



Edited by Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves

The Youth of Early Modern Women



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Figure 1.1 Hans Baldung Grien, *The Seven Ages of Woman*, 1544–1545



Introduction

Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves'

Abstract

This collection of essays demonstrates that early modern women experienced a shaping time of life between childhood and adulthood. Drawing on diverse sources from across Europe as well as Spanish America – including literary and visual representations, material cultures, letters, and judicial records – these studies together explore three central themes: how female youth was culturally constructed; how young women underwent distinctive physiological, social, and psychological transformations; and how differences of social rank inflected these changes. Scholarly investigations of European youth have generally focused on the more visible and institutionalized male presence. These essays show that women, too, had a youth that allowed them to reach full adulthood, to exercise agency, and to express themselves.

Keywords: female youth; girlhood; adolescence; young women; ages of woman; agency

Did early modern women have a youth? Yes. Although the scholarship has not only ignored but also, in some contexts, rejected a category for female youth, European women in fact underwent a distinctive shaping time between childhood and full adult status. This interdisciplinary collection explores the many ways that, between 1500 and 1800, young women took steps toward grown-up roles in several domains. The essays draw on a diverse mix of sources from across Europe and even Spanish America, including literary and visual representations, material culture, letters, and judicial

¹ We are grateful to the many colleagues who have enthusiastically supported this project from its conception. We warmly thank our editors at Amsterdam University Press and its readers for helpful suggestions. For a publication grant in support of the cover, we also thank the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies, University of British Columbia, Okanagan.

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records. This variety permits us collectively to address two mutually shaped frames of inquiry: first, early modern cultural constructions of youth, and second, particular lived experiences, including young women's exercise of personal and expressive agency in several forms. A third principal axis of investigation highlights the differences among young women of elite and more modest social ranks.

Early modern language designating female youth often lacked precision, but European culture did recognize and represent important transitions. Personal development took place within culturally mediated conventions and the constraints of moral and social norms. Unlike male youth, for some of whom an institutional or corporate dimension made their adolescence more visible to scholarship, girls' experience was largely domestic, if not necessarily private. Although females generally lived under male authority, in practice the rules applied differently to girl children, to grown women, and, we would suggest, to the young women in-between. As youths, girls were maturing sexually, working for a livelihood, leaving home, developing social lives, and sometimes marrying while these transitions were underway. This fluid time brought some danger; it was easy for girls to go astray or to become prey to exploitative adults. Yet young women's physical, economic, and social transformations could also accompany the acquisition of fuller self-knowledge and a greater measure of agency and decision-making.

As represented in the classic schema of the 'Ages of Man', one early modern model for life proposed a series of stages tracing an arc from the cradle and childhood upwards to maturity, and then downwards to decrepitude and the grave. In this imagery, the 'Ages of Man' were sometimes three or four, and more often, as time went on, seven or even ten or twelve.² Before the peak of adulthood stood youth, a time of great energy but not always the best judgement. But these 'Ages', including youth, belonged to men, because for early modern culture the human, indeed the ideal, was based on male patterns. For example, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare's humorous summation of the drama of life into seven acts traces a progression from '[m]ewling and puking' infant to 'whining school-boy', lover, soldier, and then on to the fifth stage as a justice '[i]n fair round belly', presumably settled fully into adulthood with all of its responsibilities. The decline then begins, '[i]nto the lean and slipper'd pantaloone', with his 'youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide / For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice, / Turning again toward childish treble'. The final stage offers a return to

2 Chojnacka and Wiesner-Hanks, *Ages of Woman, Ages of Man*, uses the 'ages' to organize a teaching collection of primary documents.

'second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing'.³ Rather than honouring men's life stages, this passage pokes fun, but it still all too typically ignores women's ages altogether. In other visual representations where female analogues do appear beside men on the stairway of life, the figures are shadows of male stages and little differentiated from age to age.⁴

As Colin Heywood has observed, youth, like childhood, was culturally constructed and historically variable, even within a single era.⁵ Vocabulary, now and then, reflects this diversity. Our modern vocabulary seldom speaks of youths, but rather of adolescents and teenagers.⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines adolescence in physiological and developmental terms as '[t]he period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult', but does not assign age as markers as the modern term 'teenager' suggests.⁷ Early modern usage had other concerns. In religious writing, adolescent immaturity was often linked to sin. For example, in *The Imitation of Christ* (c. 1425) Thomas à Kempis wrote of his need of grace in order to overcome 'my Nature proane vnto al impietie euen from my youth', an idea that echoes the perspective expressed in Genesis that 'the imagination of man's heart is euil from his youth'.⁸ Yet, summing up age-specific terms in early modern England, Paul Griffiths finds that, although the word 'adolescence' appears, 'youth' was used much more often.⁹ Margaret Cavendish, despite being an energetic advocate for women's education, autonomy, and travel, was clearly thinking only of young men when she recommended in her brief commentary 'Of Youth':

[S]end them abroad to learn to know the World, that they may know men, and manners, to see several Nations, and to observe several Natures, Customs, Laws, and Ceremonies, their Wars, or Contracts of Peace, thus

3 Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7.139-66.

4 See for example, a German calendar (1589), in Chojnacka and Wiesner-Hanks, *Ages of Woman*, ii.

5 Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 28.

6 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in recent usage, 'youth' is not common as a term to designate pre-adult individuals; the word more often appears as a compound noun in such phrases as 'youth culture' or 'youth groups'.

7 For the use of 'teenager' concerning medieval and early modern youths, see Eisenbichler, *Premodern Teenager*, 1.

8 Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, 259; Gen. 8:21 (King James Version), 1611, <https://www.king-jamesbibleonline.org/1611-Bible/>.

9 Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, 17.

they may come to be good Statesmen, or Commanders in War, and be able to do their Country good service.¹⁰

The opportunity of travel and especially the benefits outlined here take gender (as well as rank) for granted. As with the 'Ages' schema, the concept of youth readily defaults to a male reading.

The language commonly used to identify young females was less preoccupied with age than with family relationships and sexual chastity. In the early modern prescriptive literature for young women, the emphasis on marriage generated a triad of categories – maids, wives, or widows – that obscured adolescence as a distinct intermediate stage on the path to adulthood. In Richard Hyrd's 1529 English translation of Juan Luis Vives' tract on female education, *De institutione feminae Christianae* (1524), girls from infancy into their teens are referred to primarily as 'maydes', a term whose meaning, according to the *OED*, could signal either 'young female' or 'virgin (of any age)'.¹¹ As a result, the terminology used in this tract carries specific connotations, for, as Jennifer Higginbotham points out, the word 'maid' could not refer to a sexually active adolescent or young woman.¹² Other lexical choices privilege terms that denote a girl's current and anticipated familial relations, such as 'doughter' and 'euerye kynde of women / virgins / wyues / and wydowes', the latter phrase both capturing and delimiting the options for female adulthood at the same time as it elides reference to female youth. Similarly, *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights*, an early seventeenth-century legal commentary, describes the 'Ages of a Woman' in language that effectively renders female youth invisible by proposing that '[a]ll of them are understood either married or to bée married'.¹³ In these formulations, marriage is too strong a marker of adulthood, given the demographic evidence, as discussed below. Essays in this collection by Jennifer McNabb for the sixteenth century and Margaret Reeves for the seventeenth further elaborate the varieties in English-language usage concerning children and female youth.

Similar concerns shaped lexical habits in other languages. In French, *filie* was the word for daughter and for an unmarried female. Since *filie* standing by itself, however, might convey moral ambiguity, the standard usage for a

10 Cavendish, 'Of Youth', 59.

11 Vives, *De institutione*. Here we cite from Hyrd's translation, *Boke Called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 4 and *passim*.

12 Higginbotham, 'Fair Maids', 175.

13 E[dgar], *Lavves Resolutions*, 6.

respectable girl was *jeune fille* (or *vieille fille* for an ageing spinster). There was no language to distinguish between younger girls and nubile ones. Italian offered a larger array of terms: as in the French, *figlia* meant a daughter, but for girls more generally, the vocabulary included *putta* for a young child, *ragazza* for a broader range of girlhood, and *zitella* indicating a virgin of any age old enough to marry. These terms and their range of connotations suggest that youth was more potently a social designation than a status bounded by age. In parallel, for the Netherlands, Marja van Tilburg shows in her essay here the slow development in conduct books of differentiation between unmarried young women and wives.

The topoi of the 'Ages of Life' as early modern culture applied them to women echoed these distinctions, and also their variety. Although the visual images of specifically female life stages are not many, they still offer scholars of youth more than one useful perspective. The sixteenth-century German artist Hans Baldung Grien himself made several versions. Aligned with the tripartite model of a woman's life that we have seen, the most common pictorial rendering showed only three stages: babe, nubile maid, and crone. As an allegory, Baldung painted this threesome, accompanied by Death, in 1509–1511 and again in 1541–1544.¹⁴ Depicting scantily veiled female bodies, the representation of human ageing is deeply corporeal. In an article on the 'periodization of women's lives', historian Silvana Seidel Menchi surveys the early modern imagery and argues that the limited tripartite version not only reflected standard cultural constructions of womanhood, but also, potentially, restricted how women viewed themselves.¹⁵ In particular, concerning girlhood, Seidel Menchi suggests a practice, especially where brides were young, of 'anticipation' of marriage that may have precluded opportunities for education and other gathering of experience. Notably, she insists that this regimen was culturally and socially based rather than physiologically driven, and thus may have had different impacts in those strata or settings where brides were typically older.

Seidel Menchi's discussion also shows that, in the mid sixteenth century, a few artists elaborated the representation of female lives beyond three phases. Circa 1560, the Italian Cristofano Bertelli portrayed ten ages of women on the conventional stairway, clothed, if lightly sexualized, and heroically

14 Hans Baldung Grien, *Three Ages of Woman and Death* (1509-1511, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna); *Three Ages of Man and Death* (1541-1544, Museo del Prado, Madrid). Note that the gendering in the wording of painting titles is inconsistent on different websites, and elsewhere.

15 Seidel Menchi, 'Girl and the Hourglass', 58-65.

posed.¹⁶ In a different style, the same Hans Baldung Grien represented in a pair of paintings a female life in ten stages; the view of the first seven ages, our frontispiece (Figure I.1), is unusually nuanced in its representations of youth's trajectory.¹⁷ This painting poses in an imaginary landscape seven figures moving from infancy to middle-aged adulthood. At the left front sits a scarcely gendered, clothed toddler with a coral amulet, and on the right at the back, with her body hidden, stands a firm-looking, postmenopausal woman, her hair covered with a white coiffe. Between them, nudes representing five intervening 'ages' emphasize female corporeality and sexuality. The first is a prepubescent girl with a plain braid down her back and her body little differentiated from a boy's. The second figure with high breasts, more luxuriant, long hair, and a necklace of tiny pearls appears a young teenager; she is, in our volume's terms, in an early stage of youth. The third nude, posing at the centre of the whole array, has a fully rounded body, elaborately dressed hair, and fancy jewellery. Still a youth, sharing the white drapery with her younger companions, she is in her prime, ready for an imminent wedding and wedding night. To the bride's right are two more nudes, both with their hair bound up and no jewellery, and linked by startling dark drapery. By cultural logic, these two represent the life stage of wife and mother, the supposed epitome of righteous womanhood. Yet the nude bodies, sagging breasts, and darker limbs of the fifth more markedly than the fourth, highlight not fulfilment but wear and tear, along with the decline of sexual attractiveness and fertility.

Representations of life stages in other media ambivalently confirm this scheme of female sexuality's progression, incipient in the teenage years, to full-blown and active among brides, to waning quickly after motherhood. For example, the Piedmontese jurist Giovanni Nevizzano, in a compendium on marriage law published in 1526, ironically and misogynistically characterized young women's life stages: ages seven to fourteen, corresponding to Baldung Grien's first nude, virgin; ages fourteen to 21, corresponding to the second, 'prey to love'; ages 21 to 28, corresponding to the central figure, not bride but

16 Seidel Menchi, 'Girl and the Hourglass', 54-55 and 58. See also a Dutch print representing female lives in twelve stages: *The Women's Looking Glass* (after 1667), Folger digital image no. 3150.

17 Seidel Menchi, 'Girl and the Hourglass', 57-58 and 60-61. The painting of *Seven Ages* (1544-1545) is now in Leipzig; the second painting, *The Three Ages of Woman and Death*, survives only in a late sixteenth-century copy held in Rennes. This analysis of the 'Seven Ages', itself a schematic rather than naturalistic representation, does not claim to be a complete or properly contextualized art historical commentary. The intention is only to suggest congruences with features of the category of female youth found in other media.

'whore'.¹⁸ Although we must not take any of these representations literally, their convergence, along with Elizabeth S. Cohen's and Julie Hardwick's essays here, confirms the importance of sexual maturation as a dimension of growing up female that was central to youth.

In other textual domains, regulatory discourses from European law and religion suggested a transition from childhood to a stage of greater responsibility. Although in many places adolescents remained minors for most legal purposes until the age of 25, arriving at the age of twelve to fourteen conferred some greater agency. Sometimes gender talked, as girls moved into a new state sooner than boys. Classically and canonically, the minimum age to consent to marriage was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Analogously, at these same gendered ages, young people in Catholic Portugal acquired additional religious responsibilities, and, if orphans, could participate in some decisions about their fates.¹⁹ Elsewhere in Catholic Europe custodial institutions for orphans or children at risk also typically wanted children to enter before the age of twelve, and certainly not after fourteen.²⁰ This threshold assumed that adolescents should earn their own keep; it also likely reflected mistrust of youthful impulsive energy, even for girls. In eighteenth-century Seville the city council decreed that girls over fourteen years old should not be admitted to asylums because they might set a bad example, including by running away.²¹

In the last 50 years, a multidisciplinary literature on young people in the European past has evolved. Ironically, Philippe Ariès's claim that medieval and early modern culture largely discounted childhood has continued to stimulate a rich body of work refuting his conclusions.²² One strand of this scholarship considers youth, but the term has functioned largely as a false generic. Before scholarship attended explicitly to masculinities, most of the discussion about youth as a distinct age category has been about

18 Quoted in Seidel Menchi, 'Girl and the Hourglass', 43. For the Middle Ages, Phillips, 'Maidenhood as the Perfect Age', 4-5 and 8-9, highlights this age as both sexually attractive and still virginal. In parallel, city regulations from Strasbourg in 1500 made fourteen the minimum age for becoming a prostitute; girls found working 'whose bodies are not yet ready for such work, that is who have neither breasts nor the other things which are necessary for this, should be driven out of the city with blows and are to stay out under threat of bodily punishment until they reach the proper age'; quoted in Wiesner, 'Paternalism in Practice', 191-92.

19 Sá, 'Up and Out', 22; and Abreu-Ferreira, *Women, Crime*, 86.

20 Tikoff, 'Not All Orphans', 46. See also Franco in this volume.

21 Tikoff, 'Not All Orphans', 49-50.

22 Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*. Recent responses include: Heywood, *History of Childhood*; Classen, *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*; King, 'Concepts of Childhood'; and Averett, *Early Modern Child*.

boys and young men. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos's observations thus apply particularly to males:

So a person might be considered mentally and emotionally mature for specific rights and obligations at different times during his teens, as well as legally mature at 21; but in terms of social experience, the requirements of some professions, or responsibility for a family, he could be considered, at eighteen, 20, or even 25, as still quite young.²³

In the historical scholarship on early modern male youth, central to the discussion has been education and professional training. For elite men – gentlemen, patricians, and future bureaucrats – there was humanist schooling and, for a privileged few, experiential learning as, for example, on the Grand Tour. Many urban craftsmen, merchants, and some professionals trained through apprenticeship.

Alexandra Shepard, writing about England, has spoken directly to the ages of man. She argues that marriage figured in the construction of adulthood not only for women but also for men. Youth, by contrast with adulthood, was a dangerous and inconstant age.²⁴ As markers of male maturity, an association of marriage with mastership also appeared in German towns. On the other hand, in early modern Turin the linkage between professional maturity and headship of household was less consistent.²⁵ Not only in England, but also in many parts of Europe, male youths were known to be energetic, headstrong, and inclined to violence. They were solicitous of honour and often given to imprudent defence of their own.²⁶ Young men's sexual appetites also threatened disorder which, if not channelled to prostitutes, could endanger respectable girls or other men.²⁷

Antagonism, rivalry, and public performance were also features of a masculine youth culture that cultivated peer-bonding and served, at times by transgression, the management of social tensions. The rituals of charivaris and the *Abbeyes de Jeunesse* in France, described in Natalie Zemon Davis's early work, had analogues in Italy such as the fistfights on Venetian bridges or the Florentine jousts in celebration of St. John the

23 Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 36.

24 Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, Part 1. For the medieval period, see Karras, *From Boys to Men*.

25 Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*, uses male ages as a recurrent analytical category.

26 Shoemaker, 'Taming of the Duel'.

27 For gang rape in French towns, see Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, 12-13 and 19-22. See also Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 94-107.

Baptist.²⁸ Some confraternities also gathered boys and young men to deliver social messages.²⁹ Thus, although young men were expected to be rowdy, in various settings their youth groups had a public role.

Using the triad of life stages as a temporal framework has until recently given historians of early modern women little to say about 'girlhood', but that term has now more frequently come into scholarly use to foreground the distinctive experiences of female children. Notably, for England, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford not only break female childhood into several stages but, critically, also attend to social rank.³⁰ Gender differentiation emerged especially at a fourth stage when the child became 'potentially useful'.³¹ By the age of seven, if not earlier, boys in middle and upper classes left the overwhelmingly female circle where they had spent their early years in order to be educated, at home or at school, by professional male instructors. Elite girls, in contrast, continued their training in social and domestic skills appropriate for their future roles as wives and mothers within the household. Daughters of the best families might continue this domestic education as ladies-in-waiting at court. Girls of lower status, if not at age seven, more likely by age twelve, often left home to go into service. Recent literary studies have begun to elaborate further our understanding of cultural constructions of English girlhood. The collection of essays edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh investigates the relationship between gender and childhood, and Deanne Williams and Jennifer Higginbotham have extended this discussion in their respective explorations of girlhood in Shakespeare and early modern drama.³² These patterns in England appeared with variations in other parts of Europe, but few have been discussed in print.

As with girlhood, a discussion of early modern female youth has only just begun. In her study of adolescence in early modern England, Ben-Amos devotes one chapter to female youths, focusing primarily on their training in housewifery and domestic service, and demonstrating how gender constrained apprenticing opportunities for young women in comparison

28 N.Z. Davis, 'Reasons of Misrule', 97-123, and 'Rites of Violence', 152-87, in *Society and Culture*. For Italy, see R. Davis, *War of the Fists*, 59-62 and 109-12; Trexler, *Public Life*, 225-40 and 368-99; and Zorzi, 'Rituals of Youthful Violence', 235-66.

29 Eisenbichler, *Boys of the Archangel Raphael*.

30 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*. For an earlier period, Phillips, in *Medieval Maidens*, describes 'maidenhood' as a female life stage that corresponds in many respects to what we are calling 'youth'.

31 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 78.

32 Miller and Yavneh, *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*; Higginbotham, *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*; Higginbotham, 'Shakespeare and Girlhood'; Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood*; and Williams, 'Introduction: Girls and Girlhood'.

to their male counterparts.³³ Literary studies by Ursula Potter and Diane Purkiss have explored representations of female youth in Shakespearean drama, but the category of 'youth' as it applies to early modern women is still not well articulated.³⁴ Despite an older scholarship that presumed no youth for women, in the domains of representation and cultural commentary, the essays in this volume find rich and subtle renderings by women themselves and by others about them. Furthermore, these studies show that the expectations and opportunities for female youth, like so much in the early modern world, differed markedly between ordinary people and elites, and between those of lay and clerical status.

Although the essays in this collection deliver richly varied accounts of the constraints, challenges, and opportunities that characterized youth for women, we will open that discussion here with a few introductory comments on the conditions within which these experiences took place. Youth typically involved taking steps toward adult roles in several domains. For the individual woman, these included becoming sexually mature, developing the varied skills required for adulthood – that is, education broadly construed – and entry into social networks and work life beyond her natal household. For some it also might involve travel and movement, including between rural and urban settings. The end of youth often appears easier to pin down than the beginning, since marriage as a formal rite of passage has been seen to usher in adulthood for most European women.³⁵ Yet the marital boundary was not so clear for many. On the one hand, for some noble brides who married young, a stage of youth continued after marriage, as appears in the essays by Jane Couchman and Megan Moran in this volume. On the other hand, significant numbers of European women – more and more as time went on – never married or became nuns, the brides of Christ. Jacqueline Holler here observes this phenomenon also in New Spain. What marked the moves from childhood to youth to adulthood for these lifelong singlewomen?³⁶

The beginning of youth is harder to pinpoint, but with the onset of sexual maturity the body was a central locus of change. Outside of learned medical literature, menarche did not attract much cultural attention before the

33 Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 133-55.

34 Potter, 'Greensickness', 271-91; Potter, 'Navigating the Dangers', 421-39; and Purkiss, 'Fractious: Teenage Girls' Tales'. See also Terpstra, *Lost Girls*.

35 Chojnacki, 'Measuring Adulthood'.

36 Froide, *Never Married*, 154-64; and Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 108.

eighteenth century.³⁷ Yet historians now put its arrival for most early modern girls at around age fourteen or even fifteen, well after the canonical age of marriage for girls at twelve. While women becoming mothers in their mid teens was not shocking, early modern physicians did not assume that most were ready to bear children immediately after menarche. A practice likely much more common – an extended virginity – posed risks that preoccupied medical writers with the possibilities of the polysymptomatic ‘disease of virgins’ or greensickness.³⁸

Even for most early modern women who did become wives, the wedding was no clear marker of the end of childhood. Marriage often came late after a youthful transition to adulthood was well under way. As shown in several of the essays in this collection, the age of first marriage varied with class and, in some measure, with geography. Nevertheless, European women typically married late by global historical standards, that is, in the mid or even late twenties rather than as young teenagers. In classic demographic studies, this pattern has best been documented for ‘northwestern’ Europe, especially England and France, in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some scholarship focused on earlier generations in Italy has suggested that in Mediterranean regions women married younger. Yet, even though the age of first marriage did trace a broader range among ordinary people in the south, many brides were not teenagers, but well into their twenties.³⁹ Social rank, on the other hand, did make a difference. To secure the political and economic ambitions of their elders, aristocratic girls were sometimes betrothed even as children and wed as soon as possible. More usually, however, high-born brides married in their mid to later teens, or even their early twenties.⁴⁰ Thus, elite girls typically went to the altar younger than plebeian ones, but seldom as children. They, too, often had a time for youth.

Later marriage caused young women to traverse an interval likely of several years or even a decade, during which they themselves developed sexual feelings and, more dangerously, began to attract the sexual desires of others, as represented in the Swiss images analysed in Christiane Anderson’s essay. Early modern women lived within an honour culture in which familial reputation put central value on women’s good sexual conduct.

37 McClive, *Menstruation*, 108 and 116-20; and King, *Disease of Virgins*, 84-85 and 88-89.

38 King, *Disease of Virgins*, 43-66; see also Churchill, *Female Patients*, 102-09 and 212-14.

39 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans*, 138-43 and 203-11; Poska, *Women and Authority*, 113-14; and Abreu-Ferreira, *Women, Crime*, 38.

40 Sá, ‘Up and Out’, 24-25; for several locations, see Litchfield, ‘Demographic Characteristics’, 198-99.

So, as daughters and sisters moved from childhood into youth, protecting their virginity and honour became a more pressing task for families and for surrogate kin such as masters and mistresses. This responsibility was more challenging because, licitly or illicitly, non-elite young women were not wholly cut off from sex. Courtship, including in some corners of Europe premarital cuddling and even intercourse, brought together young men and women with sexual prospects. For such encounters, there were customary rules about what to do and not do, and in some settings young people informally policed each other. Essays here by Julie Hardwick and Eleanor Hubbard explore these regimes. Courtship also provided a narrative through which to seek sexual favours from nubile women whom the men could not or did not intend to marry. Riskier still were the older men – including masters charged with the care of their household dependants – whose appetites lit upon the untried charms of serving girls or neighbours.⁴¹ The loss of virginity, however, need not mean that a young woman forfeited the chance of a respectable future. For some, sex was a resource that they more or less skilfully deployed in pursuit of what they saw as their interests.⁴²

Youth for early modern women also often meant movement. Many left their natal households, sometimes to circulate within a somewhat larger social and economic terrain; others also travelled or migrated some distance. Women moved to marry, but also, earlier or later, many went to work in service or other settings. For most non-elite women, getting married meant setting up a new house. Noblewomen, whose matches were usually matters of family and state politics, moved to an existing and typically large household, often far from home.⁴³ Yet many girls, of both high and low rank, had left their natal homes before they became brides. As the essays here by Julie A. Eckerle, Jacqueline Holler, and Sarah Morris describe, travel – both real and imagined – could inflect female youth in distinctive ways.

The fragility of the demographic regime left many children, male and female, without one or both parents long before they had grown up. When mothers died, a young girl might move to another household as kin or servant, or sometimes both, where an adult woman could oversee her in a kind of fosterage. In parallel, in Catholic cities monastic asylums or conservatories, such as the one in early modern Rome discussed in the essay here by Alessandra Franco, were created to sequester and protect poor girls,

41 For a German example contextualized in the broader features of female youth, see Harrington, *Unwanted Child*, 23-35.

42 Ferrante, 'Sessualità come risorsa'.

43 Baernstein, 'Regional Intermarriage', 204-14.

including prostitutes' daughters, during the dangerous teenage years when they risked recruitment into the family business. As life typically shifted girls and young women from household to household, they also often moved from place to place.

Young women mostly learned essential adult roles by informal routes, usually in one or more households. The content varied by social rank, as shown in Barbara Mujica's comparative essay. Aristocratic girls, sometimes under the attentive eye of a mother or grandmother, learned essential social skills, courtly arts such as dancing, and perhaps even some humanist literary culture.⁴⁴ When they reached the stage of youth, some noble girls were sent to court as ladies-in-waiting. In these positions they refined their manners, cultivated channels of patronage that helped their families, and made themselves visible as potential brides.⁴⁵ In Catholic domains it was also common practice to dispatch well-born girls to convents either to prepare them to take the veil or to mould them into pious wives and mothers.

Much of what non-elite girls learned as daughters or servants, however, were common skills and attitudes appropriate to their gender. Elite girls, like those in Michele Nicole Robinson's essay, were taught them too. After praying, the normative tasks, both practical and moral, were spinning, sewing, and other activities that sustained the labour of other members of the household. We often call these tasks 'domestic', although that can leave us with an overly narrow view of their scope because early modern housekeeping involved many productive activities. In the countryside, for example, young women often performed a range of agricultural tasks. Some youthful work engaged more specialization. Contractual apprenticeships in specific crafts were rarely accessible to girls.⁴⁶ Yet many kinds of artisans and even some low-level professionals such as notaries depended for prosperity and even survival on collaborative labour that drew on not only male but also female workers. In such cases, as daughters and wives, young women learned the skills needed to support the family trade.⁴⁷ In a few settings, unmarried women, such as the silk workers of Lyon described here in Hardwick's essay, left their homes to live with their peers and take up skilled work.

Far more common was the practice of service, a means for many girls to get some training, earn their keep, and, as they got older and more productive,

44 Couchman, "Our little darlings", 101-14; and Paoli, 'Foreign Mothers'.

45 Adams, 'Fostering Girls in Early Modern France'; Guasco, *Discourse to Lady Lavinia*.

46 Spence, "A Perl for Your Debts?"

47 Hardwick, *Practice of Patriarchy*; and Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*.

to build some capital in promised contributions toward a dowry. Especially for orphans, entry into service as a form of fosterage might start at the age of seven or nine. For many girls, service often began around the age of eleven or twelve, with an expectation, if only sometimes a formal contract, to stay for seven to ten years and receive some compensation in clothing and money.⁴⁸ Others became servants later in their teens.

Although institutional schooling dominates our twenty-first-century assumptions about preparing young people for their lives and careers, the early modern context was quite different, especially for girls. Female literacy advanced during the early modern era, and by the seventeenth century more and more, especially elite, young women learned to read and write, though not at a set age and rarely in a public classroom.⁴⁹ These skills helped them cultivate their souls, conduct their own or family business, and, for a few, reach past their own thresholds to participate in the emerging 'republics' of letters.⁵⁰ Poorer girls, notably those growing up in cities, sometimes had access to limited instruction in dame schools or charity classes taught by nuns. In the countryside, moreover, non-elite women remained predominantly illiterate into the eighteenth century. Even for those early modern young women who acquired these potent skills, school and an age-staged curriculum were not standard structures shaping their youth.

Read together, the essays in this interdisciplinary collection argue forcefully that youth was in fact an important phase of the early modern woman's life cycle. These case studies from across Europe and beyond also document how all human experiences, female as well as male, came in many forms and colourations. The nature of social expectations and of individual women's responses varied not only by gender but also by rank, education, religion, local situations, and, always, personal temperament. At the same time there are several recurrent themes that we highlight with our groupings of essays: cultural conceptualizations of female youth; self-representations in life-writing and letters; evolving models for training girls for adulthood; and courtship and the potential or actual sexual lives of young unmarried women.

The first section of this collection considers efforts to conceptualize female youth through representations in assorted settings and media. Two

48 Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 152-56; and Vergara, 'Growing Up Indian', 79-80. Wolfthal, 'Household Help', 14-18 and 25-35, discusses portraits of several young women servants.

49 Houseman, *Literacy in Early Modern England*.

50 With the mastery and judicious display of rare skills in Latin, art, or music, a 'virgin' female youth could, as a prodigy, garner public admiration and honour for her family. For examples, see Ross, *Birth of Feminism*, 4, 6, 9-11, 30-47, and 107.

essays probe literary framings in seventeenth-century England. Reeves examines Puritan writings as well as lyric and epic poetry in order to track the nuanced imagery that distinguished children from youths, including girls. Morris reads Aphra Behn's play, *The Rover*, as a representation of a young gentlewoman going 'rogue' in order to see the world. In a very different, judicial, domain of English discourse, McNabb probes court records from Cheshire to explore the range of words strategically deployed to characterize girls and young women. Then, taking us into the realm of emotions and imagination, Holler extracts ideas about youth from testimonies before the colonial Mexican Inquisition by and about a sixteen-year old Spanish girl suspected of diabolical possession. Finally, using visual imagery, Andersson shows us from Switzerland male artists' drawings of young women that position them ambiguously between eros and war.

The second group of essays, engaging both retrospective and very immediate forms of life-writing, yields self-representations of early modern youth by mostly well-born European women. From Spanish autobiographical writings, Mujica compares the girlhoods of three Carmelite nuns who emerged from very different social backgrounds to become religious reformers. Also drawing on retrospective texts, Eckerle examines the impact for seventeenth-century English gentlewomen of passing part of their girlhoods in the colonial environment of Ireland. Two other essays rely on the more immediate medium of family letters. Both also consider elites where women were more likely to marry young. Moran shifts our attention to the urban patricians of sixteenth-century Florence in order to reconstruct young women's negotiations around clothing and fashion before and after marriage. In parallel, noblewomen's correspondence from the Netherlandish court of Orange-Nassau allows Couchman to trace how marriage and even motherhood might not feel definitively like being all grown up.

The third grouping, presenting female youths of different social ranks in European cities, explores several modes for training girls and preparing them for adulthood. For Italy, first Franco, reading regulations and administrative records from a Roman asylum for girls at risk, argues that a period of institutional education corresponded, for some, to a special time of youth. Next, looking in contrast at patrician and middling families in Bologna, Robinson studies material culture – both its few surviving objects and its representation in art and archival documents – to concretize our understanding of female transition from child to adult. Third, moving to the north, Tilburg compares Dutch conduct manuals to show that norms for bourgeois female youth differentiated from those for wives only later in the eighteenth century.

Using judicial records from several kinds of tribunals, the essays in the fourth section explore early modern courtship and the entanglements that followed as teenagers became sexual. All of these studies suggest that young women of the urban middle and working classes risked misuse; but they also worked – alone or in collaboration with family and peers – to shape their lives, or at least the stories told about them in court. For Rome, Cohen uses prosecutions of illicit sex with unmarried teenagers to show that these encounters had multiple meanings and that the young women were not simply victims. For metropolitan London, Hubbard lays out a lively, night-time youth culture that included young women as well as men and crossed social strata. Similarly, Hardwick's study of Lyon shows young workers, male and female, collaborating not only in premarital sex but also in dealing with the resulting pregnancies through 'remedies'.

In sum, early modern culture did not often concertedly articulate a specific stage of youth for women. Yet if we pose the question of whether women had a youth, there emerges from a rich mix of literary and visual representations as well as from testimonies and other documentary sources, a distinctive, critical phase of late girlhood. Prescriptive discourses sometimes worked to discount such an in-between interval for girls. A persistent scholarly expectation, however, that women passed from an undifferentiated childhood abruptly into adulthood misunderstands the varieties and complexities of life experience. Especially for the bulk of any population that struggled with limited resources, everyday practice had to have ways to accommodate the routine disjunctions and internal contradictions between the approved and the real. Not surprisingly, therefore, this gathering of essays figures female youth as a time of multiple and critical transitions. With or without consistent labels, laws, or literary tributes, all young women went through a series of functional changes that altered their physical capacities and social identities, and prepared them to take on varied adult roles. Although experiences differed with social and economic resources, maturity required teenage girls to become familiar with altered bodies that brought new powers and new risks; to learn to deal with people outside the household and often to leave home; and to work for their own keep as well as to fend not only for themselves but also for family and associates. Most female youths continued to live as dependants. Nevertheless, steps toward adulthood brought them increasing responsibilities, fuller skills, and a greater measure of agency within their local settings.

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Part 1

Concepts and Representations



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1. 'A Prospect of Flowers'

Concepts of Childhood and Female Youth in Seventeenth-Century British Culture

Margaret Reeves

Abstract

This analysis of cultural constructions of childhood and female youth in early modern English literature reveals diverse perspectives on the child's moral nature evident in three distinct ideas of childhood. Puritan writers frequently instructed their young readers about the problems arising from inherent corruption, while poets such as Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne re-imagine childhood by situating it within a framework of innocence. These poets anticipate Wordsworth's Neoplatonic conception of a child whose alignment with divinity bestows power and agency. This proto-Romantic conception, when inflected by gender as happens in some of Andrew Marvell's lyric poetry, offers a distinctive space for re-imagining female youth, and an illuminating contrast to the less adequate version of innocence granted to Milton's youthful Eve.

Keywords: youth; childhood; girlhood; innocence; proto-Romantic; *Paradise Lost*; Wordsworth; Marvell

It is a truth universally acknowledged that certain claims about pre-modern childhood and parent-child relations made by Philippe Ariès and Lawrence Stone are insupportable given the abundant evidence to the contrary.¹ The most troubled issue concerns whether a concept of childhood as a distinctive phase of life was possible in early modern culture. Working largely with French materials, Ariès advanced the now (in)famous claim that no idea of childhood existed prior to the seventeenth century (5). Stone, writing

1 Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*; Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*.

about early modern England, made complementary assertions that clear distinctions between childhood and adulthood would not emerge until the eighteenth century (410), and that high mortality rates in childhood played a role in delaying this understanding (249). Using varieties of evidence, including texts by parents writing to and about their children, scholars of both the medieval and the early modern have hotly disputed these hypotheses.² Nevertheless, such debates have productively generated new areas of inquiry on the history of ideas of childhood in Western culture.³

These debates have prompted reconsideration of a set of deeply naturalized assumptions about childhood. Recent cultural studies criticism posits that childhood is not a natural state – as Simone de Beauvoir said of womanhood – but is instead a socially, historically, and culturally constructed idea.⁴ In the seventeenth century, childhood as an idea was in flux, with multiple concepts in circulation. One concept, mentioned by Stone, derives from early modern beliefs in astrology that assume a person's character is governed by planetary configurations at birth or conception (406). A second, equally individualistic as well as biologically determinist view holds that a balance of fluids in the body determines one's disposition, an idea with roots in Galenic teachings on the four humours that also accounts for changes in temperament as people age.⁵ Neither of these approaches to the question of human nature, then, proposes a distinct essence or set of attributes identifying childhood as a separate stage of life distinguishing it from adulthood.

In England, an historically important notion of children as inherently prone to sin from birth pervades Puritan culture and shapes the literary works that Puritan writers aimed at child readers. The basis for this pessimistic view is Calvin's *Institution of Christian Religion*:

[E]ven infants bring their condemnation with them from their mother's womb; for although they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their unrighteousness, they have its seed included in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed of sin, and, therefore, cannot but be odious and abominable to God.⁶

2 See for example, Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth*, 6; Laurence, *Women in England*, 90; and Tancke, *Bethinke Thy Selfe*, 76.

3 For a summary of Ariès's significance, see Heywood, 'Centuries of Childhood'; and Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 1–17.

4 Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 267.

5 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 406; and Burrow, *Ages of Man*, 12.

6 Calvin, *Institution of Christian Religion*, 1039.

The idea of infant depravity that follows from Calvinism's stance on human nature is diametrically opposed to the early twenty-first century default view of childhood innocence,⁷ but had a strong impact on Puritan parents in early modern England. For example, Elizabeth Joscelyn writes to her unborn child that, 'The diuells malice is as easily perceyved for euen now he lyes lurking ready to catche euery good motion from th[y] hart'.⁸ Joscelyn grounds her advice in the belief that innate corruption requires serious attention from infancy.

This Puritan idea of childhood – based on a Calvinist notion of innate corruption – inspired a body of literature in English that was distinctive in being marketed directly to children, portraying youthful rather than adult protagonists and narrators, and addressing child readers directly as sinners responsible for their own salvation.⁹ Other literary genres, such as fables, chapbooks, advice books, and conduct manuals, were read by children, even though not always written specifically for them. Seventeenth-century Puritan writers, however, created this distinct body of works that situate a child's experience as a central focus for its target audience and, through these writings, produce an idea of childhood that remains an important legacy of the period. For example, John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* (1646) encourages its youthful readers to internalize this idea through the question-and-response structure of the catechism. In replying to questions about his moral nature, the child respondent confirms his 'corrupt nature is empty of Grace, bent unto sinne, and onely unto sinne, and that continually' (A2v). Rereading as well as memorizing the responses invites young readers to recognize themselves as innately sinful beings. Similarly, the 'awakened' child in John Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) laments that 'I was in sin conceived' and at birth, 'I was with filth bespaked' (4–6). Unlike the prescriptive literature inscribing modes of conduct for female and male youths in circulation at this time, distinctions between genders in these Puritan texts are less pronounced. Belief in innate depravity is a powerful equalizer, with distinctions in representations of gender taking second place to the insistence that young readers self-identify as sinners who must work for their own salvation.

Similarly, in *A Token for Children* (1676), James Janeway informs his readers that they are utterly corrupt in nature, and that the child who plays is the Devil's child, while the one who prays is God's.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Janeway's

7 The modern notion of childhood innocence has been the subject of considerable debate in contemporary childhood studies. See, for example, Jenkins, 'Childhood Innocence', discussed below.

8 Joscelyn, *Mothers Legacy*, 62.

9 Demers, *From Instruction to Delight*, 41–42.

10 Janeway, *Token for Children*, gr.

gentle tone, addressing his readers as 'my dear Lambs' in a narrative that recounts the conversions and deaths of Puritan children, takes them seriously as subjects with affective capacities that are worthy of attention. The stories of heroic child protagonists whose 'joyful deaths' are deemed exemplary situate them as active agents whose piety is illustrative of their own salvation. Whether Janeway's use of such terms of endearment in addressing his youthful readers is genuine or strategic (or both), his tone hints at a measure of ambivalence around the hard-line conception of infant depravity typically presented in Puritan children's literature.

A blend of affection and insistence on innate corruption likewise informs Anne Bradstreet's poetry referencing children and childhood. The voice of the child speaker in the section entitled 'Childhood' from 'The Four Ages of Man' (1650) laments 'AH me! conceiv'd in sin, and born in sorrow', an acknowledgement of depravity that the child must 'with shame conceal' (43).¹¹ Yet intriguingly, Bradstreet taps into a discourse of childhood innocence in the same poem, for this young speaker finds protection from moral corruption in his inexperience with the more serious concerns of adulthood: 'I gave no hand, nor vote, for death, or life', but rather, 'Where e're I went, mine innocence was shield' (44). This poem tempers its investment in the notion of infant depravity, revising its Calvinist perspective by construing its ignorance of the ways of the world as youthful innocence.

Historians single out John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) as an important touchstone in the historiography of childhood for two reasons: first, the idea of childhood formulated in this treatise is diametrically opposed to the Puritan view, and second, Locke envisions a more radical separation from adulthood by describing children as strangers to the adult world. Historians of childhood trace a line from Locke's notion of the child's mind and character as an intellectual and moral *tabula rasa* whose development depends on careful management by an adult instructor; to the utopian idea of children as innately good but lacking in the capacity to reason expounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in reaction to Locke; and, finally, to the Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth, who is thought to have been largely influenced by Rousseau but takes his ideas further in producing an idealized conception of childhood that aligns it with divinity.¹²

This trajectory needs revision because it discounts the historical importance of other ideas of childhood circulating in the seventeenth

11 Bradstreet, *Tenth Muse*, 41–55.

12 See, for example, Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 58–70; and Heywood, *History of Childhood*, 23–27.

and eighteenth centuries. Puritan children's literature is often dismissed by historians of the genre as too stridently didactic. However, the idea of childhood produced within this body of writing is important not only for the seventeenth century, but also for its ongoing influence in subsequent periods. Puritan works for children were republished throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and both Patricia Demers and M.O. Grenby illustrate the way a Calvinist insistence on infant depravity shaped evangelical writings for children well into the Victorian period.¹³

The evolutionary trajectory assigned to ideas of childhood often excludes what I call a proto-Romantic aesthetic of childhood circulating in some seventeenth-century lyric poetry. The term 'proto-Romantic' refers to an idea of childhood that anticipates the influential Romantic notion given prominence in Wordsworth's poetry, and in particular, in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1807). The impact of this poem on Victorian and early twentieth-century cultural constructions of childhood is, according to Hugh Cunningham, 'difficult to exaggerate'.¹⁴ I will show first that a proto-Romantic idea of childhood is evident well before Locke and Rousseau composed their influential tracts on education in 1693 and 1762 respectively. Then I will argue that this pre-Lockean concept has implications for an understanding of how gender inflects early modern ideas of childhood and female youth during the seventeenth century.

The key differences between Wordsworth's idea of childhood and those of his immediate predecessors in the eighteenth century lie in his attribution of divine agency to the imagined child figure. Wordsworth's 'Ode' elevates the child's moral nature well beyond the secular notion of the blank slate proposed by Locke or the largely secular idea promoted in Rousseau's depiction of *Émile*, whose natural goodness consists of an absence of evil at birth and an inability to conceive of evil or to act on it during boyhood. The moral innocence that Locke and Rousseau associate with childhood is inherently precarious, since it is preserved only by taking energetic measures to protect the child from corruptive influences. Wordsworth's 'Ode', on the other hand, envisions a child born 'not in utter nakedness / But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home' (63–65). This child views the

13 Grenby, *Child Reader*, 85–91. See Demers's discussion in *From Instruction to Delight* of the role played by evangelical writers such as Hannah More and Mary Martha Sherwood in the Sunday School movement at the turn of the nineteenth century, 235–38.

14 Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 69. Wordsworth composed the 'Ode' between 1802 and 1804, publishing it in 1807. Passages quoted from this and all other poems are cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

world around him as if it were '[a]pparelled in celestial light' (4) because 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy' (66). In attributing spiritual purity to early childhood, the 'Ode' offers a much more elevated conception of goodness than is found in Locke or Rousseau. The child of the 'Ode' is born not naked, which is to say not weak, because he is clothed in the remnants of a heavenly existence that reinforce his divine aspect and subsequently enhance his visual and intuitive perceptions of the world. The poem links the child's spiritual purity to his intellectual powers, as '[t]hou best Philosopher' (110), 'Mighty Prophet', and 'Seer blest' (114) whose 'exterior semblance doth belie / Thy Soul's immensity' (108–09). The powerful childhood subjectivity constructed here is, thus, a source for knowledge about nature, the divine, and the poet's own adult self. The 'Ode' traces the healing influence of these recollections of early childhood through which the adult persona is able to reanimate his creative powers. Finding these powers diminished, he grieves in recognition of what he has lost, yet finds renewal through a nostalgic recovery of a childhood perspective that heals and empowers him. This Romantic idea of childhood, then, exudes agency derived from its moral, spiritual, and aesthetic power, and demonstrated in its ability to heal and rejuvenate the melancholic adult persona.

The idea of childhood created in Wordsworth's 'Ode' is fashioned from a complex mix of pastoral aesthetics, pantheistic views of divinity, and an idea of spiritual purity based on an Edenic notion of pastoral innocence infused with Neoplatonic notions of reincarnation. This extraordinarily powerful idea of childhood is sometimes confused with the modern notion of childhood innocence. For example, in his discussion of this concept's 'lost histories', Robert A. Davis proposes a genealogy of childhood innocence that reaches back to the early medieval period and persists until the present day, with the Romantic poets positioned as important stages along the journey taken by, as Davis puts it, 'this version of innocence' (386). However, Davis fails to account for the substantial differences between the more complex Romantic idea of childhood empowered by its proximity to divinity, and the late twentieth-century myth of childhood innocence. According to Henry Jenkins, this modern idea of childhood innocence has taken on the status of a cultural myth that 'transforms culture into nature'. This mythology of innocence, Jenkins contends, exaggerates the vulnerability and weakness of children beyond infancy, carefully polices and limits their access to knowledge, and denies their capacity as active agents.¹⁵ The argument I present below accepts

15 Davis, 'Brilliance of a Fire', 379; Jenkins, 'Childhood Innocence', 15.

distinctions that are elided in Davis's genealogy. My focus, for the most part, is on the more powerful, Romantic idea of childhood presented so forcefully in Wordsworth's 'Ode'. I argue that this idea has a longer history than is currently recognized, with its roots observable in an imaginative construction of childhood circulating more than a century earlier in seventeenth-century lyric poetry.

