ease with her own interpretation of religious readings—such as her interpretation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Lucilla does not simply accept everything that is said to her: her spirit is to question, even if she does not directly oppose what is pressed upon her. This spirit of questioning is central to More's thoughts on religious female agency: it is the responsibility of women to keep Christianity awake and alive to contemporary needs and changes, and it is up to them to encourage progression and enquiry.

So that her New Eve is compatible with a modern society, More must ensure that Lucilla is earthly, an attainable figure for women, grounded in a Protestant tradition which emphasised the virtues of marriage. As such, allusions to the Virgin Mary must simultaneously indicate that Lucilla is a New Eve, whilst also distancing her from *Catholic* understandings of Mary. Whilst out walking, Cælebs is struck, 'arrested', by the sound of a soft female voice (*Cælebs*, p.338), which draws him in. Entering the home of a poor tenant, he silently watches Lucilla kneeling at the foot of a bed, wherein an elderly woman lies dying:

[her sister Phoebe's] dishevelled hair [...] formed a fine contrast to the angelic tranquillity and calm devotion which sat on the face of Lucilla. Her voice was inexpressibly sweet and penetrating, while faith, hope, and charity seemed to beam from her fine uplifted eyes [...] she had thrown off her hat, cloak, and gloves, and laid them on the bed; and her fine hair, which had escaped from its confinement, shaded that side of her face which was next the door, and prevented her seeing me [...] It was a subject not unworthy of Raphael (*Cælebs*, pp.338-9).

As Stott suggests, Lucilla's hair is a reminder of Milton's Eve,<sup>176</sup> but, more significantly, it recalls the paintings of Raphael Sanzio da Urbino, the Italian Renaissance artist, known for his rousing images of religious scenes and figures. Lucilla's uplifted eyes, in the direction of heaven, her hair shading her face like a veil, and her expression of pure devotion, recalls Raphael's *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, or, more revealingly, one of his Madonna paintings, with the Virgin Mary gazing on her child with loving adoration. Conversely, this also brings us back to Lillith, and the coils of golden tresses hanging wantonly around her face in Rossetti's 'Eden's Bower'. A fine line can be traced between the religious ecstasy etched into the paintings of St. Catherine and the Madonna, and the ripe and erotic representation of Lillith. It imbues Lucilla with a sense of the Virgin's goodness (a reading traced to the narrator), but also the sexual maturity of the experienced Lillith (an alternative reading traced to Cœlebs' desire).

With her earthly sexuality, Lucilla embodies a figure within reach of other women. Her values and principles are also easily emulated. In Dr Barlow's view, her greatest talents are humility, sincerity, meekness and conscience (*Cœlebs*, p.240), and all that is required of her, and any young woman, is faith, 'the sure foundation of a better hope' (*Cœlebs*, p.240). As Mrs Stanley explains:

Ten thousand other young women, with natural good sense and good temper, might, with the same education, the same neglect of what is useless, and the same attention to what is necessary, acquire the same habits and the same principles' (*Cœlebs*, p.228).

She is not a 'miracle', carrying a 'discouraging superiority whom others might despair to emulate', but a simple 'Christian girl' (*Cœlebs*, p.228). In their view, New Eve is a woman atoned and transformed: vindicated from the sins of Eve, distanced from the

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<sup>176</sup> Stott, p.277

celestial purity of the Virgin Mary, renovated: she is holy, but yet earthly—a role model, within the reach of any woman who aspires to sincere virtuousness.

This final chapter has tackled a problem that has been recurring throughout the thesis: the categorisation and marginalisation of female writers. It has outlined the extreme situation of Southcott, a woman who has been consistently pigeon-holed as a “prophetess”, rather than a writer who responded to events within her society, and participated in discourses from women’s rights to theology, like any other writer might. Although this is a more extreme type of categorization, it is similar in kind to that observed with Barbauld in the introduction and Wollstonecraft in chapter one, and highlights a bigger problem with respect to the critical treatment of women writers. Similarly, More has also often been left in the margins of the Romantic canon, apparently failing to live up to the high expectations of feminists. Critics have judged her only in terms of women’s rights, and have been unable to observe the ways in which important discourses have been both implicit and explicit in her work. By drawing these two writers together in the Fuzzy Set, and noting the correlations between them and other writers, two things have been enabled: firstly, Southcott has been brought back into mainstream critical analysis, as a writer rather than as a prophetess; secondly, More has been seen to engage in controversial discourses, blurring the boundaries between these discourses and moving seamlessly between religion, politics and even women’s rights. As with the heterosexual matrix in chapter one, this set has discovered a shared value between More and Southcott—the reinvention of Eve—one very small aspect of their work, which just happens to be similar to both. Indeed, it is unusual that two such women, distant in terms of wealth, privilege, education and religious beliefs, could share such a similar vision. Yet both had individually come to realise that the Established Church and the dissenting