Resemblances between Wordsworth's poetry and the work of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poet, Henry Vaughan, have been identified, although the issue of direct influence remains open to question.¹⁶ For my purposes, what is of most importance are their shared interests in the act of recollection and the association of early childhood with divine goodness. For example, one of the most distinctive features of Wordsworth's Ode is its Neoplatonic emphasis on the pre-existence of the soul:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar. (58–61)

The speaker recovers through the act of recollection not merely a sense of the child's pre-existence, but its affinity with divine power. In Vaughan's 'The Retreat' (1650), the speaker undertakes a similarly nostalgic act of recollection in his yearning 'to travell back / [...] That I might once more reach that plaine, / Where first I left my glorious traine' (21–24). As in Wordsworth's 'Ode', 'The Retreat' enacts nostalgic yearning, in the process establishing and idealizing childhood as a distinct stage of life:

Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race. (1–4)

The association between infancy and spiritual purity noted above in Wordsworth's 'Ode' is anticipated here. Another poem by Vaughan, entitled 'Childe-hood' (1655), takes issue with the competing 'Hell-fire and brimstone'

¹⁶ In an essay published in 1922, L.R. Merrill shows how Wordsworth's 'Ode' is directly indebted to Vaughan. Merrill's claim that Wordsworth owned a copy of Vaughan's collected poems, *Silex Scintillans* (1650; 2nd edition 1655), is, however, disputed in later scholarship. See Merrill, 'Vaughan's Influence', 96; Seelig, *Shadow of Eternity*, 184; and Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading*, 263.

(11), Calvinist view of infant depravity, instead situating childhood as a lost state of which he can only catch a glimpse, although his 'striving eye / Dazles at it, as at eternity' (1–2). Vaughan's speaker sees early childhood as a state both desirable and unreachable, a situation mirrored in the solution Wordsworth's speaker expresses in regard to his melancholia. His 'Ode' identifies a lack of vision as an acute problem confronting the adult speaker:

The glory and the freshness of a dream.
 It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day.
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (5–9)

The nostalgic longing to return to early childhood in Vaughan's poetry is reformulated here by Wordsworth as a desire to reclaim the visionary power of the child. This act of recollection ultimately relieves the adult persona's psychological and emotional distress. As in Wordsworth's poem, Vaughan's speaker studies childhood, to 'scan / Thee, more than ere I studied man ('Childe-hood', 39–40). Vaughan's poem constructs an idea of childhood as an entirely distinct phase of life from adulthood, a view that is usually thought to have emerged in Locke and Rousseau, and, more importantly, sees childhood as a state of being worthy of both admiration and careful scrutiny.

The poetry of one of Vaughan's immediate successors, Thomas Traherne (c. 1637–1674), similarly cultivates a proto-Romantic idea of childhood.¹⁷ The association of infancy with an inherited spirituality found in Vaughan's 'The Retreat' is echoed in Traherne's 'Wonder':

How like an Angel came I down!
 How bright are all things here!
 When first among His works I did appear
 O how their Glory me did crown! ('Wonder', 1–4)

17 Traherne, *Poetical Works*, 4–13; and Traherne, *Poems of Felicity*, 111–12. The question of a direct relationship between Traherne and Wordsworth remains unresolved. Although Traherne's poems were not published until the early twentieth century, the remarkable correspondences in thought and forms of expression between their respective poems on childhood – especially evident when comparing Traherne's 'Walking' to Wordsworth's 'Ode' – suggest some familiarity by Wordsworth with the earlier poet's works.

Traherne, with greater certainty than Vaughan, invokes a pre-existent entity whose inherent nature is angelic; further on, the poem clarifies that the divine spirit is the source of the child's power:

And while my God did all his Glories show,
 I felt a vigour in my sense
 That was all Spirit. ('Wonder', 19–21)

The Neoplatonism, the blanket of divinity, and the enhanced visual acuity that are so central to Wordsworth's 'Ode' are expressed in these lines from Traherne's 'Wonder'. As with Vaughan, the act of recollection, of remembering, which involves reconstructing the idea of the child through a nostalgic lens, informs Traherne's poem 'Innocence'. Here, the speaker recalls that 'all my soul was full of light', and that 'A joyful sense and purity / Is all I can remember' (8–10). Traherne, like the later Romantic poets, idealizes early childhood as an Edenic state of innocence distinct from the poet's adult self (an approach also explored in Traherne's poem 'Eden'). In 'Innocence', the speaker's visual perception is enhanced by a light emanating from a divine source, with his adult self deriving strength from that recollected idea of a child,

Whose strength and brightness so do ray,
 That still it seems me to surround;
 What ere it is, it is a light
 So endless unto me
 That I a world of true delight
 Did then and to this day do see. (43–48)

The anticipation of Wordsworth here is apparent, although this child is not as powerful a visionary as the 'Mighty Prophet' and 'Seer blest' (114) imagined in the 1807 'Ode'. And, like Wordsworth, Traherne attributes divine knowledge to childhood, expressed more directly in 'Wonder':

The stars did entertain my sense,
 And all the works of God, so bright and pure,
 So rich and great did seem,
 As if they ever must endure
 In my esteem. (12–16)

Here, the child's understanding, his 'sense', allows access to knowledge of all creation, with its divine origins affirmed in his assertion that 'I nothing

in the world did know / But 'twas divine' (23–24). Traherne's recollections of his early years in *Centuries of Meditations* evoke similar affinities between childhood and divinity:

Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world than I when I was a child. [...] All appeared new [...]. My knowledge was Divine. I knew by intuition those things which since my Apostacy I collected again by the highest reason. My very ignorance was advantageous. I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence.¹⁸

Incorporating, like Vaughan, a response to Calvinist notions of the child's innate sinfulness, the speaker in 'Wonder' at once denies knowledge of evil and asserts unmediated access to divine knowledge.

A more remarkable foreshadowing of Wordsworth's 'Ode' occurs in Traherne's poem, 'Walking', which illustrates the poet's capacity to recall childhood pleasures by tracing how memories can move simultaneously across both space and time:

Observe those rich and glorious things,
 The rivers, meadows, woods, and springs,
 The fructifying sun;
 To note from far
 The rising of each twinkling star
 For us his race to run.
 A little child these well perceives,
 Who, tumbling in green grass and leaves,
 May rich as kings be thought,
 But there's a sight
 Which perfect manhood may delight,
 To which we shall be brought. (37–48)¹⁹

The landscape of 'meadow, grove, and stream' that provides the opening image in Wordsworth's 'Ode' (1), repeated in its final stanza as 'Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves' (187); the image of a rising star in the Ode's fifth

18 Traherne, *Centuries*, 156–57.

19 Traherne's 'Wonder', 'Innocence', and 'Eden' were first printed in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, edited by Dobell, in 1903. Citations of these poems are from this edition. Traherne's 'Walking' was printed in *Poems of Felicity*, edited by Bell. Citations from this poem are from the version edited by Endicott in *Representative Poetry Online*.

stanza (59); the mention of 'Another race' having been run in the Ode's final stanza (199); and the lost pleasures 'Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower' in the 'Ode' (178) collectively reflect the perceptions and movements of the symbolic child in the passage cited above from Traherne's poem. Indeed, the affinities between Wordsworth's and Traherne's notions of childhood are striking, and confirm the presence of a proto-Romantic aesthetic in the earlier poet's notion of the emotional, cultural, and epistemological function of this idea of childhood.

Both Traherne's and Vaughan's poems engage in a nostalgic reconstruction of a poetic subjectivity achieved by situating childhood as an idealized remembered state, thereby giving voice to an idea whose cultural power derives from its association with divinity and its location as a potent source of pleasure and reassurance for the adult speaker engaged in the act of recollection. The key difference between Traherne and Wordsworth is the former's emphasis on simplicity as a prominent attribute of his idea of childhood, as opposed to Wordsworth's emphasis on its complexity. Traherne pays less attention to the potential for empowerment already inherent in his idea of childhood.

This proto-Romantic idea of childhood, infused by notions of innocence, provides an instructive historical and conceptual framework through which we can explore representations of female youth in another, more celebrated strain of seventeenth-century lyric poetry by John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and Thomas Carew. Their metaphysical lyrics take inspiration from the figure of the female youth on the cusp of or just beyond pubescence, with the question of innocence and its potential loss through sexual experience positioned as the source of much of the emotional, intellectual, and ethical tension generated within the *carpe diem* topos. That is to say, to approach definitions of childhood and youth from a proto-Romantic perspective incorporating divine innocence rather than through a Calvinist notion of infant depravity, or, alternatively, through the more tightly scripted dictums of conduct books, can reshape interpretations of the early modern masculine poet's engagement with the concept of female youth. In the rest of this essay, I will examine the ways in which concepts of female youth are in play in this culturally significant stream of poetry.

Female youth has until recently been largely a category in search of a definition. As noted in the introduction to this volume, Juan Luis Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman* sees females as either virgins, wives, or widows, and this triad is further reduced to two options in T.E.'s *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights*, which categorizes females as either married or to be married. There is no temporal or conceptual space made available

in such formulations for a definite, distinctive period of adolescence after girlhood but before full adulthood, even though the more common age of first marriage in seventeenth-century England was the mid-twenties rather than during adolescence.²⁰ Donne reproduces this erasure of a transitional period between childhood and womanhood in his poem 'Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn' (1633).²¹ This poem's celebration of marriage compresses the movement from girlhood to womanhood into one day in the refrain repeated at the end of the first four of the poem's eight verse paragraphs, that she will '*Today put on perfection, and a woman's name*' (12, 24, and 36), with the last iteration of the refrain intensifying this effect by shifting into the present tense: today she '*puts on perfection*' (48) [emphasis in original]. The 'fair Bride' (2) is a 'sober virgin' (33), one of the 'Daughters of London' (13) honoured as 'angels, [who] yet still bring with you / Thousands of angels on your marriage days' (15–16). Girlhood is portrayed here as a state of collective angelic innocence, although lacking the divinely endowed agency associated with the proto-Romantic conception expressed later in Vaughan's and Traherne's figurations of childhood. The rapidity of the transition from girlhood to wifedom is accelerated in the last four verse paragraphs when the first word of the closing refrain is recast from '*Today*' to say she will '*Tonight*' acquire this state of perfection, '*and a woman's name*' (60, 72, 84, 96). The length of time during which the transition to adulthood takes place is reduced further as the poem progresses, from one day, to one night, and, ultimately, to one moment in the remarkably violent imagery symbolically figuring the moment of consummation as a form of biblical sacrifice:

So, she a mother's rich style doth prefer,
And at the Bridegroom's wished approach doth lie,
Like an appointed lamb, when tenderly
The priest comes on his knees t'embowel her. (87–90)

The transition from a state of childhood innocence – implied in the image of the lamb – to a post-nuptial state of womanhood is figured as a sudden, violent, but necessary sacrifice of childhood innocence. The sharp division drawn by Donne between prepubescent childhood and post-pubescent

20 In their study, *Women in Early Modern England*, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford demonstrate that child marriages were 'the exception rather than the rule by the seventeenth century', 112. See also Julie Hardwick's essay in this volume for the average age of first marriage in England.

21 Donne, *Complete English Poems*, 133–35.

womanhood occludes the idea of female youth, and, as in Vives' tract and the *Lawes Resolutions*, eliminates the conceptual space that an idea of female youth might occupy.

Unlike Donne, Marvell's poetic treatment of female youth enables such a conceptual space to exist. The proto-Romantic aesthetic discussed above provides a useful context for reconsiderations of Marvell's poem 'The Picture of Little T.C. in a Prospect of Flowers' (1681).²² The opening lines of the poem emphasize T.C.'s 'simplicity', situating her in what the title presents as a 'Prospect of Flowers' that is evocative of the affinity between childhood and nature evident in Vaughan's and Traherne's poems. Moreover, as Diane Purkiss observes, T.C.'s situation resonates with John Milton's portrayal of prelapsarian Eve in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost* (1674), when Eve tends her flowers while Adam speaks at length with Raphael.²³ The power that Little T.C. assumes in the garden – taming the wild flowers (5), 'giv[ing] them names', and telling them 'What colour best becomes them, and what smell' (8) – compares to Eve's claim of propriety over Eden's flowers. Upon learning of her expulsion, Eve indicates it is her flowers she will miss the most, 'which I bred up with tender hand / From the first op'ning bud, and gave ye names (11.276–77). As with the prototypical romantic child, Alice, in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) – whose wish that the flowers could talk is unexpectedly granted – the connections made in these poems between females and floral beauty signal a latent potency in such conceptualizations of female youth.²⁴

Recontextualizing 'Little T.C.' within a proto-Romantic aesthetic of childhood can augment other readings of Marvell's poem that are troubled by what has been called the 'eerie eroticism' of his ironic application of Petrarchan tropes to portrayals of prepubescent girlhood.²⁵ Yet Marvell's poem carefully anticipates rather than dramatizes erotic desire where the speaker predicts that 'chaster Laws' shall the 'wanton Love [...] one day fear, / And, under her command severe, / See his Bow broke and Ensigns torn' (11–14). The female youth's incipient erotic power is similarly cast in future tense in the third stanza, where the speaker plans to 'in time compound,

22 Marvell, *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 114–15.

23 Purkiss, 'Marvell, Boys, Girls', 185. Purkiss demonstrates T.C.'s affinity with Milton's portrayal of Eve in the Garden of Eden, and Mandy Green in *Milton's Ovidian Eve*, 133, observes that Eve is linked more closely than Adam to the flowers and fruits of Eden. See, for example, Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4.708–10; 5.331–49; 8.44–47; and 11.273–85. We learn in Book 11.276–77 of *Paradise Lost* that it is Eve rather than Adam who has named the flowers.

24 Carroll, *Looking-Glass*, 199.

25 Spiegelman, *Wordsworth's Heroes*, 50; see also Purkiss, 'Marvell, Boys, Girls'.

/ and parley with those conquering Eyes; / Ere they have try'd their force to wound' (17–19). The irony in Marvell's deployment of Petrarchan tropes relies on the recognition, by both the male speaker and the reader, that Little T.C. has not yet taken on that role, and thus remains unaware of the power she will one day have 'to wound' (19).

Purkiss examines the ethical landscape around Marvell's use of these tropes in a poem about a girl, and concludes that the poem is more symbolic than erotic, because its ultimate focus is its exploration of the male poet's relationship to adult masculinity rather than to a real girl. Marvell desires, Purkiss argues, 'a moment prior to [the] genesis of masculinity' (181). Yet Purkiss's analysis highlights the careful ethical navigation under way here. In this respect, the poem is caught within a network of contested relations that inevitably emerge between adult authors and their fictional children. Jacqueline Rose argues that adults writing about childhood are inevitably writing about themselves, that innocence is not 'a property of childhood but [...] a portion of adult desire', and that when adults write for or about the child, they create an idea that they desire but can never access in the world outside the text.²⁶ In 'Little T.C.', I argue, Marvell is writing less about a real child than about a fictive idea with which he is experimenting.²⁷ This notion is one I have identified above as a proto-Romantic conception of childhood already in circulation in seventeenth-century lyric poetry.

Marvell's portrayal of 'Little T.C.', given its association with a seventeenth-century proto-Romantic aesthetic of childhood, offers a refreshing departure from the heavy didacticism of the prescriptive literature written for young females during the early modern period, and from the misogynist literature that assumes an inherent corruption essential to female beings.²⁸ Marvell's interest in the conceptual space occupied by female youth, however, still raises questions about the way he positions his adult male speaker in relation to female youth as a focus of desire. In his edition of Marvell's poetry, Nigel Smith situates another such poem, entitled 'Young Love' (1681), within a classical form of poetic predation by older males expressing amatory desire for children and youths, citing Carew's 'The Second Rapture' (1640) as

26 Rose, *Case of Peter Pan*, xii.

27 In his commentary on the poem, Marvell's editor, Nigel Smith, proposes the daughter of one of Marvell's acquaintances as the poem's subject, and suggests a composition date of 1652. My reading of the poem concurs largely with Smith's claim that sexual desire in this poem is forecast rather than expressed directly. See *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 112.

28 See, for example, Brathwait, *English Gentlewoman*; Swetnam, *Arraignment*; and Gould, *Love Given Over*.

typical of this strain.²⁹ Important differences, however, between Marvell's and Carew's poems go well beyond what Smith identifies as some 'delicate distinctions' made in Marvell's poem. One crucial distinction worth noting in 'Young Love' is the care the speaker takes to differentiate love from lust. He observes that the female youth's 'fair blossoms are too green / Yet for lust, but not for Love' (11–12). By comparison, the speaker in Carew's 'Second Rapture', although admitting he is past his prime, seeks not love but lust, and his own sexual gratification as an end in itself: 'Give me a wench about thirteen, / Already voted to the queen / Of lust and lovers' (7–9). Carew's choice of the term 'wench' rather than 'maid' to refer to a sexually experienced youth is compatible with early modern usage.³⁰ However, reading this poem from a modern perspective on adolescent prostitution, it is difficult to tell where the centre of pathos ought to fall: on the adolescent target of his lust or on the speaker himself, whose 'old decayed appetite' (24) rejects any of the usual satisfactions in a life well lived. Happiness is now found not in 'fortune, honour, nor long life, / Children, or friends, nor a good wife' (3–4), but instead within a temporary, self-absorbed form of sexual gratification at the expense of another, much younger being. For him, a single moment of 'true bliss' is, we are told in the last line, the only form of happiness available to him. Satirizing the sexual appetites of older men who lust after adolescents, Carew mockingly situates this second rapture as a manifestation of an elderly would-be lover's second childhood.

Unlike the elderly has-been in Carew's 'Second Rapture', the speaker in Marvell's 'Young Love' equivocates about the age and gender of the youthful object of his desires. At first glance, the apostrophe inviting a 'little infant' in the first line of Marvell's poem to 'love me now' places the speaker on the brink of a breathtakingly inappropriate indiscretion, until we consider the scope of the meaning of the word 'infant' in the seventeenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, citing Edward Coke, defines the term 'infant' during this period as a legal category incorporating a range of ages up to the age of majority, which was 21 for males. However, definitions of majority in the early modern period are determined by gender, and, indeed, more applicable to boys becoming men. For the female youth addressed in 'Young Love', then, the question at issue is less one of the age of majority than of consent.

29 Marvell, *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, 72; Carew, *Collected Poems*, 127.

30 Jennifer Higginbotham argues that the term 'maid', unlike 'wench', excludes sexually experienced females. See 'Fair Maids', 175.

Internal evidence suggests the poem's addressee is a post-pubescent, adolescent female. Although her 'fair blossoms' are still 'green' (11), a commonplace association of the term 'blossom' with post-pubescent female physiology allows the possibility that she is in her mid-teens, a reading confirmed when she is compared to '[c]ommon beauties [who] stay fifteen' (9). If so, to put this poem in historical perspective, the addressee is the same age as *The Tempest's* Miranda, and two years older than Romeo's Juliet.³¹ Interestingly, we are never told the age of the (presumably) male speaker of 'Young Love'. He hints at a considerable age difference by comparing 'our sportings' to 'the nurse's with the child' (7–8) and in the hyperbolic personification of 'old Time beguiled' by 'young Love' (6). Despite this unspecified difference in age, in the process of expressing his desire, the older speaker, I argue, seeks consent and a level of mutuality that sets him apart from the ageing lover in Carew's 'Second Rapture'.

Time, both literal and personified, appears to stand still, or at least, moves too slowly for the older lover in 'Young Love', prompting him to shift into *carpe diem* mode in the second half of the poem in a direct echo of Robert Herrick's 'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time' (1648). Herrick's poem opens with some pointed advice to female youths:

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
 Old Time is still a flying:
 And this same flower that smiles to day,
 To morrow will be dying. (1-4)

Marvell's speaker invokes such conventional anxieties about the fleeting nature of youth in 'Young Love' in his concern that 'Time may take / Thee before thy time away' (17–18), a risk to which the speaker alludes in 'Little T.C.' as well. An unstated but nevertheless important question involved in any such imagining of December/May amatory exchanges where the object of desire is likely an adolescent is an important one: can one desire amorous intimacy without desiring sexual intimacy, and if so, to what extent, as Purkiss puts it, should we indeed worry (181)? Certainly, references to sporting between lovers in other love elegies by Marvell and his peers allude readily to physical intimacy.

It is worth noting, too, that the fourth stanza of 'Young Love' figuratively violates the 'delicate distinctions' that are, as Smith suggests (72), in play throughout the rest of the poem, especially in the violent imagery of the

31 Williams, 'Introduction', 4.

'lusty bull or ram' seeking a 'prize' for 'his morning sacrifice' ('Young Love', 15–16). The stanza chronologically separates the 'snowy lamb' and 'wanton kid' (13–14), associated here with 'Love' in the first half of the stanza (13), from the bull and ram that symbolize lust (15–16) in the second half. These two pairs of images, imperfectly balanced, uphold the distinction between love and lust, yet remind us of the threat posed to the youth, and to the youthful love she symbolizes, by the older, aggressive figure. Rather than celebrating predation, then, this poem cautions against it. Moreover, the speaker makes explicit the requirement for consent, urging in the fifth stanza 'Of this need we'll virtue make, / And learn love before we may' (19–20). The desired gratification here is not uniformly egocentric as in Carew's 'Second Rapture'. Speaking in the first person plural, the Marvellian lover seeks mutual edification, with this element of reciprocity restated in the poem's closing vision of a double coronation. In the last stanza of 'Young Love' the speaker states 'I crown thee with my love' and asks her to 'Crown me with thy love again', ultimately promising that 'we both shall monarchs prove' (30–32). The implied reciprocity inherent in this image, and the suggestion that *both* lovers will be learning about love, implies she may not be the only virgin here.

These poems thereby acknowledge youth to be a separate, culturally significant period for girls on the way to womanhood, and recognize female youth as a force to be reckoned with. Situating conceptualizations of seventeenth-century female youth within a proto-Romantic conception of childhood locates the agency lurking within the poetic conceit of beguiled Time. When the *carpe diem* motif is invoked in Marvell's 'Little T.C.' and 'Young Love', as with other poems invoking this motif, Time becomes a pivotal force, but its forward momentum is counteracted by the beloved's evident resistance (although in Marvell's two poems discussed here, we do not hear the nymph's reply). That is to say, the sense of urgency in the would-be lover's plea to wait no longer is a product of the speaker's recognition of the apparent stasis inherent within female adolescence: visually, she is no longer a child, but conceptually, she is not quite an adult. It is this notion of Time beguiled, as if temporarily arrested, that positions female adolescence as a period defined by prospective rather than consummated love. The object of desire, in Marvell's poetry, remains youthful, and, I would argue, closer to childhood than womanhood because her amatory potential is always unfulfilled, unrealized, and impeded by the ongoing activity of becoming. Her capacity to become an object of both erotic as well as amatory desire is suspended within the liminal space of an inscrutable adolescence that may be on the cusp of or just past pubescence.

This idea of female youth is one that beguiles old Time, but also bides her time until she is ready to assume the form her culture deems to be full womanhood. The masculine speaker in Marvell's poetry is in this sense doubly analogous to old Time, both beguiled and forestalled by a young love he cannot take further without her consent. Situating poems by Donne, Marvell, and Carew within the context of proto-Romantic conceptions of childhood provides a context through which we can better understand what has been viewed as the ambivalent eroticism of poems that dramatize the movement into full puberty during a distinctive life stage for females after childhood, but prior to reaching full womanhood.

This analysis has shown that at least two distinctive ideas of childhood – the Puritan and the proto-Romantic – were culturally intelligible ideologies circulating during the seventeenth century. Not only are both conceptions of childhood more complex than is often assumed, but also both ideational categories have much lengthier historical trajectories than are currently recognized. Having invoked this comparison between the Puritan and proto-Romantic, I now want to propose that at the intersection between these two culturally significant ideas of childhood might exist an early version of the weaker, more vulnerable myth of innocence discussed above. This weaker form of innocence, I propose, is apparent in the depiction of the historically resonant virginal couple situated at the centre of seventeenth-century poetic figurations of innocence.

It is generally assumed that in *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are created as fully fledged adults. It is worth asking, however, whether they are instead portrayed by Milton as youths rather than adults, even though the latter reading is suggested in the poem's description of Adam's 'manly grace' (4.490.) In their prelapsarian state, Adam and Eve are of course morally innocent. But their lack of knowledge is emphasized: they continuously explore and rehearse what they know about each other, and discuss – to the point of dispute – their proper roles and duties in the garden. Adam even milks Raphael for as much knowledge as the angel is willing to provide, in a conversation that ironically sets limits on human learning. In this respect, Milton's Adam and Eve, at the moment of creation, are figured more as youths rather than adults in that their precarious vulnerability aligns them with a weaker, less powerful form of childhood innocence.

Differences emerge between Adam and Eve around the question of knowledge, with significant consequences. A distinction well recognized in scholarship on *Paradise Lost* observes that, in tasting the fruit, Eve is motivated by a thirst for knowledge, whereas Adam, with what Stanley Fish calls 'troubled clarity', discerns the nature of her sin and its consequences,

and decides to fall with her.³² Unlike the figurative child inhabiting the proto-Romantic aesthetic discussed above, and unlike Adam, Eve lacks direct access to divine knowledge, which leaves her vulnerable to the false promises of higher knowledge proposed by Satan in the form of the serpent. Although both intelligent and curious, she remains too pliant and naïve to resist the serpent's persuasive rhetoric. In this respect, Milton's Eve is more closely aligned with the weak version of precarious innocence than with the proto-Romantic aesthetic of childhood.

This proto-Romantic idea thus offers an informative lens through which to understand the fascination with childhood and female youth evident in seventeenth-century lyric and epic poetry. Lyric poems by Vaughan and Traherne anticipate a Romantic aesthetic in their recasting of the child's moral nature through Neoplatonic terms that subvert Calvinist notions of infant depravity. Marvell's metaphysical conceits adapt this version of potent innocence to explore the power inherent in female youth, and thus acknowledge it as a distinct, temporal phase of life between girlhood and womanhood. Furthermore, examining these constructions of childhood and youth in lyric poetry of the period illuminates the cultural logic that shapes Eve's precarious relationship to knowledge in Milton's epic, thereby exposing the insufficiency of Edenic innocence as a model for female youth. It is evident, therefore, that cultural constructions of childhood innocence, whether in the modern or early modern period, are more multi-dimensional and complex than historians of childhood have thus far recognized. In Victorian culture, following upon the emergence of the Romantic idea of childhood during the nineteenth century, a so-called 'cult of the child' coalesced around the figure of the female child on the cusp of puberty. In such cultural forms, as in seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, navigating the fine line between representation and transgression relies to an extent on the viewers' and readers' assumptions of childhood innocence as the framework through which such depictions are interpreted.³³ That an elevated view of the moral nature of childhood and female youth can be framed in seventeenth-century literature as either powerful or powerless

32 Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, 1. For an interesting discussion of the way Eve's access to knowledge is mediated, see Liebert, 'Rendering "More Equal"', 162. See also Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*. Although there are important differences between the portrayals of Adam and Eve in Genesis compared to *Paradise Lost*, Irenaeus of Lyons, an early Christian writer, proposed that Adam and Eve of the Old Testament were both innocent and infantile in their lack of understanding of 'those things that are wickedly born in the soul through lust and shameful desires'. Quoted in Davis, 'Brilliance of a Fire', 387.

33 See Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, for discussion of this question within a Victorian context.

contributes to the critical project of denaturalizing mythologies of childhood and youth in all periods, and augments our historical perspective on the cultural politics of innocence.

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2. A Roving Woman

The Rover, Part I and Hellena's Self-Creation of Youth

Sarah Morris

Abstract

Hellena's antics in Aphra Behn's 1677 play, *The Rover*, are explored in this essay through the lens of the grand tour. This lens allows for a more focused investigation of the play's preoccupation with youthfulness, and also demonstrates how Hellena's antics fit within the tradition of not just carnival but also rogue literature. Facing life in a nunnery – a path determined for her by her father and brother – Hellena uses rogue tactics and the carnival season to carve out a space for youthful experiences for herself; and, in doing so, she ultimately alters that patriarchal predetermined path to fit her own desires, which include marriage to Willmore.

Keywords: Aphra Behn; *The Rover*; carnival; rogue; grand tour, female youth

'Have I not a world of youth?' This question, posed by Hellena to her sister Florinda in the opening scene of Aphra Behn's *The Rover, Part 1*, highlights a central but often overlooked theme of Behn's text.¹ The 1677 play, set in Spanish-controlled Naples, certainly presents a youthful world of revelry, masquerade, and love affairs. The play, like so many of Behn's works, stands as proto-feminist in that it features strong female characters who take action in the face of opposing patriarchal forces. One of the central storylines involves three young women – Hellena, Florinda, and their kinswoman, Valeria – who use disguises to interact more freely with the English cavaliers currently visiting Naples. This plan, spearheaded by Hellena, stands as only one of several cunning plots that Hellena orchestrates throughout the play.

1 Behn, *The Rover, Part I*. Subsequent references to the play are cited parenthetically.

To escape the watchful eyes of her brother, Don Pedro, and her governess, Callis, Hellena readily employs both clever disguises and cunning wit, not unlike the female rogue figures often found in early seventeenth-century works.

Hellena's rogue-like antics throughout the play have traditionally been read in terms of carnival, and rightfully so.² Other productive lenses for reading Hellena's high jinks, and the play as a whole, include the maid/whore juxtaposition³ and Behn's apparent proto-feminist rewriting of her source material, namely Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or, the Wanderer* (1664).⁴ Behn purposefully sets her play during the festive season, as illustrated in Don Pedro's command in the first scene ordering Callis to 'lock [Hellena] up all this carnival' (1.1.137). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, carnival often served as an opportunity for social disorder, controlled chaos, and sensual indulgence. The focus of scholars on the carnivalesque in *The Rover, Part 1* has certainly paved the way for investigations of topics such as market culture, gender dynamics, and social disorder in Behn's work. For the purposes of this essay, though, I propose a different lens for interpreting Hellena's actions: the grand tour.

Reading Behn's play through the lens of the grand tour allows for a more focused exploration of the text's preoccupation with youthfulness, and such a reading also allows for a look at how Hellena's antics fit within the traditions of not just carnival but also rogue-literature. The grand tour, which was emerging as a popular pastime during the period when the play was written, primarily served as an opportunity for young English gentlemen to experience the world before settling into the trials of adult life. Hellena's adventures throughout Behn's text do more than just upset the status quo for a short time; Hellena actually uses the carnival season to 'go rogue' against patriarchal desires by carving out a space for youthful experience between a sheltered childhood and a (future) cloistered adulthood.

Such a 'carving out' stands as particularly significant since the youth of upper-class women in early modern drama is generally elided; girls from aristocratic families often move straight from the parental household into marriage, usually without ever experiencing the world outside of the home. Those who do 'go rogue' – consider Shakespeare's Portia or Rosalind, for example – generally do so to follow or aid their beloved, or to flee danger. In carving out a youthful experience for herself, and the worldly education that

2 See Beach, 'Carnival Politics'; and Boebel, 'Carnival World'.

3 See Pacheco, 'Rape and the Female Subject'.

4 See DeRitter, 'The Gypsy, *The Rover*, and the Wanderer'.

goes with it, Hellena ultimately changes the predetermined direction for her life. In the play's opening scene, Hellena appears as a young, inexperienced, inquisitive woman who desires to experience love and other worldly sensations before resigning herself to life in a nunnery. By the play's end, she has recreated herself as an equal to Willmore – the Rover himself – and, in doing so, has prepared herself for a different form of adulthood: married life.

Hellena's rogue-like actions, then, serve as a levelling of the playing field between the text's young aristocratic men and women. She grants herself a similar sensual education and youthful experience to that of the play's young English men. Hellena differs from her female counterparts in the play in that she decides to disguise herself not to flee or to pursue her beloved, but to forge her own path of worldly experiences and pleasures. In creating Hellena as a rogue-like figure, Behn demonstrates the need for young women, as well as their young male counterparts, to receive a worldly education to be better prepared for adult life. Reading Behn's text through the lens of the grand tour, then, ultimately allows us to see how Hellena, through her rogue-like tactics, creates a space for youth between her cloistered girlhood and the equally cloistered adulthood designed for her. Youth appears in Behn's play as a space where Hellena's natural curiosity can flourish and where that curiosity can help shape her for the trials of adulthood, albeit a different version of adulthood than the one envisioned by her father and brother.

Creating a '[W]orld of [Y]outh'

Behn depicts Naples in her play as a space where young men and, notably, women can experience life and love before settling into adulthood responsibilities. For the play's men, life in Naples consists of one fleeting engagement after another, with little interest in pursuing long-term investments. Frederick, for example, acts mainly as a companion to Willmore's and Belville's exploits in love; Willmore has come ashore 'only to enjoy [himself] a little this carnival' (1.2.66), since 'love and mirth are [his] business in Naples' (1.2.73); Blunt is a 'raw traveller' who gets caught in Lucetta's bed-trick scam and thus learns about greed and avarice the hard way (1.2.67); and Don Antonio and Don Pedro, the play's two Spanish lords, both vie for the attention of the courtesan Angellica throughout the play, with both willing to pay the excessive price of 1000 crowns for such a 'sweet' (if fleeting) affair. Only Belville, the English colonel who has travelled to Paris, Pamplona, and other places before arriving in Naples, appears interested in pursuing

something substantial and long term. He is caught in the throes of love, enraptured by the Spanish Florinda. The play's young women also take advantage of the youthful atmosphere around them. Hellena, Florinda, and Valeria enjoy the freedom of carnival, aided in their exploits by the use of various guises and a desire to experience love. Angellica, for her own part, enjoys the attentions of 'all the youth in Naples' (1.2.308). In short, Behn creates in *The Rover, Part 1* a world ruled by youthful ambitions and desires.

In most early modern texts, such a world of youthful vigour would normally be tempered by the wisdom (or, conversely, avarice) of an elder generation. Behn's text, however, remarkably lacks an elder's presence. While several patriarchal figures are mentioned in the play – including the viceroy, Don Pedro's father, Don Pedro's uncle, Don Vincentio, and the exiled son of Charles I – none of these characters actually appears in the play, nor do their wills or desires play any central role. The desire of Florinda's father for her to marry the old Don Vincentio is soon supplanted by the desires of the son, Don Pedro, for her to marry the young Don Antonio instead. The play's oldest figures would be Callis, the young women's governess, and Philippo, Lucetta's co-conspirator in the bed-trick against Blunt. Callis, while ordered by Don Pedro to keep a watchful eye over Hellena, is soon infected with a 'youthful itch' and decides to accompany the young women on their exploits (1.1.181). Later, she is easily misdirected by one of Hellena's schemes. Philippo, as a rogue figure himself, stands as more of a social outcast than as a patriarchal figure within the text.

The play's conflict between 'old' and 'young', therefore, appears largely biased in favour of youth. The play as a whole demonstrates a preoccupation with youthfulness. The words 'youth', 'young', or 'youthfulness' appear over 40 times in the text, and over ten times in the first scene alone. These terms are applied most often to the play's young women. Hellena is described in the *dramatis personae* as 'a gay young woman design'd for a Nun', and is later called both a 'young devil' (1.2.126–27) and a 'young saint' (1.2.167–68) by Willmore. Hellena's sister, Florinda, is termed 'the young wife' (1.1.106–07) and 'a young lady' (1.1.118), while Callis, the governess, has a 'youthful itch' to participate in carnival with her charges (1.1.181). The women's youth often appears as a valuable commodity throughout the play, although the men value female youthfulness for different reasons than the women. For the men, women's youth is valuable for its connection to beauty. When Hellena questions whether Willmore 'would impose no severe penance' on a woman who decided to 'console herself' before resigning to nunnery life (1.2.171–72), Willmore indicates he is willing, 'if she be young and handsome' (1.2.173). Blunt, a fellow Englishman, demonstrates a similar preoccupation

with youth and beauty when asked about the name of the prostitute with whom he has become enamoured and believes to be a 'person of quality'. He exclaims, 'What care I for names? She's fair, young, brisk and kind, even to ravishment!' (2.1.46–47).

Blunt's preoccupation with youth and beauty, coupled with Willmore's candour, demonstrates the lustful and lascivious appetite with which this group of young English visitors view the Spanish women. Only Belvile, who appears throughout the text as Florinda's chaste beloved, questions this lustful pursuit of youth and beauty. When Willmore demonstrates his amazement over Blunt's luck, Belvile remains suspicious: 'Dost thou perceive any such tempting things about him that should make a fine woman, and of quality, pick him out from all mankind to throw away her youth and beauty upon; nay, and her dear heart, too?' (2.1.88–91). Belvile's addition of 'her dear heart' to youth and beauty demonstrates his ability not only to find value in something other than the women's looks, but also to recognize and sympathize with their perspective. This ability aligns him with his pure and innocent beloved, Florinda.

The play's female characters also frequently connect youth to beauty and, like Belvile, they view youth as something that can be wasted. In their initial discussion with their brother, Don Pedro, both Florinda and Hellena bemoan Florinda's impending betrothal to Don Vincentio. When told that she must consider the older man's fortune, Florinda posits her own youth as more valuable: 'Let him consider my youth, beauty, and fortune; which ought not to be thrown away on his age and jointure' (1.1.77–78). Hellena starkly supports her sister, claiming that she would 'rather see her in the Hostel de Dieu, to waste her youth there in vows and be a handmaid to lazars and cripples, than to lose it in such a marriage' (1.1.126–29). The fact that Florinda foregrounds youth in her statement and Hellena makes it the focus of hers indicates the value of youth for these women, and that value, Behn suggests, lies in the potential of youth for creating alternative opportunities for self-fulfilment and advancement. Hellena highlights this idea in her questioning of her sister about her fitness for love in the opening scene:

Have I not a world of youth? a humour gay? a beauty passable? A vigour desirable? Well shaped? Clean limbed? Sweet breathed? And sense enough to know how all these ought to be employed to the best advantage?
(1.1.41–44)

Hellena acknowledges here the close connection between her youth and beauty, and while her assertion that she knows how to use them to 'the best

advantage' suggests her fitness for the world of love (and love-making), she employs her youthful vigour, beauty, and wit throughout the play to navigate various social positions and alter her predetermined path for adulthood.

The Grand Tour

For noble English families of the late early modern period, the grand tour served as the crowning jewel in a young (male) aristocrat's formal education. Including extended visits to major cities on the Continent – and generally occurring in the years between attending university and starting a career – the grand tour provided young men with an educational experience that both supplemented and reinforced their classical training. The terms 'educational' and 'experience' should both be emphasized here, since the tour allowed its participants not only to come face to face with the various monuments, landscapes, and works of art featured in traditional classical studies, but also to experience a manifold sensual palette derived from both interaction with other cultures and freedom from strict parental control. James T. Boulton and T.O. McLoughlin point to this sensual experience in *News From Abroad*, claiming that while serious students would have taken advantage of the educational opportunities the tour offered, 'others saw the Tour as simply an opportunity to enjoy a different culture, particularly a more liberal, even sophisticated lifestyle, with fashion, manners and women the focus, rather than monuments'.⁵ Lynne Withey further emphasizes this point in *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, commenting that the grand tour 'provided a socially acceptable form of escape, a way of sowing wild oats, in the parlance of a later time'.⁶ The grand tour, then, provided young men with a way of experiencing all the sensual pleasures of the world before settling down into marriage, career, and model citizenship, even if the cultural rite itself was touted as purely educational.

This 'Grand Tour' has traditionally been treated by literary and historical scholars as an eighteenth-century phenomenon. Certainly, the tradition came into its own as a cultural rite during this period, aided by large-scale improvements in roads across the Continent and by the flourishing of the English mercantile class.⁷ As Withey points out, 'by the middle of the eighteenth century the continental tour [...] had expanded to become a

5 Boulton and McLoughlin, *News from Abroad*, 6.

6 Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, 3.

7 Boulton and McLoughlin, *News from Abroad*, 5.

common experience among the sons of wealthy professional and mercantile families' (5). And the end of the eighteenth century, in particular, has widely been considered by scholars as the 'apogee of the age of the grand tour', as Brian Dolan phrases it in *Ladies of the Grand Tour*.⁸ By the late eighteenth century, then, we can see the various ways in which the grand tour had become an established part of English aristocratic culture, particularly in the narrow definition of the tour's characteristics that appears during that period. The 'tour' itself has become well defined in terms of typical tourists and their destinations. The typical tourist was male and British, even into the late eighteenth century,⁹ and grand tourists 'confined themselves mainly to France and Italy, concentrating on a handful of cities: Paris, Geneva, Rome, Florence, Venice, and Naples'.¹⁰

As several scholars have pointed out, though, the origin of this tradition actually derives from at least a century earlier, when it arose in the wake of the English Civil War, if not from the general travelling practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Withey traces the origins of the grand tour to the 'British aristocracy in the sixteenth century' (5), while Jeremy Black comments in his introduction to *Italy and the Grand Tour* that 'protracted travel for pleasure [...] developed greatly in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, becoming part of an ideal education and image of the social elite'.¹¹ He continues: 'such travel [for pleasure] became more common in the seventeenth century, although it was affected by the religious (and political) tensions that followed the Protestant Reformation of the previous century' (1–2). Italy, in particular, proved a potentially dangerous destination for English travellers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries due to these religious and political tensions,¹² although these tensions had largely given way to hostilities with other countries by the English Restoration. By all accounts, the travelling practices of the English elite in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries helped shape the continental tour that emerged in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³ Notably, the term 'Grand Tour' itself was first introduced into English popular culture by Richard Lassels, a Catholic priest who published the term in 1670, not long before the appearance of Behn's *The Rover, Part 1*.¹⁴

8 Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 9.

9 Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, 6.

10 Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, 7.

11 Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 1.

12 Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, 7.

13 Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveler*, 1.

14 Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 2; and Boulton and McLoughlin, *News from Abroad*, 4.

Behn's play represents the themes and motifs of the grand tour in several ways that, if only coincidental, appear to foreshadow the century ahead. The play demonstrates a certain preoccupation with learning and education through its dialogue, although the lessons its characters learn are centred on worldly experience rather than formal scholarship. These references to learning, knowledge, and 'lessons' throughout the play underscore the worldly education that several characters, particularly Hellena and Blunt, receive about the nature of love and lust. The play also features several women's portraits that are admired by the men. Angellica's decision to advertise herself through three portraits serves as a marketing scheme, but the men – especially Willmore – treat the portraits more like works of art than advertisements. Angellica's portrait functions in Behn's play not unlike the various monuments, sculptures, and paintings that young men would often encounter on the grand tour.

The setting of the play itself also speaks back to the grand tour. Naples often served as the final major stop on the tour, although the city did not emerge as a truly popular destination until the second half of the eighteenth century. Withey claims that 'Naples was a popular destination among grand tourists, one devoted almost exclusively to the pleasures of the senses' (28). Naples' (and Italy's) reputation is reflected in the spirit of Behn's play, which devotes the majority of scenes to pursuits of both love and lust. This setting in the Spanish-controlled Italian city of Naples also allows for a meshing of cultures, specifically English, Spanish, and Italian, with references to the French and the Dutch (all, notably, cultures that would have been experienced on the grand tour).

Finally, the play boasts a focus on travel and mobility. As the play's title indicates, its characters rove freely. Most of the English visitors, for example, have made multiple stops on the Continent before arriving in Naples. Belvile, it is noted, has been to Paris (usually the first stop on the grand tour) and Pamplona, while Willmore – a seasoned traveller – literally wanders into Naples in search of sexual gratification and general entertainment. Blunt, in contrast to Willmore, is a 'raw traveller' whose naivety about the world causes his gullibility. The play's women also rove freely, although in a much more circumscribed space. Hellena, Florinda, and Valeria are not allowed the same freedom to 'roam' as their male counterparts, and so must use their wit and cunning, via disguise, to wander through the play's various social circles.

Hellena as a Female Rogue Figure

This disguised roving by the play's main female characters speaks back to the dramatic tradition of female roguery in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century texts. In *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz define the rogue figure as 'a cultural trope for mobility, change, and social adaptation'.¹⁵ Of the various characteristics that generally define rogues – wit, cunning, and guile (including the use of disguises) – mobility was generally seen as the most threatening in the early modern era. Mobility, whether geographical or social, disrupted the established order. Female mobility proved particularly threatening, especially since women were closely connected with the (immobile) household. The female rogue first appeared in the rogue pamphlets of Thomas Harman and John Awdeley of the 1560s, but did not emerge as a strong dramatic figure until the 1590s and early 1600s, when vast political, cultural, and social changes (along with hardships such as disease and famine) allowed her to take centre stage. In dramatic texts, the female rogue generally appears as a cunning and sharp-tongued member of the lower orders who either wanders geographically or moves up and down the social ladder via disguise and wit. Such movements often proved threatening to the established social order. In Thomas Middleton's *Trick to Catch the Old One* (1608), for instance, the lowly Jane presents herself as a rich widow, and ultimately advances her personal station by becoming Hoard's wife. In a similar manner, Doll works with her two co-conspirators, Subtle and Face, throughout Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) to swindle unsuspecting visitors. Other female rogue figures include Long Meg of Westminster, who wanders from place to place and often adopts the guise of a man in *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635); Bess Bridges, a tapster turned pirate to save her beloved in Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* (1631); and Lucetta, the jilting wench who pulls a bed-trick on Blount in *The Rover, Part 1*.

Hellena's antics throughout Behn's play – her disguises, sharp wit, and clever scheming – all paint her as a rogue figure. While the term 'rogue' generally carried a negative connotation, it is important to note that this was not always the case with female rogues. Take, for example, the case of Moll Cutpurse, the cross-dressing heroine of Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* (1611). More so than the other women above, Moll has proven a particularly complex figure for scholars to tackle, generally because she often appears as both the epitome and the antithesis of a female

15 Dionne and Mentz, *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, 1.

rogue. Moll's cross-dressing and her ability to move through various social circles paints her as a potential threat to the social order, but she appears to do so out of preference for that particular style of dress rather than for an ulterior motive. Unlike Middleton's Jane or Jonson's Doll, Moll has no desire to marry or to swindle others out of their money. In fact, Dekker and Middleton continually work to present Moll in their text as a figure who is in touch with the English underworld, yet displaced from it. In Act 5, for instance, Moll demonstrates an intrinsic knowledge of rogue culture, including a mastery of cant (rogue 'language'), but when questioned about that knowledge, presents herself as a mere observer:

I must confess, in younger days, when I was apt to stray, I have sat amongst such adders, seen their stings – as any here might – and in full playhouses watched their quick-diving hands, to bring to shame such rogues, and in that stream met an ill name. (5.1.298–303)

Moll's use of phrases such as 'sat amongst', 'seen', and 'watched', as well as her assertion of 'as any here might', distances her from the actions of dangerous rogue figures, while at the same time highlighting her familiarity with their culture.

Moll, and her real-life inspiration, Mary Frith, both proved to be popular with early modern audiences, and such popularity was not fleeting. The English Restoration, which saw the rise of female actors, women playwrights, and more diverse audiences for the London stage, demonstrated a renewed interest in female rogue figures. Real-life figures such as Elizabeth Cellier, Mary Carleton, and even Mary Frith herself (whose biography, *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith*, was published in 1662, shortly after her death) fascinated the public, and often served as inspiration for Restoration literature. Rogue-like women appear throughout Restoration drama, especially that of Behn, who, as a female playwright, had a vested interest in portraying strong women who pushed back against social conventions. Roguish female characters litter her works, from the playful 'feigned courtesans' in *The Feign'd Curtizans* (1679) to the vehement Widdow Ranter in *The Widdow Ranter or, the History of Bacon in Virginia* (1690).

The emergence of the female rogue figure in dramatic English literature, however, also coincided with rising portrayals of roguish upper-class women – a category to which Behn's Hellena more readily belongs. Examples of such women include figures like Shakespeare's cross-dressing heroines (particularly Julia from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Rosalind from *As You Like It*), Jonson's Grace from *Bartholomew Fayre* (1631), and Rachel

and Meriel from Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars* (1652). These women often adopt rogue-like tactics to escape danger, pursue their beloveds, or free themselves from patriarchal restraints. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for instance, Julia disguises herself in male attire and takes on a lower social position in order to pursue her beloved, the false Proteus. Jonson's Grace does the opposite; she flees into the company of rogues in order to escape an unwanted suitor. Rosalind and Imogen (from Shakespeare's *As You Like it* and *Cymbeline*, respectively) each use disguises and wit to flee from danger. Brome's heroines, frustrated with the patriarchal restraints placed upon them by their father and by society in general, seek the comfort of simple beggarly life. All of these women go 'rogue' in the sense that they use disguises, wit, and silver tongues to move unfettered through various social situations and to achieve their own ends.

Behn's Hellena fits nicely into this mould of the upper-class roguish woman. Throughout the play, Hellena adopts various disguises, including both male garb and a 'gipsie' costume, in order to move unhindered through the carnival festivities. Her choice of disguise in and of itself marks her rogue-like intentions, since the term 'gypsy' was widely used in the vagabond literature of the period to refer – often pejoratively – to itinerant people, especially Roma, in early modern Europe. Her scheming and roaming throughout the play match her well with the 'roving' Willmore, who follows his own lustful designs in pursuing Angellica, Naples' most desirable courtesan. In her initial discussions with Willmore, Hellena uses both wit and wordplay to enrapture him, and her rogue garb in this instance serves to make her a more mysterious, more desirable 'other'; after this first meeting, Willmore continually refers to Hellena as his 'little gipsie'. Like Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Brome's heroines, Hellena desires both love and freedom from the harsh patriarchal constraints placed upon her, and she adopts rogue-like tactics as a means to her end. She differs from these other female rogues, however, in that her primary motives align with the principal goals of the grand tour: to experience the world before settling into the responsibilities of adulthood.

Hellena and the Grand Tour

In the opening scene of *The Rover, Part 1*, Hellena finds herself in a predicament. Growing up as the younger daughter of a Spanish lord, Hellena has lived a particularly sheltered life, as demonstrated by her persistent questioning of her older sister, Florinda, in the play's opening lines. Florinda

complains: 'What an impertinent thing is a young girl bred in a nunnery! How full of questions!' (1.1.1–2). The fact that Hellena has been 'bred in a nunnery' while Florinda was present at 'the siege of Pamplona' (1.1.48) – where she met the young English captain Belvile – further illustrates how little experience this 'young girl' actually has with the world. Hellena's predicament becomes more fleshed out with Florinda's assertion that she has not only been 'bred' in a nunnery, but that she is also 'a maid designed for a nun' (1.1.29), which implies that Hellena will spend the remainder of her life cloistered away from the world behind a convent's walls. The appearance of the young women's brother, Don Pedro, further emphasizes this idea; Don Pedro insists that 'at Lent she shall begin her everlasting penance in a monastery' (1.1.137–38). When Hellena remarks that she would rather be a nun than forced to marry according to her brother's choice, Don Pedro continues to emphasize her predetermined path for adulthood: 'Do not fear the blessing of that choice. You shall be a nun' (1.1.141). Hellena's fate, according to the dictates of her father and brother, then, has already been decided, and her predicament resides in the fact that this predetermined path runs contrary to her personal desires.

It is at this moment, when she is caught between her sheltered past and her equally cloistered future, that Hellena decides to take her education about the world into her own hands. Her conversation with Callis, the governess, after Don Pedro's departure clarifies her plans to go in masquerade during carnival. Callis asks Hellena whether she has considered the life set out for her by her brother and father, and Hellena responds: 'Yes [...] that of a nun: and till then I'll be indebted a world of prayers to you if you'll let me now see what I never did, the divertissements of a carnival' (1.1.169–71). The use of 'divertissements' here not only suggests the amusements of carnival, but also highlights the wandering nature of Hellena's ambitions, since to 'divert' is to 'turn aside from [a] (proper) direction or course'.¹⁶ Hellena shirks her proper course for the diversions of the world around her, to 'see what [she] never did', with carnival and her rogue disguise serving as the means to her end. It is no coincidence that her first interaction with Willmore reintroduces the idea of diverting. When Willmore comments on her path to the nunnery, Hellena redirects his thoughts, claiming 'you design only to make me fit for Heaven' (1.2.179–80) and informing him that he should 'quite divert [her] from it' (1.2.180–81). He is the diversion she has been seeking, and the diversion for which she has set her plans in motion. The fact that the 'gypsy' outfits have already been laid out – as implied by

16 'Divert', *OED Online*.

Hellena's command to Florinda in the first scene to 'assume [a humour] as gay, and as fantastic as the dress my cousin Valeria and I have provided' (1.1.178–79) – suggests that Hellena has been planning this 'divertissement' for some time, and that her wit and cunning will help carry out that plan.

At first glance, though, Hellena's actions do not seem that different from those of her sister and kinswoman. Willmore's 'little gipsie' serves as the ring-leader, certainly, but Florinda and Valeria also dress in disguise, and they also participate in carnival. I would argue that Hellena differs from the text's other female characters in intent rather than in kind. Florinda dons a mask like her sister, but her goals follow more traditional lines: she does so to pursue her beloved, Belvile. Hellena's elder sister remains a stock image of passive femininity throughout most of the play, falling into the role of damsel in distress at least twice (when she must be saved from being raped). Valeria's aims are perhaps the most closely aligned with Hellena's in the play (that is, she wants to have fun), and yet the young kinswoman almost appears like an afterthought in the text – as if she exists purely to be paired with Frederick or to serve as 'wing-woman' to her female companions, to turn a modern phrase. And while Callis also participates in carnival, she does so with a watchful eye. Of her female companions, Hellena alone remains centre stage as an active rogue-like figure.

At least one other central female figure in the play, though, rivals Hellena's rogueries: Angellica Bianca. Arguably, Angellica is the most roguish woman in the play (except, perhaps, for Lucetta, the jilting wench) due to her independent nature, her ability to turn her looks and wit for profit, and her occupation. At the play's end, the jilted courtesan even takes up arms and threatens to shoot Willmore. Once again, I will argue that Hellena differs from Angellica in intent rather than in kind. If both are arguably rogue-like, and both use their roguery as a means to an end, the ends they seek differ. Hellena adopts rogue-like tactics to experience the world and all its pleasures (especially love). Angellica is already a woman of the world, and she uses her charms – and her ability to sell love and lust – to turn a profit. The courtesan's rash decision to admit the penniless Willmore and her subsequent fall for him probably say more about her own youthfulness than her business acumen. Both young women adopt roguish tactics, but only Hellena embarks on her own grand tour.

In truth, Hellena's grand tour is a microcosm of the 'Grand Tour' experience of many young English gentlemen. Her travels are limited to Naples, not the various cities on the Continent. She does not visit famous monuments, landscapes, and works of art that she studied in her formal education. She is not male (although she does take on the guise of one), and she is certainly

not English. Hellena's grand tour, instead, aligns more closely with the young men's education and experience in the 'sensual palette'; her 'roving' throughout carnival allows her to experience not only other cultures, but also freedom from parental control (particularly after she has shaken off Callis) and a taste of the sensual pleasures of interacting with the opposite sex. Her 'gipsie' disguise and subsequent male disguise allow her to interact with both the English visitors and the (presumably) native Angellica Bianca, and these various encounters teach her valuable lessons about the perils of lust and the risk of inconstancy in love.

Hellena's desire to receive a 'sensual' education appears throughout the play – she often emphasizes the idea of the world or worldliness in her speech. When questioned about her plans for carnival, for instance, Hellena responds that she wants to do 'that which all the world does [...] be as mad as the rest and take all innocent freedoms' (1.1.174–75). While this comment certainly can be taken as a description of the mad world of carnival, it also rings true with the spirit of the grand tour, in which young people took advantage of the (supposedly) innocent freedoms offered to them by escaping watchful parental eyes. Despite her assertion to her sister that she 'came thence not, as [her] wise brother imagines, to take an eternal farewell of the world, but to love and to be beloved' (3.1.39–41), Hellena's discussions of love and courtship always return to the idea of earthly, carnal pleasures and knowledge. After all, she follows that statement with the bold assertion: 'and I will be beloved, or I'll get one of your men, so I will' (3.1.41–42). When questioned further by her sister and Valeria, Hellena proclaims that she does not want to be the 'considering lover' like her sister – the one who writes 'little soft nonsensical billets' (3.1.55) and follows all the proper rules of courtship. She doesn't have time! She is bound for the nunnery, where she 'shall not be suspected to have any such earthly thoughts about [her]' (3.1.60–61). And yet, even her conversation with her brother in the play's initial scene reveals her focus on such 'earthly thoughts' throughout the play, when she displays a keen interest in the happenings of the marriage bed. She presents Florinda's pending marriage to the old Don Vincentio as a bleak affair:

That honour being past, the giant stretches himself, yawns and sighs a belch or two, loud as a musket – throws himself into bed, and expects you in his foul sheets, and e'er you can get yourself undressed, calls you with a snore or two – and are not these fine blessings to a young lady. (1.1.114–18)

Her preoccupation with worldly pleasures, however, appears most fruitfully in her discussions with Willmore. Hellena flirts freely with Willmore in the

palm-reading scene, an action that notably would not have been allowed of a Spanish female youth, particularly one so guarded by her father and brother. When Willmore tells her in this initial conversation that it "tis more meritorious to leave the world when thou hast tasted and proved the pleasure on't" (1.2.176–77), she responds by asking him to take her off her pre-appointed path and 'bring [her] back to the world again' (1.2.181). In a later conversation, after discussing marriage with Willmore, she comments that 'a handsome woman has a great deal to do whilst her face is good' (3.1.170–71), asserting that 'should I, in these days of my youth, catch a fit of foolish constancy, I were undone: 'tis loitering by daylight in our great journey' (3.1.172–74).

Constancy and inconstancy serve as major sticking points in the play for Hellena and Willmore's relationship, and Hellena in her comments here demonstrates not only her interest in worldly pleasures, but also how much she has already learned both about the world and about Willmore in particular, since in presenting herself as inconstant she mirrors his own inconstant behaviour towards her. She presents herself as rogue-like as she perceives him to be, exclaiming 'Well, I see our business as well as humours are alike: yours to cozen as many maids as will trust you, and I as many men as have faith' (3.1.181–83). Acquiring such keen knowledge and insight into Willmore's character is significant, if only because such knowledge about a particular suitor would generally have been denied to a sheltered young woman in this period. Through her roving, Hellena grants herself a similar education about the constancy and inconstancy of the opposite sex that the young English gentleman, Blunt, receives in the play when he encounters Lucetta.

Hellena's general aptitude and willingness to learn throughout the play also links her to the grand tour, which was, above all else, supposed to be an educational experience. Talk of learning pervades several of her discussions, such as when she asserts to Valeria that 'if you are not a lover, 'tis an art soon learnt' (3.1.47–48), a comment that soon has Florinda exclaiming 'I wonder how you learned to love so easily' (3.1.49). Hellena's desire to know more about love, and about the world in general, appears in the first lines she speaks in the play. In response to Florinda's complaint that she has 'told thee more than thou understand'st already' (1.1.2–3), Hellena exclaims: 'The more's my grief. I would fain know as much as you, which makes me so inquisitive' (1.1.4–5). This inquisitive nature appears throughout the play in her questioning of Florinda about love, in her questioning of her brother's plans for Florinda's marriage, in the curiosity displayed in her exchanges with Willmore, and in her tendency to remain in the shadows in order to

observe the interactions of those around her. For example, in the third act, right before Belville and Moretta enter discussing Willmore, the disguised Hellena turns to Florinda and Valeria, remarking: 'Let's step aside and we may learn something' (3.1.70–71). And learn something she does in this scene, particularly about Willmore's roving eye.

One moment in the play that perhaps highlights these various ideas associated with the grand tour most vividly – learning, roving, and sensual desire – would be when Hellena and Willmore finally learn each other's names. This revelation, which would normally occur upon an initial meeting, comes at the play's end, after both of them have already learned everything else they need to know about each other. Such a late revelation calls into question which character the play's title – *The Rover* – actually refers to, especially since Hellena carefully paints herself as Willmore's equal throughout the text. Her ability to match him remains further underscored by the actual names each of them gives. When Willmore asserts 'I am called Robert the constant' (5.1.472), Hellena echoes him a few lines later: 'I am called Hellena the inconstant' (5.1.477). Her switch from 'constant' to 'inconstant' reveals her deep knowledge of his character, since she labels herself to match his own inconsistency throughout the play. Such knowledge would not have been possible without her youthful (and educational) adventures during carnival. Such knowledge is powerful too, since it ultimately alters her course for adulthood.

Implications

In establishing Hellena as a rogue-like young woman who actively seeks worldly experience, Behn makes a powerful statement about the importance of such experience for young women, as well as young men. In allowing Hellena to create her own youthful space in between childhood and adulthood, Behn establishes that the space outside of the home, and even beyond the watchful parental (or patriarchal) eye, can prove fruitful for both sexes since – according to the logic of the play – more experienced young women can ultimately make better spouses. Much like the travels of the grand tour served as a way for young men to experience the world before settling into the responsibilities of adulthood, so Hellena's roving throughout the play actually prepares her to be a wife through allowing her to know her future husband before committing to him. Both the play and the carnival within end with order restored, and yet that 'order' has altered quite a bit from when the play started. Hellena ends the play dressed not as a young Spanish noblewoman, but as a young boy – a sign, perhaps, that she, like

Willmore, remains a bit rogue-like even in the restored order of the play. Parental and patriarchal desires have been subverted, and will remain so, since both Hellena and Florinda have chosen to follow their own paths. Alternative futures have been carved out, especially for Willmore and Hellena, neither of whom envisioned marriage at the play's start. Behn's 'world of youth' concludes with a new 'venture': adulthood.

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3. 'She is but a girl'

Talk of Young Women as Daughters, Wives, and Mothers in the Records of the English Consistory Courts, 1550–1650

*Jennifer McNabb*¹

Abstract

This exploration of litigation involving marriage and defamation indicates the ways in which early modern witnesses expressed ideas about young women within the institutional venue of England's ecclesiastical courts. The archival evidence describes relationships interrupted and fractured by charges of sexual and social misbehaviour, demonstrates the ability of young women to mount spirited objections to family matrimonial strategies, and reveals voices of young female servants offering opinions on the actions and words of the surrogate families of masters and mistresses. Witness testimony illuminates the legal, social, and cultural expectations of and for young women as they passed through an identifiable stage between childhood and maturity.

Keywords: litigation; courtship; defamation; witness testimony; church courts; female youth

A remarkable document from England's Consistory Court of Chester contains a harrowing account of young Katherine Prescott's coming of age.² Her father, Henry, determined that twelve-year-old Katherine should marry William Bower, aged fifteen, who was 'of a very good estate [...] in good[es], tenement[es] and land[es]'. Being 'greatly perplexed and troubled in mind',

¹ The author would like to thank the volume's editors and readers for their helpful comments during the preparation of this manuscript, as well as audience members and panellists at sessions of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association meeting and the Attending to Early Modern Women conference who offered feedback on earlier versions of this project.

² CALS EDC 5 1624, no. 17.

Katherine voiced dissent, saying she would 'leape into a worke pitt and drowne her self before she married William Bower'. Henry Prescott was unmoved; his 'p[er]suasions, threat[es], and menaces' as well as a promise to withdraw his financial support and paternal blessing forced Katherine into her parish church for a solemnization of marriage. Her display of opposition before the ceremony, though, prompted the minister and congregation to lobby Henry Prescott to abandon his plans. When they were unsuccessful, Katherine had no choice but to capitulate; yet her mumbling of the vows caused many present to question whether she had spoken the verbal formula required for a valid union. A battle of wills erupted after the ceremony between Katherine and the men responsible for her governance, her father and her new husband. Henry Prescott settled the young couple in his house and demanded they consummate their relationship – a demand echoed by the young bridegroom – but Katherine thwarted their plans through a variety of schemes, including enlisting young female servants to share her bed instead and locking her chamber door to prohibit her husband's entrance. Meanwhile, she pursued a sustained campaign to dissolve her marriage, having 'complayned and made her moane and greefe knowne to divers persons with whome she was familier or durst speake'. These objections reached the Commissioners for Causes Ecclesiastical in Wigan, who ordered her suit be heard before the Bishop's consistory court in Chester in 1624.

The cause papers of Katherine's case present a compelling and occasionally chilling narrative of a young woman alternatively defiant and cowed, both constrained and unbroken by her age and dependent condition. The final words of the allegation requesting that the court declare her 'pre[tend]ed marriage' invalid cast into stark relief the vulnerability of young women in early modern England: they claimed Katherine had been unable to secure justice 'by reason of the want of libertie, frend[es], and meanes'. Yet the documents of the consistory courts of northwest England reveal that young women were not so devoid of 'libertie, frend[es], and meanes' that they were ignorant of or barred from the courts' proceedings. Female youths instead appeared frequently as plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses in child marriage suits, breach of contract suits, and requests for nullification. Just as courtship and matrimony offered young women an opportunity to demonstrate agency as they navigated the road to adulthood, legal action concerning the rupture of relationships also afforded female adolescents the opportunity to provide evidence about their lives in the courts.

Early modern consistory court records provide valuable commentary on female youths' experiences as daughters, wives, mothers, and labourers as voiced by adult witnesses of both sexes as well as by young women

themselves. Analysis of litigation heard by the diocese of Chester's two consistory courts at Chester and Richmond reveals contestation and negotiation over the words used to describe female youth as well as the values and expectations associated with the female stage of life between childhood and adulthood.³ Articulations both of legal theory and of the lived experience of young women in court records clearly demonstrate the constraints female youths faced in early modern English society. But to see in them evidence of the relentless oppression of patriarchy is to ignore the initiative that young women employed in using the institutional forum of the court to describe their memories, words, and actions. Witnesses and litigants communicated a multifaceted and often flexible conception of female youth, shaped by young women's socioeconomic and marital status, by their physical and social development, and by the definitions and requirements of ecclesiastical law.

Evidence and Method

Scholars have long wrestled with the problem of defining adolescence as a social category and as a distinct stage of life in the medieval and Renaissance periods. Philippe Ariès's assertion that concepts of childhood and adolescence were non-existent in the Middle Ages proved a boon to claims situating their emergence in the early modern period, but that developmental timeline was subsequently contested by several historians of youth, including Barbara Hanawalt and Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos.⁴ The prevailing scholarly discourse on early modern youth remains decidedly male in its orientation, drawing on evidence of apprenticeship and education to posit the existence of a male youth culture characterized by misrule and riot and associated particularly with urban areas.⁵ Prescriptive evidence for early

3 The Deposition Books for the Chester court consist of witness testimony, while the Cause Papers consist of procedural papers (libels, personal responses, interrogatories, depositions, articles, and sentences). Cause paper materials for Richmond's court are found at the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds. Appeals material for both courts is housed at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York. Furnivall's *Child-Marriages* includes transcriptions of additional matrimonial litigation.

4 Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*; Shorter, *Making of the Modern Family*; Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*; Hanawalt, 'Historical Descriptions and Prescriptions for Adolescence', and *Growing Up in Medieval London*; Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England*.

5 Yarbrough, 'Apprentices as Adolescents'; Houlbrooke, *English Family*; Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy' and *Meanings of Manhood*; Archer, *Pursuit of Stability*; and Lamb, 'Youth Culture'.

modern conceptions of female youth exists in relative abundance, however, and the essays in this volume and other recent work argue persuasively in favour of a more complex theory and practice of female youth during the early modern period.⁶

My research seeks to redress a gap in extant scholarship by examining descriptions of the characteristics, behaviour, words, and memories associated with young womanhood as expressed within the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical law. Records of England's consistory courts are an underused but rich source for the study of youth. Alexandra Shepard indicates that at the height of their business, the courts may have hosted as witnesses as high a proportion as one in seven of the population over the age of fourteen, the minimum age accepted under ecclesiastical law for giving testimony at court, which perhaps purposely coincided with the canonical age of maturity for boys.⁷ The diocese of Chester's two consistory courts dealt with matters of ecclesiastical discipline, but also served as popular venues for the resolution of disagreements between private parties involving defamation, tithes, pews, probate, economic breaches of faith, and marriage. The richness of the Chester courts' documentary record, its mix of urban and rural litigants and deponents, and its representations of the testimony and circumstances of people of diverse social statuses make it an invaluable source collection for a consideration of female youth.⁸

Early modern adolescence had both biological and social definitions, identified by the onset of biological puberty and characterized by an absence of the status, property, and agency that came, at least for males, with the attainment of full adulthood. Traditionally, the signifier of female adulthood was marriage.⁹ Evidence of wives' distinct status is captured in the

6 Scholars of the English Renaissance have identified shifting ideas about young women's roles and bodies in contemporary moral, medical, and dramatic texts: Miller and Yavneh, *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*; Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body*. In 'Fair Maids and Golden Girls', Jennifer Higginbotham demonstrates that the vocabulary associated with young womanhood in dramatic texts and dictionaries between 1500 and 1700 lost flexibility in communicating subtle social and cultural messages and values, and became instead more rigid in describing a particular developmental stage.

7 Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself*; 9. For the minimum age of witnesses, see Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society*, 40. Age was a qualification featured in Tancred's discussion of ecclesiastical procedure (cited by Donahue on the same page): 'Condition and gender, age and discretion / Fame and fortune and troth / If these aren't found in the *testes* / You should, to admit 'em, be loath'.

8 Thirty per cent of the witnesses in matrimonial litigation surveyed for this paper were women (of 326 deponents, 92 were female and 234 were male), and most witnesses were of the 'middling sort', below the level of the gentry but above that of landless labourers.

9 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 76; Erikson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*.

court documents from Chester: a suit from 1640, for example, reiterates the Bishop's order 'that wiewes should sitt in pewes & seat[es] and that all yonge women vnmarried & children [...] should sitt or kneele in the iles [...] and not in pewes or seat[es]', revealing the physical separation of married and unmarried women within ritual and communal social space.¹⁰

England's failure to enact a comprehensive reform of its matrimonial law until Lord Hardwicke's Act in 1753, however, complicated marriage's function as a rite of passage. It remained possible to construct matches between children younger than the canonical ages of consent (twelve for girls and fourteen for boys) and to create binding marriage outside the authority of the Church of England through the exchange of matrimonial vows, both of which were considered spousals, or matrimonial contracts.¹¹ While child marriage and handfasting lost social and cultural legitimacy in many areas, they persisted in the diocese of Chester, and contested matrimony produced numerous legal actions.¹² To investigate the courts' documentary record for information on female youth, I selected a sample of 210 matrimonial cause paper files from the Chester courts (dated from 1545 to 1653) that included witness testimony: 138 deal with irregular marriage between parties over the ages of consent, and 72 feature matrimonial contracts for children under the canonical ages of maturity.

Sixteenth-century lawyer Henry Swinburne in his posthumously published *Treatise of Spousals* identifies three developmental categories for females – infants, children, and women – although his discussion of the ages associated with each reveals considerable diversity of contemporary opinion.¹³ The canonical impediment concerning age, however, meant that matrimonial law was conclusive in its definitions of stages of the female life-cycle. Marriage contracted for those under the age of seven ('infants') was invalid due to the parties' inability to give mental or physical consent. Matrimonial contracts made on behalf of children between the ages of seven and twelve (girls) or fourteen (boys) became binding if the parties

10 CALS EDC 5 1640, no. 94.

11 The practice of exchanging consent by speaking words of marriage was identified by additional terms including 'trothplighting' and 'handfasting'.

12 See, for example, Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England*; Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation*; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*; Out-hwaite, *Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts*.

13 Swinburne notes, for example, that under civil law, young people were considered 'infants' until the age of 21, and, based on a survey of classical and contemporary texts, he identifies childhood with the period under 14, 18, 21, 22, and 25, depending on the authority and circumstance. Swinburne, *Treatise of Spousals*, 19 and 24.

engaged in sexual intercourse or if, after reaching the legal age of maturity, they demonstrated matrimonial consent.¹⁴ For courting couples over the ages of consent, the speaking of present-tense words of matrimony had performative force to enact valid marriage. When the words exchanged were uncertain or disputed, however, other signs of consent – including consummation, cohabitation, giving gifts, or even simply appearing as ‘man and wife’ in social and economic contexts – assumed significance in witness testimony. As a result of these legal provisions, friends and family carefully assessed young women’s behaviour for evidence of consent or dissent from marriage and reported their findings in court when compelled to do so.

An important consideration for the value of information on young women provided by these matrimonial suits centres on the issue of irregularity itself: how useful is evidence from accounts of irregular relationships in reflecting experiences of average female youths?¹⁵ To answer that question, this essay also investigates more general commentary on marriage provided by 2200 non-matrimonial suits from the diocese of Chester. That evidence suggests that when matrimonial contracts functioned as expected, the resulting unions never appeared as abnormal in the documentary record, apparently escaping either the notice or the censure of authorities. For example, an adultery suit from 1593 filed against Marie Cragg includes Richard Cragg’s assertion that he ‘was but tend[e]r of yeares by the p[er]swasion & p[ar]tlic by the threatning[es] of his fath[er] [when] he did intermarie w[i]th the said Marie’.¹⁶ Both parties subsequently consented to marriage, and the couple had two children. Had Marie’s adultery not later come to light, evidence of this child match would be non-existent. Clearly the tactics of Richard Cragg’s father had worked as he (and countless other fathers, mothers, kin, and guardians) intended; the child spouses validated their marriage upon attainment of the ages of majority. Incidental talk of marriage in the cause papers suggests that irregularities frequently yielded enduring, unremarkable matches. Lawsuits requesting confirmation or dissolution of marriages

14 Swinburne, *Treatise of Spousals*, 18–47. For an assessment regarding regionalism and child marriages, see Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage*, 128–29.

15 Historians have discussed in considerable detail the difficulties facing a scholar who studies court documents. For some of the more eloquent discussions of both the caveats of and strategies for using such records, see Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*; Kuehn, ‘Reading Microhistory’; Gowing, ‘Language, Power and the Law’; and O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 10–16. Charles Donahue reminds readers that court cases recount subjective stories rather than objective truths about marriage, and identifies and labels particular story patterns in his examination of late medieval marriage: *Law, Marriage, and Society*, 10–11 and 46–62.

16 CALS EDC 5 1593, no. 9.

made outside the prescribed formula for matrimony can be considered somewhat atypical in that they required judgment of ecclesiastical authorities. Evidence from other types of litigation, however, confirms that the strategies and practices of irregular marriage were widely recognized and accepted as culturally legitimate in England's northwest and, by extension, that the young women whose lives are documented in the suits examined below should not be considered rare or deviant.

Talk of Young Women by Adults

The application of matrimonial law in Chester's consistory courts both informed and complicated the question of what constituted female youth. Depositional evidence provided by adults in child marriage suits offers little indication witnesses considered young brides women by virtue of their premature advancement to wifehood. Edward Hopwood, for example, claimed his rebellious granddaughter, Anne, was 'but a girle' whose desire to nullify her child marriage revealed her ignorance of what was best for her and for her family.¹⁷ The most common label for child brides in the records was the one attributed to Hopwood, yet 'girl' is a developmental category absent from Swinburne's treatise on matrimonial law. The great range of words found in early modern literary and prescriptive sources to describe young women is absent from the court papers: none is referred to as a 'lass' or 'damsel', and 'maid' is a term reserved for household servants in child marriage suits.¹⁸ The usage of 'girl' may have been the preference of recording court clerks rather than a reflection of deponents' spoken words, although it is clear that clerks were responsive to the precise language witnesses used in their oral testimony, as the court papers indicate numerous corrections made to written accounts when testimony was read back to witnesses to secure their assent to its accuracy.¹⁹

While the testimonial procedures of ecclesiastical law may have inhibited the documentation of an extensive vocabulary for female youth, deponents appear to have exercised linguistic agency in discussing young women in other ways. Numerous witnesses reported their assessments of girls' bodies to determine biological preparedness for intercourse and childbirth, and

17 CALS EDC 2/9, f. 303v.

18 The term 'wench', a popular label in literary sources for female children, made only a single appearance in these records.

19 For an overview of procedure, see Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society*, 33–41.

to ascertain age as related to canonical stipulations concerning consent.²⁰ Deponents described young brides as 'small' or 'little', as when in a suit from 1570 deponent Thomas Smyth judged child bride Joan Higgenson 'not marriageable' by virtue of her being 'a litle girle'.²¹ In 1570 Alexander Worthington recalled the child marriage of Elizabeth Orrell and Richard Elston, when Elizabeth was so young she had been carried to the church in Preston 'in tharmes of one Henry Wolderne'.²² The most striking descriptor comes from an action from 1586 when witness Randolph Crokson called eleven-year-old groom Thomas Wadde 'boy' but referred to Thomas's eight-year-old bride, Frances, as a 'woman'.²³ Writers of early modern conduct and household manuals did acknowledge that girls matured more quickly than boys, but instead of demonstrating popular acceptance of that point, Crokson's label performs more valuable service as a reminder that deponents employed descriptions of young brides purposefully, since age, physical readiness for intercourse, and ability to demonstrate consent were all integral to the law of marriage.²⁴ Crokson was a witness on the part of young Thomas Wadde, and his testimony emphasizes Thomas's immaturity as grounds for dissolution of the marriage.

Quantitative data further support the conclusion that young brides attained little of the status and few, if any, of the domestic or maternal responsibilities associated with adulthood. This evidence clearly confirms child marriage both as the product of strategies by adults responsible for the governance of youngsters and as an arrangement between children, rather than between a child and a mature adult: 75 per cent of the child marriage suits in Chester featured underage girls, while grooms had not reached the age of consent in 79 per cent of such suits. In the remaining suits, the incompleteness of case files obscures the age of one or both parties. When considerable disparity did exist between spouses' ages, witnesses voiced strong objections absent from other suits. In 1573, for example, Thomas Shostworth described the 'disorderly marriage' of eleven-year-old Anne

20 During the early decades under investigation, witnesses often used variations on the phrase 'bie viewe of hir bodye' to introduce perceptions of girls' physical development. See, for example, CALS EDC 2/7, f. 142r; EDC 2/8, ff. 136v, 143r; and EDC 2/9, 508. By the early seventeenth century, the parish register of baptisms provided evidence of age.

21 CALS EDC 2/9, 11.

22 CALS EDC 2/9, 47.

23 CALS EDC 2/8, f. 154v.

24 Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 83. For early modern legal commentary on the theory that girls matured more quickly, see Swinburne, *Treatise of Spousals*, 48–49.

Goodshawe and William Stephenson, aged 22.²⁵ He reported that he would never have gone to the Goodshawe house on the afternoon in question had he known he would be called upon to witness a marriage, as 'he thought the whole matter wold growe to some trouble after' since Anne was 'not at lawfull yeres'. Other witnesses echoed Thomas's misgivings, which stemmed from the alleged spouses' unequal levels of maturity rather than Anne's age alone.

Testimony provides few indications of the independence of child spouses. For example, 82 per cent of child marriage suits identify individuals whose approval and actions worked to arrange the union. Deponents discussed the active role taken by parents of female litigants in 61 per cent of the suits and by parents of male litigants in 57 per cent; 42 per cent mention the actions of 'friends' and non-parental kin of female litigants; and 43 per cent identify 'friends' and non-parental kin of male litigants.²⁶ Perhaps unsurprisingly, men were more frequently identified as masterminding child marriages than women. Fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and male guardians all worked to create matches for their young offspring, heirs, and charges, with female approval or influence actively sought only when male authority was absent.²⁷ Cohabitation of young spouses, usually in the house of one set of parents, is indicated in 34 per cent of child marriage suits. The living arrangements and experiences of spouses who did not cohabit diverged sharply according to gender: boys were commonly sent to school or apprenticed, while girls remained in the homes of parents or guardians.²⁸ This evidence, combined with the vocabulary identifying child brides as 'young', 'small', and 'girls', makes clear that merely being married did not catapult girls to the ranks of adulthood.

25 CALS EDC 2/9, 640–41.

26 These numbers reflect the fact that multiple parties, both kin and non-kin, were sometimes discussed in individual suits as playing important roles in bringing a marriage to completion. The category 'friends' is a reflection of language used in the records themselves, where the identities of such individuals are seldom given. See Rushton, 'Property, Power and Family Networks', 211, and Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 148–59, for the composition of 'friends' mentioned in early modern matrimonial suits. O'Hara equates 'friends' with the concept 'fictive kin', noting the connections among 'family and the surrogate family of masters, mistresses, and fellow servants, from biological kin, affines, and a range of what may loosely be termed fictive kin'. See O'Hara, 'Ruled by my Friends', 22.

27 The mother of George Hanson, for example, took on a key role in the negotiations concerning her son's child marriage to Anne Drackeford because her husband died during George's minority. CALS EDC 5 1616, no. 71.

28 In only a single instance was a child bride described as being put into service 'abroad' after the exchange of vows. CALS EDC 2/9, unnumbered deposition in a cause between Anthony Mettershed and Anne Rowcrosst [1573–1574?].

Young women over the age of consent whose fractured relationships prompted breach of matrimonial contract suits faced uncertainty about their status that also destabilized the traditional tripartite division of female lives into the stages of maid, wife, and widow. If properly married, these young women crossed the all-important physical and social boundaries from maid to wife resulting from the initiation of sexual relations and adoption of duties ranging from household management to childbirth and childrearing. If the courts did not ratify claims of matrimony, however, the performance of these wifely actions was deviant rather than normalizing, and exposed young women to censure. During the courts' review of suits alleging irregular unions – a process that could take years – young women found themselves stuck in a suspended developmental state. They were denied the ability to live as a maid advancing toward adulthood through marriage with an alternative partner, as well as the financial, social, and cultural security and status afforded by wifehood.²⁹

The practical challenges of such an interruption are provided by the account of Margaret Launcelot in 1604.³⁰ In refuting John Holmes's contention that the pair married thirteen years before, Margaret confessed she 'spoke in a merie maner' to John as a young woman, but not with the intent of binding herself in marriage. She stated that she had since been 'in talke of marriag w[i]th two or three' others, but suggested that John's continued claims deterred these suitors and constituted a form of 'molestat[i]on'. It is worth noting that while consequences of matrimonial uncertainty for young women included a prolonged, often troubled period of adolescence like that suffered by Margaret, none of the suits suggest that rumours of marriage similarly derailed male youths' quest for manhood.³¹

Quantitative analysis of Chester's breach of contract suits reveals a more gendered pattern of oversight than that indicated in the child marriage suits. Nearly one-third contain evidence of the direct involvement of young women's parents in the establishment of alleged marriages, twice the number featuring the actions of young men's parents. Almost half of the suits describe the kin, friends, and guardians of young women helping shape the process of

29 After Joann Whitworth gave birth to an illegitimate child in 1588, Ellen Brooke employed her 'to spinne' for the space of one year, during which time Joann's suitor, Thomas Bostock, came often to visit her and the child. CALS EDC 5 1598, no. 20. The breach of contract suit was filed a full ten years after the contract had been established, a period for which no information on Joann's employment or living conditions is provided.

30 CALS EDC 5 1604, no. 30.

31 The jactitation of marriage suits in the Chester courts invariably feature young women refuting rumours of marriage, as in CALS EDC 5 1618, no. 77.

alleged matrimony, while a smaller proportion, one-third, discusses the role of the young man's kin, friends, and other parties. Young men appear to have had more independence in initiating and advancing courtship than young women, by virtue of either social or legal custom. The evidence of courtship as a male-engineered activity for the northwest is complicated, however. While scholars have identified the giving of courtship and matrimonial gifts as a male practice in other areas of England, in the diocese of Chester, nearly 60 per cent of the suits discussing gift exchange include accounts of female giving, meaning young women were often active participants rather than passive receivers in the gift economy.³² It further demonstrates that female youths could procure and proffer items that deepened and displayed couples' commitment.

Talk of Young Women by Young Women

Consistory court records include first-hand accounts provided by young women themselves in the forms of litigants' personal responses and witness testimony. Young women seeking nullification of marriage constructed narratives that either exploited problems of proof and legitimacy inherent in irregular marriage or professed ignorance of matrimonial law in the attempt to secure a favourable judgment. In 1567 Alice Davenpart reported that she was 'of so smalle discrec[i]on and age [...] that she cannot remember whether she was married to the said Ranulph [Grasly] eu[er] or neu[er]', and her claims of ignorance by virtue of age were echoed by numerous child brides.³³ Dorothy Wright admitted to a consent-based contract with Thomas Clutton in a suit from 1608, but tried to persuade the court that the match was invalid by noting that it took place in a private house without a licence or the required public reading of the banns, suggesting an understanding of

32 Rushton, O'Hara, Peters, and Gowing emphasize male giving in both theory and practice, while Houlbrooke's examination of sixteenth-century Norwich indicates male givers outnumbering female givers 'nearly three to one', and Carlson's study of Ely and York reveals a disparity of five to one. Rushton, 'Testament of Gifts', 26; O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 65; Houlbrooke, 'Making of Marriage', 344; Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation*, 111; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 160; Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies*, 85–86 and 130–43; and Peters, 'Gender, Sacrament and Ritual', 87.

33 CALS EDC 2/8, f. 127r. For similar talk about the inability to signal consent by virtue of age or to remember the occasion of marriage, see also personal responses from Elizabeth Tilston, EDC 2/8, f. 3r; Elizabeth Low *alias* Mason, EDC 2/8, f. 119r; Isabel Orrell *alias* Lathom, edc 2/8, f. 155r; Alice Watson, EDC 2/8, f. 269r; Helen Gleave, EDC 2/8, f. 336v; and John Rambotton, EDC 2/9, 508.

the legal requirements for marriage. More typical, however, was Elizabeth Mather's claim in 1640 that she contracted matrimony without understanding the contract's implications, 'being vnskillfull in the lawes of God and man'.³⁴ Young men, in contrast, did not cite ignorance of legal requirements, which suggests gender-specific pleading strategies that would have aligned with contemporary perceptions of male and female understandings of the law.

Young female plaintiffs and defendants offered details of their relationships that allow us to reconstruct social expectations and practices associated with early modern marriage. They recounted the circumstances through which they expressed consent to matrimony, often stressing the particular formula of words employed, as when Cicely Haughe, aged 22, confessed in 1569 to taking Richard Shene by the right hand and saying 'vnto him there and then I Cicilie take the Richard to my wedded husband and the reste of the wordes of matrimony', after which the pair kissed to ratify their contract.³⁵ Elizabeth Nibbe's account in 1583 of her relationship with William Sefton reveals her cautious consideration of making a binding commitment: 'because the pl[aintiff] was a straunger' whose material prospects were unknown to her, Elizabeth sent a messenger to his home county, and upon learning he was a younger son with limited means, she 'did breake w[i]th him', having never spoken the legal words of marriage.³⁶ Katherine Prescott, whose story opened this essay, swore she had not consummated her marriage to William Bower to signify her continued refusal of the union, and other young women offered testimony concerning their own sexual activity or its absence in pursuit of legal claims as well. In 1637 Christiana Williamson, for example, listed a variety of physical and material exchanges with Robert Wainwright she thought constituted proof of a valid union:

[T]he said marriage was ratified and confirmed betwixte them as she beleeves by lying and being in one and the same bedd together, by continued cohabitac[i]on, by guift[es], by kisses, by imbracement[es], by kinde language, and good vsage as man and wife.³⁷

Young women also appeared before the courts as witnesses in matrimonial suits. Because present-tense words of matrimony were the key legal measure

34 CALS EDC 5 1608, no. 50; EDC 5 1640, no. 49.

35 CALS EDC 2/8, f. 217r.

36 CALS EDC 5 1583, no. 62.

37 CALS EDC 5 1637, no. 14.

of early modern marriage for those over the ages of consent, female deponents who witnessed matrimonial contracts formed in domestic spaces and reported memories of the precise language employed provided valuable testimony as to a match's legality. When accounts of the exchange of marital vows between Radcliff Kelsall and sixteen-year-old Catherine Fallowes varied, several young women in Catherine's life were called to testify in a matrimonial suit filed in 1641. One, sixteen-year-old Margaret Moores, recounted an afternoon she spent with Catherine and Radcliffe, during which time 'she did not observe any passages betwixt the s[ai]d Ratcliffe & Catheren purporteinge any contract of matrimonie'.³⁸

Young female servants, friends, and neighbours also commented at great length on couples' physical and material displays of affection and the performance of typical spousal behaviours.³⁹ Unmarried female servants witnessed the words and deeds of members of their households in the course of their duties, so they frequently offered evidence concerning the sentiments of alleged spouses. A deponent in a child marriage suit between Ellis Broughton and Joan Jones recalled, for example, that as a 21-year-old servant in the Broughton household, she overheard the child groom signify his desire to dissent from marriage after coming to the age of majority, stating 'he would shewe no curtesie or token of love toward [...] Joan'.⁴⁰

Because consummation transformed matrimonial intent into an indissoluble union, young female witnesses' observations on physical relations between reputed spouses was vital. In a child marriage suit from 1570, 'seruinge woman' Elizabeth Gerard, aged eighteen, testified that Jane Broke's mother 'gaue [her] sheet[es] [...] purposelie to be laid upon a bed to be made for [Jane and defendant Edward Butlor] to lye in', a task Elizabeth remembered completing with the assistance of another servant.⁴¹ She further reported, however, that Mistress Broke's plan for the union's consummation did not succeed that night or any other night, a fact Elizabeth knew to be true since she was Jane's 'chamberfellowe' throughout her time in service. Such depositional evidence signals the law's treatment of young female servants as expert witnesses, courtesy of their knowledge of domestic activities.

38 CALS EDC 5 1641, no. 13.

39 For the symbolic capital of informational 'markers' of marriage, see O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, and Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*.

40 CALS EDC 2/8, f. 74v.

41 CALS EDC 2/9, 58.

Young Women, Words, Sex, and the Law

Historians have noted that women seeking redress for assaults on their sexual reputations made plentiful use of the ecclesiastical law prohibiting defamatory speech.⁴² Married rather than single women dominate defamation litigation, a factor that stems in part from husbands subsidizing costs of litigation to exonerate their wives and safeguard their own reputations as effective masters of their household. If unmarried young women had sufficient material support to initiate suit, however, they could and did take their causes to court in hopes of recovering good name and fame.

Accounts of fornication and defamation, which dominated the business of the Chester courts during the decades considered here, provide glimpses of the agency and vulnerability of female youth and reveal three important points. First, defamation suits initiated by unmarried women make clear that accusations of sexual incontinence could inflict significant damage to young women seeking to advance to adulthood through marriage: a witness in 1595 noted, for example, that he believed Katherine ap Roger would have 'byn married before nowe yf thees speaches [alleging misbehaviour] had nott byn'.⁴³ Second, defamation suits contain a stylized vocabulary for female youth: young women are commonly described as 'maids'. The descriptor is often formulaically coupled with the modifier 'honest' for women claiming their reputations had been unfairly tarnished by accusations of misbehaviour, but records do not demonstrate an elaborate or complicated terminology to distinguish the characteristics of individual young women.⁴⁴ Finally, the same association of young women with the household that allowed them to claim authoritative knowledge of purported spouses' behaviour also made them key witnesses in cases of defamation, as insulting speech was frequently uttered in residential spaces or in the company of other women. Anne Eaton, aged fifteen, for example, recounted hearing Dorothy Harrison report that Margaret Bryce was 'naught' with Hugh Pulford during a visit to the home of Margery Hilton.⁴⁵ Defamation

42 The law, cited in Helmholz, 'Canonical Defamation in Medieval England', 256, reads: 'We excommunicate all those who, for the sake of hatred, profit, or favor, or for whatever cause, maliciously impute a crime to any person who is not of ill fame among good and serious men, by means of which at least purgation is awarded to him or he is harmed in some other manner'.

43 CALS EDC 5 1595, no. 22.

44 In a suit from 1640, for example, insult victim Martha Grey was described as 'a maide vnmarried and of a single condic[i]on and of good and modest conv[er]sac[i]on'. CALS EDC 5 1640, no. 33.