churches could not support female ministry because of a fundamental problem: in being compared to Eve (the Eve of the Bible, or the Eve of the literary elite), women were believed to be inherently flawed and prone to temptation. They ascertained that such a model could only hinder and oppress women: their unique qualities, which could enable them to become enlightened religious leaders, were being squandered or suppressed. A new version of Eve, and of woman, was required. Southcott's New Eve could provide a female figurehead for the Church of England, a strong and resilient woman who could down-talk Satan, leading them to redemption through the Second Coming. By contrast, More's New Eve was a woman of rigorous piety, an earthly *and* spiritual woman, who could subtly question the religious testimonies and literature of men, helping those around her to carefully examine their religious integrity. Both transformed the figure of Eve, the representation of woman-kind, into a woman of strength and hope, beyond the reach of temptation, intrinsically pure and virtuous. Within the set, both women have been seen to resist the boundaries that have traditionally been pressed upon them, defying categorization, refusing to be marginalised—inconsistent and often deliberately fuzzy. Between them they prepared the way for a new female crusade of women—missionaries, philosophers, ministers— a new generation, who throughout the preceding century would carve their way through an increasingly secular world.

### Conclusion

It is Robert Polwhele's 'The Unsex'd Females', his allusion to the Garden of Eden (a theme which has dominated this last chapter) and his attack on Anna Letitia Barbauld that provide the final thoughts on the Fuzzy theory and women writers in the late eighteenth century. In chapter one I suggested that this poem was one of those responsible for enforcing the Law of the Excluded Middle with respect to women writers. It is described by Clarissa Campbell Orr as an 'hysterical verse diatribe' against Mary Wollstonecraft,<sup>1</sup> and certainly does pinpoint her as the root of all evil in the 'female band despising NATURE'S law'.<sup>2</sup> But it is to Barbauld that Polwhele turns his attention next, directly linking the two writers and suggesting that it was to Wollstonecraft's command to 'vindicate the Rights of womankind' that Barbauld responded:

'No more by weakness winning fond regard;  
Nor eyes, that sparkle from their blushes, roll,  
Nor catch the languors of the sick'ning soul,  
Nor the quick flutter, nor the coy reserve,  
But nobly boast the firm gymnastic nerve;  
Nor more affect with Delicacy's fan  
To hide the emotion from congenial man;  
To the bold heights where glory beams, aspire,  
Blend mental energy with Passion's fire,  
Surpass their rivals in the powers of mind  
And vindicate the Rights of womankind.'  
She [Wollstonecraft] spoke and veteran BARBAULD caught the strain,  
And deem'd her songs of Love, her Lyrics vain[.]<sup>3</sup>

In this extract, Polwhele clearly accuses Barbauld of turning her back on poetic sensibility, in favour of 'gymnastic nerve', 'bold heights', 'mental energy' and 'Passion'. It is just as much an attack on Barbauld as it is on Wollstonecraft, and is even perhaps more relevant to her situation. In the 1790s (*The Unsex'd Females*'

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<sup>1</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr, *Wollstonecraft's Daughters: Womanhood in England and France 1780-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.16

<sup>2</sup> Robert Polwhele, 'The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature' (London; Printed for Cadell and Davies, in the Strand, 1798), l.12

<sup>3</sup> Polwhele, ll.80-92

appeared in 1798), Barbauld had taken a break from verse writing and had begun, instead, to publish a number of political pamphlets (sometimes as poems) that included *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), *An Epistle to William Willberforce Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (1791), *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792), wading into a number of very public debates. Although *Evenings at Home*, in six volumes, was published between 1792 and 1796, Barbauld concluded the decade with more political musings, including an article in the *Monthly Magazine*, entitled "What is Education?" (1798). It was, perhaps, this essay that landed Barbauld on the wrong side of Polwhele's binary; by engaging in the debate on education, she had come dangerously close to Wollstonecraft's territory. Indeed, the work produced by women writers in the 1790s, a decade characterised for its great political excitement, appears to have been particularly fuzzy. More interesting, however, is Polwhele's insinuation that what Barbauld wrote *before* the 1790s—her 'songs of Love, her Lyrics'—were more appropriate for a female writer: in his opinion, her early poetry complemented the 'coy reserve', and 'Delicate' mind, by displaying 'weakness' to win 'fond regard'. This, of course, appears to hark back to Wollstonecraft's attack on 'To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers'. But can Barbauld's work be split so easily down the middle?