45 CALS EDC 5 1625, no. 3.

litigation thus empowered young female witnesses to share their opinions, while the pleading strategies they employed in support of defamed young women sought to mitigate the language of insult through descriptions of female honesty.

Court documents demonstrate that early modern adults and ecclesiastical authorities considered the premature initiation of sexual activity a violation of the socially approved passage from girlhood to womanhood. Churchwardens of Guilden Sutton presented cleric William Darnall in 1582 as 'notoriously deformed' in his behaviour, for example, citing as evidence his attempt to 'intise one [Elizabeth] the daughter of William Rogerson to have com[m]ittid fornicasion w[i]th him, [...] she being but a girle of x yerres of age' – an age, incidentally, by which many child spouses were contracted to one another with the full approval of their adult guardians.⁴⁶ The Bishop's court censured William Jackson in 1640 for his 'wickedness and sinne' in impregnating Elizabeth Reade, and the charge's description of Elizabeth as 'the yonge woman whom you had deflowered and overthrown' clearly portrays her as William's victim.⁴⁷ These descriptions demonstrate the courts' role as a protector of young women who had fallen victim to predatory men.

Accounts of single young women's illicit pregnancies in the records underscore the perils of motherhood without the safety and legitimization of marriage. In 1572, for example, Robert Shenton confessed that he and Margery Pole 'hath talked and consent togeth[er] aboute marriage to be had betwene them', conversations that led to intercourse and resulted in the birth of a child, although Robert failed to fulfil his promise to formalize their union.⁴⁸ Ellen Swann learned in 1591 that Peter Fearnhead, the man with whom she had contracted marriage and to whom she had borne a child, had contracted marriage with another.⁴⁹ Historians of early modern England have concluded that many brides were pregnant at the time of marriage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a circumstance that could prompt the mutually desired formalization of a coupling through marriage or, as happened with a degree of frequency in the diocese of Chester, the initiation of legal action seeking the courts' requirement of that regularization.⁵⁰ The

46 CALS EDC 5 1582, no. 8.

47 CALS EDC 5 1640, no. 93.

48 CALS EDC 2/9, 229–30.

49 CALS EDC 5 1591, no. 22.

50 Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, especially 48–60, 107–12; and Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 100–104.

volatile combination of words and sex empowered some young women even as it endangered others.

The documents generated by Chester's courts help illuminate the ideals and realities associated with female youth in early modern England. Testimony demonstrates the employment of a narrow legal vocabulary for young, unmarried women that litigants and witnesses could nonetheless adjust in support of certain claims and desired outcomes. England's ecclesiastical courts, which represented a nexus of early modern religious, social, and legal ideals and realities, also imbued the narratives of young women themselves with a degree of publicity and authority often denied them in other settings and circumstances. Further, the evidence witnesses offered to the courts clearly recognized female youth as a particular stage of life: girls did not become women in a single ritual or developmental moment, but passed through an intermediate stage on the way to adulthood. A concept of youth, marked by opportunities to express consent or dissent, to pass judgment and offer opinion, and to initiate an exploration of their sexuality existed for young women in early modern England as they moved toward the world of adults.

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4. Flight and Confinement

Female Youth, Agency, and Emotions in Sixteenth-Century New Spain

Jacqueline Holler

Abstract

Based largely on a 1557 Inquisition trial from the kingdom of New Spain, this essay examines the trial of sixteen-year-old María de Ocampo, a member of Guatemala's Spanish elite who accused herself of demonic pact. The case emerges as a complicated blend of demonic fantasy, clandestine romantic entanglement, intimate connections among female youths of varying social status, and flouting of parental authority. Focusing on sexuality and mobility, two of the themes most relevant to the gendered lives of girls and women in early colonial New Spain, this analysis argues that attention to the emotional content of the case – particularly romantic fantasy, anger, and frustration with confinement – reveals both the distinct emotional worlds and the agency of early colonial female youth.

Keywords: colonial Mexico; New Spain; girlhood; demons; emotions; sexuality; spatial confinement; Guatemala; female youth

The intention of the Devil was 'that [I] not marry, because he wanted to take [me] somewhere where [I] would rule and be a lady'.¹ These are the words of sixteen-year-old María de Ocampo – spoken by her and recorded verbatim, as far as we know – and as such a rare artefact of great importance to the

1 María de Ocampo, Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico), Ramo Inquisición (hereafter AGN, Inquisición), Vol. 35, Exp. 1, ff. 1–385. 1557–1571. 'Que no la casasen por que el la quería llevar a una parte donde ella mandase y fuse señora'. I have altered the pronouns from third person (as the notary recorded them) to first person for clarity. All translations of documents from the AGN are by the author.

history of youth.² This essay is based largely on a close reading of the 1557 Inquisition proceeding in which María, a member of Guatemala's Spanish elite, accused herself of demonic pact. María's case contains hundreds of pages in which the testimony of girls and female youths is recorded. That in itself makes the document noteworthy, since most historical records about children, as Mary Jo Maynes laments, do not record the voices of children themselves.³ For early colonial New Spain, Inquisition documents are one of the few sources in which the voices of children and youth, however mediated by the coercive power of the institution, can be found. In María's dossier we see a world of prepubescent and adolescent girls: girls who sleep and work together, watch each other's movements, talk intimately, and keep secrets from the adults around them, despite intra-household distinctions of class and ethnicity that reproduced those prevalent in the colony at large. The case provides not only unparalleled access to the voices of female youth, but also the opportunity to study female adolescence with particular regard to sexuality and mobility, two of the themes most relevant to the gendered lives of girls and women in early colonial New Spain.

Histories of Girlhood in New Spain

Latin American studies of girls and girlhood have been relatively scarce. In the 1990s, Asunción Lavrin surveyed studies of colonial Latin American childhood, identifying very few works; not much has changed since then. Many studies continue to focus on the family rather than on children per se. And where child-focused studies exist, as Sonya Lipsett-Rivera has pointed out, we know much more about *ideal* children – about how children were supposed to behave – than about real ones.⁴ Moreover, most studies have focused on childhood rather than girlhood or boyhood – though some scholars have limned at least some of the gendered distinctions within the category 'child'.⁵ Jorge Rojas Flores has provided one of the few in-depth studies of colonial Latin American girlhood in his case study using the recollections of a seventeenth-century Peruvian nun.⁶ Studies of Latin American girlhood thus remain rare, and where they do exist they tend

2 Maynes, 'Age as a Category', 117; see also Alexander, 'Can the Girl Guide Speak?', 133.

3 Maynes, 'Age as a Category', 117.

4 Lavrin, 'La niñez'; Lipsett-Rivera, 'Model Children'.

5 See, for example, Premo, *Children of the Father King*.

6 Rojas Flores, 'Ursula'.

to emphasize the modern period.⁷ For example, Kathryn Sloan's 'Defiant Daughters' argues that in the nineteenth century, adolescent girls in Mexico used elopement to escape abusive homes. Sloan traces a new attitude in the 1800s, expressed in law and culture: the new understanding divided childhood into distinct stages, allowing for the expansion of children's rights and, Sloan argues, for the 'discovery' of girlhood.⁸

But where does this leave early modernists in general, and scholars of New Spain in particular? Sources for female youth in the early colonial period are generally scarce. Using recollections of youth written by adult women may provide insights, but in New Spain, such writings are rarer than, for example, in England; and even the many *vidas* and chronicles of early colonial religious women, splendid sources though they are, may contain little or no information about youth. For example, as Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau point out, Mariana de la Encarnación says nothing in her chronicle about her life and childhood except that she entered a Conceptionist convent at the age of nine. Other, late colonial sources seem richer, as in the *vida* of the Querétaro *capuchina* ('Capuchin nun') Madre María Marcela (born 1759), who recounted her hacienda childhood (including her abuse by her father) in great detail.⁹ Rojas Flores is perhaps the only historian of Spanish America to have effectively mined a *vida* for evidence relating to the lives of elite girls.¹⁰ For the early colonial period, nonetheless, youth seems muted in women's writings, themselves relatively scarce compared to those available for English-speaking lands. And of course, such works are still retrospective, the *recollection* of youth by women often many years distant from it.

Portraits are a valuable source, but of little avail to the historian of early colonial Mexico because they are virtually non-existent; only in the eighteenth century did female portraiture, and family portraiture in general, become widespread. The famous portraits of *monjas coronadas* ('crowned nuns'), often painted to commemorate an adolescent girl's entry into religious life, first appeared in the 1700s; so did (elite) family portraits, including those depicting girls.¹¹ In the absence of portraits, the most common representa-

7 Lavrin, 'La niñez', 41.

8 Sloan, 'Defiant Daughters', 365.

9 As a foundation chronicle, Mariana's text was focused on her adulthood and participation in the Carmelite foundation. An excellent new edition is now available; see Mariana de la Encarnación, *Relación*. See also Arenal and Schlau, *Untold Sisters*. For sexual abuse in late colonial families, see González Reyes, 'Familia y violencia sexual'.

10 Rojas Flores, 'Ursula'.

11 See Brown, 'Portraits and Patrons', 135.

tions of female youth in early to mid-colonial Spanish America were images of the childhood of the Blessed Virgin.¹² These paintings might show us something of the colonial world, as far as dress and décor, but they are idealized images and reflect very little of the emotional world and agency of real girls. The relative scarcity of Latin American studies on female youth and potential sources for the early colonial period makes the case of María de Ocampo even more interesting, not least for what it adds to our knowledge about how girlhood was constructed.

Constructions of and Prescriptions for Female Youth

Early modern Spanish offered varied terms for the phase of female life between infancy and womanhood. The terms '*moza*' and '*niña*' both correspond to the English word 'girl', but describe slightly different phases of life. In early modern Spanish, young girls were (and still are) more likely to be referred to as '*niñas*', adolescents as '*mozas*'. Both could also be *muchachas*, though in practice this word tended to describe older girls.¹³ Thus the varied Spanish vocabulary for girlhood usually connoted something about age. It is worth remembering, however, that youth-linked descriptors were also used to delineate social status; New Spain's convents contained '*niñas*' who might be either girls or adult women, and servants were often described as '*mozas*' well into adulthood. Thus there is little precision in this terminology, except its distance and difference from the term and category 'woman'.

Still, the Spanish world clearly recognized not only the distinct character of childhood, but also a period of transition thereafter. The *Siete Partidas*, the thirteenth-century legal code that formed the basis of law in Spain and its colonies, prohibited trying in court anyone under ten and a half; children above seven, however, were considered to possess reason.¹⁴ This has sometimes been assumed to mean that adulthood commenced after the age of ten – a belief easily disproved by the fact that legal minority continued until the age of 25. A transitional period, roughly corresponding to adolescence, was recognized in a number of ways, including by the two types of legal guardianship under

12 For a careful study of such paintings and their implications in the context of early modern Spain, see Villaseñor Black, 'Paintings of the Education of the Virgin Mary'.

13 In Esteban de Terreros y Pando's eighteenth-century dictionary, for example, '*moza*' is defined as '*muchacha, joven, o donzella*' ('girl, youth, or maiden'), corresponding to the Latin *juvenis*; '*niña*' is defined as '*muchacha*', corresponding to the Latin *puella* or *puellelula*. See Terreros y Pando, *Diccionario castellano*.

14 Premo, 'Minor Offenses', 118; and Lipsett-Rivera, 'Model Children', 55.

Spanish law. These forms of guardianship (tutelage and curatorship) established a distinction between young children (thirteen or younger for boys, eleven or younger for girls) and those between this age and 25. Both rules for prosecution and the form of guardianship for older youth recognized their liminal status as inhabitants of a state between true childhood and full adulthood.¹⁵

For girls, of course, full adulthood was elusive. Mexican girls were prepared for what might be called a life of perpetual minority, trained from an early age for the sole goal of matrimony, which overdetermined conceptions of female adulthood. In the Spanish world, as in other parts of early modern Europe, ideal womanhood was associated with, as the popular adage had it, 'a husband or a wall'. That is, marriage and conventual life were considered the only honourable options for women. But in Spain, and even more in Spanish America, formal entry into religious life was seldom possible for women of middling and lower social status. The vast majority of women were presumed destined for marriage, and it rather than monasticism was seen as the normal path for girls to tread. As Pilar Gonzalbo has written, adulthood was linked with marriage for *both* sexes, since 'the rupture with the parental home came when a man and woman united in matrimony'.¹⁶ But for girls, this break was far more important than for boys, who had other options and multiple markers of adult status. Deborah Kanter has argued that parental duty toward daughters was largely directed toward marrying them off, at which point many parents felt their duty had ended. Richard Boyer, for his part, has noted the 'monotonous' domestic pattern of girlhood training relative to that given to boys: 'girls [were] confined mostly to domestic settings, learning wifely skills such as sewing and cooking, rehearsing female virtues of modesty and subordination, and then marrying'. Boyer finds in women's recitations of their early lives 'a spare and narrow range of choices and opportunities'.¹⁷

Even when schooled, girls were constantly reminded of their destiny; according to Gonzalbo, the girls' curriculum was a weak echo of boys' studies, eschewing numeracy and competence in writing in favour of Christian doctrine and 'womanly' training in sewing, weaving, and embroidery. This tendency to a curriculum based on 'feminine' skills seems only to have strengthened over the colonial period – even depictions of the Virgin's education moved over time from depictions of reading to a focus on handiwork.¹⁸ The uniform future of marriage was presumed to await both non-indigenous

15 See Coolidge, *Guardianship*, 22; Mitchell, 'Growing up Carlos II', 199.

16 Gonzalbo, 'La familia'. Translation by the author.

17 Kanter, *Hijos del Pueblo*, 58–59; Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*, 44.

18 Gonzalbo, *Las mujeres*, 129; Villaseñor Black, 'Paintings', 117.

and indigenous girls, girls raised by their parents and those raised by others: all were united in their presumed singular path, despite, ironically, the great number of women in all classes who never married.¹⁹

Though canon law prohibited forced marriage and valorized free consent, the reality of colonial Spanish American marriage was quite different. Despite some regional variations (for example, the Andean practice of *servinacuy* or trial marriage, an indigenous practice at odds with strict parental control), parental selection was common. Throughout the colonial period, parents attempted to arrange suitable matches for their children, culminating in the strengthening of parental control (and concomitant late-colonial lawsuits over 'unsuitable' marriages) enabled by the Pragmatic Sanction of 1776. Both the nature of girls' training and its frequent terminus in an arranged marriage were made clear by Mariana Monroy, testifying in the late seventeenth century before the Holy Office on suspicion of bigamy:

She was raised in the house of her mother because she did not know her father; and she occupied herself in serving her mother, with whom she lived until the age of fourteen, and being this age she married a Spanish man from Spain [...] and she married him to please her mother, because her mother wanted it, but not of her [Mariana's] will.²⁰

Mariana had an obvious reason to emphasize her lack of consent to this marriage, of course, but the themes of parental domination and the inevitability of marriage are clear and believable. Still, youth of all social classes had their own desires. (As we shall see, María de Ocampo was no exception.) However, while clandestine marriages and elopements provided youth the possibility of circumventing parental objections, such strategies were arguably less common – particularly for girls – than compliance with parental wishes.²¹

If girls' futures were more determined by marriage than those of boys, and if parental compulsion was more likely to be exercised on girls, it is also true that the very definition of female adulthood hinged more on sexuality

19 Leavitt-Alcántara, *Alone at the Altar*; Vergara, 'Growing up Indian'.

20 Mariana Monroy, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 441, Exp. 2, ff. 257–411. 1678; ff. 361–361v. 'Se crió en cassa de la dicha su madre por que no conoció al dicho su padre y se ocupava en serbir a su madre con quién bivió asta que tubo catorçe años de edad y siendo desta edad se cassó con un hombre llamado Manuel de Figueroa Español natural de los reynos de españa que unas vezes le decía era de Sevilla y otras de Ayamonte y que se cassó con el por que quiso la dicha su madre y por darle gusto pero no de su voluntad'. See also Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*, 43–44.

21 The classic study is Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*; see also Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came*; McCaa, 'Marriageways'; Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey*.

and marriage than was the case for males. Indeed, while the border between childhood and womanhood was prolonged and blurred, marriage and sexuality provided the clearest distinction between a girl and a woman. Even a twelve-year-old could be referred to as a woman if she were married. This was true, for example, in the case of María de Figueroa, who appeared before the Inquisition as a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old, and who had been married for the first time while under the canonical age of twelve.²² And even below the age of twelve, sexual activity provided a key marker of female maturity. Sonya Lipsett-Rivera has demonstrated that *malicia* (a term loosely translating to 'sexual awareness') was applied to girls as young as nine, exonerating rapists and eliding the boundary between prepubescent girls' bodies and desires and those of adult women.²³ This was more likely when girls were plebeian, indigenous, or *castas*, demonstrating that the greater mobility and 'freedom' of plebeian girls could be a double-edged sword indeed.²⁴ Bianca Premo, in her study of childhood and patriarchal authority in colonial Lima, has found – perhaps not surprisingly given the foregoing – that prepubescent girls were conscious of their sexual honour just as adult women were.²⁵ A key distinction between female and male youths is thus provided by the central role of sexuality in determining female maturity.

Closely related to sexuality, strictures on mobility were another hallmark of female youth, and another marker of the period between girlhood and womanhood. Confinement and control were, of course, hallmarks of ideal girlhood. Fray Luis de León, in his popular 1583 book *La Perfecta Casada* ('The Perfect Wife'), wrote approvingly that:

When girls are born, the Chinese twist their feet, so that when they become women they will not have them to wander on, and because, to walk in their own houses, those twisted feet are sufficient. As men are for the public, thus the women for enclosure; and, as speaking and going out into the light are for men, thus for them [women] enclosing themselves and covering themselves.²⁶

22 AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 370, Exp. 3. 1630. Del Comissario de Zacatecas con una causa de la Real Justicia contra María de Figueroa española por casada dos veces (From the commissary of Zacatecas, with a judicial accusation against María de Figueroa, Spaniard, for being twice married).

23 Lipsett-Rivera, 'Intersection of Rape and Marriage'.

24 Lipsett-Rivera, *Gender and the Negotiation of Daily Life*, 163 and *passim*. Note that *castas* were people of mixed race and African descent – those who were neither 'Spanish' nor indigenous.

25 Premo, *Children of the Father King*, 127.

26 Luis de León, *La perfecta casada*, 241. 'Los chinos, en nasciendo, les tuercen a las niñas los pies, por que cuando sean mujeres no los tengan para salir fuera, y porque, para andar en su

As Fray Luis's reference to 'wandering' suggests, spatial confinement was central to the definition of woman, wifely duty, and the prevention of feminine sexual misconduct; and, according to the friar's influential text, it was never too early to start. Clearly, at the very least, girls in early colonial Mexico were not simply 'children', with concomitant implications of free movement. As Lipsett-Rivera and Premo have made clear, girls throughout Spanish America were expected to (and did) consider their modesty and sexual propriety; ideally, they would also comport themselves accordingly. At play, it seems clear that girls were monitored more closely than boys; one Portuguese advice book even went so far as to suggest that girls should never play outside after weaning!²⁷

On the other hand, these rules were highly variable according to social location. It is certainly clear that plebeian and rural girls enjoyed more mobility and less protection than did elite, urban girls. For example, the *vida* of the late-colonial mystic María de San José describes how as a girl she escaped the noise and bustle of her family life by retiring to a hut she had built outdoors (though still within the garden of her family's hacienda).²⁸ Girls who lived outside their parental households as servants or fosterlings might be ostensibly enclosed, but might also be vulnerable to sexual exploitation from male members of the household. As this suggests, one should not overstate plebeian liberty. The ideal of female enclosure, however difficult to achieve for non-elite girls, seems to have operated to some extent in all classes. Even in the most remote places and among plebeians, girls experienced much more constraint than did boys. María de Figueroa, the twice-married young girl discussed above, was clearly not a member of the elite, but she was nonetheless passed from paternal supervision to husband and back to her father's house before imploring a young mulatto man to spirit her away – which he did.²⁹

Still, there is little evidence that girls were subject to the full expectations placed on adult women. There is also anecdotal evidence that to some degree children were exempted from the rules of decency that applied to adults. For example, in the 1598 case of Marina de San Miguel, Marina

casa, aquellos torcidos les bastan. Como son los hombres para lo público, así las mujeres para el encerramiento; y como es de los hombres el hablar y el salir a luz, así dellas el encerrarse y encubrirse'. Translation by the author. This book, written as a guide to marriage for Fray Luis de León's niece, was in large part a defence of women and their proper roles; highly successful, it appeared in multiple editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

27 Sá, 'Up and Out', 24.

28 See Arenal and Schlau, *Untold Sisters*, 381.

29 AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 370, Exp. 3. 1630.

attempted to excuse her sexual behaviour by comparing it to the blameless sexual play of children. The claim failed to exonerate the adult Marina, but points to a shared conception of youths' limited culpability.³⁰ Finally, despite the persistent belief that premodern children were subjected to extreme rigidity and discipline, there is evidence that girls were at least sometimes indulged precisely to avoid emotional states judged dangerous to their health. For example, Rojas Flores describes the indulgent treatment Úrsula, the seventeenth-century Peruvian nun he studies, received from her grandmother. Úrsula wrote that 'everything had to be as I wished and nothing was not to my liking so that I would not become sad and become more ill'.³¹ In a period of high child mortality, parents wanted happy children because they were presumed to be healthier, and this may have led to relaxing behavioural strictures in at least some cases. In sum, though there is no reason to conclude that early colonial girls were considered 'mini-adults', sexual threat and propriety were presumed to apply to girls, with corresponding constraints on the movement and play of female youth that increased with age.

The Case of María de Ocampo: Girls' Emotions, Girls' Agency

The case of María de Ocampo, though exceptionally lengthy, is in some ways typical of the activities of the Spanish American Inquisitions, which by the second half of the 1500s had already begun to take a Tridentine form: that is, they focused on policing quotidian sinful behaviours and beliefs while only occasionally acting against 'heretical depravity and apostasy' (*heretica pravedad y apostasía*). The American Inquisitions faced a formidable if not impossible task: policing a diverse colonial population inhabiting a massive territory, the great majority of whose residents (that is, indigenous people) were exempt from the authority of the Holy Office. As a female penitent, María was far from a rarity, since females formed a substantial minority of those processed by the Inquisition throughout the colonial period.³²

When María denounced herself before Bishop of Guatemala Don Francisco Marroquín in September 1557, she revealed that fourteen months prior – that is, at the age of fifteen – she had first made contact with the Devil.³³

30 See Holler, 'More Sins'.

31 Quoted in Rojas Flores, 'Úrsula', 114.

32 For discussion, see Holler, 'Holy Office'.

33 Because María's case occurred before the Holy Office of New Spain was formally implanted (in 1571), it took place under episcopal jurisdiction. Dominican Tomás de Cárdenas acted as

However, her self-denunciation emerged in the midst of swirling rumours that linked her to Francisco del Valle Marroquín, who was suspected of seducing her using spells. The case suggests that María had no choice but to come forward, and that her primary strategy (if such can be discerned) was to protect her very human lover by constant reference to the Devil. Indeed, frequent glosses throughout the dossier suggest that Valle Marroquín was the primary target of the Holy Office's interest (and would remain so in years to come, when he and María would again come to the attention of the Holy Office). As his name suggests, Francisco was related to the Bishop; he is described by Robinson Herrera as 'one of Santiago's shadiest but most upwardly mobile professionals'.³⁴ Still, there is no reason to believe that the Devil was merely a stratagem introduced by María in her testimony. Other girls testified to many conversations with María in which diabolical activities and influences were referenced, and at least one girl claimed also to have experienced direct contact with the Devil.

Over her many months of detention (in a private home) and confession, María's testimony about the Devil's activities was recanted and reinvented repeatedly; she was examined by a midwife to ascertain her virginity (she passed); some of the girls who testified in her case were subjected to whippings by their guardians when they were suspected of lying; and eventually, almost in sheer exhaustion, the case concluded with María's sentencing to public penitence at Mass and the wearing of a *sanbenito* (a penitential garment used by the Inquisition) over her clothing for a period of four years.³⁵ The case emerges, in its hundreds of pages, as a complicated blend of demonic fantasy, clandestine romantic entanglement, intimate connections among girls of varying social status, and flouting of parental authority: a blend in which María's emotions are manifest.

In her first confession, María made clear that her emotions, gender, and youth were relevant to her behaviour, stating that 'with anger and sadness and passion and as a youth' (*con enojo y tristeza y passion y como moça*) she had one day offered herself to the Devil.³⁶ Clearly, María thought her youth and feelings significant. Women characteristically referred to themselves as 'weak women' or 'sinners' when expressing contrition or begging for

Inquisitor, and was present at María's self-denunciation. For Cárdenas's activities as theological advisor (*calificador*), see Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition*, 113.

34 Herrera, *Natives, Europeans, and Africans*, 211, n. 68. He nonetheless enjoyed a long and successful career in the Audiencia of Guatemala.

35 Her relationship with Valle Marroquín continued, however, and would see her involved with the Holy Office again almost 20 years later.

36 María de Ocampo, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 35, Exp. 1, f. 5.

clemency. That María used the term '*moza*' to explain her actions points to a generalized belief that youth aligned with lesser culpability and, perhaps, heightened and less controlled emotion; adolescent girls in particular were judged vulnerable to melancholy, green sickness, and other disorders related to the retention of the menstruum.

The emotions of female youth were generated and expressed within a context of rules and regulations laid down by powerful elders; but girls also existed within their *own* emotional community,³⁷ in which they could and did express emotions judged illicit elsewhere: mockery of and anger toward parental authority, romantic desire and excitement, and intimate secrecy. In their emotional displays, female youth are revealed as agents inhabiting a world both inside and outside the category of 'women'.

One of the most striking emotions evident in María's confessions is her frustration with confinement, coupled with an impatient desire for mobility. The testimony in María's dossier cannot fail but make one attentive to the spaces of female youth, particularly as linked to social status. She referred almost obsessively to her house as her father's; more significantly, the dossier produces a claustrophobic sense of the house as the stage on which María's life was lived. María is framed and enclosed by the house in every bit of testimony. Witness after witness refers to María standing at a window, or standing by one of the many doorways that linked the dwelling either to the outside world (*la calle*) or to the more open and accessible (yet still walled) spaces around the house, such as the orchard and garden.

María's 'framing' within the windows and doorways of her father's house is an apt metaphor for the patriarchal surveillance that 'framed' her life as an elite girl. María's containment allowed not just her father, but all of the girls and women of the house, to observe her activities. This was made clear in one meeting described by María. She said that the Devil came to the door of the hall in her father's house and asked her to open the door, telling her that he wanted to take her 'someplace very nice' (*a una parte que hera muy buena*). As soon as she had sent him away, however, her mother and 'the [servant] girls' (*las muchachas*) entered the room. In the case,

37 Because of the important work of Barbara Rosenwein, we know that within the same temporal and spatial context (sixteenth-century New Spain, for example) there might exist multiple 'emotional communities', groups with different 'fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression'. So in a very loose sense early colonial New Spain might be said to constitute an emotional community; more precisely, however, we might discern multiple emotional communities, including the world of children and the further separated world of female youth. See Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 24. For further discussion, see Holler, 'Of Sadness and Joy'.

solitude is rare, even in María's own bedroom, where she shared a bed with other girls. If solitude was hard to find, doors, windows, gates, and keys are omnipresent in the dossier – as are María's efforts to combat them. María's father was clearly the particular agent of containment, and his business trips to Central America were María's opportunity to sneak into the garden at night while her mother slept, or – as one girl reported – to tell her mother that she had diarrhoea so she could repeatedly slip outside to chat with a male visitor.

As the foregoing suggests, the wish to flee resonates throughout the dossier. Perhaps unsurprisingly given her enclosure, María's descriptions (fantasies?) of the Devil's activities involved both literal and metaphorical flight from the paternal home. For example, she described how the Devil first appeared after she offered herself to him, significantly by angrily expressing the desire that he should take her out of her father's house. She also detailed discussions in which the Devil told her of goings-on in other parts of the world that he had influenced, such as 'wars against the Pope' (*guerras contra el papa*) and the murder of a Roman woman by her husband. Another day, she reported, she challenged the Devil to prove his potency by bringing her grapes and apples from Castile; gone no more than half an hour, the Devil returned from Spain with six delicious apples, which she ate. Eventually, María said, the Devil took her out of the house altogether, taking her to the top of the church and to the door of another prominent resident of the city, at which point she became too frightened to go further and banged on the door until it opened and she was escorted home. Through these conversations and actions, it may be argued, María expressed a desire for the mobility and adventure generally denied to women.

Flight, of course, is one of the five themes identified by Magnus Lundberg in his recent work on contemplative women. From a gendered perspective, the 'flight' of religious women was a response to their frustration at their spatial containment – at not being able to do what male missionaries did. When religious women flew, they gained temporary access to the world of men, and 'a dramatic expansion of the restricted space in which they normally lived and acted'.³⁸ Similarly, María's metaphorical flights allowed her to temporarily escape the monotony of constricted youth for a world of news and mobility.

Because flight was only metaphorically possible, however, much of María's testimony also concerned her anger, particularly toward her father. Anger

38 Lundberg, *Mission and Ecstasy*, 224–26.

was often seen as illicit for girls and women,³⁹ but María and other girls within the household testified to their rage toward the powerful patriarch. (For example, teenaged Juana, an indigenous orphan who had been raised within the house, said that she sometimes hated María's father; unfortunately, she did not elaborate further.) Both María and other girls identified María's father, and particularly his control over María's future marriage, as the cause of her rage (and thus the Devil's appearance). María also claimed that the Devil had, at her request, played jokes on her father and mother, hiding keys and other important objects, placing a turtle in the water basin, cutting girls' hair while they slept, and generally causing trouble. María's desire to flout her father's authority is nowhere more evident than in her bizarre assertion that the Devil had sex with her while she lay in bed with her parents. What could be a more effective riposte to paternal authority than to engage in illicit sex literally under a father's nose?

The Devil thus became a proxy, in María's testimony, for the power of romantic love to defeat paternal power. As her story suggests, romantic and sexual excitement could, in the emotional world of girls, appear as resistance to patriarchal power. Desire for romantic love and erotic excitement are a key theme in María's confessions; they are not incompatible with resistance. In the lives of grown women, patriarchy tends to be most obviously embodied in husbands; and in fact, much feminist historiography has documented the nuances of this form of patriarchal power. But in the lives of girls – for whom fathers, not lovers, rule – romance is more likely to be framed as escape from constraint. This theme, which Kathryn Sloan sees as typical of the nineteenth century, is present in María's testimony from centuries earlier.

On one hand, marriage appears in María's testimony as something to be resisted. María alleged that the Devil wanted to carry her away from home so that she would not be married, because he himself loved her. She also claimed that he cautioned her that, since he had sown discord between husbands and wives, she should not marry. This antipathy toward marriage was noted by several of the girls who testified. But if María's anger and resistance to marriage are on display in her diabolic imaginings, so too is her desire for romance. María was clearly being courted by at least two men, to judge from the testimony of other girls, and had received gifts, letters, and frequent clandestine visits. Menciá, a *mestiza* thirteen-year-old resident in María's house, testified that María had mused about being married to

39 María de San José, for example, claimed that in her youth God had struck her home with a bolt of lightning after she swore in anger at another girl. The lightning strike was followed by the appearance of the Devil in the form of a naked mulatto, who told her 'you are mine'.

Marroquín Valle, whom she described as a rich gentleman; María apparently delighted in the thought of being 'a relative of the Bishop'. Antipathy to arranged marriage could thus coexist with romantic fantasies of marriage and social success. María's older sister, who confronted María after she had been seen talking to a man at the window, testified that María planned to marry clandestinely because their father would not give his consent.

In María's descriptions of her purported sexual acts with the Devil, there is also evidence of her romantic idealization of sexuality – and, perhaps, a good measure of ambivalence and inexperience. She claimed that demonic sex brought her 'much delight' as the Devil threw her onto the bed, kissing and embracing her. Obviously unacquainted with or uninterested in the more grotesque demonological imaginings of demonic bodies, María described the Devil's penetrative member as 'a handspan in length and as slender as a little finger' (*larga como un xeme y delgada como el dedo meñique*). While claiming that coitus had occurred, María insisted that after these acts 'it appears to her that she is still a maiden and a virgin when it comes to her body' (*a su parecer que esta donzella y virgen quanto al cuerpo*). Indeed, she explained that while the Devil was capable of bearing a generative organ of any size, he had selected such a delicate one to preserve her virginity. María's words point to the importance of sexuality in determining the boundary between girlhood and womanhood. In insisting that she was still a maiden, María de Ocampo was in some sense clinging not only to her respectability, but also to the only thing that made her a girl.

But these confessions also evince a sentimental romanticism. Indeed, María's imaginings of the Devil are immature and girlish – one almost thinks of today's *Twilight* phenomenon, where the monstrous and menacing vampire becomes domesticated through an inexplicable love for a mortal girl; the emotional investment of girls in this fantasy has been viewed by scholars as both capitulation and resistance to patriarchy.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Devil, in María's confessions, is a gentlemanly lover ('very gallant') and more a servant than a figure of authority (though he has his own emotions, and occasionally becomes angry with her). His promise that he will take María somewhere 'where she will rule and be a lady' seems almost poignant, a fantasy of romance as flight from domination rather than as another stage in its recapitulation. The Devil and romantic love thus constituted, for María and her friends, a zone of what William Leddy has called 'emotional

40 See Miller, 'Maybe Edward Is the Most Dangerous Thing'; but also Alberto, 'Love and Lust for FANg Culture'.

refuge': respite from the emotional norms and strictures of the time, whose principal law for girls was enclosure, constraint, and obedience.⁴¹

Indeed, María described her relationship with the Devil in terms of reciprocity that hint at resistance to the double standard of her era. She claimed that the Devil had told her he had other 'girlfriends' (*amigas*), older indigenous women with whom he had sex. She told him that 'since he had other girlfriends, then she too would take other boyfriends, and by this she meant men, not demons'.⁴² Similarly, she described giving the Devil a paper on which were written unusual vows, sealed with a drop of her blood: 'I am your girlfriend and you are my boyfriend, and I need not leave you until I wish'.⁴³ But María's fantasy of reciprocity and/or rule was doomed. Certainly, some young women did acquire their own houses and achieve independence; the young sixteenth-century holy woman (*beata*) María de la Concepción said she had bought her own house at such a tender age because her father was a 'tedious quarreller' (*trabajoso renidor*).⁴⁴ But for many female youth, and we may assume for María de Ocampo, dreams of ruling a household were just that, because – notwithstanding the considerable power that elite women exercised over servants, children, and slaves – they were ultimately junior partners of husbands.

Barbara H. Rosenwein has argued convincingly that emotions are an important source for historical change.⁴⁵ While María de Ocampo's case permits only a musing on, rather than a fulsome description of, the emotional world of colonial female youth, it does hint at, for example, the deep colonial roots of Sloan's 'defiant daughters' of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the case makes clear that the physical and emotional worlds of early colonial Mexican girls had distinct contours, particularly relative to the world of boys. The two most obvious manifestations of the distinction are enclosure and spatial constraint, which grew as a female youth matured, and the uniform destiny of marriage, which produced both desire and resistance. Inquisition cases, replete with information about childhood, offer much potential for further investigation of the youth of early modern women.

41 Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 129.

42 María de Ocampo, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 35, Exp. 1, f. 88. '[A]sí dixo a esta confesante que tenia otras tres amigas yndias y viejas las dos en amatitlan y la una en petapa y que se echava carnalmente con ellas e que esta confesante le dezia que pues el tenia otras amigas ella tambien tomaría otros amigos e que lo dezia por hombres no por demonios'.

43 María de Ocampo, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 35, Exp. 1, f. 20: 'Yo soy vra amiga y vos soys mi amigo y no os tengo de dexar hasta que yo quiera'.

44 María de la Concepción, AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 48, Exp. 4. 1574.

45 See Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*.

And the rarest materials within them – the impassioned and immediate words of early modern girls – offer historians the opportunity to engage with female youth as not merely a construction but a lived experience, and with girls and young women as historical actors in the fullest sense of the term.

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5. Harlots and Camp Followers

Swiss Renaissance Drawings of Young Women circa 1520

Christiane Andersson

Abstract

Many young women, especially from the lower classes, were deeply affected by the violence and plunder of war during the early modern period. The two most important Swiss artists during this period, Urs Graf and Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, who both served as mercenary soldiers in numerous campaigns, created drawings that reflected their experiences and expressed their ambivalence about both war and its victims. As the drawings of harlots and camp followers discussed in this essay show, the young women caught up in warfare around 1520 bore the desecrations of war in their disrupted lives and damaged bodies. In his drawings, Urs Graf expresses highly ambivalent feelings of both fear and lust toward them.

Keywords: Urs Graf; Niklaus Manuel Deutsch; Switzerland; war; female camp followers; women in war; female youth

The lives of young women in northern Switzerland during the early years of the sixteenth century became caught up in the economic turmoil and rapid societal change of a new era. The Swiss Confederacy during the period around 1520 had developed into a society largely based on mercenary warfare. A culture of ongoing war redefined work life, politics, religious habits, social norms, and the gendered experiences of women as well as men.¹ Even art itself developed in new ways that reflected the importance of military prowess in society. This was especially true in the two major centres of Basel and Bern, where the two most important Swiss artists of the period, Urs Graf and Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, worked. Both had served

1 Andersson, 'Niklaus Manuel', 204–06.

Figure 5.1 Niklaus Manuel, *Scenes from Camp Life* (detail), c. 1517



as mercenary soldiers in numerous campaigns, and their artwork naturally reflected those powerful experiences.² In the case of Graf's drawings, the resonance of war coupled strikingly with the imagery of sexually alluring young women as harlots and camp followers.

As always in circumstances of war, women's lives were caught in the crossfire and young women's experiences took particular turns. Having become the victims of pillage, plunder, and rape, as recorded in the Swiss chronicles,³ many young women in the countryside were forced to abandon their scorched fields and destroyed farms and join their marauding attackers in order to survive. Often members of the lowest social class,⁴ they became camp followers and prostitutes who accompanied the campaigns, where they provided a variety of services for the mercenary soldiers.⁵ They foraged for food: in the winter they collected snails; in the summertime mushrooms, herbs, and kindling wood; and they often stole vegetables from nearby fields.⁶ As in civilian life they cooked, washed, mended clothes, and cared for the sick and injured. They sometimes took on commercial roles, like Brecht's *Mother Courage*, who sold shoes, alcoholic beverages, bread, pistols, and other necessary items. And many of them also performed sexual services. Manuel illustrated some of these activities in

2 Graf (c. 1485–c. 1529) is documented as having served as a mercenary in 1510, 1513, 1515, and 1521, and there were likely additional, undocumented forays. Indications that as a young man Manuel (1484–1530) similarly served as a mercenary are found in a 1507 drawing depicting the siege of a castle near Genoa; he later served Francis I of France (February to May 1516), as well as in the Battle of Bicocca (1522) and subsequently at Novara. See Wagner et al., *Niklaus Manuel Deutsch*, cat. no. 139, Plate 75; and Egli and von Tavel, *Niklaus Manuel Catalogue*, cat. no. 23.

3 Wagner et al., *Niklaus Manuel Deutsch*, cat. no. 189.

4 Redlich, *German Military Enterpriser*, vol. 1, 466, and vol. 2, 207.

5 Hale, *Artists and Warfare*, 34–41.

6 Fronsperger, *Kriegszbuch*, n.p.

his silverpoint sketchbook of about 1517 (Figure 5.1).⁷ The young women's sexual availability to the soldiers is suggested by their hitched-up skirts that showed their legs.⁸ In the centre of the drawing, one of them stirs food in a large cauldron over a raging fire. Next to her another young woman with raised skirt draws a soldier's attention to something she points to, perhaps giving directions. A third young woman sits inside a small hut used to lure birds; from here she could observe and catch them to prepare as food for the soldiers.⁹

Such young women living in military camps were a source of intense fascination for Graf, who portrayed them numerous times in his drawings. Some of these sketches may have been created while the artist was engaged in military campaigns, others after his return home to Basel. Graf was a highly regarded goldsmith, but almost nothing he created in that medium has survived.¹⁰ His most original and innovative body of work consists of approximately 150 drawings, most of them made with pen and ink or using watercolour. This is the medium in which he made his most lasting contribution and to which he owes his place in Western art history. When not away from Basel serving as a mercenary, Graf also designed woodcuts – mostly book illustrations for local publishers – and made stained glass, engravings, and a few etchings, but produced only very few paintings.¹¹

Graf employed drawing for two different purposes: as preparatory studies for works of art in other mediums, such as goldsmith's metalwork or stained glass, as was customary in Renaissance art, and as entirely independent works, which was highly unusual for the time. It is to the second category that his most fascinating drawings belong, because this allowed him enormous freedom of expression. These latter works, created and intended as complete works of art in their own right, played a seminal role in Northern European art by helping to liberate drawing from its traditional, subsidiary status as preparatory work. Free from the constraints of traditional image-making, Graf fully exploited the potential of his medium for personal expression. In so doing, he provided us with unparalleled insights into his times, including the lives of young women, and into his own psyche.

7 Egli and von Tavel, *Niklaus Manuel Catalogue*, cat. no. 56.12.

8 Niklaus Manuel consistently showed the raised skirt to identify young women who had lost their virginity, as for example in his drawing of a foolish virgin, c. 1514; see Andersson, 'Niklaus Manuel', 186–87 and Fig. 8.2.

9 Behlen, *Real- und Verbal-Lexikon*, vol. 3, 95.

10 Hollstein et al., *German Engravings*, vol. 11, Plate C 1-8.

11 Andersson, 'Urs Graf', 424.

Figure 5.2 Urs Graf, *Young Woman Making a Gesture of Greeting, c. 1514*



In his drawings Graf addressed both public and private issues. His sketches are not only trenchant commentaries about the world around him, but also extremely personal statements of his most intimate obsessions and fears. His focus on young attractive women is apparent in these examples. Some are rapidly sketched, whimsical records of a sudden insight, passing mood, or witty observation. Others appear to be the carefully considered products of intense contemplation. Graf's *engagé* eyewitness accounts

provide fascinating glimpses into the daily life and attitudes of early sixteenth-century Basel and its citizens. Offering visual plays on proverbs and verbal metaphors, Graf singled out the controversial and emotional topics of his day. More attracted by vice than by virtue, he held up a mirror to the foibles and failings of his contemporaries.

Graf made many highly personal sketches of the young women whom he encountered in the city or in military camps. Others were the inventions of his artistic imagination. These drawings reflect the contradictory values regarding women that were common during his time as well as his personal ambivalence toward them. He was clearly fascinated by and sexually attracted to them, but at the same time mistrustful and accusatory. Some of these sketches appear to show a realistic view of the life circumstances of the young women whom he portrayed. But more common in his work are drawings expressing his personal emotions toward them; for him, young women elicited not only fear and condemnation, but also erotic fantasies and wishful thinking.

Graf's drawings show young women, more and less eroticized, in a variety of guises and settings. A drawing from about 1514 depicting a very young woman standing in tall grass is perhaps the most conventional, but it too shows the artist's ambivalence toward his subject (Figure 5.2). She stands alone, wearing the customary dress of the lower classes and displaying the braided hair often seen on young prostitutes. The artist has drawn her with prominent breasts, despite her youth. She holds her cupped right hand demurely over her stomach as was considered appropriate for her sex.¹² But her left hand is raised toward the viewer in a gesture likely signifying an erotic greeting. The artist confronts the viewer matter-of-factly with the reality of a young woman's life: lacking in means, she has been forced into sexual dependency. Her serious facial expression and sad gaze suggest how troubled, even desperate, her existence is.

Other drawings of desirable young women that focus less on real-life situations are more revelatory of Graf's personal obsessions. These capture his wishful constructions of the ideal woman, sexually available and compliant. His large-format, pen-and-ink sketch dated 1525 contrasts sharply with Figure 5.2. This later drawing portrays an elaborately dressed young woman who looks alluringly out of the corner of her eye (Figure 5.3). While this sketch could be a portrait of someone he knew, more likely the artist has created on paper his personal fantasy of an available female, again with

¹² This gesture also occurs in other drawings by Graf, for example, *Young Woman with a Wine Flask* (1514), Kunstmuseum Basel, Inv. U. X. 59. See Andersson, 'Popular Lore', 73f., 116f., Fig. 140.

Figure 5.3 Urs Graf, *Smiling Harlot*, 1525

ample breasts emphasized by her décolletage. She glances coquettishly from under her lavishly adorned hat, expressing her sexual interest in the artist. Certainly, no 'proper' woman would have dared gaze at anyone in such a direct and provocative manner. The artist portrays her as a harlot, her success in her trade indicated by her elaborate costume: an intricately stitched dress, carefully embroidered fichu, fancy hairnet, and floppy leather

hat adorned with silk bows and jewellery. The metal hat ornament showing a merman and the pendant around her neck displaying the crowned initials 'MA' are the kind of decorative objects that the artist himself made in his goldsmith's studio.

The artist's erotic fascination with young women is also evident in a half-length figure with equally voluptuous breasts in a drawing dated 1517 (Figure 5.4). Graf portrays her in profile, a pose that gives power to his gaze while placing the sitter in a passive position, unable to return it. Drawing with pen and black ink, with the darker areas added with brush and grey wash, was a standard technique for this artist. The addition of red chalk to this woman's face, however, is unique among his portraits and surely served to enhance her lifelike appearance. The attempt at realism may also explain the unusually large size of the portrait: it measures 21 by 15 centimetres. Furthermore, Graf attempts to take possession of her image – and thereby of her – by inscribing the drawing three times with a symbol representing himself. He inserts his monogram, 'VG', twice with white body colour imitating the form of a beret brooch of the kind that would customarily be affixed where he has placed it, on the front of the woman's hat next to the feather. The monogram appears a third time in black ink at the right edge of the sheet centred between the digits of the date 1517. The comb and curry comb under the inscription play a role here as erotic symbols expressing the artist's sexual desire for the young woman portrayed. In Basel dialect the verb *strälen*, to comb or brush, was a slang expression for sexual intercourse, and, in some cases, for sexual assault. A popular expression from 1525 describes a victim of a gang-rape as having been thoroughly 'brushed' (*gnuog gestrält*).¹³ In the typically raucous language of German fifteenth-century carnival plays, a pun on the literal versus the sexual meaning of curry combing (*strigeln*) describes a sexually satiated man as having had 'his horse amply curry-combed'.¹⁴ Here the horse signifies the penis. The expression indicates that the erotic connotations of this instrument evolved from the suggestive movement of brushing down a horse with a curry comb.

In addition, in this highly unusual sketch, Graf took special measures to obtain a woman with whom he had become obsessed, but who did not respond to his desires. He resorted to sympathetic magic, a type of sorcery based on the premise that manipulation of an effigy would influence the person portrayed and cause him or her to act in accord with the wishes of the one implementing the magic ritual. This means of gaining power over

13 Andersson, *Dirnen, Krieger*, 78, n. 94.

14 Andersson, 'Popular Lore', 220.

Figure 5.4 Urs Graf, Young Woman in Profile, 1517



someone goes back at least to ancient Greece and Egypt.¹⁵ People at all levels of late medieval and early modern society had recourse to magic in matters of sex and love.¹⁶ It was used by men to render a woman compliant to their sexual desires, but analogously also by women. Indeed, a disproportionate number of women were prosecuted for the use of erotic magic. This occurred probably not because women more actively used it than men, but because female manipulation of male affections was more intensely feared, and because men could plausibly accuse their mistresses of witchcraft.

It was well known that magical images, in order to be effective, should resemble as closely as possible the person one desired to influence. Here the red chalk seems to have served Graf as a way to achieve a greater likeness. Another indication of this drawing's potential use in magical influence over the young woman is seen in the inscription in the upper-right corner: 'Oh God, let her love me or let me hate her / or else I'll die'.¹⁷ Although Graf implores God to make her love him, the incantation suggests that he did not rely on religious belief, but rather has taken matters into his own hands by using sympathetic magic. Below the three lines of text, the ends of the letter 'S' are drawn down to form a decorative pattern suggesting love knots, which Graf used often in his drawings of women, especially of those he desired.¹⁸

The drawing's use of sympathetic magic is also revealed by the piercing of the image, a procedure commonly performed on magical images of individuals whose affection one hoped to gain. The belief that piercing an image can work erotic magic appeared in handbooks, laws and treatises condemning magic, judicial records, and literary texts, and often in necromancers' manuals. When a person's image was cut with a sharp instrument, the symbolic harm to the image was believed to transform into real harm to the victim, although the affliction was temporary, lasting only until the desired person acquiesced to the perpetrator's desires. In the case of Graf's drawing, that would have meant until the woman fell in love with the artist. Here Graf slashed the portrait of his beloved in a series of 40 narrow, elongated gashes that form a pattern covering her shoulder and breast. These holes in the paper must have been made with a sharp knife and are unique in the artist's

15 Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, 16–19.

16 Kieckhefer, *Magic*, 58–64.

17 My translation. The drawing's inscription – 'Ach got lieb mich ir/ oder leyd sy mir/ Ich stirb sunst schier' – would read in modern German 'Ach gott, mach mich ihr beliebt oder verleide sie mir, ich sterbe sonst fast'.

18 See *Prostitute in Profile*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum; and Andersson, *Dirnen, Krieger*, 16, Plate 9.

Figure 5.5 Urs Graf, *Old Fool Observing a Nude Young Woman*, c. 1515

work; among his other preserved portraits of women, none shows such incisions. They suggest more than a decorative pattern on her clothing, which he could have executed with pen and ink. A fifteenth-century German manual explains the purpose of this practice. After a man has drawn the image of a woman, he is instructed to recite: 'By this image I have drawn the heart and mind of so-and-so, and by strong invocation I arouse her to

love, desire and yearn for me'.¹⁹ The brief inscription in the corner of Graf's drawing expresses similar desires and intentions.

A young woman with some features similar to those in Figure 5.3 is the erotic focus of a drawing by Graf created in about 1514 (Figure 5.5). Also appearing in profile, she is shown wearing a braid down her back and a jaunty beret decorated with a feather, and carrying a curry comb in her right hand. In this image, however, the young woman is shown full length and nude. Wearing only slippers, a beret and some jewellery, and holding the symbolic curry comb, the artist has reduced her to a wholly sexual being. Graf furthermore portrays her being followed and observed by a lecherous old fool, identified by his short tunic and fool's cap with donkey's ears and bells. The artist portrays him as old, infirm, nearsighted, and being mocked by a bird perched on his head. Peering lasciviously at the nude young woman, the old man holds up a pair of large eyeglasses, instrument of the voyeur, the better to inspect her. It is also the symbol of his foolish blindness, and a traditional aspect of the fool's outfit.

The age difference between the two figures places this drawing among the many early sixteenth-century renditions of the 'unequal couple' theme, which satirizes lecherous old fools who fall for attractive young women.²⁰ The old man's excessively large money bag worn at the waist alludes to the mercenary nature of such 'unequal' couples; the older one will attain the attention of the younger only by means of money. As a popular proverb of the period expresses it, 'he who hopes to capture a beautiful woman must carry a heavy purse', meaning heavy with coins. The conspicuous position of the fool's dagger, a well-known phallic symbol, between his legs and pointing toward her also emphasizes his lechery. The eyeglasses, the large purse, the dagger, and even the wooden leg, which adds to the emphasis on his infirmity, display the ludicrous nature of his foolish courting. Not even his money bag can spark her interest. Ignoring him completely, the nude woman's boredom is expressed in the laconic comment inscribed on her neckband: '*OCH.MI*' ('Oh, my!'). Having inscribed his monogram '*VG*' twice into the loops of the rope forming a love knot that she dangles in the air, the artist demonstrates with malicious pleasure that he, not the old fool, is the object of her attention and her curry comb.

Graf's witty drawings of prostitutes or camp followers drew on contemporary culture to poke fun not only at old fools but also at the young women themselves. A pen-and-ink sketch of a young woman stepping into

19 Quoted in Kieckhefer, *Magic*, 102–04.

20 Stewart, *Unequal Lovers*.

a brook or lake employs an erotic metaphor to create a tantalizing image of a prostitute displaying her lack of 'virtue' (Figure 5.6). The drawing's 'come hither' tone is conveyed both by the skirt-raising gesture and the woman's coquettish glance out of the corner of her eye. It has always been assumed that the artist shows the woman stepping into water merely to justify the raised skirt and the ample display of leg. But stepping into water had a much more specific meaning in the sixteenth century; it was a commonly understood expression for having sex or, in the narrower sense, for losing one's virginity. Graf's contemporary in Bern, the artist and writer Niklaus Manuel, used this image in a carnival play he wrote in 1530. Although the play's protagonist, Elсли, has lost her virginity with another man, her fiancé, Uli, is urged to marry her anyway, reasoning that she is neither the first nor the last to have 'stepped into the brook' – that is, to be a so-called 'fallen' bride.²¹

Contemporary writers repeatedly warned men against the dire consequences of such seductive glances. Sixteenth-century body language was very specific in its meanings. A broadsheet manual of about 1509 outlining proper conduct for young women proscribes provocative glances and winking at men.²² Another forbids eye contact with men on the grounds that the eyes betray the feelings of the heart.²³ In another of his plays, *On the Pope and His Priests* (1522), Manuel gives one of the characters, a prostitute, the telling name Sibilla Schilöugli ('Sibilla Furtive-Glance'), referring to the seductive glances of such women.²⁴ Graf's contemporaries must have recognized immediately the meaning of the woman's glance in his drawing. It is just as expressive as in the large-format portrait of the well-dressed prostitute in Figure 5.3. The seductive leer was not new to sixteenth-century art, but illustrating the popular saying 'stepping into a brook' is the artist's own distinctive invention. It expresses both his wry commentary on 'easy virtue' and the male viewer's sensual enjoyment. Turning a verbal metaphor into a

21 Uli is urged to marry Elсли anyway: 'Uli, du bist jetzt ganz verwirrt / Lass dich wisen und tu das best! / Sie ist weder die erst noch letst, / Die mit dem Fuss in bach ist treten'. From *Ein hüpsch Fasnachtspyl von dem Elszlin trag den knaben, und von Uly Rechenzan, mit irem eelichen gerichtshandel, kurzwylyg zu lessen*. See Bächtold, *Niklaus Manuel*, 277, lines 535–38.

22 'Dein gesellen sych nit schertzlich an / Wann er es (tut), ker dich nit daran [...] Dein auge halt und niemandt wünck'. From a single-sheet broadside, *Aine schone lere iungen leuten*.

23 'Sie sollen das gesicht vor allen dingen mit züchten niederschlagen und bewaren / mit den augen niemand winken / noch besonder ansehen / anschilhen / oder mit einem aug anblintzen / auch nicht ungebürlich auffreissen / dann die augen seind ein warning des hertzens / und was das auge sicht / dasselb das hertz sticht'. From the anonymous *Ein sehr nutzliches*.

24 'Vom Papst und seiner Priesterschaft', in Bächtold, *Niklaus Manuel*, 61, line 797.

Figure 5.6 Urs Graf, *Young Woman Stepping into a Brook*, c. 1521



visual one offered the artist a witty formula to poke fun at a woman made to reveal the reduced state of her 'virtue' through her own action.

More typical of Graf's work than the comparatively light-hearted drawing of a prostitute walking outdoors in fine weather are images of violence done to women on the periphery of battlefields (Figure 5.7). Young women who had joined the mercenary soldiers as camp followers were not always

Figure 5.7 Urs Graf, *Victim of War Standing before a Landscape*, 1514



spared war's destruction, as contemporary Swiss chroniclers recount. So, for example, when they fell into enemy hands, they were often maimed, but intentionally left alive in order that they could return to their camp and bear witness to the enemy's violence. In Figure 5.7 the artist represents a young female victim of war blinded in the left eye, and missing both arms and her right leg. Having no other livelihood, the prostitute is shown to be still in business, with her skirt hitched up to display her legs, one flesh

Figure 5.8 Urs Graf, *Camp Follower Passing a Hanged Mercenary Soldier, 1525*



and one wood, and her one eye on the lookout for clients. The tranquillity of the sunny landscape in the background serves to heighten the horror of her condition.

A late work of 1525 depicts the effects of war on both sexes (Figure 5.8). A hanged man in the garb of a mercenary – here a victim of war, robbed of his hat, shoes, and weapons – dangles from a branch upon which crows or vultures have already gathered. One of them pecks out his eyes. The

apotropaic gesture of his clenched fists, customarily intended to ward off evil but obviously ineffective here, is a pitiful commentary on his fate. In contrast to the plundered mercenary, the attractive young camp follower who walks past, unmoved by the gruesome sight, is lavishly dressed in a feathered beret, a heavy gold chain, and a richly embroidered skirt. She carries containers for food and drink that are of no use to the soldier. Her 'booty' from this campaign is an inopportune pregnancy, revealed by the opening in the dress over her belly. Graf's succinct narrative about the inequities of war, from which camp followers may profit while mercenaries pay with their lives, is a commentary on the vicissitudes of fortune. Had the woman arrived earlier, she might have saved his life because, in Graf's day, the intercession of a pregnant woman could absolve a person condemned to death. By juxtaposing the luckless mercenary and the successful camp follower, the artist illustrates the stark contrasts of life and death which typified his own military experience.

In his highly personal drawings, Graf combined narrative with symbolic or allegorical elements to express his attitudes and feelings about young women as erotic subjects during a period of rapid social change. But Graf's drawings express much more than one remarkable artist's personal fantasies and mistrust of women. His ambivalence toward young women was typical of the wider culture in the early modern age. It was generally understood that youth in women amplified their sexual allure. Young beauty attracted and tempted, but in this culture men were also keenly aware that women tricked and rejected as well. In Graf's drawings the inflection of war as the context, sometimes implied and sometimes clearly expressed, complicated the imagery further. An ambivalence similar to that about women also prevailed about war.²⁵ Ultimately it was as harlots and camp followers that even young women bore the desecrations of war in their rough lives and damaged bodies.

25 Two drawings dated 1529 by Manuel express strong critiques of mercenary warfare: Egli and von Tavel, *Niklaus Manuel Catalogue*, vol. 2, 444, cat. nos. 80.01–80.02. Graf's drawing of the battlefield at Marignano, where the Swiss were vanquished in 1515, makes a similar statement. See Bächtiger, 'Marignano'.

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Part 2

Self-Representations: Life-Writing and Letters



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6. Three Sisters of Carmen

The Youths of Teresa de Jesús, María de San José, and Ana de San Bartolomé

Barbara Mujica

Abstract

Discalced Carmelite convents were among the few places in early modern Spain in which women from radically different backgrounds interacted as equals. Teresa de Jesús, the daughter of a *converso* merchant, grew up in a large, comfortable household where girls as well as boys acquired literacy. María de San José was the ward of a duchess and raised in a palace, where she received a broad, humanistic education. Ana de San Bartolomé was a peasant with a tendency toward reclusion; she received no formal education. All three women faced difficult issues when young: spiritual struggles, social pressures, and questions of identity. In the convent, they may have discovered that they shared some common, unifying experiences.

Keywords: Discalced Carmelites; Teresa de Jesús (of Ávila); early modern girls' education; María de San José; Ana de San Bartolomé; *conversos*; early modern lesbianism; early modern family

Where in highly hierarchical early modern Spain could women of radically different backgrounds live together like sisters? Perhaps only in a reformed convent such as those of the Discalced Carmelite order. Teresa de Jesús (Ahumada) (1515–1582) was the daughter of a *converso* merchant.¹ María de San José (1548–1603) was the ward of a duchess and raised in an aristocratic household. Ana de San Bartolomé (1549–1626) was a peasant.

¹ The term usually refers to a Spanish Jew who accepted Catholicism during the forced conversions of the late fifteenth century.

Drawing primarily from Teresa's *Life* (1562),² María's *Book for the Hour of Recreation* (1585), and Ana's *Autobiographies* (1607–1624, 1622),³ as well as the little-studied letters of all three, we can form an idea of these women's early years. Despite sharp social and individual dissimilarities, all three experienced stressful youths and, after a difficult struggle, took the veil of Our Lady of Carmen.

Teresa de Jesús (known as Teresa de Ávila in the English-speaking world) launched the Carmelite Reform in 1562, with the foundation of the first Discalced Carmelite convent, San José de Ávila. At the time, religious practice consisted largely of recited prayers and rituals, but Teresa advocated a more authentic, personal relationship with God. In her convents, called 'discalced' or barefoot to signify austerity and poverty, the nuns were to cultivate 'mental prayer', which Teresa saw as an intimate conversation with God. Teresa's reform spread quickly. During her lifetime, she founded seventeen convents throughout Spain. After her death, María and Ana carried the reform into Portugal and Belgium, both Spanish territories. Most early modern Spanish convents replicated the stratified social structure of the surrounding society. However, Teresa strove to mitigate the effects of social rank by banning titles and accepting novices whether or not they could pay a dowry. However, she did maintain the two-tiered system by which black-veiled nuns, usually from more affluent families, performed administrative work and white-veiled nuns performed menial tasks. Yet her custom of keeping convents small and insisting that all members of the household take responsibility for multiple duties meant that women of different backgrounds had to work together and cooperate. Teresa's letters about the social and economic conditions of postulants make it clear that she accepted a wide spectrum of novices. Teresa, María, and Ana did not all live in the same convent at the same time, although they could have. María joined the order in 1571 in Malagón, and in 1575 travelled to Beas with Teresa to make a new foundation. Ana had entered San José in 1570 and, had she not been ill, would have accompanied Teresa to Beas.⁴

2 The first draft; the book went through several revisions.

3 Ana wrote two autobiographies. The first, known as the *Antwerp Autobiography*, consists of fragments written between 1607 and 1624, with a final paragraph added in 1625 or 1626. The second, known as the *Bologna Autobiography*, was written during the second half of 1622 and has not been translated.

4 Teresa, *Collected Works*, I, 50. Subsequent references to Teresa's writings, cited parenthetically by volume and page, are from this translated edition.

The order's foundress, Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada (baptized on 4 April 1515), was of mixed heritage. She was named after her maternal grandmother, Teresa de las Cuevas, a woman of Old Christian pedigree – that is, with no Jewish or Muslim blood. On her father's side, Teresa was the daughter and granddaughter of *converso* merchants. Her paternal grandfather, Juan Sánchez, had been a successful businessman in Toledo, once a thriving community of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, but by the end of the fifteenth century a centre of brutal persecution of non-Christians. Even before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, Sánchez took advantage of an Edict of Grace, which allowed 'Judaizers' to admit to their transgressions and accept Catholicism. He then moved to Ávila, where he became a prosperous silk and wool merchant. *Converso* men often sought to 'cleanse' their lineage by taking Old Christian wives. Juan Sánchez not only married an Old Christian woman, Inés de Cepeda, but even adopted her surname. In turn, Teresa's father, Alonso de Cepeda, married twice, each time to Old Christians. Catalina del Peso died after giving him two children. Beatriz de Ahumada gave him ten more, of whom Teresa was the third and the only girl until the birth of Juana in 1528, the year their mother died. In this large family of twelve children, some took their father's last name while others took their mother's, as was the custom.

Wrangling about the family's Christian identity went on during much of Teresa's youth. In Ávila, her grandfather, Juan Sánchez undertook a *pleito de hidalguía* – a legal procedure to prove his *limpieza de sangre* (Old Christian blood) – and purchased a patent of nobility.⁵ Due to continuing gossip about Juan's Jewish origins, his sons initiated their own *pleito de hidalguía* when Teresa was four years old. Although they won, the procedure must have been harrowing. The brother-in-law of Alonso's first wife provided accounts of the family's public disgrace in Toledo, which compromised their social position.⁶ Teresa was seven when her father secured the *ejecutoria* establishing the family's status as Old Christians, but the process to validate the Cepeda's purity of blood was still going on when she was 22. Although in a private letter to her brother Lorenzo in 1561 Teresa mentions the *ejecutoria*, she never refers publicly to her *converso* background, undoubtedly due to the stigma attached to Jewish blood.⁷ Not surprisingly, as an adult, she often railed against the absurdities of the honour code and required no proof of lineage from her postulants.

5 Egido, *El linaje judeoconverso*.

6 Medwick, *Teresa*, 23.

7 Teresa, *Collected Letters*, I, 36.

Like many boys and girls from *converso* families Teresa learned to read, and she enjoyed access to a variety of books.⁸ Her parents probably provided most of her instruction, with the help of tutors. For a merchant Don Alonso possessed a significant library. Teresa writes in *Life*, 'My father was fond of reading good books, and thus he also had books in Spanish for his children to read' (I, 54). In addition, her uncle Pedro owned copies of Saint Jerome's *Letters*, from which Teresa read to him, and Francisco de Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. Often referring to herself as ignorant, Teresa knew little Latin and received no advanced training. Yet she read widely for a woman of her time.

As a youth, Teresa loved hagiographies, many of which read like adventure stories. She writes that tales of martyrdom once inspired her to escape from home with her brother Rodrigo in hopes of being decapitated by Moors (I, 55). Although hagiographers traditionally interpret this incident as an example of her early piety, she herself describes it as more of a prank. Teresa also loved novels of chivalry, which she read in secret with Doña Beatriz, even though her father frowned on them and moralists warned that they could have damaging effects on girls. In *The Education of the Christian Woman*, Juan Luis Vives calls them 'pernicious books filled with endless absurdities'.⁹ Nevertheless, Teresa was an obsessive reader of such books: 'I was so taken up in this reading that I didn't think I could be happy if I didn't have a new book' (I, 57). The clandestine nature of their reading surely strengthened the bond between mother and daughter. Writing in her late forties, Teresa looks back on her youth and recognizes these novels as detrimental to her spiritual development, causing her to 'waste many hours of the day and night' in a 'useless practice [...] hidden from my father' (I, 57). As an adult, Teresa seems to harbour some ambiguity toward her mother, whom she credits with guiding her spiritually, but faults for her frivolousness.

Despite moralists' admonitions against girls learning to write, many merchants' daughters did so. Teresa, like her brothers, mastered this skill and made use of it throughout her life. She may even have collaborated with Rodrigo on a romance of chivalry called *El caballero de Ávila*.¹⁰ Teresa also learned the utility of writing in everyday life. Before abandoning commerce because it was considered a *converso* occupation, Don Alonso would have written or dictated hundreds of business letters. If Teresa was a prolific letter-writer and an astute negotiator as an adult, it was certainly because

8 Martz, *Network*, 114–15; Baranda, 'L'Éducation', 30; Yovel, 'Conversos'.

9 Vives, *Education*, 74–75.

10 Marín Pina, 'Caballero', 160.

she had watched her father engage in business activities during her entire youth. Teresa also learned the skills considered essential to a young woman's education: sewing, spinning, and cooking, as well as dancing, chess, and playing musical instruments, although she mastered only the tambourine, which she played her whole life.

Teresa writes that as a child, she learned to pray from her mother, while her father served as a role model by performing charitable acts. When famine threatened Ávila around 1518, Don Alonso donated wheat to feed the hungry. Following his example, Teresa strove to give alms when she could. She writes that her father refused to keep slaves, and when his brother's slave girl lived in their house, Don Alonso treated her like one of his own children. Teresa says that her father enjoyed reading inspirational books, but she does not mention that he was devoted to any particular saint or prayed the rosary (I, 54). Insisting that she was his favourite child, Teresa showed concern for him during her whole life, becoming executrix of his will after his death. Yet some scholars believe that she found him authoritarian. For example, María Carrión suggests that Teresa's decision to take vows may have been a reaction against her father's domination.¹¹ Teresa makes it very clear that her father opposed her entering the convent (I, 63). Still, when she left his house, she was filled with pain so severe that it was as though 'every bone in my body was being sundered' (I, 64). It seems that Teresa was somewhat conflicted about her father. She loved and respected him, yet in this matter was determined to disobey him, no matter how much her decision might hurt him.

The Cepeda-Ahumada brood would have grown up in comfort. Don Alonso was a successful businessman, and his wife brought him an impressive dowry that included houses, a garden and dovecot, some 2000 head of cattle, vineyards and fields.¹² The family lived in a massive, solid house filled with hand-carved furniture and antiques, according to an inventory of household belongings filed shortly before Teresa's birth, and had servants.¹³ As a *converso*, Don Alonso had to keep up appearances. He probably possessed religious paintings and artefacts, but would have been careful to avoid ostentation, as *conversos* were sometimes accused of flamboyance.¹⁴ Because books were luxury items, their abundance in his house attests to the family's affluence.

11 Carrión, *Arquitectura y cuerpo*.

12 Walsh, *Teresa*, 21.

13 Walsh, *Teresa*, 3.

14 Zeldin, 'Catholic Monarchs'.

Growing up in a large household, the young Teresa would have had plenty of playmates. The influence of religion is clear in some of her childhood pastimes. For example, she mentions that she and Rodrigo, influenced by their reading, played at being hermits, and that with other little girls, probably cousins, she sometimes 'pretended we were nuns in a monastery' (I, 55). Because early modern Spaniards generally conceived of childhood as a training ground for adult roles, children usually had little time for free play; Teresa would probably not have had much opportunity for games.

Teresa's relationships with her siblings were mixed. She grew up with brothers, and clearly felt comfortable with men as an adult. Her two sisters were not real companions for her. She speaks of María, 'a sister much older than I', who had little influence on her (I, 58), and of Juana, thirteen years her junior, for whom she 'had no affinity', although she kept her in the convent with her before later negotiating her marriage (I, 272–73). Although biographers have idealized Teresa's family, friction existed among the siblings. Teresa adored Rodrigo and Antonio but did not care much for Pedro, who was apparently mentally disturbed. Retrospectively, she calls him 'crazy' in her letter to Lorenzo of 10 April 1580.¹⁵

In 1528, when Teresa was about fourteen years old, her mother's death altered her life dramatically. Teresa turned for solace to the Virgin; yet, under the influence of some wayward cousins, she became more concerned with popularity and clothes than with prayer. Doña Beatriz had bequeathed to her husband a collar worth 30,000 *maravedíes*, rings, bracelets, earrings and other jewellery, velvet gowns, linen petticoats, silks and cummerbunds of taffeta embroidered in gold, and silk hairnets.¹⁶ As dresses and jewellery traditionally passed from mother to daughter, Teresa would have worn her mother's finery. As an adolescent, she loved fashionable clothes and perfumes. She writes that she was vain about her hair and hands and took excessive pains about cleanliness. Under the influence of her cousins, Teresa participated in activities that she does not name but that probably included some of those condemned by moralists, particularly gossip, strolls, and carriage rides. She would also have attended religious festivals, balls, and local celebrations.¹⁷ Thirty years later, Teresa describes herself as a well-meaning but naïve and malleable youth. She blames Don Alonso for failing to provide her with proper guidance and allowing his affection to place her in a morally vulnerable position (I, 57).

¹⁵ Teresa, *Collected Letters*, II, 298.

¹⁶ Walsh, *Teresa*, 25.

¹⁷ Burke, 'Invention of Leisure', 143

This period in Teresa's life was undoubtedly unsettling. Not only had she lost her mother, but all of her brothers would soon leave for the Americas, where most of them would perish. Furthermore, her father's finances were precarious. In 1524, when Teresa was nine years old, Don Alonso started borrowing heavily. He continued to mismanage his affairs until, at his death, he was seriously in debt. In these troubled circumstances, Teresa began to wrestle with choices about her adult future. At about sixteen, she provoked gossip by becoming involved with a male cousin. Although she says that the young man wanted to marry her, she seems more concerned about the possible sinfulness of their relationship than with the proposal. Doña Beatriz had died immediately after childbirth, so perhaps Teresa was frightened of marriage. She writes that she sees marriage as a form of subjection (III, 306). It may be, too, that she was squeamish about sex, as she writes to her brother Lorenzo about his sexual arousal, that she has 'never experienced this'.¹⁸ Teresa does not articulate what struggles she went through at the time, but Don Alonso put an end to the chatter by placing her as a boarder in the Augustinian convent school of Our Lady of Grace. Her older sister, María, was soon to marry and leave Ávila, and with no female guidance at home, Teresa was in a vulnerable position.

Convent schools were a common solution to such dilemmas. The Augustinian sisters were renowned for their strictness and austerity. Teresa was not drawn to their way of life, and writes that she was then 'strongly against' becoming a nun, but did not want to get married. Yet gradually, under the influence of the novice mistress, María de Briceño, Teresa discovered a strong spiritual inclination (I, 60). During this period, Teresa was often ill, and, in fact, was sickly most of her life. At seventeen, she left the Augustinian convent because of fever and fainting. She went first to her father's house, and then was sent to recuperate with her married sister, who lived in Castellanos de la Cañada. On the way, she spent several days with her Uncle Pedro, who introduced her to the works mentioned above by Jerome and Osuna, from whose *Spiritual Alphabet* she learned recollection and mental prayer. She writes, 'My fondness for good books was my salvation' (I, 63). Around that time Teresa decided to become a nun. At 21, she entered the Convent of the Incarnation, which offered a more relaxed environment than Our Lady of Grace. Despite his opposition to her taking the veil, Don Alonso provided a substantial dowry, including a yearly contribution of large quantities of grain or 200 gold ducats, as well

¹⁸ Teresa, *Collected Letters*, I, 475.

as bedding, mantles and cloaks.¹⁹ Teresa professed on 3 November 1537, at age 23, and so concluded her youth.

The lessons of her youth served Teresa well in adulthood. One of the major religious reformers of the sixteenth century, Teresa founded seventeen Discalced convents in spite of the vigorous opposition of Calced Carmelites hostile to the reform. Often at odds with the Carmelite hierarchy, she was severely reprimanded by the Father General, Juan Baptista Rubeo, who in 1575 placed her under virtual house arrest in the convent of Toledo. Yet Teresa managed to extricate herself from these thorny situations. The child of a *converso* businessman, Teresa would have learned early in life the value of diplomacy and negotiation. *Conversos* typically lived defensively, dealing with outsiders with caution and restraint. In her letters, Teresa reveals how delicately she treats even some of her worst detractors. Through the use of tact and charm, skills she undoubtedly developed growing up surrounded by suspicious neighbours, she carried the reform forward.

In contrast, María de San José was often assertive, even combative, when dealing with her superiors. María's youth was dramatically different from that of Teresa, and this certainly influenced the undeferential way in which she later conducted herself with the order's male leadership. Her aristocratic upbringing gave her the self-confidence to confront powerful men in an outspoken and aggressive manner. Born in Toledo, María was undoubtedly of noble background, as she was sent at a young age to be raised at the palace of Doña Luisa de la Cerda, sister of the Duke of Medinaceli and widow of Don Arias Pardo de Saavedra, a close advisor to the king. María's lineage is, however, unclear. She could have been a relative, possibly illegitimate or *converso*, of the Duke and Duchess.²⁰ Doña Luisa had herself given birth to an illegitimate daughter who was raised in the household of the child's father, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.²¹ After marrying Don Arias, Doña Luisa had seven more children, three of whom died in early childhood.²² Throughout Europe, it was common for noble families to send their sons and daughters to other aristocratic households to be educated. Given her own experience of having to give up a daughter and the tragedy of burying three of her offspring, Doña Luisa might have been delighted to receive

19 Bilinkoff, *Avila*, 114.

20 Arenal and Schlau, *Untold Sisters*; Manero Sorolla, 'Margins'; Weber, 'Volume Editor's Introduction'.

21 Pérez González, 'Doña Luisa de la Cerda'.

22 Four were living in the palace when Teresa visited, but three of them expired in early adulthood.

this brilliant young girl into her home, regardless of the circumstances surrounding her birth.

Naturally, María recounts none of this personal background in *The Book of Recreations*, the closest thing to an autobiography that she produced.²³ Rather than a traditional autobiography, *Recreations* is a kind of psychological self-portrait that enables María to express her opinions and feelings hidden behind a fictional character. Set during the convent 'recreation', or rest period, the text is a colloquy among nuns. The character Gracia, who represents María, expounds on such subjects as women's intellect, prayer and meditation, confessors, and the theological debates of the day. However, the author tells us nothing, either directly or indirectly, about her youth before her first encounter with Teresa. Instead, her self-representation highlights her intellect and literary skills. Both an insider and an outsider at the ducal palace, perhaps she was reluctant to write about her biological parents, or perhaps she hardly knew them. Regardless, the work provides important information about her personality and attitudes that help to explain the battles against Church and Carmelite authorities that defined much of her life.

As a youth in courtly service, María Salazar first met Teresa when the future saint visited the palace of the recently widowed Doña Luisa. Then thirteen or fourteen years old, María was fascinated with the famous holy woman, who reputedly had visions and levitated. María wrote verses for Teresa and spied on her in her cell, witnessing her in ecstasy. Soon María began to imitate Teresa, seeking solitude to pray and meditate. However, when she first approached Teresa about taking vows, the holy woman laughed off the suggestion, calling the girl frivolous.²⁴ María writes that in spite of her prayers and regular confessions with Jesuits, it was difficult to practise piety in the bustle of the court (44). She admits that she was attracted to worldly vanities: galas and outings, pretty clothes and hairdos, and exchanges in which she could show off her intellectual prowess. Yet, court life literally made her ill, for, in her own words, whenever she lost sight of Christ's sacrifice, 'He would take away my health' and then nurse her back afterward (44–45). Like Teresa, María probably became familiar with Saint Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, a form of meditation in which the individual engages the imagination to recreate a scene from Scripture and then places

23 *The Book for the Hour of Recreation*, translated by Powell, is the source for subsequent parenthetical page references.

24 Auclair, *Saint Teresa*, 130–31.

himself or herself in it, through contact with the Jesuits. María's description in *Recreations* of her meditative practices seems to confirm this (51).

Teresa returned a second time to Doña Luisa's palace on her way to found the convent in Malagón. At that time, María witnessed two more of Teresa's ecstasies as well as a miraculous cure, which made her determined to take vows. She was drawn to the kind of mental prayer that the Discalced Carmelites practised, and, she writes, reason convinced her she should become a nun (47). Yet, in spite of these enlightening experiences, María struggled. Although she wanted to take the veil, she still loved the vanities of the world. 'I spent two years in terrible straits', she wrote (51). She was unable to share her anxiety with either her Jesuit confessor or Teresa. However, eventually she came to realize that her attachment to reason was an impediment to her spiritual growth. It took her eight more years to mature into the woman who, in 1570, would finally take vows at the Discalced Carmelite convent in Malagón.

Doña Luisa was interested in girls' instruction on many levels. At the convent, she arranged for a Theatine *beata* to come to teach the local farm girls.²⁵ In her palace, she provided her charges with a broad, humanistic education. Descriptions of the education of elite Spanish women are rare. Nevertheless, according to Helen Nader, 'every action and written record of their adult years reveals a level of education that far exceeds the stereotype of girls simply learning to sew and embroider'. Spanish noblewomen were ordinarily 'literate, numerate, and proficient in Latin'.²⁶ María learned Latin and French at Doña Luisa's court. María did not compose treatises in Latin, but used it in several of her writings. She was also well versed in Scripture and routinely cites the Bible. In *Ramillete de Mirra (Bouquet of Myrrh)*, which contains a number of legal and ecclesiastical Latinisms, she constructs a meditation on suffering and survival around a verse from Cantic 1.²⁷ *Recreations* includes Latin quotations as well as citations from both Aristotle and Plutarch, although it is not known whether María read these authors in the original Greek or in Spanish (57, 77). Teresa apparently found María's use of Latin annoying, as she comments in a letter that her friend's writing is 'very good, if it were not for that Latin'.²⁸ Elsewhere she writes, 'God deliver all my daughters from presuming to be Latinists'.²⁹ Nevertheless, María

25 Manero Sorolla, 'Margins', 119.

26 Nader, *Power and Gender*, 6.

27 'My love is a bouquet of myrrh; I will place him between my breasts'.

28 Mujica, *Teresa*, 117.

29 Teresa, *Collected Letters*, I, 404.

defends women's studying Latin. In *Recreations*, when Gracia mentions a priest 'who grew very angry when he saw us crossing ourselves in Latin', the character Justa responds that he must have been simple-minded because the Church commands nuns to recite the Divine Office in Latin (37–38). As an adult, María also still remembered some of her French. In 1586, now a woman in her mid-thirties, she wrote in that language to Jean de Brétigny, a nobleman who sought to bring the Discalced Carmelite reform to France.³⁰

María's writings amply reveal her wide knowledge and varied literary skills. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau note that 'her metaphors and similes refer to architecture, painting, and music; to civil and ecclesiastic law; and to the natural order of animals, minerals, and plants'.³¹ In a letter, Teresa jokingly calls María a *letrera* (roughly, 'brain'), a reference to her broad range of knowledge.³² Her use in *Recreations* of the colloquy, an elegant, classical, dialogic form, likens María to male intellectuals of the period. Her language is vivid, energetic, and unabashedly literary. Her prose is carefully structured and rich in rhetorical devices. For example, in *Recreations* she develops *confutatio* through the give-and-take between her characters Gracia and Justa, who constantly call into question each other's assumptions; *modus proferendi* when she advances ideas found in Scripture to elucidate a position; and *paranomasia* when she calls Sister Atanasia an *erizo* ('hedgehog') and *llena de espinas y fealdad* ('spiky and ugly'). She often uses ironic self-deprecation to mock men who demean courageous and smart women. Her stylistic dexterity is evident in *Ramillete de Mirra*, an open letter against her detractors, written to the Discalced Carmelite community between 1593 and 1595. María argues her case like a seasoned attorney – citing evidence, historical precedents, biblical sources, and ecclesiastical documents – and bolstering her authority by citing her long and close association with Teresa. María apparently learned this form of legalistic argumentation at Doña Luisa's court. Similarly, the *Letter from a Poor, Imprisoned Discalced Nun* (*Carta de una pobre y presa Descalza*) is impressive for its logical argumentation, its vivid metaphors, and its erudition, in spite of its familiar, conversational tone. María also studied poetic forms at Doña Luisa's court and composed *redondillas*, *octavas reales*, tercets, and even sonnets. Much of her verse is similar in form and theme to secular erotic poetry, although it is difficult to know if she was actually familiar with Petrarchan tradition.

30 Pérez García, *María de San José*, 34.

31 Arenal and Schlau, *Untold Sisters*, 41.

32 Teresa, *Collected Letters*, II, 46.

Having received a superior education herself, María repeatedly defended women's intellectual abilities and right to learn. In *Recreations*, Justa asserts that there have been many women 'who have been equal and even superior in learning to a great many men' (37). Furthermore, women are better suited than men, she argues, to instruct other women. She returns to the topic in the *Instruction of Novices* (*Instrucción de Novicias*), in which Gracia conflates the biblical characters Deborah and Abigail 'in order to emphasize the foundress's role as mother and teacher'.³³ Although María sometimes mentions the weakness of women, it is always with irony. This same confidence in women's intellectual merit sustained her in her later struggles with the order's male hierarchy.

Two years after Teresa's death, María de San José left for Portugal to found a convent in Lisbon. Although Teresa had designated María as her successor, that intention was never fulfilled. Unlike Teresa, María had not learned the need for restraint and discretion as a youth, and almost immediately she clashed with her superiors. Teresa had given prioresses considerable authority to manage their own convents, but Nicolás Doria, the Provincial, sought to diminish their power and modify Teresa's *Constitutions* to bring them under priestly control. María de San José and another of Teresa's close friends, Ana de Jesús, prioress of the Madrid Carmel, went over Doria's head and appealed for support directly to Pope Sixtus V, who supported the nuns but who died within the year. His successor, Pope Gregory XIV, reversed Sixtus's position in the papal brief *Quinoniam non ignoramus*. María was imprisoned incommunicado in her convent, and Ana was deprived of voice and vote. Doria, later Vicar General, died in 1594. In 1603, Francisco de la Madre de Dios, third Vicar General, sent María to a remote convent in Cuerva, where she soon died.

One can hardly imagine two more dissimilar youths than those of the highly intellectual María and the nearly illiterate Ana de San Bartolomé. Ana was born in El Almendral, near Ávila in rural Spain, the sixth child of parents who owned an estate with farmland and livestock. As a landed peasant, her father would have enjoyed a fairly high social position in the local community, although not as high as that of *hidalgo*. Most likely, her family were Old Christians, as were most rural folk.³⁴ In the *Bologna Autobiography* Ana states only that her parents were God-fearing people and that her father, although a busy man, never faltered in matters of conscience. He gave his sons a basic education, while his daughters learned only catechism,

33 Howe, *Education and Women*, 77–78.

34 Urkiza, 'Introducción' (1981), I, 56.

although Elizabeth Howe suggests that Ana may have also learned to read a little Spanish.³⁵

Unlike Teresa, who depicts herself as a social butterfly in her youth, Ana seems to have been a spiritually intense loner from childhood. Ana states in both her autobiographies that she began to manifest her spirituality as a young child and never wavered in her complete devotion to Jesus. As an illustration of her spiritual precociousness, she notes that when, as a little girl, she heard her sisters remark that children become capable of sin at seven years old, she raised her eyes toward heaven and ‘the Lord showed himself to me there with great majesty’.³⁶ Judging from her commentary, she was an introverted child who preferred the company of Jesus to that of ordinary people (38). Her faith was unsophisticated and, from a modern perspective, perhaps even superstitious. When she went out to play with other children, she would ask Jesus’s permission first, and when she stopped praying to the saints for a day or two, she became fearful they would become angry.

After her parents died when she was about ten, Ana was assigned the task of tending the flocks. For a child who loved solitude, this was probably an agreeable arrangement. At this point in her life, her relationship with Jesus deepened. When she went off into the fields, sometimes ‘the Child Jesus came and sat on my lap’ (38). She saw Jesus as a personal friend, a real physical presence, a reassuring companion who appeared to her as a child of her own age and grew as she grew. Sometimes she became so lost in prayer in some solitary place that night would overtake her, causing her brothers to scold her. But, she explains, ‘they didn’t know the company I was keeping and I never told them’ (38). Ana’s autobiographies reveal some rather problematic areas of her personality and may help us to understand her later conflicts with male superiors and fellow nuns.

The Jesuit psychoanalyst W.W. Meissner stresses that even though some early modern mystics were actually psychotic, many went on to lead constructive lives.³⁷ Ana is perhaps an example. In a society in which manifestations of the supernatural had notable currency, Ana’s familiarity with Jesus might not have seemed so extraordinary; but from the perspective of modern psychology, Jesus and Mary might be seen as surrogates for the parents that Ana had lost. In many *vidas* of this period, including Teresa’s, women speak of taking Mary for a mother after the death of a biological

35 Howe, *Education and Women*, 28.

36 Ana de San Bartolomé, *Autobiography*, 37. This text, translated by Donahue, is the source for subsequent parenthetical page references.

37 Meissner, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 320.

mother, and sometimes of seeing her in visions. Today, child psychologists consider surrogates and 'imaginary friends' as a normal phenomenon during early childhood, especially after a traumatic experience such as a death in the family.³⁸ However, even if we interpret Ana's childhood friendship with Jesus as a parasocial relationship born of loneliness, it was certainly also an authentic manifestation of her early spiritual sensitivity.

Other aspects of her social and sexual history are knottier, however. Judging from her autobiographies, she was uncomfortable with her gender as a youth. She writes that in order to devote herself more completely to Jesus, she determined to 'go where no one would know I was a woman' (39). She and a friend, Francisca Cano, arranged to steal away dressed as men and live like hermits. Such desires are certainly no proof of psychological issues, especially in an age when women's activities were so severely restricted. However, some of Ana's later friendships, in particular her almost obsessive preoccupation with Ana de la Ascensión, have raised questions among scholars.³⁹

Ana rejected marriage in spite of opportunities, and far more vehemently than Teresa. Nevertheless, when her plans for a hermitic life failed, she seemed doomed to a conventional existence as her siblings were already making plans to marry her off. Ana was an attractive young woman – strong and healthy, thanks to hard farm work – and her siblings had found a willing fiancé.⁴⁰ Maybe they insisted because a husband, particularly a younger son who did not stand to inherit his own farm, would bring labour assets into the family. Furthermore, as a younger daughter, Ana would have inherited a part of her parents' wealth, and her siblings may have preferred to keep it in the family rather than give it as dowry to a convent.⁴¹ In Spain, daughters could inherit money, clothing, jewellery, and other goods, although not land. Economic factors, the anticlerical attitudes that prevailed in some rural areas, and reluctance to relinquish their sister to a cloister from which she could never emerge might explain the family's strong opposition to Ana's taking the veil.⁴²

All during her teenage years, Ana persisted in her desire to become a nun and have only Jesus as a husband. Her siblings' opposition tormented her, but, she writes, in her dreams, the Virgin and Jesus showed her a convent

38 Taylor, *Imaginary Companions*.

39 Velasco, *Lesbians*, 109.

40 Urkiza, *Beata Ana*, 24–25.

41 Casey, *Early Modern Spain*, 200.

42 Casey, *Early Modern Spain*, 235.

that would someday be hers. She complains in the *Bologna Autobiography* that women simply do not have the option of remaining single.⁴³ During this time, she says, the Devil plagued her with temptations. To combat them, she 'took scourges and lay down naked on the ground in a cave, even though it was damp, until the fury of the temptation died down' (39). Were these temptations sexual? Ana provides no details, but it is clear that the thought of a heterosexual relationship was distasteful to her. She writes in the *Bologna Autobiography* that she told Jesus, if she could find a man as 'beautiful and wise and perfect' as He, she would consent to live with him, but only in a platonic relationship.⁴⁴ Ana appears to transfer the feelings that most women have for men to a super-human surrogate. In her mind, all men were lacking in comparison to Jesus. Ana also recounts that one night in a dream she saw a handsome young man who, to her delight, promised to marry her. Upon awakening, she realized it was Jesus.⁴⁵ In the *Antwerp Autobiography* she tells a slightly different version of the story in which Jesus states, 'I am the one you want and whom you will wed' (40). Repeatedly, she describes Jesus as 'very handsome', and refers to him in erotic terms, often as a spouse who teases and kisses his wife. However, Ana's language should not surprise us, not only because nuns are brides of Christ, but also because the marriage metaphor is so common in mystical writing, with roots in the biblical Song of Solomon.

In her writing, Ana fashions herself as unsuitable for conventional marriage. She recounts that she once appeared before a potential suitor dishevelled and dressed in kitchen rags, infuriating her sister and driving away the man (40). Furthermore, whenever her brothers' friends came to the house, she would go outside or 'make a face at them, as though they were a bad vision' (41). Disdainful of men who might court her, Ana portrays herself as a better man than they are. For example, in a passage in which she describes how her siblings sought to break her will, she writes that they assigned her tasks that 'required the strength of men'. These Ana welcomed as a distraction and performed so easily that 'house servants said that two of them together couldn't do what I was doing' (42). When her siblings demanded that she carry heavy sheaves, she describes, with obvious satisfaction, how her extraordinary strength left men in awe: 'those who were reaping made the sheaves two times bigger than those they made for the men, thinking that I couldn't lift them onto the carts. I lifted them with

43 Ana de San Bartolomé, *Obras completas*, 482.

44 Ana de San Bartolomé, *Obras completas*, 482.

45 Ana de San Bartolomé, *Obras completas*, 483.

great ease, so that the men stopped reaping to watch me, and they were amazed' (42). While others saw her as wilful or even mentally unstable, Ana saw herself as devoted to God, whom she served with 'perfect purity and faithfulness' (41).

Lisa Vollendorf explains that in the seventeenth century, biological sex determined gender; society had no tolerance for deviations from accepted, sex-based norms of behaviour.⁴⁶ Departures from convention such as Ana's were often explained as signs of divine or demonic intervention. Ana notes that observers saw her aberrant physical strength as coming from 'God or the devil' (42). Given her distaste for men and marriage, her transvestite inclinations, and her impressive muscle power, it is tempting to see Ana as a transgendered individual, a woman uncomfortable with her biological sex. However, Ana herself interpreted her eccentricities as divine gifts that enabled her to combat her siblings' efforts to marry her off.