As I have shown, in order to utilise the Fuzzy Set Theory it is important to first understand that the work of women writers is rarely, if ever, straightforward. With regards to Barbauld—a writer whose work has been consistently categorised as "feminine" and "polite" or, conversely, "political" and "masculine"—this is particularly evident. As explored in the last two chapters, gardens, flowers and nature are rarely used unambiguously in the work of women writers from this period. While

appearing to be an appropriate topic of interest for women, they can also disguise a number of statements, either political, or related to a contemporary discussion or debate. Thus, initially, this poem appears to be about the presentation of flowers to a young lady, from either a male or female admirer, who reflects on the innocence of flowers in comparison to the purity of the woman to whom they are given, surmising that for both women and flowers, ‘Your best, your sweetest empire is—to please’.<sup>4</sup> So far, so polite. But there are several themes here that might incite a critic’s interest.

As William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft have noted, this poem is on the subject of botany, and may have been inspired by Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* (1796), in which Emily’s betrothed happily reflects on his future wife’s pursuits: ‘she has a passion for flowers, with which I am extremely pleased, as it will be to her a continual source of pleasure’.<sup>5</sup> As McCarthy suggests, when young women began taking an interest in botany, ‘the potential for sexual suggestiveness made conservative men nervous’.<sup>6</sup> It certainly agitated Polwhele—it was for this that he derided women writers:

With bliss botanic as their bosoms heave,  
Still pluck forbidden fruit, with *mother Eve* [my emphasis],  
For puberty in signing florets pant,  
Or point the prostitution of a plant;  
Dissect its organ of unhallow’d lust,  
And fondly gaze the titillating dust;  
With liberty’s sublimer views expand,  
And o’er the wreck of kingdoms sternly stand[.]<sup>7</sup>

In a footnote he quotes Wollstonecraft’s *Elements of Morality, For the Use of Children*, in which she had encouraged parents ‘to speak of the organs of generation

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Letitia Barbauld, ‘To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers’, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Ont. Canada: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), p.95, l.18

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, p.95

<sup>6</sup> McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, p.95

<sup>7</sup> Polwhele, ll.29-35

as freely as we mention our eyes and hands’;<sup>8</sup> ‘To such language our botanizing girls are doubtless familiarized’, protests Polwhele, ‘[and] if they do not take heed to their ways, they will soon exchange the blush of modesty for the bronze of impudence’.<sup>9</sup> As Sam George suggests, botany is described by Polwhele as ‘compulsive and orgiastic’: ‘These sighing, panting girls are indulging in something akin to sexual experimentation’, they ‘have fallen prey to immodest curiosity’.<sup>10</sup>

If Polwhele missed the clear botanic interest in ‘To a Lady with Some Flowers’, he may also have missed a number of other daring ideas. Indeed, the theme of flowers and spring indicated in the opening lines is, after the discussion in chapter three, particularly significant:

Flowers to the fair: To you these flowers I bring,  
And strive to greet you with an earlier spring.  
Flowers sweet, and gay, and delicate like you;  
Emblems of innocence, and beauty too.<sup>11</sup>

Words such as ‘spring’ and ‘delicate’ remind us of Charlotte Smith’s ‘April’, ‘To Spring’, and particularly ‘To Dr. Parry of Bath’, in which Smith appears to present a drawing of flowers to the obstetrician who had treated her daughter Anna Augusta, and in which she had spoken of the frailty of a ‘lovely family of flowers’, shrinking from ‘the bleakness of the Northern blast’.<sup>12</sup> This immediately evokes themes of decline and mortality we observed in this earlier poem. Their association with innocence and the reference to them growing in ‘Eden’s pure and guiltless garden’<sup>13</sup> also reminds the reader of Prelapsarian Eve. But, like the flowers in Lucilla’s hair in Hannah More’s *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, they also speak of desire: these ‘flowery