Early modern religious leaders recognized the sometimes close relationship between sexual and spiritual experience. For Teresa de Jesús, such occurrences were unsurprising. When her brother Lorenzo complained of the erotic arousal that accompanied his intense spiritual feelings, Teresa wrote to him, 'don't pay any attention to them'. At the same time, Teresa was wary of close same-sex relationships. She warns against 'particular friendships' that might occasion sinfulness.⁴⁷ She advises nuns against mutual touching or using terms of endearment with one another, and is especially suspicious of intimacy between prioresses and their spiritual daughters, although her main concern seems to be the discord that might stem from such friendships in the form of cliquishness or gossip and favouritism, rather than homosexuality. Having purged herself of 'temptations', Ana possibly channelled her sexual impulses into spiritual episodes. Despite her discomfort with gender norms, there is no clear indication in these passages that Ana imagined physical relationships with women, although her letters include frequent expressions of love for her sisters in religion. In fact, it is not clear that in early modern Spain lesbianism as a sexual category was even on the radar. While Inquisition records document a few same-sex liaisons between women, Vollendorf points out that these were sometimes explained away by 'miraculous' sex changes.⁴⁸

46 Vollendorf, *Lives of Women*, 21. There were exceptions, as illustrated by the popularity of the gay actor Cosme Pérez.

47 Teresa, *Collected Letters*, I, 475; *Collected Works*, III, 27.

48 Vollendorf, *Lives of Women*, 64. In *Immodest Acts*, Judith Brown describes the relationship of the seventeenth-century Italian mystic Benedetta Carlini with her nun assistant.

Although the mysteries of Ana de San Bartolomé's sexuality remain unresolved, it is clear that Ana herself interpreted her struggle against convention as grounding for religious life. She believed that by rejecting men and marriage, she was complying with God's revealed plan for her. The conviction that God was guiding her steps and creating means for her to achieve her goal gave Ana the fortitude to persevere. She writes that God brought to El Almendral a pastor who read her heart and introduced her to a convent, where 'it pleased God that the nuns accepted me right away' (41–42). That convent was San José de Ávila, which Ana recognized as the same one that the Lord had shown her in visions. Yet her siblings' opposition persisted. A brother actually menaced her with a sword and was prevented from killing her only by the intervention of one of her sisters or, perhaps, Ana says, an angel (45). Eventually the family did give their consent, and Ana entered the novitiate in 1570, at the age of 21. She met Saint Teresa in the spring of 1571 and professed as a Discalced Carmelite on 15 August 1572.

Ana writes that her youth was filled with miracles that illustrate God's favour. On one occasion, when she went to look for a lost ox, a rabid dog attacked her. The ox confronted the dog and rescued her, to the amazement of everyone (43). This highly transparent story is a variation of others. Hostile forces (her siblings, suitors, the dog) besiege her, but God sends a messenger (Christ, an angel, the ox) to save her, and all are 'amazed' at the special love God has shown her. Later, when she is out in the flax fields with a kinswoman, she sees three people dressed in white who suddenly disappear. She concludes, 'I knew it was the Holy Trinity' (44). Shortly afterward, she was mysteriously cured of exhaustion upon entering the shrine of Saint Bartholomew. During this period of stress, in which she was facing intense opposition from her brothers and sisters, Ana finds solace in the certitude that at all times God is watching over her.

A woman of extraordinary skill, Ana de San Bartolomé became Teresa's nurse and often travelled with her to make foundations. After Teresa's death, Ana helped carry Teresian spirituality abroad. In 1604, she left Spain with Ana de Jesús and others to establish a Discalced convent in Paris. Ana de Jesús became the prioress, and Ana de San Bartolomé went on to found another convent in Pontoise, returning shortly afterward to take over as prioress in Paris. However, difficulties developed between her and Pierre de Bérulle, an influential cleric who had helped bring the reform to France. As there were no Discalced friars to serve as the nuns' confessors, Bérulle manoeuvred to occupy that role and to exert increasing control over the new convents. He wrested authority from Ana de San Bartolomé and, according to her, humiliated her incessantly. Ana's description of Bérulle's

harassment echoes in many ways her account of her struggles against her siblings when she was young. Ana possessed neither Teresa's diplomatic skill nor María de San José's intellectual prowess. As she had in her youth, she fought her oppressors through faith and obstinacy. Finally, in 1611, she left for Flanders, founding a convent in Antwerp and serving as its prioress for the rest of her life.

Like Teresa de Jesús, both María de San José and Ana de San Bartolomé became involved in serious conflicts with overbearing priests and stood their ground. All three women used the lessons of their youth to help them cope with the vicissitudes of leading a reform movement in a male-dominated society.

Biographers sometimes idealize the youths of religious women, depicting them as periods of innocence and bliss. However, the writings of Teresa, María, and Ana reveal that their formative years were as tumultuous and stress-filled as adolescence today. As girls, Teresa and Ana had to cope with the trauma of loss and separation. Social and financial pressures, spiritual struggles, disagreements with parents and siblings, and questions of lineage, sexual identity, and possibly even legitimacy surely caused these women discomfort when they were young. Teresa knew from experience that the early years could be a period of instability and flightiness, sometimes resulting in girls taking religious vows before they were mature enough to understand what that entailed. For that reason, and because parents sometimes placed little girls of two or three years in convents in order to avoid paying a marriage dowry, Teresa stipulated in the *Constitutions* of the order, Article 21, that novices had to be at least seventeen years old.

Perhaps the convent offered Teresa, María, and Ana not only a spiritual refuge but also a place to come to terms with the vexing issues of their youths. All of them wrote retrospectively about their early years, suggesting that even as adults they were still reflecting on some of the issues that haunted them as girls. Perhaps in the convent they discovered that, despite the differences in class and upbringing, they shared some common, unifying experiences.

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7. Elite English Girlhood in Early Modern Ireland

The Examples of Mary Boyle and Alice Wandesford

*Julie A. Eckerle*¹

Abstract

Taking as its starting point the little-discussed experiences of many early modern Englishwomen in Ireland, this essay examines the experience of elite English girlhood in Ireland through the lens of the retrospective accounts of Mary Boyle (later Rich, Countess of Warwick) and Alice Wandesford (Thornton). Although Boyle and Wandesford present idealized versions of much of their Irish experience, their texts also reveal the fragility of this existence, ultimately reinforcing the importance of the patriarch's physical presence in order for English girlhood to work on non-English soil.

Keywords: Mary Boyle (Rich); Alice Wandesford (Thornton); Ireland; education; colonial; England; girlhood

When writing retrospectively about her childhood and youth in Ireland in the 1620s and 1630s, Mary Boyle – later Lady Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick (1624–1678) – recounts a lengthy but happy fosterage with a friend of her father, Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork. '[B]y the tender care of my indulgent father', she writes,

that I might be carefully and piously educated, I was sent by him to a prudent and vertuous lady, my Lady Claytone, who never having had any child of her own, grew to make so much of me as if she had been an own

¹ I am grateful to Naomi McAreavey, Elizabeth Cohen, and Margaret Reeves for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

mother to me, and took great care to have me soberly educated. Under her government I remained at Mallow, a town in Munster, till I was, I think, about eleven years' old, and then my father called me from thence (much to my dissatisfaction), for I was very fond of that, to me, kind mother.²

This passage from Rich's autobiography, *Some Specialties In the life of MWarwicke*, emphasizes several aspects of Mary's early life, including her close relationship with Lady Anne Clayton, a seeming maternal surrogate in the absence of Mary's own mother; the beneficial education she received at the Clayton home; and her satisfaction with this arrangement, which entailed essentially growing to adulthood outside of her father's home.³ This was standard practice for the Boyle children. The typical Boyle newborn, as explained by Nicholas Canny in *The Upstart Earl*,

usually spent some weeks or months in the parental home before it was farmed out to a country nurse who reared the child to the age of three or four. Then the child spent some years in the care of a tutor at Lismore, or at the house of a carefully chosen foster-mother, but in either event was removed from direct parental supervision. [...] By the eleventh year the daughters would either have been sent for upbringing to the households of their future in-laws, or would have remained with their foster-parents until, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, each went to live with whatever husband had been chosen for her. Finally, after the daughters had borne children, and when the sons had completed their formal education, the young Boyles, by now adults, were permitted to enjoy the company of their father in a relaxed or familiar environment. (102)⁴

Accordingly, Mary continued with Lady Clayton until she left Mallow and – shortly thereafter – Ireland in 1638. She had lived roughly ten years with Lady Clayton and all of her thirteen-plus years in Ireland.

2 Rich, *Some Specialities in the Life of M. Warwicke*, edited by Croker, 2.

3 Clayton, the wife of an English planter, fostered at least three of the Boyle girls: Alice from 'as early as 1615'; Mary beginning in March 1628; and their younger sister, Margaret, from 1634 (Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 100–101). Lady Catherine Boyle (c. 1588–1630), the Earl's second wife and mother of all his children, died within a year of Mary's move to the Clayton home. Significantly, Rich refers to Clayton in her autobiographical manuscript as a 'kind Matrone' (2v), a term with distinctly less maternal warmth than the 'kind mother' used in T.C. Croker's nineteenth-century print edition quoted here.

4 Lismore Castle was the seat of the Boyles. Fosterage was common in both the English and Irish aristocracies, especially for young boys.

A similarly nostalgic, retrospective account of a youth spent in Ireland in the 1630s appears in *My First Booke of My Life* by Alice Wandesford, later Thornton (1626/7–1706/7).⁵ Unlike Mary Boyle, Wandesford was not born in Ireland but travelled there with her mother and younger brothers in 1634, when she was eight. Nor was she fostered, but instead lived with her parents, as the family had travelled to Ireland in order to join her father, Christopher Wandesford (1592–1640), who went to Ireland in 1633 as Master of the Rolls and eventually, albeit for a short time, became Lord Deputy.⁶ Yet her tone in *My First Booke* is quite similar to Mary's:

I inioyed great happienesse and Comfort dureing my honoured fathers life, haueing the fortunate opportunity in that time, [...] when I staid there, of the best education that Kingdome could afford, haue<ing> the aduantage of Societie in the sweete & <chaste> company of the Earle of Strafford's Daughters, The most Virtuous Lady Anne & The Lady Arbella Wentworth, Learning those qualities with them which my father ordered. Namlie,
The french Language, to write & speake the same; Singing, Danceing, Plaieng on the Lute & Theorboe; learning such other accomplishments of Working Silkes, gummeworke, &c., Sweetemeats & other sutable huswifery, As by my Mothers virtuous prouission, & caire, she brought me vp in what was fitt for her qualitie & my fathers Childe. (10)

Young Alice lived thus contentedly for several years until her father died in 1640; Dublin succumbed to violence the following year, and she and her family escaped soon after. But from 1634 to 1641 – from the age of eight to fourteen or fifteen – Alice's home was in Ireland.⁷

Rich's and Thornton's accounts of seemingly idyllic youths in Ireland thus offer a fascinating glimpse into a unique experience of girlhood at precisely the moment when early modern 'girls' transitioned into 'women'.⁸

5 For two important analyses of Thornton's Irish narratives, see Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*, especially 92–97, and Anselment's forthcoming essay, 'Alice Thornton'.

6 Wandesford was officially Lord Deputy from April to December 1640.

7 Alice left Ireland just once during this time period, when she accompanied her mother and brother to Bath in 1639.

8 On the evolving meanings of the term 'girl' in the early modern period, see Higginbotham, *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters*: 'in the mid-seventeenth century [...] "girl" and the other terms in its semantic network began to be defined as separate categories of female youth. "Girl" subsequently came to be defined as the female age category that it largely is today' (8). On the other hand, the term 'youth' in the Early Modern period 'normally referred to young people in their teens or early twenties' (O'Dowd, 'Early Modern Ireland', 29).

I say 'unique' because Mary and Alice lived this significant phase of life *in* Ireland in the period just before the numerous wars and rebellions of the seventeenth century would create havoc for individuals of *all* religious, political, and national persuasions on the island and, indeed, throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. Mary's and Alice's experiences – albeit a limited sample recorded many years after the fact – suggest that, on the one hand, privileged English girlhood continued much as usual even in the atypical setting of a (to the English mind) foreign and savage land. The education they received and the carefully selected and controlled environments in which they received it further suggest that they were being prepared for the lives of aristocratic wives, particularly as they reached the critical age of puberty. This is very much in keeping with the other findings of this volume in regard to what Elizabeth Cohen and Margaret Reeves call in their introduction the 'shaping time' of youth 'between childhood and full adult status'. It is highly significant, for example, that Alice's and Mary's idyllic interludes end abruptly when they are both around fourteen years old – an age that seems appropriately within the 'youth' category and that also puts both girls on the verge of marriage, at least theoretically.

And yet, not only was the transition I focus on here *abrupt*, as noted, but also it did not lead directly to marriage, that most traditional marker of female adulthood. On the contrary, for both women, marriage did not happen immediately upon leaving Ireland: Mary wed Charles Rich a few years later, in 1641, and Alice married William Thornton in 1651, when she was 25 years old. Significantly, then, if the last few years of the tranquil period they spent in Ireland may justly be considered their 'youth', this period's ending did not coincide with their transition to adulthood as it was traditionally understood. Thus we are forced to consider the complexity of their situations, particularly the geographical setting in which they spent their formative years. Early modern childhood, Katherine R. Larson reminds us, was 'shaped as much by social class and geographical location as by gender and age' (68).

Mary's and Alice's circumstances match the traditional English model in three of these categories: class, gender, and age. Therefore, although two individuals' experiences alone do not allow any firm conclusions about how categories of girlhood and youth may have differed in Ireland as opposed to in England (if at all), they do demonstrate how factors external to the girls' individual development might force a more abrupt transition than one would expect otherwise. For Wandesford, this was her father's death and the 1641 Rebellion in Ireland, the latter following quickly upon the heels of the former. For Boyle, on the other hand, it was likely the change in

circumstances of her primary caregiver, Lady Clayton, in combination with her father's plans for her marriage.⁹ In both cases, however, the Irish setting of what we might call their 'tween' years was a significant external factor.

Most of what we know about these girls' lives in Ireland comes from auto/biographical sources, including their own retrospective narratives and their fathers' letters. They were in Ireland to begin with, of course, because of their fathers' involvement in England's ongoing, centuries-long effort to assert political control and to establish English settings and customs in Ireland. Yet how the female family members of male administrators and settlers actually experienced Ireland has been long overlooked, despite the fact that many girls and women, like the older Rich and Thornton, not only frequently referenced Ireland in their life writing but also, on occasion, made it a significant focus of their texts. Thus this subset of early modern women's life writing – which runs the gamut from nostalgic to bitter and includes the full range of life writing genres common at the time (prose narrative accounts like Rich's and Thornton's, letters, receipts, and so on) – usefully reminds us that many Englishwomen constructed their written lives against the complicated and fraught landscape of Ireland. In this essay, therefore, I interrogate first-person accounts like Rich's and Thornton's in an effort to understand not only what an elite English girlhood in early modern Ireland might have looked like but also how early modern Englishwomen more generally came to understand and represent the complex landscape of Ireland in their life writing.¹⁰

Like all life writing, of course, such accounts must be read as rhetorically motivated, carefully constructed texts in which the writers manipulate to the best of their ability formal and generic structures in order to constitute the self, or a narrative of the self, that fulfils the particular needs of a particular moment. In some cases, that particular moment is years distant from the events being recorded, as is the case with both Rich and Thornton, whose autobiographies are coloured by the nostalgia of their older years – Rich

9 As it turns out, Mary rejected her father's proposed husband, James Hamilton, Lord Clondeboy (d. 1659), creating significant tension with her father.

10 Early Modern 'Irish' and 'English' women's life writing in the Irish context is finally getting the attention it deserves, thanks largely to Coolahan, *Women, Writing, and Language*; Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*; and McAreavey, 'Epistolary Account' and 'This is that I may remember'. Julie A. Eckerle and McAreavey's forthcoming *Women's Life Writing and Early Modern Ireland* builds on these foundational texts. The two game-changing volumes on Irish women's writing published in 2002 as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (vols. IV and V) also include excerpts by Englishwomen, such as the early pages of Rich's autobiography.

writing in the 1670s and Thornton around 1669.¹¹ Furthermore, while rhetorical context is key to understanding any single life-writing document, genre-based elements and narrative patterns frequently inform whole bodies of material. Therefore, although my focus in this essay is quite narrow (two accounts of English girlhood in Ireland in the 1630s written roughly 40 years later), it is important to note that my primary examples accord with what I have found to be quite standard categories of representation within the larger corpus of early modern Englishwomen's representations of Ireland in their life writing. These include an idealized version of Ireland as a mini-England, the inverse depiction of Ireland as a kind of nightmare landscape, and slightly less morally laden versions of Ireland as a site of rich potential for individual transformation or as a land of mystery and somewhat exoticized otherness.

In the first of these categories, the one most evident in my opening passages, Ireland is idealized as a mini-England, a home-away-from-home during the periods when women accompanied husbands and fathers to Irish settings. Of course, the English colonization of Ireland did literally attempt to transform Ireland into an English space, and certainly within the homes of colonial administrators, it was likely to succeed. As Canny writes of Boyle, for instance, 'Cork populated his estates in the vicinity of Lismore and Youghal with Englishmen, and moulded the local environment to an English model' (35). But the idyllic settings so constructed on English-run estates and within the walls of English homes are both temporary and tenuous (as Alice's case will effectively illustrate) and thus frequently give way to another narrative strain, identified above as a kind of 'Irish nightmare'. In this 'sub-genre', so to speak, Ireland is the setting, cause, and antagonist in narratives of disaster, ruined careers, and death. Here we learn of how financial and material disasters ruined many families, and we find the war-torn landscapes through which women like Lady Ann Fanshawe (1625–1680) – wife of English diplomat Richard Fanshawe – escaped with her family when the English garrison in Cork fell to Oliver Cromwell in October 1649. In the third type I have identified, women's accounts of early

11 Comments in Rich's diaries suggest that she wrote most of the narrative in 1671, but she also incorporated events that occurred as late as 1674 (Croker, 'Preface', vii). The complicated Thornton corpus comprises four different volumes that often re-narrate, or revise, the same material. For the clearest account of these manuscripts, see Anselment's introduction to *My First Booke of My Life*. Two of the manuscripts contain references to Ireland, as Thornton 'recalled briefly in "A Booke of Remembrances" and at greater length in [...] "My First Booke of My Life", the sense of place she enjoyed with her family during a happy Dublin life' (Anselment, 'Alice Thornton').

modern Ireland depict the great potential for and realization of individual transformation to be found there, whether via spiritual conversion or the non-traditional behaviour often necessitated by war-time settings. And in still another narrative mode, Ireland is not necessarily dangerous but certainly mysterious, given to superstitions like the banshee and characterized by a general 'otherness' that many Englishwomen life writers struggle to understand.

Of course, in reality, these various narrative themes often blend together. This is especially the case with the idealized and demonized versions of Ireland, which – as I have defined them – are also oversimplified, in part because of English prejudice toward the Irish during the colonial period and in part as a result of my own attempt to delineate narrative types within more complex accounts.¹² These narrative strains consistently encroach on one another, perhaps most vividly when the landscape Fanshawe describes in her memoirs as fertile, peaceful, and 'seemingly quiet' in 1649 literally gives way one memorable night several months later to gunshots and screams of terror – the 'lamentable scricks [shrieks]', she explains, 'of men & women & children [...] [who] were all Irish stript and wounded turned out of y^e Town' (50, 51).¹³ Thornton's account of her own escape from Ireland nearly ten years earlier similarly blends seemingly contradictory versions of Ireland, as will be discussed below. Nonetheless, distinguishing between the various threads in women's auto/biographical writing about Ireland allows us to see more clearly the contradictions and conflicts that informed English attitudes during these tumultuous decades – decades, in fact, when the Irish peerage was being thoroughly reconstituted in an effort, Jane Ohlmeyer writes in a recent book, to 'make Ireland English' (9).

Indeed, for the English in Ireland, the 1620s and much of the 1630s had been primarily occupied with expanding plantations, consolidating estates, and generally solidifying control over the native Irish. As the 1630s drew to a close, however, the march toward civil war in England had its own repercussions in Ireland, where crown and parliamentary loyalties were complicated by tensions among the various layers – and thus factions – of English settlers.¹⁴ The period 1632–1640 also witnessed the disastrous

12 To treat 'the Irish' in monolithic terms is of course highly problematic, though this is exactly what England did in the early modern period.

13 Fanshawe also wrote her retrospective account, often referred to as her *Memoirs*, in widowhood, specifically 1676 (BL Add. MS 41161).

14 The primary categories of identity in Early Modern Ireland as they are generally understood were the native Irish (Irish-speaking, primarily Catholic descendants of the pre-Anglo-Norman inhabitants); the Old English (primarily Catholic descendants of the Anglo-Norman invaders of

deputyship of Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641), 1st Earl of Strafford – father of the ‘sweete’ girls with whom Thornton describes spending her days, and the man whose execution as a traitor in January 1641 was a critical turning point in Charles I’s already troubled relationship with Parliament.¹⁵ Later that year, tensions in Ireland exploded when Irish Catholics rebelled against the English (Protestant) administration. As Martyn Bennett explains, ‘The Rebellion spread across the country during the rest of the year, embracing the Old English [...] as well as the Irish themselves. By the summer of 1642 the Rebellion had become something of a war for political equality with England, Wales, and Scotland and for religious freedom, if not for true independence’ (119). Although the Rebellion, or Rising, of 1641 was eventually put down, the anger it unleashed continued to create conflict and turmoil throughout the decade until the Cromwellian conquest in 1649 silenced the Rebellion as well as the lives of many individuals who had participated in it.

Yet, intriguingly, the political machinations and shifting loyalties that dominated men’s activities throughout the 1630s – and that are documented in their own life writing of the period – is virtually non-existent in the girlhood accounts with which this essay began. In other words, even though the received historical tradition of colonial Ireland tells of military conquests, political conflicts, and endless plots and betrayals, another history was simultaneously being experienced and written – especially by the girls and young, unmarried women of the English elite. For these individuals, Ireland was not only a site of warfare and danger but also, perhaps more than anything else, a *home*.

This was particularly the case for Mary Boyle, one of many Boyle daughters who either were born in Ireland or spent significant years of their childhood there. They included Alice (1608–1668) and Margaret (1629–1637), who were also fostered by Lady Clayton; Lettice (1610–1642) and Joan (1611–1656/7), who were the only Boyle daughters to ‘spen[d] a considerable number of years in the parental home’; Dorothy (1617–1668), who lived with her future in-laws at Rathfarnham, Dublin as soon as her marriage to Sir Arthur Loftus was arranged in 1626 (they married in 1632); and Katherine (best known as Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh, 1613/15–1691), who was born in Ireland, spent much of her young life there, and eventually married into the Irish

twelfth-century Ireland); and the New English (primarily Protestant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century settlers who spoke English and were generally loyal to the English crown). These would be joined by a fourth category, the Cromwellian settlers, later in the seventeenth century. Yet all categorization is inadequate to Ireland’s complex history, which included waves of settlement and colonization over many centuries.

15 Wentworth’s political life, and particularly his death, continue to be subjects of debate.

peerage and lived with her husband, Arthur Jones, in Athlone until the 1641 Rebellion.¹⁶ Neighbours of the Boyle girls when they were at their father's estate included other girls in similar circumstances, such as the daughters of Sir John King, another Irish administrator. Dorothy (later Lady Dorothy Moore, 1612/13–1664), Margaret, and Mary King moved in similar social circles and learned some of the same skills as those described by Thornton, including dancing. It is worth noting, however, that the adult Dorothy did not think as highly of these experiences as the adult Alice did, as she explained in a letter to Lady Ranelagh that:

[D]ancing and curious workes [...] serve onely, to fill the fancy with unnecessary, unprofitable and proud imaginations. My experience as well as my reason tells me this; for my owne education was to learne both, and all I got by them was a great trouble to forget both.¹⁷

Alice, as we know, shared her lessons with the Wentworth daughters. Ladies Anne (1627–1695/6) and Arabella (1629–1689) lived at Dublin Castle from 1632/3 until 1639, when they were sent to live in England with their maternal grandmother, the widowed Lady Clare.¹⁸ Their father believed that, at ages twelve and ten, respectively, they were ready for a new 'educational' environment: although 'they had pretty manners, danced well, and could speak French', Wentworth claimed 'that Dublin was not the best school for elegant graces'.¹⁹ For all of these girls, whatever the variances in their Irish experience, the general impression of Ireland that they came away with when they eventually moved or returned to England informed both the adults they would become and, in the case of Mary and Alice, the accounts they would write. Significantly, these narratives share at least a few common elements.

The most striking is that English girlhood in Ireland seemed to require the presence of the girl's father. It is critical that, in Thornton's recollection of her blissful youth in Ireland, she includes the qualifying phrase 'during my father's life'. The Irish idyll that she and the Wentworth girls experienced was

16 Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 102–03. Canny speculates that Lettice and Joan were home more because they 'suffered rejection in the many marriages which their father sought to negotiate on their behalf' (103). As for Katherine, it is important to note that she also spent formative premarital years (1624–1628) in England at the home of Sir Thomas Beaumont, to whom she was contracted for a time, and most of her adulthood post-1641 in England as well.

17 Quoted in Pal, *Republic of Women*, 128–29.

18 Anne married Edward Watson, Lord Rockingham; Arabella married Justin MacCarthy, son of the Earl of Clancarty, and may well have lived in Ireland again during her marriage.

19 Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 266.

a fragile one, both constructed and maintained by powerful fathers working in the interest of the English crown. Indeed, in her idealizing character sketch of her father, Thornton depicts him in traditional terms as just the kind of pious and resourceful steward a good father should be: '[H]e had A wise & prudentall loue towards all his Children [...] For their Pieous & religious Education, with faire & noble prouissions for them in his Last Will & testament' (22). Thornton's language echoes Rich's (especially the latter's claims that she was 'piously educated' and fostered with a 'prudent and virtuous lady') in its characterization of Wandesford as a good father. But he is not only an exemplary 'husbandman' for his own family, Thornton insists. He was also a successful steward of 'Gods [*sic*] Vineyard' in Ireland, and so loved there that he was keened by the Irish at his funeral (22, 26). And even though she also notes her mother's oversight of many of her activities – as, again, Rich notes the wise 'government' of Lady Clayton – Thornton makes clear that the overall regimen is as her father 'ordered' it. Indeed, according to Wandesford's eighteenth-century biographer and descendant Thomas Comber, even the father's use of epistolary communication with his daughter when she was in England in 1639 was intended to serve an *educational* purpose:

Always attentive to his Children's real Improvements in all Things truely praise-worthy, he now became a Correspondent of his younger Daughter, *Alice*; though only 12 Years old he well knew of what Consequence it must be to young Ladies, to initiate them in the Elements of family Correspondence with a prudent Father; and therefore wrote to this Daughter a monthly Letter. (111–12)

The Earl of Cork's oversight of his daughters' lives was equally thorough, even if – in contrast to Wandesford – he chose to send his girls to live in others' homes. Canny notes that the Boyle children's 'upbringing and education were a matter of the greatest concern to their father' and that Boyle 'was extremely selective about the households to which he would commit his children for their upbringing' (8, 32). And the Wentworth sisters departed Ireland – and their own education there – on a patriarchal order.

Secondly, rather obviously, English girlhood *was* deemed possible on Irish soil. Crown officials had the advantage of government-sponsored housing like Dublin Castle, where Anne and Arabella Wentworth lived during their entire time in Ireland. But nearly all Englishmen in Ireland invested in ample estates there. Wandesford went so far as to build a *town* at Castlecomer: 'an elegant Town, exactly on the Model of a famous one in *Italy*, viz. Alsinore. The Houses were all of *free Stone*, very convenient, and

with a noble Market-Place in the Centre'.²⁰ Thus Alice was exposed to a variety of lodgings, from a Dublin house on Dame Street to the Castlecomer castle – 'a pretty convenient Castle of sufficient Strength to be a Security [...] from the Rapine of the wild *Irish*' – and Dublin Castle.²¹ Even when not housing their daughters in their own homes, men like the Earl of Cork were quite capable of creating or finding satisfactory English households like the Claytons'. Therefore, despite the fact that he claimed in a 1630 letter to the Earl of Kildare that 'Ireland holds no comparison with England for the education of a young lady, here being neither means to breed her well nor marry her well', most of his daughters *did* grow up on Irish soil.²²

Perhaps the significance of the patriarch's presence in and authority over his daughters' Irish girlhood is so obvious as to not merit mention since, as already noted, English children would not have been in Ireland in the first place if not for their fathers having households there. Yet the daughters' emphasis on their fathers – as is so clear in the writing of Rich and Thornton – demands acknowledgement. This is even more so since, by this same logic, the father's fall or absence translates into the family's fall and the consequent 'loss of paradise', if you will. As Raymond A. Anselment says of Thornton's portrayal of her happiness in Ireland, 'He [Wandesford], and not Ireland, is the source of this contentment' ('Alice'). Indeed, Lord Deputy Wandesford's death in late 1640 would lead to life-long financial struggles for his family, struggles that contributed to Alice's reluctant decision to marry and that mark her entire autobiographical corpus with their associated pain and loss.²³ But even the immediate aftermath of Wandesford's death is traumatic, and his loss demarcates a radical shift in Alice's life as she represents it, as well as in Ireland *as she represents it*. No longer a world capably managed by her father, Thornton's Irish existence is prolonged – perhaps unwisely, she suggests – by her mother, who

tarried in Ireland, discharging those Seruants & paieng many debts which should haue bin don by the Excequtors, longer then she could well doe, in regard that her Ioynture beeing in England she wanted supplies.

20 Comber, *Memoirs*, 99.

21 Comber, *Memoirs*, 103.

22 Quoted in Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 109.

23 As Thornton writes quite bluntly in a later manuscript, a marriage was arranged for her against her will and without her knowledge 'for y^e gaining this aduantag for y^e clearing the Estate of the sequestration' (BL Add. MS 88897/2, 39–40). Tragically, Wandesford's only living son and heir drowned within a short time of Alice's marriage and his consequent 'Recovery of his Estates from Sequestration' (Comber, *Memoirs*, 43).

[T]hus she continued till about the October after, when [...] that horrid Rebellion & Massacre of the poore English Protestants began to breake out in the countrey. (35)

Ireland, in the absence of Thornton's father, is no longer peaceful and enriching but tumultuous and menacing, no longer a home but a dangerous place to be escaped. As she continues the tale:

[W]e were forced vpon Alarume to leaue our house & fly into the Castle [...] with all my mothers Familie & what goods she could. [F]rom thence we were forced into the Citie, continuing for 14 daies & nights in great feares, frights, & hideous distractions & disturbances from the Alarums & out cries giuen in Dublin each night by the Rebels; & with these frights, fastings & paines about packing the goods, & wanting sleepe, times of eating, or refreshment wrought so much vpon my young bodie that I fell into a desperate flux called the Irish dissesas, beeing nigh vnto death, while I staid in Dublin. (37)

In point of fact, nearly ten months had passed between her father's death and the Rebellion's official beginning in October. But Thornton is quite emphatic about linking the two, identifying his death as 'the begining of troubles in our Familie, after which follo<w>ed the breaking out <of> the Rebellion of Ireland' (26).

Thus we see that loss of a literal father, as represented in Thornton's narrative, represents a greater loss of English colonial control (which we can think of as the symbolic father) since,

In the vacancy of a wise & prudent Gouvernour after my Fathers death & my Lord of Straffords imprisonment by the Parliament in England, That Nation was vnder the authority of Iustices, [...] 2 old gentlemen [who] haueing liued in Ireland many Peaceable yeares could not be made sencable that the Irish had an ill designe against the English. (35)²⁴

The political and the personal here become intertwined, though of course – for Thornton – it is the personal that matters most. In her wise father's absence, life as she knows it falls apart, and that disintegration is best illustrated by rebellion and chaos, disease and subterfuge, and '2 old gentlemen' who are not up to the task of shepherding their English family through a

24 The gentlemen to whom Thornton refers were Lords Justices Sir William Parsons and Sir John Borlase.

moment of crisis. Without a clear and vital patriarchal head, in other words, English society in Ireland – as well as the fragile and peaceful girlhood it enabled and nourished – was no longer possible. Indeed, one might argue that the departure of another patriarch from Ireland set this disintegration into motion, since it was the King's recall of Wentworth earlier in 1640 that led to Wandesford stepping into the Lord Deputy position and that, more personally, may have contributed to the sudden turn in his health. This is certainly one reason cited by Thornton, who acknowledges the stress that the trial of her father's dear friend created for him.²⁵ Whatever the actual cause of the end of their Irish idyll, though, by 1641 and the beginning of rebellion in Ireland, all three of the girls described in Thornton's picturesque scene were without fathers, and – according to Thornton's account, at least – English Ireland was as well.²⁶

But when the fathers lived, and when the girls' worlds were ordered by those fathers' desires, English society thrived. Daily life under such circumstances included exercise, spiritual training, the presence of instructive maternal figures, *English* companionship, and education – the details of which are relatively unclear despite Thornton's claim, cited above, that it was 'the best education that Kingdome could afford'. As was typical at this time, the spiritual facet of a young child's education was most important, and a key responsibility of the mother or a maternal surrogate. Thus, when Mary's mother was alive, 'the principal role assigned to Lady Cork was to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere within the household'.²⁷ Lady Clayton, as we have seen, also helped make sure that the Boyle girls within her care, including Mary, were 'carefully and piously educated'. Alice's mother apparently took this aspect of her identity quite seriously, for Wandesford writes in *A Book of Instructions* for his son that 'In this Time of your Minority [...] your Devotions to God will be directed by your Mother and others about you' (12). Comber further reports that:

Mrs. *Wandesforde* followed the Example of her Husband's excellent Mother, calling her Children together every Morning before they breakfasted, and making them repeat their private Prayers to her, read or repeat by Memory Psalms and Chapters, [...] and then blest them on their Knees. (32)

25 Wandesford and Wentworth had been friends since boyhood.

26 It is no coincidence that Comber uses distinctly paternal language to describe Christopher Wandesford: '[H]e was truly a Father not only to his Children, but to all his Dependants' and 'The *Irish* at our Ld. Deputy's Interment raised their *peculiar* Lamentations, a signal Honour, paid to him as the *common Parent* of the Kingdom' (*Memoirs* 137, 141).

27 Canny, *Upstart Earl*, 118.

Wentworth's daughters lived in Dublin under the direct guidance of their stepmother, Elizabeth, whom their father had married somewhat hastily – within a year of their mother's death – likely, at least in part, to assure a consistent spiritual caregiver in his children's lives as he prepared to move his household to Ireland.²⁸ She, his three children (at the time), and his brother actually set up house in Dublin several months before he himself arrived. Later, of course, the girls' grandmother took over their upbringing but only – it bears repeating – as their father ordained.

As for non-familial companionship, the girls seem to have had plenty, if primarily aristocratic and 'English'; examples include elite families like those with whom Alice dined and the play- and study-mates with whom she spent her days. For instance, in one of the more light-hearted scenes of her narrative, Thornton describes 'play time' spent 'swing[ing] by the Armes for recreation & being good to exercize the body of Children in growing'. Indeed, this activity, encouraged by Lady Strafford, united the older girls, or 'ladies', with the younger ones, since Thornton writes of how '[T]he ladies [...] would make me, beeing a young girle, doe the same with them, & I did soe & could hold very well by the Armes as they did & [...] found it did me good' (13). Thus, although Alice and Mary must have interacted with Irish people to at least some degree (we know, for example, that an Irish boy named Frank Kelly joined Alice's family for a time and that Lord Deputy Wentworth's household at Dublin Castle numbered close to 300 people), they generally do not figure in the older women's recollections of their youth unless as the reason for and backdrop of their fathers' work.²⁹ And that work, as Thornton states directly, was none other than 'the due ordering of that Barbarous People & theire Ciuilizeng them to our good Lawes & government' (18).

In the background of their fathers' labour, then, the girls lived a quite luxurious life. Wentworth's Dublin Castle was enhanced by 'polished marble columns and orders for Venetian brocades', while the Earl of Cork apparently 'allowed his younger daughters a hundred pounds a year pin-money'.³⁰ Life for these elite English girls seems, in fact, to have been so pleasant that it

28 Wentworth married first Lady Margaret Clifford; second Lady Arabella Holles, mother of Anne and Arabella; and third Elizabeth Rodes.

29 By the nature of his position, Wentworth would have taken into his household 'the sons of many of his friends as pages or gentlemen-in-waiting' as well as supervised 'young Irish noblemen' (Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 204, 205). Such details provide only the barest hint of the number and types of people with whom his daughters would have come into contact while living in Dublin Castle.

30 Wedgwood, *Thomas Wentworth*, 226, 180.

is easy to forget that they faced any hardships at all before their respective departures from Ireland. Yet Mary's sister Margaret *died* while they were both fostering with Lady Clayton. Alice reports nearly 'drowning In Ireland by a fall out of the Coach' in 1636, hurting herself in a fall while swinging, barely avoiding injury from a fire at their house in Dublin, and nearly succumbing to shipwreck on her return voyage to Ireland from Bath in 1639 (11, 12, 13, 15). And the Wentworth girls had to be rescued in the middle of the night from a fire at Dublin Castle that ultimately destroyed the wing in which they were sleeping. Such facts remind us that the narrative lenses through which these recollections are conveyed are informed by nostalgia, hindsight, basic life experiences as adults, and – to varying degrees – 'Anglo-Irish colonial subjectivity'.³¹

Mary Rich's narrative is particularly instructive in regard to the role of hindsight. In her account, she claims first 'dissatisfaction' at having to leave Lady Clayton, but later gratitude to both her father and her God for taking her away from Ireland and 'into England'. This striking shift from displeasure to filial gratitude within mere paragraphs is a consequence of time: time for Rich to marry a man of her own choosing (rather than her father's choice of James Hamilton), time to experience a less than satisfactory marriage with that husband, time to embark on repentant and defensive autobiographical projects, and time to witness history. For Mary Boyle, in other words, Ireland was simply home – the site of girlhood, relative content, and attentive caregivers. But for Mary Rich, Ireland *after* she left it became the site of rebellion as well as of a narrowly avoided personal disaster. Writing of her refusal to marry Hamilton, she notes how hindsight reveals:

[A] good providence of God in not letting me close with it, for within a year after my absolute refusing him, he was, by the rebellion of Ireland, impoverished so that he lost for a great while his whole estate, the rebels being in possession of it; which I should have liked very ill, for if I had married him it must have been for his estate's sake, not his own, his person being highly disagreeable to me. (3)

Much has been written about Rich's various motives and rhetorical goals in her multiple, often quite different, autobiographical accounts. In the case of her autobiography, from which I have been quoting, Rich seems deeply concerned to defend her filial disobedience, which she does through the reliance on providence (seen here) as well as her use of a romance plot that

31 Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World*, 93.

practically demands her disobedience in the name of love.³² Yet, just as the reality was quite different from the autobiographical account – something we know because of the frequent complaints and worries she expressed about her husband and her marriage in her voluminous diaries – so were the real circumstances around her departure from Ireland likely different than how she represents them here. In Rich's autobiography, she reports being called away from Ireland in one sentence and then moving with her family to England and being courted by Hamilton in the next; the grammatical joining of the two incidents implies a causal relationship as well. Perhaps this was the case, but other possibilities also exist, with at least one Earl of Cork biographer, Dorothea Townshend, claiming that Mary left Lady Clayton because the latter was changing her living situation in the wake of her husband's death in 1637 (292).

In the end, however, it is not the reason for Mary's departure from Ireland that matters most here but, instead, the fact that she constructed the Ireland of her youth in a very intentional way that was inevitably informed by her adulthood in England. The latter included relief at not having married into a family that would be devastated by conflict in Ireland, as well as a need to justify and make sense of a life lived entirely – and sometimes controversially – in England. Both of these motives, furthermore, are bound up with her father, a dominant patriarchal figure who loomed large in her own life as well as that of seventeenth-century Ireland.

When Richard Boyle, then, 'removed, with his family, into England' (3), Mary's Irish home shifted into her past.³³ In accordance with the pattern I have delineated, the safe Irish space in which she, an aristocratic English girl, could develop in traditional fashion disappeared with the departure of the father, the colonial authority, and in fact became increasingly dangerous. This moralistic story is both personal and political. After all, even though Rich and Thornton embarked on their autobiographical projects with primarily personal motives, to idealize a father or a father's role in Ireland inevitably meant idealizing the English colonial project that took the father to Ireland in the first place.³⁴ Ironically, to read Thornton's and Rich's texts in this way is also to recognize how quickly 'Ireland' and 'England' lose any sense of

32 See Eckerle, *Romancing the Self*, esp. 148–58.

33 As it turned out, Boyle's move to England was only temporary; Mary's was permanent.

34 Although self-defence looms large in both cases, it dominates Thornton's revised manuscript. Anselment documents that, '[C]ompelled to defend her reputation and that of her family, when Alice expanded the recollections of the Irish years significantly, the revision reflects the defensive tenor. Praise of her honorable father and devotion to a merciful God are an essential part of this vindication' ('Alice Thornton').

clearly demarcated borders in their narratives. When, for example, Thornton fondly recalls ‘the best education that Kingdome could afford’, one must ponder exactly which kingdom she means. Since she writes as a widow in England, ‘this kingdom’ most logically refers to England itself. Yet drawing attention to ‘that Kingdome’ in a narrative moment about life in Ireland would seem to point to Ireland, or possibly to Ireland as it was managed by England, thus raising intriguing questions about just how a young girl might have understood the place in which she found herself. Ireland, for the young Alice, *was* England. Only in adulthood can she see the fragility of this construct and of the idyll it enabled in her youth.

Therefore, through the eyes of Mary’s and Alice’s older selves, we witness elite English girlhood at its finest, regardless of the soil on which it occurs. Because the walls that surrounded this girlhood eventually disintegrated, we are able to see with greater clarity not only just what went on there but also – as most colonial powers eventually learn – that the borders are *not* distinct, nor are the walls impenetrable. For the purposes of this essay, furthermore, we learn something about the fragility of early modern girls’ youth as well. Indeed, only by bringing together the tale of Ireland as a source of pain and unhappiness with the happier story of the Ireland that offers a peaceful, traditional aristocratic girlhood – presided over by the family patriarch, complemented by English companions or family members, and isolated from the Irish beyond the household’s walls – can we begin to understand the complex emotional and geographical landscapes within which such girlhoods were experienced and the kind of self-sustaining fictions that undergirded it. If the differentiation between ‘girlhood’ and ‘youth’ is not as clear here as we might like, it may well be because the ideal circumstances in which such a transition *should* have occurred broke down or unravelled, providing glimpses of the horror outside the familial walls that would haunt Alice and Mary long after their youths had faded.

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8. Young Women Negotiating Fashion in Early Modern Florence

Megan Moran

Abstract

This essay examines how young women negotiated their position in family life through participation in the larger world of Florentine clothing and fashion. Although young women were far from independent agents, they could take active roles in assembling a dowry and trousseau and later, as wives and new mothers, in arranging clothing for themselves and other family members. Two case studies of correspondence from the mid to late sixteenth century of Florentine women in the Spinelli and Ricasoli families suggest that daughters and young wives engaged with fashion and the consumption of apparel, before and after marriage, for their households.

Keywords: youth, gender, clothing, fashion, Florence

For sixteenth-century patrician Florentines, clothing was a potent marker of status and identity. Acquiring and wearing fine clothing and accessories in conjunction with marriage made young women unusually visible. An extended period beginning with plans to make a match for a girl, and often not ending until she was the mother of babies, marked a special time in a Florentine woman's life. Although, like most family members, young women were far from independent agents, they could have active roles in assembling a dowry and trousseau and later, as wives and new mothers, in arranging clothing for their households. Their success in these tasks reflected well on their families. Women's letters from two sixteenth-century families allow us to glimpse young women at this work. Patrician women learned how to navigate the clothing trade and pursue fashion as a special function, and pleasure, of female youth. Family correspondence shows that young

women were intricately engaged in negotiating both inside the family and in a larger circle of domestic suppliers.

For affluent Florentines, marriage was central to family strategies, and clothing women was a centrepiece of making good marriages. Every bride needed a dowry that consisted of a large sum of cash and/or land and an expensive trousseau that included clothing, jewellery, sheets, handkerchiefs, and shoes as well as assorted personal items such as books or devotional objects. The wedding dress was the focal point of the bride's wardrobe as 'their display-conscious families lavished money on multiple bridal outfits to enable their daughters to display the honor of their lineage on their backs'.¹ Handsome and fashionable goods enhanced the family honour, but there was always a tradeoff in high costs. Money often did not stretch. Furthermore, laying out too much could earn a family the reputation of being spendthrift and blemish its *fama*, or public renown. Sumptuary legislation sought to constrain patrician families' purchases of expensive clothing and jewellery. These laws tried to slow dowry expenditure as well as encourage humility and moral behaviour for women whose lavish clothes could, according to moralists and theologians, lead them and the men around them into temptation. Nevertheless, enforcing these laws proved difficult in Florence.²

In this essay, two case studies of young Florentine women from the mid to the late sixteenth century – Lisabetta Spinelli and Cassandra Ricasoli – show unmarried daughters and young wives in lively correspondence about clothing and accessories with a wide variety of male and female relatives, before and after marriage. As women prepared for marriage and became wives, youth functioned as a transitory stage between childhood and full adult maturity.³ Most Florentine brides were between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and so, in the early years of marriage, wives and mothers were still quite young.⁴ For patrician families, the combination of marriage as a means to preserve a legitimate patriline and as a tool for social, economic, and political advancement ensured that male interests dominated the process. Patrician families had to raise large dowries for their daughters

1 Frick, *Dressing*, 107. More broadly, on Florentine marriage strategies and dowries, see Molho, *Marriage Alliance*.

2 Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy*, 133.