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Polwhele, p.11f

<sup>9</sup> Polwhele, p.11f

<sup>10</sup> Sam George, *Botany, Sexuality and Women’s Writing 1760-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.120-1

<sup>11</sup> Barbauld, ‘To a Lady’, ll.1-2

<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Smith, ‘To Dr. Parry of Bath’, in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* ed. by Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.57, ll.5-6

<sup>13</sup> Barbauld, ‘To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers’, l.8

wreaths' are worn by 'consenting lovers' and the Graces, goddesses of fertility. As outlined in chapter three, McCarthy has suggested that Barbauld's poetry often carried with it an erotic charge, and this is certainly evident here.<sup>14</sup> The allusion to the Garden of Eden and these hints of desire are also unusual in another sense, because they tie the poem to Polwhele's suggestion that female botanists (above) 'still pluck forbidden fruit with Mother Eve'— the implication being, as George suggests, that "they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last", because, as daughters of Eve, 'they are open to temptation'.<sup>15</sup> This, of course, brings us back to the problem of Eve and Original Sin: Polwhele is one of those who continue to associate any independent woman with Eve. Barbauld's botanist, however, appears to dwell more on the innocence of Eve, and, like More, emphasises quiet desire alongside virtue and goodness. As such, the woman to whom the speaker presents the flowers is like Lucilla, a multidimensional New Eve.

Another characteristic typical of Barbauld's poetry is observed in the dramatic change of tone:

To loftier forms are rougher tasks assign'd;  
The sheltering oak resists the stormy wind,  
The tougher yew repels invading foes  
And the tall pine for future navies grows.<sup>16</sup>

This is the same "violence" observed by Harriet Guest in 'The Rights of Woman', outlined in the introduction of this thesis. Stormy winds, invading foes, navies: this is war-like nature, the same danger of which Smith spoke in 'The Lark's Nest' and 'To Dr. Parry'. Curiously, this also links the poem with Barbauld's most striking piece of war poetry, 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven'. Indeed, Anne Janowitz has also made the connection between 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven' and 'To a Lady', noting that

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<sup>14</sup> William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), p.186

<sup>15</sup> George, p.121

<sup>16</sup> Barbauld, 'To a Lady', ll.9-12

the comparison between female beauty and flowers, although derided by Wollstonecraft as “ignoble”, was championed by Barbauld in this latter poem through the ‘metaphoric link between the metropolis and the flower’, and the life of the city presented on the model of a beautiful woman, ‘who knows no second spring’.<sup>17</sup> In Janowitz’s view, in so doing, Barbauld ‘both dignifies the problem of female aging and also infuses London’s ruins with humanity’.<sup>18</sup> This, of course, complicates our understanding of ‘To a Lady’ as polite, and ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’ as unambiguously violent and political.

The final lines of the poem return to the same soft tone highlighted in the opening lines: ‘But this soft family, to cares unknown, | Were born for pleasure and delight alone.’<sup>19</sup> Like the flowers of Smith’s ‘To Dr. Parry’, while this ‘soft family’ may not be aware of the danger to which they are exposed, they are still, like Smith’s ‘lovely family of flowers’, at its mercy; this is not just a gentle poem reflecting on the soothing qualities of nature. The connection to Smith’s ‘To Dr. Parry’, written in thanks and gratitude from one friend or acquaintance to another, also reminds the reader of Barbauld’s ‘To Mrs P[riestly] with some Drawings of Birds and Insects’, published in the same collection of poetry (*Poems*), in 1773. Both were accompanied by sketches taken from nature. Curiously, this poem had been praised by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, who highlighted the lines ‘Pleasure’s the portion of th’ inferior kind; | But glory, virtue, Heaven for Man design’d’<sup>20</sup> (presumably because it appears to address sexual inequality), before

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<sup>17</sup> Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Devon: Northcote House, 2004), p.103