3 Taddei, 'Puerizia, Adolescenza', 15, 22 lists a variety of overlapping terms for both male and female children and youth; *infante*, *putto*, and *bambino* generally applied to babies, while *fanciullo*, *adolescente*, *giovane*, *garzone*, and *ragazzo* referred to either children or adolescents. Once women married, the terms signalled that status more than age.

4 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families*, 202–31.

in order to attract powerful alliances. Therefore, scholarship has debated whether young girls had any voice at all in arranging their futures. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has described fifteenth-century wives as mere 'passing guests' in their husband's families.⁵ Yet family letters from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy suggest more active and flexible roles for women in kin relations. Both Lisabetta and Cassandra especially valued links with their mothers, sisters, and aunts. Recent studies reflect similar dynamics for women in early modern Rome.⁶

During their youth, women – single and married – recognized that clothing and accessories helped define their role, status, and reputation in Florentine society. The clothing chosen by and for young women carried multiple meanings. The cut, colour, and fabric signalled its economic value. Adherence to current fashions and accessories reflected the social standing of the woman and her family. Wearing the right clothes to a banquet, dinner party, wedding, or other public event placed the woman's body on display. Children mostly wore smaller versions of their parents' clothes, often with an apron overtop to protect the garments.⁷ These aprons constituted everyday wear in the household, but they could be refashioned for public display through embroidery and ornamentation. Lining the border of cloth for sleeves, shirts, dresses, or aprons with fringe, lace, and ribbons as well as gold and silver threads was common practice.⁸ These embellishments allowed for some choice and fashionable expression by preteen and teenage girls, who sometimes practised their own needlework skills by decorating clothing.

Because of its large public impact and commensurate costs, the preparation of wedding finery involved many family members, including women. Historian Carole Collier Frick highlights a gendered division of labour where:

[T]he men of the family busied themselves with the highly adorned externals of marriage display provided by the dowry money and the appraised trousseau, while its female members oversaw the craftswomen who made the more intimate, personal items of the unappraised trousseau, which would rarely have been seen outside the private realm, being nearly invisible under the bride's clothes.⁹

5 Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 118.

6 Baernstein, 'Regional Inter-marriage', 201-19; Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 3-6.

7 Frick, *Dressing*, 164.

8 Currie, 'Fashion Networks', 484.

9 Frick, *Dressing*, 137.

The Spinelli and Ricasoli letters, however, suggest an even broader role for female relatives who also negotiated for external apparel, jewellery, and accessories that were very much supposed to be seen. Women, including young ones, not only worked with second-hand goods dealers who recycled used clothing, but also contacted the family tailors to order brand new items.¹⁰ Wives and mothers had access to finances necessary for the consumption of household goods and textiles.¹¹ Family heads still held the purse strings, but correspondence suggests that men often relied on women, even young ones, to manage the selection and purchase of clothing and household goods. Networks of female kin facilitated introductions and offered training for girls to learn how to operate in the clothing market as they moved from trainee to expert. Women's engagement in acquiring clothing and other accessories took on a variety of forms: asking the head of the household for items or money; backing the requests of other women, often with older women advocating for garments and accessories for their younger female kin; acquiring cloth and materials; negotiating with tailors and craftswomen; and, finally, wearing of clothes in public view.

In Renaissance Florence clothing and textile goods for the household were mostly custom made by a variety of workers, both male and female.¹² For affluent families, routine goods such as undergarments and bedding might be made at home by domestic servants, spinners (*filatrici*), or other needleworkers employed from time to time.¹³ For finer goods, including clothing made of expensive materials, production was commissioned in stages from more specialized hands, such as tailors or nuns. Wealthy households usually employed one or more tailors regularly over a period of years. By the mid-sixteenth century clients also engaged tailors to choose cloth and collect materials for the garments they ordered.¹⁴ Nuns usually served as suppliers of basic linens for elite households, but they also produced luxury goods featuring embroidery with metallic thread and silk or other ornamentation.¹⁵ Fancy trimmings might be made by professionals, nuns, or by daughters of the family trained to display their skills for the marriage market. Since good cloth was relatively expensive and made to last, there was also a major secondary market in recycling and refurbishing items of

10 Currie, 'Diversity and Design', 156; Matchette, 'Credit and Credibility', 225.

11 Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 225.

12 Frick, *Dressing*, 32–56.

13 Frick, *Dressing*, 40–42.

14 Currie, 'Diversity and Design', 156–57.

15 Strocchia, *Nuns and Nunneries*, 116–19; Ray, 'Letters and Lace', 53.

apparel or repurposing their materials.¹⁶ Both women and men worked as used-goods dealers who operated either officially through the guilds or unofficially at the door and in the streets.¹⁷ Though guilds tried to restrict the flourishing unofficial trade,¹⁸ these female peddlers and dealers were integral to the consuming practices of elite women.¹⁹

Personal letters show women's varied engagement with fashion and the consumption of apparel. By the sixteenth century, most patrician women could read and write.²⁰ Letters were typical forms of expression for Italian patrician women, and family archives are filled with their correspondence.²¹ In the Spinelli family, Lisabetta could and sometimes did write her own, although only one letter survives, addressed to her father, Benedetto, in the year after her marriage in 1540. Prior to her marriage, Lisabetta's voice comes to us through the letters of her mother. Mattea Mellini Spinelli's 22 autograph letters to her husband Benedetto in the 1530s conveyed messages from their daughter about clothing, and particularly jewellery for her trousseau. For Cassandra Ricasoli, 27 letters, written in her own hand, range from her teenage years in the 1580s to her mid-twenties by the 1590s. Before marriage, these letters were addressed to several family members: her younger half-sister, Lucretia; her father, Braccio Ricasoli; and her widowed aunt, Maddalena. After marriage, most of Cassandra's letters addressed her aunt.

As in other affluent families, the Spinelli women paid close attention to clothing in their letters. The year after her first husband, Giuliano Guidetti, died in 1521, Mattea Mellini married the silk merchant and banker Benedetto Spinelli. By 1534 she was a mature wife, approximately 28 or 29 years old. Benedetto oversaw the family accounts, but Mattea had areas of initiative in managing the family's interests. In the 1530s her letters regularly discussed the selection and purchase of clothing for her three children: Lisabetta, Tommaso, and Giovanni Battista. In particular, she and other female kin functioned as powerful allies in acquiring apparel and accessories toward the trousseau of her daughter.

Mattea's letters show the young Lisabetta's own participation in the project of her marriage. In 1534, Mattea wrote frequently to Benedetto, who was absent from Florence while serving the new Medici regime as

16 Currie, 'Diversity and Design', 157.

17 Matchette, 'Women, Objects, and Exchange', 246–47.

18 Frick, *Dressing*, 38.

19 Matchette, 'Women, Objects, and Exchange', 247.

20 D'Amelia, 'Lo scambio epistolare', 80.

21 Baernstein, 'In My Own Hand', 140.

Podestà in the town of San Gimignano. No fewer than 22 letters concerned items for the trousseau of their twelve-year old daughter, Lisabetta. In this correspondence, Mattea strikingly chose to represent requests as coming from the young girl, although the older women doubtless supported or even initiated this campaign. Lisabetta's first recorded attention to clothes and accessories appears in requests to her father, forwarded by Mattea, for several lengths (*braccia*) of cloth, a hair net, and, most notably, a chain (*catena*).²² This last item, probably of gold, could have been used as a necklace or as decoration on the bodice of a dress. The wish for a chain figured in every letter. Highlighting the emotional bond between father and daughter, Mattea suggested several times that Benedetto had forgotten his daughter by disregarding her requests: 'Lisabetta reminds you [about] the chain and she says that she is starting to lose her faith in you'.²³ A subsequent missive more openly berated him:

Lisabetta sends her greetings to you. I am asking that you remember that promise you made to her [and] that you respond to her because she thinks you have forgotten her since you are so far from her eyes she thinks you are also [far] from her heart.²⁴

Gifts of clothing and accessories signalled affection in Florentine families, where these items held great economic and social value.²⁵ Mattea encouraged Benedetto to demonstrate his affection for his daughter through this gift of a chain.

The push to include the chain seems to have been a strategy of the Spinelli women to add lustre and value to Lisabetta's trousseau in Florence's competitive marriage market. Mattea notes:

It appears to Lisabetta that you have forgotten her chain and she doubts her faith [in you]. She begs you to start a collection of household goods

22 Benedetto Spinelli recorded the birth and baptism of Lisabetta, in December 1522; she would have been twelve years old in 1534. Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter, ASF), Pezzo 71, Debitori e Creditori e Ricordi di Benedetto di Guasparre Spinelli della 1519 al 1542, 86v–87r.

23 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter, BRML), Spinelli Family Papers I (hereafter, SFP I), Box # 129, Folder # 2685. 'La Lisabetta vi richorda la chatena e dice che voi cominciate a manchare di fede'.

24 BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2685. 'La Lisabetta si rachomanda a Vostro Signore preghando quella si degni di richordassi di lei della promessa e che voi gli rispondiate che pensa voi l'abiate dimentichato di lungi da occhi pensa anche da cuore'.

25 O'Malley, 'Pair of Little Gilded Shoes', 76.

[*masseritia*] for her trousseau. She suffers very much as she needs a new pair of slippers. She says that in order to complete this collection she will need the chain.²⁶

Another letter reiterated: 'Lisabetta would like for you to make this collection of household goods and she reminds you about the chain for her. Then she is done and she will not ask you for anything else'.²⁷ By invoking his daughter's name, Mattea may have thought Benedetto would be inclined to respond favourably. A female relative on her father's side, cousin Gostanza Soderini, also reminded Benedetto: 'Lisabetta asks that you remember her collection of household goods for which she wants the chain'.²⁸ Lisabetta's own motives are difficult to discern as her mother wrote in her name and there are no extant letters from her at this age. Possibly Lisabetta or her mother knew other young girls in their social circle who were sporting gold chains as part of a current Florentine fashion. According to Susan Stuard, fashion 'flourished where inspiration took hold: glimpsing some feature of dress that could be echoed, imitated, mocked, parodied, or surpassed by others fed the trend'.²⁹

Ultimately, Lisabetta and her mother Mattea did not succeed in their pursuit of this fashionable and flashy addition to the trousseau. A dowry inventory in 1539 listed no chain. The record included basic items such as 70 lengths of linen for thin shirts, handkerchiefs, socks, two pairs of shoes and two pairs of slippers, several pairs of sleeves, three new dresses, and assorted other goods. There were also some more fashionable items: one grey damask dress, two hats made of crimson silk, two hats made of crimson leather, one pair of *collettini* (a form of collar with a thin silk covering on either side of the dress to veil a low neckline)³⁰ lined with silver, and two silver rings.³¹ Though certainly not as extravagant as some elite Florentine girls' dowries, Lisabetta's did include some items reflecting the fashionable

26 BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2686. 'La Lisabetta gli pare voi metterete la chatena nel dimentichato dubita della fede preghavi faciate masseritia che patisce di un paio di pianelle per fare masseritia e desiderà questa chatena'.

27 BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2684. 'La Lisabetta vorrebbe che voi facessi masseritia che vi ricorda una chatena per lei a poi fa fine e non vi chiederà poi altro'.

28 In the 1530s when Gostanza Soderini's male relatives were banished for opposition to the Medici regime, Gostanza visited Benedetto Spinelli, her cousin once removed, and his wife Mattea. BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2672. 'La Lisabetta vi priegha che voi facciate masseritia che vuole quella chatena'.

29 Stuard, *Gilding the Market*, 10.

30 Landini and Niccoli, *Moda a Firenze*, 250.

31 BRML, SFP I, Box # 14a, Folder # 276. Scritta della donora di Lisabetta Spinelli.

trends of her day. Benedetto may have deemed the chain unnecessarily expensive, inappropriate, or both. With an eye on the family finances, his resistance likely reflected a concern with the price of the item and the cost of the whole marriage offer.³² The timing of dowry payments also mattered, as it was not unusual for dowries to be paid out over time. The father may have preferred to pay in instalments. His disregard of the request for the chain could also have demonstrated a concern about sumptuary laws. In 1472, Florentine sumptuary rules clarified new prohibitions against the wearing of buttons or chains as ornamentation on the neckline of gowns or as jewellery.³³ Thus, the trousseau list suggests perhaps some level of compromise between Benedetto and the women of the family.

As a wife, Lisabetta may have had somewhat more power to speak for herself. In 1540, the newly married seventeen-year-old wrote to her father in Florence from her husband's home in Ancona.³⁴ As a young bride in a new city, Lisabetta turned to clothing and fashion as a way to express her identity. In her letter, she called on her father to 'fulfil his promise' to supply her with high-quality Florentine cloth:

I would like you to send two lengths of grey silk as well as one white and one red. Also, two pairs of white shoes and two pieces of uncut cloth for the soles per pair as well as a little more of the grey silk.³⁵

At the end she wrote, '[p]lease tell me how much you spend and I will send a response'.³⁶ Lisabetta invoked familial obligation to access her father's connections to the cloth trade in order to secure good-quality materials from Florence. With her detailed order, she designated the cut and colour of the cloth for her clothing and shoes. The term she used for the grey silk (*feltro*) marked a turn from the more negative terms used for darker cloth in the fifteenth century to the 'new evocative and fashionable names' given in the

32 After experiencing financial difficulties in the mid-sixteenth century, Benedetto dismantled the Spinelli bank, but recovered and served in posts for the Medici government. Jacks and Caferro, *The Spinelli of Florence*, 3.

33 Frick, *Dressing*, 190.

34 Benedetto Spinelli recorded Lisabetta's marriage to Luca di Piero Filippo Salucci in 1539, when she would have been seventeen years old. ASF, Pezzo 71, Debitori e Creditori e Ricordi di Benedetto di Gasparre Spinelli della 1519 al 1542, 87v–87r.

35 BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2683. '[V]orrei mi mandassi 2 braccia di feltro 1 bianco e 1 rosso e cosi 2 paia di scarpette bianche per me a 2 suola intagliate 1 paio i poco minore de l'altro e vi ringratio per mille volte'.

36 BRML, SFP I, Box # 129, Folder # 2683.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁷ With the promise to reimburse her father, she suggested her access to financial resources in her new household.

Several decades later, the letters of Cassandra Ricasoli show how, both before and after marriage, young women acquired clothing and household goods not only for themselves but also for others. Cassandra's father, Braccio Ricasoli, came from a distinguished noble family with estates in Chianti. In 1588–1589, when Cassandra was about seventeen years old, he left for a posting as the Commissario of Pistoia, a town about 26 miles from Florence, where he represented the interests of the Medici Grand Duke.³⁸ Much of his family accompanied him, including Cassandra's stepmother, Cassandra Rucellai Ricasoli, her widowed aunt, Maddalena Ricasoli, and several younger half-siblings: Lucretia, Cammilla, Cosimo, Bindaccio, and Virginia. Aunt Maddalena had already served Cassandra as a substitute mother figure to whom she often turned for advice and support.³⁹ This time, however, the teenaged Cassandra stayed behind in Florence.

Cassandra Ricasoli assisted her family, among other things, in choosing, acquiring, and paying for clothing for her father and half-siblings while they were away. At seventeen, Cassandra was on the verge of marriage and already trained in domestic duties as a future wife and mother. The adults in her life – father, stepmother, and aunt – trusted her to act as an intermediary in their absence. High-quality cloth from Florentine tailors would be especially important in this prominent setting, as the Ricasoli family represented Medici interests in Pistoia.⁴⁰ In a letter to her father, Braccio, in December 1588 Cassandra informed him: 'I will send the books you asked about this week with the three [lengths] of taffeta that Messer Ruberto sent for you here'.⁴¹ Her father's money paid for the purchase, but the daughter managed the monetary exchange and delivery of the cloth from Florence to Pistoia. Cassandra also contributed to the making of

37 Frick, *Dressing*, 177.

38 Cassandra's exact birth date was not recorded. Letters from the girl's grandmother, Cassandra Gualterotti, to her daughter Costanza, Braccio's first wife, mention little 'Cassandrina' in 1571 (although she may have been born slightly earlier). Thus, she would be seventeen years old in 1588.

39 When her aunt Maddalena moved back into the family house after her husband's death in 1578, Cassandra was seven years old. She was nine years old when her mother, Costanza, died in 1580.

40 New legislation under Cosimo I, in 1562 and 1568, permitted those in administrative positions and their families to dress more extravagantly. Currie, 'Diversity and Design', 155.

41 ASF, Ricasoli Parte Antica (hereafter, RPA), Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 18. 'La madre di Mona Cassandra che mandato a vedere come stavi costa su e tornata di villa martedì e stave bene e libri avete mandato ach(i)edere ve lo manderò di questa settimana con tre di taffeta ch' messer Ruberto mandato'.

garments for her father. In January 1588 she explained: 'I finished the fringe. It is very difficult now to send it to you and I do not know if I will be able to or if the tailor who comes tomorrow will be the bearer of this [cloth]'.⁴² Thus, Cassandra had direct contact with the tailor as she coordinated the delivery to Pistoia. On the same day, she confirmed in a letter to her aunt Maddalena: 'I have finished the fringe. I do not know if I will send it myself or by the tailor'.⁴³ Her own needlework for the garment likely served as a gift for her father and a display of her own talents. The design process was collaborative as her father chose the material, the tailor cut the cloth, and Cassandra added the embellishments to complete the outfit.⁴⁴

Girls learned very young that their clothing could carry social and political significance. Cassandra's clothing choices may have influenced her own visibility and marriage prospects. She also arranged apparel for her much younger half-sisters – Lucretia (age six) and Cammilla (age four) – while they were in Pistoia.⁴⁵ A letter from the teenaged Cassandra to the child Lucretia described one such gift: 'I made two aprons, which I will send to you. I am afraid that they are too short because I have been told that you are taller'.⁴⁶ Her letter also thanked Lucretia for the gift of decorated aprons to wear for the wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinand de' Medici to Christine of Lorraine in 1589: 'I will send them [the aprons that Cassandra made] to you and a box in exchange for those which you sent me for the wedding of the Grand Duke'.⁴⁷ Another letter, dated June 1588, offered to find Florentine cloth for a new dress for the other little girl, Cammilla. Cassandra found a tailor for the work in Florence, but suggested to Lucretia that 'if Cammilla would like her cloth made up, then she should write a letter to the tailor

42 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 20. 'Io o finite le frange e ora o mille difficoltà a mandale non so le poterà il sarto ch' ve ne costasu domatino che sarà la portatore di questa'.

43 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 19. 'Io o finite le frange non so se me le manderò per sarto'.

44 Currie notes the collaborative nature of the clothing market, but rarely documents the involvement specifically of a young daughter. Currie, 'Fashion Networks', 493.

45 Braccio married his second wife, Cassandra Rucellai Ricasoli, in 1581. Their first child, Lucretia, was born in either late 1582 or early 1583, which would have made her five or six years old in 1588. Lucretia married Giovanni di Giannozzo Manetti in 1598, when she was fifteen or sixteen years old. Cammilla was approximately two years younger than Lucretia, which would make her about four years old in 1588. She died several months later, in September 1588. Passerini, *Genealogia e storia della famiglia Ricasoli*, 412.

46 ASF, RPA, Filza 49, Fascio I, Fascetto VI, lettere n. 13. 'Ho fato dua grenbiuli tegli ma(n)derò non se setistano bene o paura che non ti se corti che me deto che tu sei grande'.

47 ASF, RPA, Filza 49, Fascio I, Fascetto VI, lettere n. 13. 'Mi pare mille ch' io non o veduto io ti ma(n)derò un paio e una scatola per cambio di quelle che tue mi ma(n)dasti [...] del noze de grande duca'.

because I am not able to do this' without the accurate measurements.⁴⁸ Here, given Cammilla's very young age, Cassandra almost certainly meant that her stepmother should contact the tailor concerning the dress. Notably, however, both girls, Lucretia and Cammilla, were addressed by their older sister as already being participants in a female culture of correspondence about clothing.

After Cassandra married, her letters to her aunt Maddalena reflect a sustained interest in fashion, as she ordered and purchased clothes for her new household. When her father, Braccio, died in Pistoia in 1589, Cassandra's marriage prospects faltered, due most likely to complications concerning her dowry. Three years later, however, in 1591 she married the Florentine Piero Tornabuoni.⁴⁹ At 20 years old, Cassandra was still young, if slightly older than the more usual teenaged brides. Her letters display the experience she gained in her youth. She bought many of the daily garments necessary for her children, such as a 'cap and handkerchiefs' for her baby, Lionardo.⁵⁰ She continued to embellish garments to match trends in style. In a letter dated October 1597 she discussed the purchase of *sengaletti* (laces for the bodice of gowns) as well as ribbons and silver lining for her children's clothes. She reported: 'I made the ribbons and silver for the children as the tailor has not provided these'.⁵¹ Her interest in fashion appeared, too, in the purchase of clothes for her husband. She wrote to her aunt: '[i]t would be better if they [the pieces of cloth] are blue and white as I know that you remember it is for Messer Piero. I will buy it and you do not have to spend [the money]'.⁵² She later reflected, 'I think it will be better if it is made of taffeta'.⁵³

Cassandra also continued to supply her aunt and young half-sisters, now living at the Ricasoli villa of Cacchiano in the Tuscan countryside, with superior Florentine cloth and tailoring. In 1595 she explained to her aunt

48 ASF, RPA, Filza 49, Fascio I, Fascetto VI, lettere n. 14. 'Racomandomi a Bindaccio e Cosimo e di Camilla ch' se la v(u)ole ch' le sua tela si fac(ci)a scriva vostra lettera al tesitore che io non posso conduci nessuno'.

49 Her young half-brother, Cosimo Ricasoli, and older uncle, Lorenzo Ricasoli, brokered the match with Piero Tornabuoni. Her dowry of 920 florins from her father's will was paid out in instalments in 1591–1592. ASF, RPA, Filza 40, Fascio II, Fascetto VI, lettere n. 1.

50 ASF, RPA, Filza 40, Fascio II, Fascetto VI, n. 1. '[L]a cuffia e fazoletto'.

51 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio I, Fascetto IV, lettere n. 61. '[O] fato del stringe e argenti per fanciulle se sarto non asetati'.

52 ASF, RPA, Filza 40, Fascio II, Fascetto IV, lettere n. 34. '[S]i fare meglio che sia possibile se si potrà fare che io o che sono azuri e bianchi so che voi aveva memoria di Messer Piero comperò e non avete a spendere e si potrà e più presto'.

53 ASF, RPA, Filza 40, Fascio II, Fascetto IV, lettere n. 34. '[I]o credo che sarebbe meglio farà di taffeta'.

Maddalena how 'the sleeves have been made according to your style and the cloth is for the young girls'.⁵⁴ She praised the tailor's abilities and noted that the cloth came from Ottavio Carducci and 'cost 2 *lire* and 30 *soldi* per length'.⁵⁵ The purchase from the Carducci shops, owned by Cassandra's maternal aunt and uncle, reflected a common practice among elite families who strengthened social ties through business associations.⁵⁶ When in 1594 her half-sister Virginia, then probably six or seven years old, needed new clothes, Cassandra dealt directly with the tailor.⁵⁷ She explained to Maddalena:

I will see the tailor and hear what he says, if meanwhile you decide anything about the dress. As for the *zimarra* [a long overgown]⁵⁸ for Virginia: about Laura, I will ask the tailor what is best. I have been told that Madonna Cassandra [her stepmother] has arranged that one be made by Laura the spinner.⁵⁹

In loose, convoluted grammar, the youthful Cassandra contributed to a multi-sided conversation involving her aunt and her stepmother about clothing, and about the young Virginia's in particular. She planned to consult with the tailor about the order, to seek his advice on whether to use Laura for the work, and presumably to relay that advice at least to Maddalena.

Cassandra regularly did business with many of the same tailors, spinners, and used-goods dealers as did her aunt Maddalena.⁶⁰ For example, their correspondence discusses a second-hand dealer named Grezia. In a letter Cassandra reported, 'yesterday Grezia bought me a *staia* [weight] of cloth for bed sheets. I wanted to have the cloth for them from Florence rather

54 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 41. '[O] care che le maniche sieno state a vostro modo e panni per fanciulle'.

55 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 41. '[N]on sono ancora tanti che il sarto non a potuto si farono quegli d'Ottavio Carducci [...] e costa di 2 lire e trenta soldi il braccia'. *Lire* and *soldi* were units of currency.

56 Currie, 'Fashion Networks', 487.

57 Virginia married Andrea di Galeotto Compagni in 1609. She was born before 1589, likely in 1587 or 1588, and so was approximately five to seven years old at the time of the letter in 1594.

58 Frick, *Dressing*, 319. The *zimarra* became a common fashion at the Medici court in the mid- to late sixteenth century: Cox-Rearick, 'Power-Dressing', 57–58.

59 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 40: '[I]o vedrò di veduto il sarto e quello che dice, in tanto se vi risolvete a nulla [...] per conto della vesta, in quanto al *zimarra* per la Virginia, e per Laura ne dimanderò il sarto questo che sarà meglio; me stato detto che Madonna Cassandra a ordito in fare una per la Laura di filatrice'.

60 Currie, 'Diversity and Design', 156.

than those brought from outside [the city].⁶¹ Cassandra also tapped into Maddalena's longstanding connections with the nuns at Santa Appolonia.⁶² In 1595, Suora Agnesa Davanzati wrote to Maddalena about a discrepancy in the price set for Cassandra's order of cloth:

I have had some cloth for bed sheets [ordered] by Cassandra, your niece, and for these she says she wants them made for 4 *lire* and 16 *soldi*. To us this appears to be too much as you have paid 4 *lire* and 12 *soldi* for your cloth. [...] I care about you and want to do this as a service for you. I also have two beautiful pieces of cloth for shirts at the price that you said.⁶³

Cassandra gratefully noted the discounted price of 4 *lire* and 12 *soldi* in her own letter to Maddalena.⁶⁴ Ten years after her marriage, Cassandra's letters in 1603 reflect how she ever more confidently bargained for better prices and shopped around for good deals on cloth. Then, a letter to her aunt complained about the practices of 'these merchants who charge 7 *lire* for a *stai*a of wool'.⁶⁵ Her role as a consumer expanded along with her maturity as a wife and mother. However, her activities did not differ in substance from those she learned in her youth.

The letters of Lisabetta Spinelli and Cassandra Ricasoli demonstrate how the youthful appetite to look good and dress fashionably offered patrician girls a place to negotiate in family life. As young women in their late teens, both before and after marriage, they selected, ordered, and purchased clothing, accessories, and household goods. These consuming activities taught girls about finances and brought them outside the domestic interior and into direct contact with local producers and purveyors, both male tailors and female spinners and sellers of used goods. Female kinship networks aided young girls. Lisabetta's mother, Mattea, advocated for her daughter

61 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 45. '[I]eri per la Grezia me stato che staido de panno de lenzuola io o voglia di meteri in Firenze una tela di quelle che sono di f(u)ora'.

62 Maddalena's sister, Maria Ricasoli, entered the convent at Santa Appolonia. Maddalena's account book reflects her numerous business dealings with the nuns. ASF, RPA, Libri di amministrazione, Pezzo 270, Giornale e Ricordi di Maddalena Ricasoli, 1553–1564.

63 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio I, Fascetto IV, lettere n. 41. '[Q]uesta avrà saraper dirvi come o avuto una tela da lenzuola dalla Cassandra vostra nipote et cosi dice ne volete quattro lire e sedici soldi della tela che a noi pare troppo cara e sulla date a quattro lire e dodici soldi la tela [...] avevo charo delle vostre e fare questo servitio a voi e 2 tele bellissime da chamicie questo prezo che dite voi'.

64 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 45.

65 ASF, RPA, Filza 41, Fascio III, Fascetto V, lettere n. 56. '[Q]uesti mercanti che lana 7 lire da staido'.

and, in doing so, she tellingly invoked Lisabetta's happiness to persuade her husband. Cassandra's widowed aunt, Maddalena, provided support and contacts for her niece, and the niece in turn helped her aunt. Cassandra also took on a similar role for her younger half-sisters.

However, there were limits and no assurance of success. Though older female relatives sought to aid the young women, neither mother Mattea nor aunt Maddalena acted autonomously without consultation from the male head of the household. An adamant patriarch or changing family circumstances – a downturn in business, the death of a parent – constrained women's and girls' negotiating power. Nevertheless, attention to youth as a female life stage that spanned the marriage process complicates the standard picture of Italian households. Scholarly studies have predominantly focused on what young women could *not* do, either from family strategies that privileged male bloodlines and patriarchal power or, with reference to clothing, from the restrictions of sumptuary legislation. Though decisions were never independent of family interests, the letters of Lisabetta Spinelli and Cassandra Ricasoli show instead what clothes and accessories girls wanted, bought, or tried to buy for themselves and others. Both these young women negotiated their positions in family life by participating in the larger Florentine world that shaped identities through clothing and fashion.

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9. 'Is it possible that my sister [...] has had a baby?'

The Early Years of Marriage as a Transition from Girlhood to Womanhood in the Letters of Three Generations of Orange-Nassau Women

Jane Couchman

Abstract

Though marriage and motherhood were acknowledged as markers of the transition from childhood to adulthood for early modern women, many did not experience these events as definitive. Sisters Elisabeth and Charlotte-Brabantine of Orange-Nassau, and Elisabeth's daughter, Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne, carried girlhood inexperience and uncertainties into their new lives as wives and mothers. Their own letters, and letters written to or about them, offer evidence for, and were an important part of, their passage from youthful, somewhat self-centred uncertainty to confident, outward-looking maturity and involvement in broader political and religious matters.

Keywords: childbirth; Huguenot; letters; marriage; Orange-Nassau; sisters; youth

'Is it possible that my sister [...] has had a baby?'" This was the reaction of Charlotte-Brabantine of Orange-Nassau (aged sixteen) when she heard that her sister Elisabeth (aged nineteen) had given birth to her first child. Elisabeth had married Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duke of Bouillon, in

¹ Elisabeth to Charlotte-Brabantine, 5 February 1597: 'Mais est il possible que ma seur Isabelle ait un enfant?' (Isabelle was a nickname for Elisabeth.) Elisabeth of Orange-Nassau, *Correspondence d'Elisabeth de Nassau 1595-1609*, 15. Subsequently E to CB, Edenassau02; Broomhall, 'Lettres de Louise-Julienne', 161. All translations from the French sources are mine.

February 1595 in his sovereign principality of Sedan. Charlotte-Brabantine and their stepmother Louise de Coligny, who had accompanied Elisabeth to Sedan, were back at home in The Hague. Charlotte-Brabantine's apparently spontaneous exclamation comes to us indirectly, passed on to Elisabeth by her husband, who had been in The Hague in October 1596, when their first child was born. Elisabeth quoted the phrase jokingly back to her sister in a letter, adding that she had indeed had a baby, and that it was already almost as big as she was (Elisabeth was notoriously short in stature).

Charlotte-Brabantine was not questioning the fact that her sister had given birth. Elisabeth had written to her so frequently that she had been able to follow the stages of her sister's pregnancy closely. Rather, Charlotte-Brabantine was expressing amazement that her sister, who was only three years older than she and with whom she had shared a home for fifteen years, had now become a mother. But the birth of little Louise did not mark a definitive change in Elisabeth or in her relationship with her sister, any more than her marriage had. Elisabeth had passed through the official life-stage changes marked by her marriage, her move to her husband's home, and the birth of her first child. However, ongoing through and beyond these official stages was her developing but incomplete sense of herself, and others' sense of her, as a (mostly) self-confident adult woman. In the letters exchanged by three generations of Orange-Nassau women, we can observe the transition from girlhood to womanhood in the early years of marriage for Elisabeth (1577–1642), for her sister Charlotte-Brabantine of Orange Nassau (1580–1631), and for Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne (1601–1665), who was Elisabeth's daughter and became Charlotte-Brabantine's daughter-in-law.

Elisabeth was not unique. Though marriage and motherhood were acknowledged as official markers of the transition from childhood to adulthood for early modern women, many did not experience these events as definitive.² Elisabeth, Charlotte-Brabantine, and Marie all carried girlhood inexperience and uncertainties into their new lives as wives and mothers. Only gradually did they (and others) feel that they were mature; only gradually did they begin to act with confidence within their marriages and in the broader political and religious context. Their own letters, and letters written to or about them, are both evidence and an important part of their passage from youthful, somewhat self-centred uncertainty to

2 For example, Stanley Chojnacki observed for Venetian women that '[f]or many women [...] the brusque interruption of adolescence by the uncertainties of youthful marriage could lead through the twists and turns of individual experience to a confident, influential, self-defining widowhood'. Chojnacki, 'Measuring Adulthood', 387.

confident, outward-looking maturity after their marriages and the births of their first children.

'The ages of women', as they are represented in the early modern period in words or in images, were usually limited to three and defined either in biological (virgin/mother/crone) or societal (daughter/wife/widow) terms.³ Even when additional 'stages' were included, the focus remained on the woman's body and on her relationships with men, rather than on the development of intellectual, emotional, and moral competencies.⁴ This external, gendered analysis of women's lives is clearly a simplification that needs to be revised. Barbara Hanawalt has commented that one of the challenges in understanding and defining life stages for women in this period is that '[w]omen's experiences are centered in private space where female culture is preserved by word of mouth rather than by public recording either in official documents or by literate recorders.'⁵ This is not entirely true – many of the transitions experienced by women do involve public, recorded events. But the letters exchanged by these Orange-Nassau women offer important access to the 'private space' Hanawalt identifies, and to the women's own experiences of these transitions.

The process of writing and receiving letters was itself a means through which women could develop a sense of their strengths. Dena Goodman's conclusion about one of her eighteenth-century subjects applies equally well to the Orange-Nassau women. Goodman writes that 'the intersubjective space of the correspondence was her construction site, a safe place where a self oriented towards others could be constructed', and that letters 'show us a young woman gaining a sense of self and self-confidence through the practice of writing'.⁶ This sense of self and of self-confidence was built not in isolation but through the relationships among correspondents.⁷ Letters were equally important in preparing these women for the roles they could play within the Orange-Nassau family network and in the larger world. As Susan Broomhall demonstrates:

3 Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 41–42.

4 Seidel Menchi, 'Girl and the Hourglass', 41–75.

5 Hanawalt, 'Historical Descriptions and Prescriptions for Adolescence', 349. Hanawalt writes that: 'One hesitates to even put a label on this life stage because the very names for the period are in hot dispute' (341–42). She observes that '[a]dolescence carries with it a sense of becoming rather than a sense of full participation' (343).

6 Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 268, 310.

7 As Natalie Zemon Davis has demonstrated, in early modern France 'virtually all the occasions for talking or writing about the self involved a relationship [...] especially with one's family and lineage'. Davis, 'Boundaries', 53.

For women, letters were particularly critical to their family identity because letters were the principal forum in which they could exchange personal and political news, impose their views and perspectives, and cement their memory in the minds of relatives on whom they might one day need to rely.⁸

The letters written by, to, and about Elisabeth, Charlotte-Brabantine, and Marie are part of a much larger Orange-Nassau family correspondence, which has long been identified as a rich source for the study of family relations, of exchanges of medical information, of expressions of emotions, of female patronage, of women's informal yet essential roles in political events, and, most recently, of gender, power, and dynasty.⁹

Elisabeth, Charlotte-Brabantine, and Marie were members of this important transnational, multi-generational, Calvinist family network, based in the United Provinces of the Netherlands with links to several Protestant German states, to France, and to England. Elisabeth and Charlotte-Brabantine were two of the six daughters of William 'The Silent' of Orange-Nassau (1533–1584) and his third wife, Charlotte de Bourbon-Montpensier (1546–1582). After Charlotte's death in 1582, and William's assassination in 1584, the young sisters were cared for by William's fourth wife, Louise de Coligny (1555–1620). She saw to it that they were prepared for the advantageous marriages she would arrange for them. They learned reading, writing, basic arithmetic, and appropriate foreign languages.¹⁰ They did needlework and learned to dance. And they participated in the carefully cultivated epistolary network through which Louise de Coligny exercised her influence.¹¹ Louise continued her stepdaughters' education through the letters she wrote to them after they left to be married, and the sisters followed her example in their correspondence with each other and with their own children.¹²

Two of the sisters, Catherine-Belgica and Flandrine, left to be raised by relatives; Louise-Julienne (1576–1644), Elisabeth, Charlotte-Brabantine, and

8 Broomhall, 'Letters Make the Family', 44.

9 See especially Broomhall and Van Gent, *Gender, Power and Identity*; Broomhall, 'Letters Make the Family'; Broomhall, *Women's Medical Work*; Broomhall and Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections'; Couchman, "'Give birth quickly'"; Pascal, 'Princesses épistolières'.

10 Berriot-Salvadore, *Les Femmes*, 136–37; see E to CB, 4 June 1596, Edenassau02, 11.

11 See Couchman, "'Give birth quickly'"; Broomhall, 'Letters Make the Family'.

12 See Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, 76: "Through correspondence, the mother would remain involved in her daughter's education, even as her daughter learned how to function on her own in the world. At the same time, she would learn through practice one of the most important skills she would need as an adult: how to write a letter and maintain a correspondence'.

Amélie (1581–1657) remained with Louise. When Louise-Julienne married Frederick IV, Elector of the Palatinate in 1593, at the age of seventeen, she took Amélie with her to Heidelberg. Elisabeth was the next to marry. The last to leave was Charlotte-Brabantine; she married Claude, Duke of La Trémoille (1566–1604) in 1598, and moved to his residence at Thouars. Through their letters, the sisters remained just as bonded during their later lives as they had been as young girls. They supported each other through complex and difficult family and political situations involving their husbands and their adult children, as well as sharing news of health, children, friends, deaths, remedies, and fashions over many decades. The children from all these marriages figure prominently, and charmingly, in their mothers' correspondence. Elisabeth and Charlotte-Brabantine began discussing a marriage between Charlotte-Brabantine's son Henri de la Trémoille (1598–1674) and Elisabeth's daughter Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne while the children were still infants, and they were actively involved in the life of the young couple after their marriage in 1619.

The Orange-Nassau family, and the families into which the girls married, were caught up in the political and religious struggles of the time. They shared the dismay of many Protestants at Henri IV's conversion and perceived favouring of his former Catholic enemies. Eventually reconciled with the King, the French families participated in the crafting and acceptance of the Edict of Nantes, and later in the struggles between Louis XIII and his mother, Marie de Medicis, and in the Fronde. The German side of the family was equally caught up in Protestant–Catholic tensions of the Thirty Years War. Thus, the new husbands were frequently called away for military service or to court for political reasons, leaving their wives to fend for themselves. In later years, the women often negotiated on behalf of their husbands and sons as well as for themselves.

The two sisters, Elisabeth and Charlotte-Brabantine, and their daughter/daughter-in-law Marie gradually took, or rather created, their places within this dynamic network. As the letters show, all three were young and inexperienced when they married and bore their first children. They all married at the age of eighteen; Elisabeth and Marie had their first children at nineteen, Charlotte-Brabantine at eighteen.¹³ They depended on earlier relationships and were mentored by more experienced women relatives. All three underwent a period of growth and apprenticeship during the early years of their marriages, leading to a sense of confidence and responsibility

¹³ Their age at marriage was not unusual for noble families, though it differed from the 'western-European marriage pattern'. See Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 57.

in their adulthood, when all three would play central roles in the political and religious events of their troubled times. For Elisabeth, we can consult her own letters to her sister Charlotte-Brabantine, as well as letters written about her by their other sisters, especially Louise-Julienne, and by their stepmother, Louise de Coligny. For Charlotte-Brabantine, few of her own letters are extant.¹⁴ Instead, the letters that the sisters' beloved stepmother, Louise de Coligny, wrote to Charlotte-Brabantine provide intimate though indirect access to the early years of Charlotte-Brabantine's own marriage, happier than Elisabeth's but still a process of development. Most of the letters connected with Elisabeth and Charlotte-Brabantine offer intimate, apparently unguarded expressions of emotions, both positive and negative. Marie, too, wrote to Charlotte-Brabantine. Differences in generation and status meant that Marie's letters were appropriately respectful, as she endeavoured to be worthy of her aunt/mother-in-law's esteem. She did not mention any difficulties she might be experiencing. Taken together, these correspondences offer a nuanced understanding of the period early in their marriages when these women were making the transition from girlhood to mature womanhood.

Elisabeth of Orange-Nassau, Duchess of Bouillon

Elisabeth's letters offer the most complex and intimate account of this transitional period. Because she was addressing her sister, Elisabeth could write candidly, with no fear of reproach, and with the expectation that her sister would sympathize with her. For Elisabeth, letters to and from her sisters and her stepmother were a lifeline as she struggled to adapt to a new home and to her husband's frequent and lengthy absences. The Duke of Bouillon was 22 years older than Elisabeth and deeply involved in French politics. In the early years of their marriage, he was absent more often than he was present: for three months, wrote his young wife, and then for 'centuries'.¹⁵ Elisabeth was initially very unhappy. She wrote that she suffered from 'continual misery', 'fears, apprehensions', 'grief and tears'. 'They preach patience to me', she wrote, but 'I have to suffer in desperation'.¹⁶

14 Most of the letters considered here were addressed to Charlotte-Brabantine and survive in the archives of the La Trémoille family.

15 '[D]es siècle entiers'. E to CB, 10 Oct. 1595, Edenassau02, 7.

16 '[P]eine continuelles, craintes, apréanssions [...] chagrins et [...] pleurs [...]; l'on me prêche la pasiance [...] il le faut souffrir avec désespoir'. E to CB, 2 Oct. 1595, Edenassau02, 6.

Elisabeth's letters to and from Charlotte-Brabantine allowed her to continue their very close relationship and to reaffirm her own value. She wrote insistently about her love for her sister and frequently asked for demonstrations of her sister's love for her. Elisabeth's first letter begins: 'I have to confess, dear sister, that I've never loved you as much'. She concluded: 'My dear [...] love me well and never stop believing [...] that I do the same for you. Know that you are always present in my thoughts'.¹⁷ They are so close, Elisabeth exclaimed in another letter, that, even far apart, they fell ill at the same time. She wrote of 'the pleasure I had that you shed tears when you remembered how you left me'.¹⁸ When Elisabeth was particularly depressed, she wrote: 'I always wish I was close to you, or you close to me'.¹⁹ All the sisters missed each other when they moved away. Their sister Louise-Julienne wrote to Charlotte-Brabantine soon after Elisabeth's marriage:

I know it will have been a difficult separation for you, now that you've left Mme de Buillon, my sister [in Sedan]. I know what it's like from having experienced it [separation from her sisters] myself.²⁰

References within Elisabeth's letters show that she also counted on her correspondence with her stepmother, Louise de Coligny.²¹ The crucial importance of letters as a means of maintaining Elisabeth's childhood relationships was even more obvious when letters went astray, or when no one was available to carry them: 'Can you believe [...] that I'm writing to you without knowing who will carry my letter, which upsets me'.²² All the Orange-Nassau sisters tried to arrange occasions when they could see each other, though meetings were rare. 'I passionately want to see you', wrote

17 'Il faut que je te confesse, chère seur, que ne t'aime jamais tant'; 'Mon coeur, [...] aymés-moy bien et ne perdés point la créance que [...] j'an fais [...] de mesme'. E to CB, 7 June 1595, Edenassau02, 1–2.

18 '[L]e contantement que j'en reçoÿ que vous ayés jete des larmes au souvenir que vous avés de m'avoir laissé'. E to CB, 22 Aug. 1595, Edenassau02, 4.

19 '[J]e me souhaite à toutes les hures près de vous ou vous près de moy'. E to CB, 10 Oct. 1595, Edenassau02, 7.

20 'Je say que ce vous aura est[é] un[e] dure séparation que celle que vous avez faicte à cest heure avec Madame de Buillon, ma seur. Je say ce que c'est pour l'avoir moy mayme expérimenté'. Louise-Julienne to Charlotte-Brabantine, 13 May 1595 in Louise-Julienne de Nassau, *Correspondance* (1), 13. Subsequently LJ to CB, LJdenassau01.

21 See Elisabeth's mention of 'une fort longue lettre à Madame ma belle-mère'. E to CB, 7 June 1595, Edenassau02, 1.

22 'Figurés-vous [...] que je vous escriis sans estre assuré qui portera mes lettres, ce quy me fâche'. E to CB, 7 July 1595, Edenassau02, 3.

Elisabeth to Charlotte-Brabantine.²³ Failing that, in addition to exchanging letters, they requested each other's portraits and those of their children, promising to hang them in their private rooms where they could see them every day.²⁴

Elisabeth longed for news of home but offered rather paltry news of her few visitors and her own activities. She wrote 'nothing at all happens here', except that she had learned not to be afraid of frogs.²⁵

I don't know how to tell you how I pass the time, because I do so many different things. I never miss a sermon, I mean not in the morning or in the afternoon, always in town. [...] M. Bours is still here [...] I often play cards with him.²⁶

She attempted to learn to play the lute but later gave that up. She wrote that:

When my dear husband isn't here, I'm in no fit state to receive visitors, I'm always suffering and in a bad humour, and it's not right to ask people to come when I'm in such distress. And when he is here, I don't want any other amusements.²⁷

Elisabeth's first pregnancy neither raised her spirits nor increased her self-confidence. She reported that she had completely changed: she was 'your sister, the fat lady, and the worst dressed in all of Sedan', and she never danced any more.²⁸ She was disappointed that her husband was not present for her first delivery: 'I had the saddest delivery ever, far from everyone I love best in the world. Good God, that's cruel'. After the delivery, she was too miserable to receive the traditional visits from neighbouring women

23 '[J]e désire, mais passionément, de vous voir'. E to CB, 5 Feb. 1597, Edenassau02, 15; Broomhall, 'Lettres de Louise-Julienne', 161.

24 E to CB, 10 Oct. 1595, Edenassau02, 8; 25 April 1596, Edenassau02, 11; 5 Feb. 1597, Edenassau02, 16; Broomhall, 'Lettres de Louise-Julienne', 161; March 1597, Edenassau02, 17.