<sup>18</sup> Janowitz, p.10

<sup>19</sup> Barbauld, ‘To a Lady’, ll.13-14

<sup>20</sup> Barbauld, ‘To Mrs P’, ll.101-2

launching into a blistering attack on ‘To a Lady’.<sup>21</sup> But it also, conversely, draws the reader back to Barbauld’s view of nature as miraculous, as outlined in chapter three. In ‘To Mrs. P’, Barbauld had, of course, celebrated friendship and nature after being roused by Thomas Pennant’s challenge in his *British Zoology* (1766) to take native fauna as subjects of poetry and to base descriptive poems on careful observation of nature.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in the brief discussion of one short poem, ‘To a Lady’, it has already been possible to free Barbauld from a range of assumptions and restrictions. By embracing her inconsistency, ambiguity, and the complex shifts in tone, I have already observed a number of connections between this poem, ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’, ‘The Rights of Woman’ and ‘To Mrs P’, as well as with the works of a number of other writers including Smith and More. Debates with which she appears to engage include the problem of Eve, natural history and female sexuality. These links demonstrate that ‘To a Lady’ is by no means the “ignoble” poetry outlined by Wollstonecraft in *Rights of Woman*, or even the “polite” poetry outlined by Janowitz and Marlon Ross, but is as complex and unorthodox as ‘Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’, or indeed anything from the number of poems, novels and other writings by female writers explored in this thesis. It is, therefore, crucial to understand Barbauld as fuzzy.

Indeed, the Fuzzy Set Theory has sought to provide an appropriate vehicle within which critics might be more at liberty to consider writers like Barbauld from a variety of different angles, helping them to understand them as multifaceted writers, open to ambiguity and inconsistency, and also helping them to understand their own

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, ‘The Vindications of the Rights of Woman’ in *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman*, ed. by D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf (Ont, Canada: Broadview Press, 1997), p.168

<sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, p.44



subjectivity and the way in which they are drawn to outdated and misleading principles such as the Law of the Excluded Middle. Specifically, it has shown that classical logic has embedded itself in critical thought, particularly with respect to women writers who have become trapped in a series of binaries based on this law. The history of this logic, and the way in which it has become attached to female writers, has been traced from Aristotle's logic, through John Locke and Gottfried Leibniz, to the criticism of Polwhele. It has also tried to outline the complex critical history that has accompanied the writings of these women, piecing together the ways in which binaries such as "masculine" and "feminine" were translated into "radical" and "conservative", causing further confusion and difficulty.

Of course, as outlined in the introduction, Fuzzy Set Theory should only be understood as an appropriated tool, one of many that critics might employ as a means by which they can better appreciate the fuzziness of women writers. It is not an extension or a representation of the theory itself. The point of the exercise is to encourage critics to create their own vehicles. As I have shown, many critics, including Guest, Miriam Brody, Mary Lyndon Shanley, Claudia Johnson and Andrew Elfenbein, already understand women writers as contradictory, and have created their own vehicles to represent this. Many more, however, have also fallen into the trap of the Law of the Excluded Middle. For them, a vehicle with ties to logic might be a useful place to begin because of its tradition in "systems" of thought, the way that it encourages further enquiry, and because it is pliable enough to work in a variety of situations. Indeed, the Fuzzy Set Theory has allowed for a number of critical observations that might otherwise have remained concealed, while adapting to the needs of each set. It has allowed for contemporary literary theory to be considered in the context of an eighteenth century discourse on sex and gender; to reconsider

biographical interpretation as a straightforward mode of critical enquiry; it has begun the arduous task of analysing writers with a complex critical history, and to incorporate conflicting interpretations; it has allowed us to appreciate bias in biography, to understand and accept interpretations which have clear ulterior motives; to appreciate unusual patterns (such as the situation in chapter two where unmarried women writers appear to have been drawn to the subject of Queen Elizabeth); to elucidate connections between writers who have often been grouped together, and free them from any restrictive understandings; to recognise that eighteenth century debates are often complex and irregular, and the position of women within these debates particularly fuzzy; lastly, it has allowed those writers who have been marginalised to be brought back into mainstream critical analysis.

These findings have not been confined entirely to the late eighteenth century, though this period has certainly been distinguished as a time when women writers were especially fuzzy. It has spanned a period of about forty-five years, from Barbauld's first collection of poetry in 1773, to Lucy Aikin's *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth* in 1818. This by no means suggests that the opportunities end there. By incorporating the work of women writers from the nineteenth century, the thesis has hinted that Fuzzy Theory might also be of interest to those working within the field of women's writing in this later period. As such, the work of Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans, for instance, may also provide interesting material for the Fuzzy Set Theory— they are both writers who have frequently been categorised as consummate “poetesses”. Indeed, Julian North has noticed that from the early 1800s there was an increasing awareness among publishers of the ‘selling power’ of the female author's

private life, which emphasised the ‘feminine modesty of the poet’.<sup>23</sup> This is, of course, a type of biographical interpretation. In North’s view, feminist critical resistance to aspects of this “poetess” tradition has led to a ‘critical devaluation’ of the work of Hemans and Landon.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in the 1960s, Hemans’ work had begun its revival with this reflection in Ian Jack’s *English Literature 1815-1832*:

The general level of her work is high, but unfortunately it almost always stops short of memorable poetry. Many of the better things... might be the work of a poetical committee. For her, we feel, poetry was a feminine accomplishment more difficult than piano-playing and embroidery but no less respectable.<sup>25</sup>

Even in the 1990s she was still considered by Germaine Greer to be a poet of “quaintness and insipidity”, remembered only “if at all” for ‘Casabianca’.<sup>26</sup> More recently, critics like Anthony John Harding have sought to understand Hemans’s poems as ‘unwomanly’, encompassing values that ‘appear to us patently hostile to women’s individual identity’, with ‘pressure points’ in which a concept of gender emerges different from the conventional.<sup>27</sup> But “unwomanly” is still a label, and still open to the Problem of Translation and the Law of the Excluded Middle.

Landon has endured a similar fate. North has noted that the image of Landon inferred from her poetry was ‘one of artlessly embodied, feminine sensibility’.<sup>28</sup> Even critics like Anne K. Mellor initially considered Landon to be ‘a woman poet who situated her self and her work wholly within the Burkean-Rousseauian categories of the beautiful and the domestic’, and who ‘constructed both her life and poetry as an

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<sup>23</sup> Julian North, ‘The Female Poet: The AfterLives of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon’, in *The Domestication of Genius: Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.191

<sup>24</sup> North, p.195

<sup>25</sup> Ian Jack, *English Literature, 1815-1832* (Clarendon Press, 1963), pp.168-9

<sup>26</sup> As quoted by Susan J. Wolfson, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.xv.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony John Harding, ‘Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman’, in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), p.138, p.140, p.145

<sup>28</sup> North, p.196

embodiment of Burke's female beauty'.<sup>29</sup> Shortly after Landon's re-discovery in the 1990s, Tricia Lootens quickly realised that there was a risk Landon might be misinterpreted as precisely that, warning: 'what critics rescue, we partly create; and the construction of our generation's "Letitia Landon" is at a crucial stage', arguing that Landon 'did more than write or enact poetic femininity' and that the 'concept of pure femininity is an illusion'.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, however, Lootens fails to find a convincing alternative, offering only that Landon is 'English' rather than feminine.<sup>31</sup> There is yet room for further improvement.

The principle issue with these two writers appears to be with the amalgamation of their work and lives and the word "feminine". Where, in the introduction, the reviewer of 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven' found that Barbauld had forgotten her gender, here, in the view of several critics, Hemans and Landon are too aware of it. But of course, the problem is not with them, it is with the word "feminine" and its contemporary definitions. Punch forward further still, and we can see that it has also been attached (and in some instances still is attached) to writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and even women whose male pseudonyms have been preserved—such as George Eliot. This suggests that the problem of binaries, of the Law of the Excluded Middle, and the scope of the Fuzzy Set Theory is much wider and much deeper than this small study allows.

This is not, then, the end, but the beginning of a critical journey free from restriction, one that will endeavour to understand women writers as perfect in their imperfections—in their changeability. It was through contradiction that these women

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<sup>29</sup> Anne K. Mellor, 'Exhausting the Beautiful', in *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.110

<sup>30</sup> Tricia Lootens, 'Reviving the Legend, Rethinking the Writer: Letitia Landon and the Poetess Tradition', in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. by Harriet Kramer Linkin, Stephen C. Behrendt (Kentucky: University of Kentucky 1999), p.242, p.243, p.245

<sup>31</sup> Lootens, p.245

could achieve emancipation from oppressive male values, often eluding the male critical gaze, allowing them to participate freely and openly in their society. The critical journey that endeavours to trace this must always demand more from what it sees, must always seek more, and must expand, as Simone de Beauvoir once said ‘into an indefinitely open future’,<sup>32</sup> a future of endless possibilities, of liberties yet untried.

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted by Nancy Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir: Philosophy and Feminism* (Colombia: Colombia University Press, 2001), p.137

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