25 'Il ne sy pase rien ycy'. E to CB, 7 July 1595, Edenassau02, 3.

26 'Je ne sais comment je te puis dire à quoy je passe le temps, puisque c'est à tant de diverse chose. Je ne perds pas un prêche, Je dis pas non plus au matin qu'après dîner; et tousjours à le ville. [...] Monsieur de Bours ne bouge d'icy. [...] Je joue fort souvent à piquet-capot avec luy'. E to CB, 1 Sept. 1595, Edenassau02, 5; Broomhall, 'Lettres de Louise-Julienne', 151.

27 '[Q]uant ce cher mary n'est point ycy, je ne suis propre à avoir de la compaignie, estant tousjours en paine et de mauvaise humeur. [...] Aussy quant il y est, je ne veux point de divertisemens'. E to CB, 7 June 1595, Edenassau02, 2.

28 'Je suis vostre seur, la grose Dondon et la plus mal abillyé qu'il y a en tout Sedan'; 'Je ne danse plus'. E to CB, 4 June 1596, Edenassau02, 11, 12.

(‘tears kept me company’), and she told her sister that the baby, a girl, wasn’t even pretty.²⁹ She was eventually cheered by the arrival of her husband four months after little ‘Lolo’s’ birth, and began to enjoy the pleasure they both took in playing with her.

During those first years, Elisabeth behaved and sounded more like a child than a woman. She struggled to adapt to radically new circumstances and took little initiative. Elisabeth’s experience differed from that of many upper-class women in that, at Sedan, no mother-in-law was present, nor did she have any sisters-in-law or other companions of her own age to keep her company. She seems to have been involved very little, if at all, in the running of her household. When she proudly wrote, ‘Believe it or not, you have a sister who is an excellent housewife’, she was referring to her ability to sew shirts.³⁰ One thing did please her though: ‘I am well loved by all the people in this town’. People had expected her to be ‘a bit of a princess’, but they had formed a good opinion of her now that they knew her.³¹

A turning point for Elisabeth was her move from Sedan to another of her husband’s properties, Turenne, in February 1597. She was obliged to leave her daughter behind, which was sad because she was beginning to enjoy her. But the prospect of being with her husband was worth the sacrifice.³² Her arrival at Turenne was something of a triumph. She described the elaborate festivities held for her, beginning with the nobles who came to meet her when she was eighteen leagues away, and culminating in a *mascarade* performed for her in the nearest town. Soon her daughter was sent to join her and became a great delight; anecdotes about naughty little ‘Lolo’ fill her letters. Elisabeth would give birth to six other children, three more daughters and three sons, none in the sad circumstances that marked Lolo’s birth. Most importantly, when Elisabeth’s husband was absent, he began to entrust the affairs of his estates to her. We find her travelling to Limeuil, Lanquais, and Montfort, where she was pleased to receive ‘homage and gratitude’ for her effective interventions.³³

29 ‘Certe, j’ay fait des couches aussy tristes qu’il s’en fit jamais, éloignée de tout ce que j’aïmais le mieux au monde. Bon dieu, que cela est cruel [...] les pleurs m’on tenu compagnie. [...] ayme bien ta petite nièce, mais non pas pour ce que l’on vous a dit qu’elle est belle, car elle ne l’est point’. E to CB, 4 Nov. 1596, Edenassau02, 13–14; Broomhall, ‘Lettres de Louise-Julienne’, 156–58.

30 ‘Non, vous avés une seur excelente ménagère’. E to CB, 4 June 1596, Edenassau02, 12.

31 ‘[J]e suis bien aymé de tout le peuple de ceste ville. [...] J’estois [depinte comme] du tout coutisanne. [...] Ils me trouve tout autre’. E to CB, 1 Sept. 1595, Edenassau02, 5.

32 E to CB, 5 Feb. 1597, Edenassau02, 15; Broomhall, ‘Lettres de Louise-Julienne’, 162.

33 ‘[D]es homage et les reconnoissance’. E to CB, 1 Sept. 1598, Edenassau02, 19.

Though she would never be as politically involved as her stepmother or her sister Charlotte-Brabantine, Elisabeth's evolving role is evident in letters she wrote between 1602 and 1605, during a period of dangerous hostility between her husband and Henri IV. Writing to Charlotte-Brabantine in December 1605, she explained that her husband, with a fine sense of the kind of role a woman could play, had decided to send her to court to represent him for an exchange of formal assurances relating to the support of the Protestant strongholds for the King:

He was thinking of sending me to tell the King what was happening, because I'd show more submission and more openness and affection, so that I would be the one to whom they would give the power to receive the assurances from the King, and I would give my husband's assurances to him.³⁴

A woman could display 'submission [...] openness and affection' in situations where a man could not do so without losing honour, an understanding used frequently by the Orange-Nassau women. Although this mission did not take place, the incident shows that her husband had confidence in her ability to negotiate on his behalf. Elisabeth herself was now much more confident of her abilities as a wife, a mother, and even in political matters.

Charlotte-Brabantine of Orange-Nassau, Duchess of La Trémoille

For Elisabeth, some 125 letters are extant; very few of Charlotte-Brabantine's letters have survived, most written to her husband. Our understanding of her experiences during the early years of her marriage comes indirectly from the letters she received from her stepmother Louise de Coligny, from her sister Elisabeth, and, to a lesser extent, from her other sisters. The first few years of Charlotte-Brabantine's marriage appear to have been much happier than Elisabeth's. Still, Charlotte-Brabantine sometimes appeared unsure of herself, and she had much to learn about how she could play a more public role. She too benefitted from advice and encouragement from her sisters and her stepmother. When her sisters and her stepmother wrote

34 'Il [son mari] inclina à me le [son voyage à la cour à elle] faire faire pour tesmoigner au Roy et plus de submition plus de franchise et d'affection de fasson que je serois celle à quy ils donneront le pouvoir de recevoir les sûretés du Roy et luy porterois celle de mon Monsieur'. E to CB, 12 Dec. 1605, Edenassau02, 71.

to support her through her first pregnancy and the birth of her first child, they often seemed to treat her more like a child than an adult woman. Over the years, Louise de Coligny offered her the benefit of her own political experience, but it wasn't until after her husband's premature death that Charlotte-Brabantine came fully into her own.

According to Evelyne Berriot-Salvadore, when Charlotte-Brabantine's marriage was arranged, Claude de la Trémoille, who was not in good health, had wanted to marry simply to provide heirs, and surprised himself by falling in love with his young wife.³⁵ Her older sister, Louise-Julienne, wrote to congratulate her: 'Madame my sister, I can't tell you how happy I am [...] that you now enjoy the love of a very worthy husband [...] and that you were welcomed by all his servants and subjects with much delight'.³⁶ Charlotte-Brabantine was pregnant almost immediately. Louise de Coligny thought she knew the precise date of conception: 'I'm sure it was that day when we had such a nice breakfast on your bed'.³⁷ Whether accurate or not, this illustrates the exceptionally intimate relationship between Charlotte-Brabantine and her stepmother that continued after her marriage.

Charlotte-Brabantine's was a much happier pregnancy than Elisabeth's, too. Charlotte-Brabantine's stepmother and her husband busied themselves in Paris purchasing what the new baby would need. Elisabeth now took on the role of experienced older sister and mentor, writing: 'I can't wait to hear how your fat belly is doing. [...] I'm sending my recipes [for remedies] [...] I felt much better for them, and I want you to feel better too'. Elisabeth was pleased to hear from a friend who had visited Charlotte-Brabantine that 'she had never seen such a healthy pregnant woman'.³⁸ Everyone was interested in the details of Charlotte-Brabantine's health and well-being. Elisabeth wrote: 'M. Louis [...] told Bonne [the Bouillon's doctor] that my husband told him that you feel discomfort in your breasts because they are

35 Berriot-Salvadore, *Les Femmes*, 139. See Broomhall, 'Letters Make the Family', 41–43 for an account of the negotiations that preceded this marriage.

36 'Madame ma seur, il me seroit imposible de vous exprimer le contantement que j'ay reçu d'antandre [...] que possédés à ceste heure l'amitié d'un très digne mari [...] et que vous avez esté receu de tous ses serviteur et subiet avec beaucoup d'alégresse'. LJ to CB, 14 May 1598, LJdenassauo1, 18.

37 'Pour certain je crois que c'est du jour où nous déjeunâmes si bien sur votre lit'. Louise de Coligny to Charlotte-Brabantine, 31 Dec. 1598, *Correspondance de Louise de Coligny*, 145. Subsequently LC to CB, Marchegay.

38 'Il me tarde bien de savoir comme ce gros ventre se porte. [...] Je vous envoie mes recettes [...] je m'en suis fort bien trouvée, et désire que vous en fassiés de mesme'. '[E]lle n'a jamais veu femme grose se porter sy bien'. E to CB, 18 Oct. 1598. Edenassauo2, 20; Broomhall, 'Lettres de Louise-Julienne', 168.

very hard, so he [Bonne] has sent some very simple recipes'.³⁹ And after the birth Elisabeth reassured her sister:

I asked Bonne what he thought of the food you're giving to my little nephew. He finds it quite different from what was given to my daughter, but he doesn't criticize it: different people, different humours. I heard that M. de Vendôme was fed that way, and he's fine.⁴⁰

Claude de la Trémoille was present for the delivery. Louise de Coligny's overwhelming joy was again expressed in somewhat infantilizing terms: 'My daughter, a son! I weep for joy. [...] I'm dying to see this little grandson, and how you hold him in your little hands'.⁴¹ Louise-Julienne also wrote to express her delight in 'your happy delivery', adding: 'Dear sister, I have to tell you that you've won the prize over all of us for having been the first to have a son'.⁴²

In the summer of 1599, when Charlotte-Brabantine was pregnant with her second child, Louise de Coligny still seemed to be treating her more as a child than as a young woman. Louise wrote:

Isn't there some way that you can come to Sully for your second delivery? I'd be able to look after you, but I don't dare hope, I want it so much. In any case, if you were a good daughter/girl [*fille*], you would do this for your mother who loves and cherishes you with her whole heart.⁴³

39 'Monsieur Louis [...] mande à Bonne que Monsieur mon mary luy a dit que vous resentiés de l'incomodité de vos tétin pour estre fors durs de façon quy luy mande des remaides fort aysés'. Both Louis and Bonne were doctors. E to CB, 1 Sept. 1598, Edenassau02, 19.

40 'J'ay demandé à Bonne ce qu'il luy sembloit de la nourriture que vous donnés au petit neveu. Il la trouve bien différente de celle que l'on a donnée à ma petite, mais il ne la blâme pas pour cela : autant de personne, autant d'humeurs. J'ay ouï dire que Monsieur de Vendôme a été nourry comme cela, quy s'en porte bien'. E to CB, 20 March 1599, Edenassau02, 22. ('Monsieur de Vendôme' was Henri IV's legitimated son with his mistress Gabrielle d'Estreés; then, as now, royal behaviour was both fascinating and influential.)

41 'Ma fille, un fils! J'en pleur de joie [...] Je meurs d'envie de voir ce petit-fils, et comment vos petits mains le manient'. LC to CB, 31 Dec. 1598, Marchegay, 145; see also Couchman, 'Lettres de Louise de Coligny', 118–19.

42 '[V]ostre heureux accouchement. [...] Il faut chère seur que je vous die que vous avez emporté le pris sur nous toutes d'avoir fait un fils le premier'. LJ to CB, Jan. 1599, LJdenassau01, 19.

43 'N'y auroit-il point de moyen que vous puissiez venir faire vos secondes couches à Sully, là où je vous irois servir de garde, mais je ne me l'ose promettre, tant je le désir; et toutesfois, si vous étiez bonne fille vous donneriez ce moyen-là à votre mère qui vous aime et vous chérit de toutes ses affections'. LC to CB, July 1599, Marchegay, 157.

And when Charlotte-Brabantine's daughter was born, Louise wrote: 'So you've given me a granddaughter! Good Lord, how pretty I imagine she is, and you too brave for writing so soon after such pain'.⁴⁴ Even three years after her marriage, Louise's tone still seems more suitable for a child:

My dear daughter [...] no one in the world could love, esteem, cherish and honour you more than your Maman, who kisses your hands a hundred times, and my little sweetheart, and my pretty little ones.⁴⁵

Though there was ample evidence that Claude de la Trémoille loved her deeply, Charlotte-Brabantine felt insecure about her husband's fidelity, especially when he was away at court. She worried when she didn't hear from him often enough. Louise de Coligny had to write several times to reassure her: 'What makes me love him most is the extreme love he has for you, for it's clear that he's passionately in love with you. I'm surprised that you say that you haven't had letters from him for such a long time'.⁴⁶ 'I think you are the luckiest woman in the world, for you have one of the noblest gentlemen in the world, who loves you perfectly'.⁴⁷ Perhaps Charlotte-Brabantine's premonitions of abandonment were at a deeper level. Claude de la Trémoille would die in 1604 at the age of 38.

We can observe, too, how Louise de Coligny continued the education she had been offering to her stepdaughter before her marriage. Louise was working to effect the reconciliation of Bouillon and La Trémoille with Henri IV. Both were prominent among the Protestant nobles who had withdrawn their support for Henri after his conversion to Catholicism. Louise coached Charlotte-Brabantine about how to use her influence with her husband to promote his reconciliation with the King. Louise's first extant letter to her stepdaughter, written in November 1598, accompanied one that she sent to the Duke. She wrote from the court:

44 'Vous m'avez fait une petite fille! Mon Dieu que j'imagine qu'elle est belle, et vous trop brave d'avoir écrit soudain après avoir eu tant de mal'. LC to CB, second week of Dec. 1599, Marchegay, 166.

45 'Ma chère fille [...] rien au monde ne vous peut davantage aimer, chérir et honorer que fait votre maman, qui vous baise cent mille fois les mains, et à mon petit coeur et mes petites mignonnes'. LC to CB, 25 July 1601, Marchegay, 186.

46 'Ce qui me le fait aimer le plus c'est l'extrême amour qu'il vous porte; car c'est chose certaine qu'il est passionnément amoureux de vous. Je m'étonne que vous dites qu'il y a si longtemps que vous n'avez eu de ses lettres'. LC to CB, 29 Oct. 1599, Marchegay, 164; Couchman, 'Lettres de Louise de Coligny', 122.

47 'Je [...] vous estime la plus heureuse femme du monde, car vous avez un des plus honnêtes hommes du monde, de qui vous êtes parfaitement aimée'. LC to CB, Dec. 1599, Marchegay, 167.

Dear daughter, I'm sending you this letter so that M. de la Trémoille will understand even better from the letter I'm sending to him what the King's intentions are. His presence here will be a very great advantage to him. In the name of God, advise him to come.⁴⁸

Six weeks later, still at court, Louise wrote: 'Give birth quickly and then send us your good husband'.⁴⁹ Charlotte-Brabantine would benefit throughout her life from the lessons in political strategy Louise was offering. Later, during the conflict between Marie de Medicis and Louis XIII, Louise sent Charlotte-Brabantine a teasing compliment: 'I hear that you've become a stateswoman, and that you're working on the peace conference'.⁵⁰ Especially after her husband's premature death, she remained a key participant in the defence of her fellow-Huguenots and her extended family.

Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duchess of La Trémoille

The marriage of Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne, daughter of Elisabeth of Orange-Nassau and the Duke of Bouillon, to her cousin Henri de la Trémoille, son of Charlotte-Brabantine of Orange-Nassau and the Duke of La Trémoille, had been planned when the children were infants. As a child, Marie wrote charming letters to her aunt and future mother-in-law, Charlotte-Brabantine, and when she was seven years old, her mother Elisabeth was already referring to her as Henri's 'little wife'.⁵¹ But in 1618, when Charlotte-Brabantine was eager for the marriage to take place, Elisabeth hesitated. She wrote: 'our affairs don't permit us to marry our daughter so soon. [...] I think there are several strong reasons that should make you want to wait until he [Henri] is a bit older before you arrange his marriage'.⁵² Henri was 20, Marie was seventeen. Elisabeth carefully explained that she, too, wanted this marriage

48 'Chère fille, [...] j'ai estimé devoir vous envoyer celui-ci [ce valet, porteur de la lettre], afin que M. de la Trémoille fût d'autant plus éclairci, par la lettre que je lui envoie, de l'intention du Roy. Sa présence ici lui servira plus que chose du monde. Au nom de Dieu, conseillez-lui d'y venir'. LC to CB, about 4 Nov. 1598, Marchegay, 140.

49 '[A]ccouchez vite et puis nous envoyez votre bon mari'. LC to CB, about 15 Dec. 1598, Marchegay, 144; see Couchman "Give birth quickly".

50 'J'apprends que vous êtes femme d'État et que vous êtes employée à la conférence de paix'. LC to CB, 18 March 1616, Marchegay, 298.

51 Marie de la Tour d'Auvergne (MTA) to CB, 16 April 1607, Edenassau02, 86; 'sa petite femme'. E to CB, 13 July 1608, Edenassau02, 135.

52 'Nos affaires ne nous permettent que nous puissions sy tost marier nostre fille [...] je croy qu'il y a force raisons et bien fortes qu'y vous doivent faire désirer de luy voir un peu plus d'âge

to take place, but did not want to interfere if Charlotte-Brabantine could find a better match for her son.⁵³ Nonetheless, the marriage was celebrated at Sedan a year later, on 19 February 1619.

As in her mother's case, Marie's husband left almost immediately after their wedding. The tensions between Louis XIII and his mother Marie de Medicis had broken out into open warfare. Henri de la Trémoille had chosen what turned out to be the losing side in the conflict, against very strong advice from his mother. He supported the Queen Mother, earning the hostility of the King and putting his family's honour and property in danger. But, unlike her mother, Marie was still in her childhood home when her husband departed; she spent the first nine months of her marriage there, and little changed in her life. She wrote frequently to her new mother-in-law, Charlotte-Brabantine. She seems, initially, to have been motivated mainly by a desire to remain in Charlotte-Brabantine's 'good graces' and to express her affection and respect.⁵⁴

Marie appears to have understood her mother-in-law's involvement in the current political manoeuvring, and her efforts to reassure the King of her family's loyalty. Marie tried, mostly in vain, to collect information that might be of use to Charlotte-Brabantine in her negotiations: 'I would like, Madame, to know some news worth telling you about, but the place where we are offers very little', she wrote, and later in the same letter: 'I'm very uncomfortable, Madame, when I bother you with this petty news, which isn't worth your knowing'.⁵⁵ In other letters, she reiterated: 'Nothing at all happens here, Madame, that is worth telling you'.⁵⁶ Marie's expressions of humility, her protests that she was unworthy of the esteem her mother-in-law expressed, go beyond epistolary conventions. She went so far as to write that she would be distressed to cause Charlotte-Brabantine any inconvenience, even that of having to reply to Marie's letters.⁵⁷ She reported on dinners,

devant que de le marier'. E to CB, 15 Jan. 1618, *Correspondance d'Elisabeth de Nassau 1610–1618*, 90. Subsequently E to CB, Edenassau03.

53 E to CB, 26 Feb. 1618, Edenassau03, 91.

54 This was, of course, one of the principal motivations for letter-writing at the time.

55 'Je désirerois, Madame, savoir quelque nouvelles digne de vous mender, mais le lieu où nous sommes en fournit fort peu'. 'Je suis bien marrye, Madame, de vous importuner des chestive nouvelle et qui ne mérittent point d'estre seue de vous'. Marie to Charlotte-Brabantine, 21 Feb. 1619. *Correspondance de Marie de la Tour D'Auvergne 1619–1628*, 38–39. Subsequently MTA to CB, Mariedelatou01.

56 'Il ne se fait rien du monde icy, Madame, qui mérite de vous estre méné'. MTA to CB, March 1619, Mariedelatou01, 39.

57 MTA to CB, June 1619, Mariedelatou01, 42.

family visitors, her father's health, nothing of more than social or family interest. A visit from her husband cheered her up, but it was very short.⁵⁸

Marie moved to Thouars in October 1619. However, this did not mark the end of her correspondence with Charlotte-Brabantine. The Dowager Duchess of La Trémoille would often spend many months at a time at court as she attempted to salvage what she could for her son and her family after the defeat of Marie de Medicis and her supporters. Charlotte-Brabantine's correspondence with her daughter-in-law continued, and with it her example of female political involvement. While we have none of the letters Charlotte-Brabantine sent to her daughter-in-law, we can observe in Marie's letters that she was being mentored in much the same way as Louise de Coligny had earlier mentored Charlotte-Brabantine. Marie, too, was introduced to the informal but powerful influence that a woman could exert in the political arena. She was now sending her mother-in-law reports about significant political and religious matters: the construction of a new Protestant temple in Thouars; the deliberations of the assembly at Loudon in response to the re-establishment of the Catholic faith in Bearn; news from Philippe Duplessis-Mornay in Saumur and from other Protestant leaders; Henri de la Trémoille's meetings with his allies; and news of the King's return to Paris.⁵⁹ Her reports were quite detailed and show a growing understanding of events. For example, she reported on an important letter from the King to Duplessis-Mornay regarding the decision of the Protestant assembly of Loudon: 'The King told him that he was very pleased with the resolution taken by the assembly, and that from now on his Protestant subjects would be treated no differently than the Catholics'.⁶⁰

When Marie gave birth to her first child, a son, on 17 December 1620, her situation was very different from her mother's first delivery. Though her husband was absent, her mother was there for the birth, and Marie also enjoyed the company of her sister-in-law, Charlotte de la Trémoille, future Countess of Derby, with whom she would later carry on an extensive correspondence.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Marie too appears to have suffered from

58 Late May–early June 1619, *Mariedelatouro1*, 40–43.

59 MTA to CB, *Mariedelatouro1*: 26 Feb. 1620, 48; 14 March 1620, 49; 21 March 1620, 50; 16 March 1620, 51; 6 April 1620, 52; 12 May 1620, 53; 27 July 1620, 54.

60 'Le Roy luy mendoit estre bien fort content de la résolution qu'avoit prize l'assemblée et dorsénavant ses sujets de la Religion seroient traittez sans nulle différance d'avec les Catholiques'. MTA to CB, 6 April 1620, *Mariedelatouro1*, 52.

61 De Witt, *Charlotte de la Trémoille*, iii and 15. The marriage of Marie and Henri 'gave Charlotte a true sister whose affection and devotion would last her whole life'. See also Marlet, *Charlotte de la Trémoille*, 24–26. For their correspondence, see Kmec, *Across the Channel*.

depression after the birth. It was decided that she should return to Sedan in August 1621 to take the waters and be cared for by her parents.

Marie continued her correspondence with Charlotte-Brabantine from Sedan, at least 48 letters between August 1621 and Marie's return to Thouars in December 1622. These were not intimate personal letters. At no point did Marie mention her own physical or emotional health. It's likely that she exchanged letters with Charlotte de la Trémoille as well, perhaps more sisterly and emotionally revealing, but none survive from that period. The letters to her mother-in-law deal with significant current events in which her husband and their families were implicated. They are even longer than the previous ones, written with more confidence. Marie facilitated communication between her father, the Duke of Bouillon, still powerful but now in poor health, and her mother-in-law. Both were significant players in the ongoing Huguenot cause. Marie passed messages back and forth, forwarded critical documents, and offered her own opinions. For example, she wrote in a covering letter to her mother-in-law that she found the advice her father was sending with the same courier to be

almost entirely marvellously consistent with your feelings, especially in that he judges that the first thing that should be looked into is working on a general accommodation; and that should be done through the Assembly, which should not refuse to make submissions, and should request the pardon that the King asks them to request. But I strongly doubt that they will want to come to that resolution.⁶²

On her return to Thouars, and particularly after her mother-in-law's death, Marie would play an even more active role, representing her husband and negotiating on his behalf. Henri de la Trémoille, however, vacillated. At times he would co-operate with the Protestant nobles, but eventually he converted to Catholicism. Like her mother-in-law, Marie worked tirelessly to protect the family's property and honour. She fought and won the battle to have their children raised as Protestants. And, like her mother-in-law, and at least in part thanks to her mentoring, Marie became one of the most

62 '[L]es avis de Monsieur mon père, lesquels je trouve la plus grande partie merveilleusement conformes à vos santimens, particulièrement en ce qu'il juge que la première chose que l'on se doit se mettre devant les yeux, est de travailler à un acomodement général; et cela par le moyen de l'assemblée qui ne doit refuser de faire toute les submissions et demander le pardon que le Roy demande d'elle. C'est à quoy je doute fort qu'elle se veuille résoudre'. MTA to CB, 21 Sept. 1621, *Mariedelatouroi*, 60.

powerful leaders of the Huguenot cause in the seventeenth century, earning in later life the title 'Queen of the Huguenots'.⁶³

Conclusion

Though their experiences differed in many ways, these three women have in common that they did not immediately become, or feel themselves to be, mature women when they married and bore their first children. They felt young and unsure of themselves, and they sometimes acted and were treated as if they were still children. Through their letters, family members, especially women, of their own and of their parents' generations, helped them make their way through what could be a lonely and frightening transition. The older women who mentored them knew particularly well how to exercise informal political power on behalf of their families and their religion. Elisabeth, Charlotte-Brabantine, and Marie all made the transition successfully and went on to have influential careers as adult women, both in their families and in the wider political sphere.

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Part 3

Training for Adulthood



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10. Malleable Youth

Forging Female Education in Early Modern Rome

*Alessandra Franco*¹

Abstract

Founded in Rome by a Jesuit confraternity, the Conservatory of Santa Caterina began its activities in the 1540s. First designed as a shelter for daughters of prostitutes, the Conservatory later opened its doors to young women from poverty-stricken families and marginalized groups. In their time spent at the shelter, the girls received an education: religious instruction, needlework, music, and basic literacy skills were the pillars of the instructional curriculum. By removing girls from their adverse backgrounds and shielding them from sexual exploitation, the Conservatory attempted to carve a formative period for its wards at a time when there were no set standards for the education of young women.

Keywords: Santa Caterina; prostitution; early modern Rome; women's shelter; education; confraternities; youth

During the sixteenth century in Rome, Florence, Venice, and other Italian cities, special concern for young women, especially those burdened by poverty and social degradation, led to the foundation of charitable institutions and asylums.² The goals of these Catholic institutions were to sequester girls from the dangers of urban life and to educate them so that, upon achieving adulthood, they could marry and live respectably. Despite common aims, however, these houses differed in their programmes and regulations. Several

¹ This essay abridges a section of my doctoral dissertation, 'The Conservatorio of Santa Caterina'.

² For Rome, see Groppi, *I conservatori della virtù*; for Florence, Terpstra, 'Mothers, Sisters and Daughters', 201–29 and Terpstra, *Lost Girls*; for Venice, Puppi and Ellero, *Le Zitelle*, and Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 121–37.

scholars have stressed the restraining aspects since these organizations attempted – with various degrees of success – to use cloister in order to secure their wards' reputations and marriageability.³ However, a primary focus on restriction obscures the complexities of the conservatories' social function and their broader impact on the experiences of some young early modern women.

In the early modern period, the boundaries between girlhood and womanhood were fluid. With poor children going to work at a young age and little formal schooling available to them, neither girls nor their guardians had clear means to track their progress toward adulthood.⁴ At this time, humanistic ideas dominated educational programmes for young people, but these models were rarely deemed suitable for girls, and especially not for socially marginalized ones.⁵ In this context, offering not only protection but also education, the Roman Conservatory of Santa Caterina della Rosa – or dei Funari (ropemakers) – carved out a distinctive space for young women, a de facto 'youth'.

Founded by a Jesuit confraternity, the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili, and with the early support of Ignatius Loyola and Filippo Neri, the Conservatory of Santa Caterina ambitiously undertook a special mission to prevent girls from joining the ranks of the many prostitutes in the Pope's capital. In sixteenth-century Rome, prostitution was a legal business and, not uncommonly, older prostitutes propelled their young kin into the trade.⁶ Weak social structures and loose legal boundaries around the age of sexual consent made girls particularly vulnerable to being plunged, barely pubescent, into the sex trade and fast-tracked into adulthood. Although the Conservatory's programme at times clashed with the assumptions and expectations of the girls' immediate families and their social environment, it offered them resources to shape their lives for the better.⁷

3 Camerano, 'Assistenza richiesta', 226–60; Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums*.

4 Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 87–108. On child labour, see Caracausi, 'Beaten Children and Women's Work'.

5 On female education as training in various 'female skills', see Whitehead, *Women's Education*. On exceptional women who pursued literary studies normally reserved to men, see Labalme, *Beyond their Sex*.

6 A chronicle of the foundation history credited Loyola and Neri as 'the main founders': Archivio di Stato di Roma (hereafter ASR), S. Caterina, Tomi 56, 3v. On the Confraternity, see Lazar, 'Protecting the Roots' and Aleandri Barletta, 'La confraternita di Santa Caterina'; on the Jesuits' ministry to prostitutes, Chauvin, 'Ignace et les courtisanes'; on prostitution, Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 67–76 and 141–47.

7 Camerano, 'Assistenza richiesta', 231–40 presents several examples of conflict between the institution and the wards' families.

Moved by Catholic zeal, coupled with a practical awareness of the risks of rape and sexual exploitation for adolescent girls, the Conservatory of Santa Caterina claimed parental rights and removed girls from their families, notably their tainted mothers. The institution was a blend of old and new. The founders framed it on older Catholic patterns for communities of female religious. Since the fifteenth century, affluent Italian families had customarily placed their daughters in convents for education, a practice known as *serbanza*.⁸ Cloister at the same time protected their honour. Although such education had been too costly for poor families, the same root idea of protection or conservation underlay the new refuge at Santa Caterina. The contrast between the wards' former life on Roman streets and the safe haven provided by the institution often surfaced in its own narrative, pointing to the dramatic separation that the Conservatory deemed essential to its mission.⁹

Inside the enclosure, the girls were led through an innovative educational programme carefully targeted to their social situations. The curriculum incorporated not only the core of religious instruction, including music, but also literacy and vocational skills. Later, when the girls were ready, the Conservatory provided dowries so that the wards could choose to marry or, in some instances, to become nuns. It also helped find suitable husbands so that the young women returned to society as adults with their virtue intact and their skills enhanced. Thus, the leaders of the Santa Caterina asylum created a safe and supportive space for the daughters of prostitutes and, later, other needy girls during a critical interval of their malleable youth. In this way, the Conservatory provided a model for the notion of female youth as a formative, in-between time during which girls were sheltered from precocious encounters with the economic and sexual demands of adulthood, and given access to moral education as well as occupational training to make them ready for their future responsibilities.

During the Conservatory's first century, it admitted and educated over 500 girls. In the later sixteenth century, shifting policies on admissions moved the institution away from its original, very specific mission of the social rescue and education of girls at risk.¹⁰ In the 1580s, as a means of financing its charitable activities, the Confraternity decided to begin accepting paying

8 The practice of *serbanza* was linked to the flourishing of sixteenth-century institutions for the education of women. See Strocchia, 'Taken into Custody'.

9 Expressed in the apocalyptic terms of 'Heaven' and 'Hell' in Folco, *Effetti mirabili*, 4v.

10 Lazar, 'Protecting the Roots', 90; Fedeli Bernardini, '*Madri gravate di figli inhumili*', 327.

boarders.¹¹ At the same time, the number of daughters of prostitutes admitted steadily declined. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, some external pupils were also allowed to attend the refuge's textile school, further transforming the institution and expanding its educational work into the outside community.¹² Although by the eighteenth century the memory of the institution's original mission against prostitution seemed lost, according to Ridolfino Venuti's *Accurata e succinta descrizione topografica di Roma moderna*, Santa Caterina was still listed as 'a comfortable shelter for impoverished girls'.¹³

In the Conservatory's early days, male officers of the Confraternity carried out most of the work. Beyond general administrative oversight, men assessed girls for admission, collected alms to fund their dowries, and arranged their marriages.¹⁴ Although women were not listed among the officers, some acted as benefactresses and were involved with the wards' care. The patronage of the noblewomen Giulia Orsini, Beatrice Caetani, and Livia della Rovere signalled the institution's high regard among Rome's most prominent families.¹⁵ After two decades it became clear that more womanpower was needed to sustain the project, which hosted about 150 girls by the late 1570s.¹⁶ In 1560, twelve alumnae of Santa Caterina had already received papal permission to take religious vows and form a community of nuns. From that point forward, women religious became the primary caregivers and educators of the wards.¹⁷ An internal religious order not only made economic sense, but also was a very efficient way to assure continuity in running the institution, since the nuns had themselves been educated there.

During its first century the Conservatory acquired a substantial physical plant in the *rione* Sant'Angelo. Financed by Federico Cesi, the first Cardinal Protector and munificent patron of the Confraternity, the community's church of Santa Caterina was built on the premises of the medieval church of Santa Maria Dominae Rosae.¹⁸ The site of the Conservatory buildings and garden occupying an area now wedged between the modern streets of via

11 Sixteen wards were admitted in 1586, paying a boarding fee of five *scudi* per month: ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 12 January 1586.

12 ASR, S. Caterina, Libro, f. 131, 18 June 1609.

13 Venuti, *Accurata e succinta descrizione*, 357.

14 *Constitutioni della compagnia*, 9–11.

15 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 26 March 1584 and 8 December 1589; Libro, f. 131, 18 June 1609.

16 Martin, *Roma Sancta*, 131; Lazar, 'Protecting the Roots', 89–90.

17 *Equum reputamus*, 6 January 1560, published in Tacchi Venturi, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù*, 317.

18 Sabatine, 'The Church of Santa Caterina', 54–63. The Cesi family's patronage continued throughout the sixteenth century: Cardinal Pierdonato was the third Cardinal Protector

delle Botteghe Oscure, via Caetani, and via dei Funari has recently been the object of an extensive archaeological dig to recover the ancient complex of the *Crypta Balbi*.¹⁹ These excavations have clarified the sequence of building campaigns that, between 1549 and 1640, considerably extended the Conservatory's establishment. Beginning in 1549, the Confraternity purchased a small lot of land (about 125 square meters) and began building living quarters on the western part of the block, attached to the old church of Santa Maria. After the opening of the new street of S. Caterina in 1559 and the acquisition of more property in 1579 (a lot of about 480 square meters), two new buildings were erected in the early 1580s along the northern and southern limits of the garden behind the new church, with a tall wall separating the Conservatory's premises from its neighbouring houses.²⁰

Given the precarious lives of the girls that the Conservatory targeted, establishing criteria for admission was a serious matter. Its Constitutions, put in writing by a special committee appointed by the Confraternity in the 1570s and printed in 1582, specified that entrants should be between ten and twelve years of age, because this time immediately preceded puberty and was the most dangerous but also still malleable period.²¹ In addition, the Constitutions required that candidates should be, on the one hand, daughters of prostitutes or otherwise extremely poor, and, on the other, attractive and healthy virgins whose lives and reputations were manifestly in great danger of 'turning out badly'. Anyone who suspected that a girl was at risk could appeal to the Confraternity, but its officials were responsible for vetting every applicant.

The Conservatory's registers show a more tangled and fragmented reality in comparison with the norms prescribed by the Constitutions. Although early records are very sparse, and even after 1560 entries were not consistent, it is possible to tease out some information about admissions.²² The wards' average age was just over ten years, with a few girls entering as young as

(1578–1586) and Federico, Duke of Acquasparta, was a Confraternity officer in the 1580s: ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 8 December 1589.

19 Only a very small part of the Conservatory still stands, attached to the church of Santa Caterina. The rest was demolished in 1943–1944 after via delle Botteghe Oscure was widened according to fascist urban plans. See Venditelli, *Crypta Balbi*, 27–28.

20 Manacorda, *Crypta Balbi*, 97 and 93–97.

21 *Constitutioni della compagnia*, 22–23.

22 Some data about admission were recorded in two volumes that listed the Conservatory's wards: the 'Alfabeto' and the 'Libro'. In addition, the Confraternity's meeting minutes (*Decreti*) often report details about the application process or admission of new wards.

nine and a few as old as thirteen and fourteen.²³ While the administrators sometimes made exceptions concerning age, virginity was a *sine qua non* for admission. A possible new ward was finally accepted only after a *matrona* (a reputable woman appointed by the Confraternity) had verified the girl's virginity.²⁴ Two women, Donna Lucrezia and Donna Paola, appear in the records as having received payments for 'services' rendered to the Conservatory. It is possible that their duty was to verify the girls' virginity on behalf of the Confraternity.²⁵

Miscalculations and last-minute surprises sometimes occurred. Morally compelled, the Confraternity might waive the normal vetting procedures if a young woman was deemed in immediate danger of being raped or prostituted.²⁶ In those cases, the Conservatory relied on the local police to enforce its decrees by placing a request to the court for the young women's removal from their families.²⁷ Even when urgent, however, the step of verifying virginity was never skipped. The records mention a girl sent back to her mother after the administrators found out that she was not a virgin.²⁸ Even in the case of one Antonia – whose admission was recommended by Pope Gregory XIII himself – the young woman, who had been found 'wandering in the streets of Rome', was placed temporarily in a widows' shelter until she was physically inspected and found to be intact.²⁹ Although over the years the Conservatory often bent its rules over the criteria of admission, exceptions were never made for girls known to have lost their virginity. Even though defloration did not mean a permanent loss of honour in early modern Rome, charitable institutions preferred to avoid mixing virgins and non-virgins. They believed that it was harmful to expose maidens to the conversation of the sexually experienced.³⁰ In the Confraternity's view, the physical loss of virginity could mark a premature end to childhood malleability.

23 This number is approximate, since age at admission was recorded in about one third of the cases listed in the *Alfabeto*. I calculated the average age at admission by comparing the available data in both the *Alfabeto* and the *Libro*.

24 *Constitutioni della compagnia*, 22.

25 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 1 July 1576; Camerano, 'Assistenza richiesta', 257, note 31.

26 *Constitutioni della compagnia*, 23.

27 *Constitutioni della compagnia*, 24.

28 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, January 1579. In 1596 the Confraternity established that physical inspections had to be conducted a few days in advance: ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 11 November 1596. See also Lazar, 'Protecting the Roots', 89; and Camerano, 'Assistenza richiesta', 233.

29 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 2 January 1582.

30 Cohen, *Evolution of Women's Asylums*, 63–64. On honour and virginity for marginalized Roman women, see Cohen, 'No Longer Virgins'.

In removing girls from the dangers of the world and beginning their formation as the Conservatory's wards, correct timing was paramount. At the other end of the process, prolonging their stay into adulthood was incompatible with the asylum's reintegration objectives. The wards spent an average of nine years within the mostly enclosed, all-female community.³¹ Finding suitable husbands for the wards was a challenge for the overseers. The girls had limited contact with the outside world, and with their families in particular. The exceptions were a few ritual festivities and, especially, the procession on the feast day of Saint Catherine. This procession, which brought into crowded streets young maidens who normally lived in a cloistered setting, increased the institution's visibility and encouraged offers of marriage. On the other hand, it exposed the wards to the curiosity of viewers and to the dangers of the city.³² The Confraternity carefully planned the procession and even determined the girls' attire. Some years, the youngest wards dressed up like saints; other years all the girls paraded dressed in white or wearing simple tawny dresses with white veils covering their heads.³³

Seventeenth-century diarist Giacinto Gigli reported one incident that occurred in 1610, when one of the wards 'was abducted' or 'got lost'.³⁴ The incident prompted the Confraternity to cancel the procession for the following years. According to Gigli, the Confraternity only decided to resume the ritual 30 years later, in 1640, because without the social exposure allowed by the procession the wards could not find suitors and get married. The archival data, however, suggests that Gigli's interpretation erred. Marriage records for the decades before and after the procession's cancellation show, instead, that the average number of marriages remained steady at about seven per year.³⁵

More than general public visibility, the Confraternity relied on an informal network of supporters and benefactors to help arrange marriages. Occasionally, a proposal came from a suitor for a specific girl, as in the puzzling case of Alessio Lorenziano that ended up in front of a judge of the Corte

31 This average is calculated by comparing the wards' year of admission with their exit date, recorded in the *Alfabeto delle Zitelle* and *Libro delle cittadelle*.

32 San Juan, *Rome*, 95–128.

33 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 11 November 1593.

34 Gigli, *Diario Romano*, 192.

35 ASR, S. Caterina, *Alfabeto* and *Libro*. The procession was resumed during the protectorate of Cardinal Antonio Barberini as one of the many steps he took to increase the public visibility of the Conservatory. Barberini issued several printed warnings regulating the procession and the penalties for violators: ASR, S. Caterina, *Instrumenti*, 22.

Savelli. Alessio wished to marry the ward Lucretia Casasanta and tried to conclude the match with the help of several intermediaries. When the Confraternity, which in the beginning seemed to favour the match, rejected his proposal, Alessio accused the Conservatory of having manipulated Lucretia into choosing religious life.³⁶ Nuns and married alumnae could also act as intermediaries. On occasion, even the wards' families might become involved and, at times, they had considerable leverage. Only rarely, however, did the chosen partner come from the same town as the girl's parents or have the same trade as the father.³⁷

With the Confraternity's help in funding their dowries and selecting a spouse, the wards typically left the Conservatory and entered marriage in their early twenties.³⁸ Giulio Folco, a businessman and an active confraternity member, highlighted the tension of this long formative period in a booklet on charity he wrote in 1574 to plead for donations:

The many young women who had been previously admitted had already reached that age at which they should marry or become nuns; and, besides this, I saw that there were a great number of others who, in order to avoid falling into bad situations, asked to be admitted. [...] All of this tormented my soul and I greatly suffered because I saw, on the one hand, that keeping the maidens still cloistered was a bad and despicable thing, and, on the other hand, rejecting those who wanted to enter was very dangerous.³⁹

Folco's concern clearly highlights how the Confraternity sought to create a formative and educational space during the malleable years of youth in order to facilitate young women's transition into adulthood.

During the nine years that the average ward spent at Santa Caterina she encountered an educational programme designed to strengthen the moral and intellectual resources of working-class Roman women. Religious formation was at the centre of the project. The Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on individual reading and interpretation of Scripture, highlighted the need for accessible schooling to educate all well-formed Christians. The response in Catholic regions, in continuity with the Fifth Lateran Council

36 Cohen, *Love and Death*, 45–69.

37 ASR, S. Caterina, *Alfabeto and Libro*. From all the entries in which the places of origin of both the wards and their husbands are recorded, this occurred in about 5 per cent of the cases.

38 This data is based on the entry and exit records found in both the *Alfabeto* and the *Libro*.

39 Folco, *Effetti mirabili*, 2v. The translation is mine. The first edition of the work was printed in Latin in 1574. The book was then reprinted several times and translated into French (1583) and Spanish (1589).

(1512–1517), renewed a longstanding yet often disregarded norm that called for the free education of children, including the poor, as part of the Church's evangelical mission.⁴⁰ During the sixteenth century confraternities and religious orders began to organize programmes to provide basic education for all.⁴¹ For example, in Rome, contemporaneous with the Conservatory of Santa Caterina's development, the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine counted about 1000 volunteers, men and women, devoted to teaching children.⁴² Since illiteracy and religious ignorance were considered two aspects of the same problem, these charitable campaigns taught reading and writing alongside catechism.⁴³ In a holistic approach, learning how to read using pious texts and prayer books accomplished the twofold purpose of training the specific skill of reading while also delivering religious instruction.

The Conservatory's Constitutions did not detail the content of instruction, but generically referred to learning 'things that are convenient respectively for those maidens who will marry or enter religious life'.⁴⁴ The rules insisted only that the memorization of Christian doctrine – probably as catechism – was deemed essential for women of all statuses. Teaching was entrusted to the community of nuns. Nonetheless, the Conservatory was receptive to 'modern' pedagogical tendencies that integrated literacy skills with religious education. The institution combined the traditional practice of educating girls in a convent setting with the specific mission to serve the daughters of prostitutes, a constituency difficult to reach.

In the Confraternity's view, educating girls at risk meant first and foremost teaching them virtuous behaviour in order to coach them into a life path different from their mothers, so that they could become functional adults and 'reputable' women. With the primary aims of saving the wards' souls and preserving the chastity of their bodies, the Conservatory sought to familiarize them with standard prayers and instruct them to receive the sacraments properly. For these goals, the Tridentine catechism, known as the *Christian Doctrine*, was a core reading. Printed in 1566 under the auspices of Pope Pius V and the Council of Trent, the text was broadly used by religious schools and also reprinted by local bishops in abbreviated or adapted forms.⁴⁵

40 Pelliccia, *La scuola primaria*, 22–25.

41 Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, 121–25.

42 The Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine started in Rome in 1560. By 1612, it counted 78 schools with 529 brothers and 519 sisters teaching children catechism. See Black, *Italian Confraternities*, 226–27.

43 Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 338–39.

44 *Costituzioni della compagnia*, 27.

45 Bellarmino, *Dichiarazione più copiosa della Dottrina*.

The wards also learned basic reading skills and were trained in traditional female handicrafts like sewing, embroidery, weaving, and knitting. Finally, as a support to religion, music was an important component of the institution's curriculum. Prestigious composers and singers from the papal *Cappella* provided high-quality musical instruction to the girls.⁴⁶

The Constitutions' wording suggests some differences of curriculum for the vast majority of wards destined for marriage and for those few who entered religious life. Although details are lacking, some hypotheses may be advanced. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the girls who became nuns stayed at Santa Caterina for an average of fourteen years, about five years longer than the girls who married.⁴⁷ There was likely more than one reason. For some wards, religious life was the last resort after the failure to find a spouse. For others, it may have taken more time to raise the convent dowry, which was at Santa Caterina typically more expensive than a marriage dowry.⁴⁸ In either case, nuns had a longer formation that continued into their novitiate years. It is difficult to gauge the effects of nine years' instruction on the wards who left to marry. Yet it seems that those who became religious made more progress in literacy skills.

A wider variety of religious books enriched the nuns' training at Santa Caterina. The community's Rule, an adaptation of the Augustinian monastic rule specifically written for Santa Caterina early in the seventeenth century, stated that:

In the refectory during meals & in the working quarter, in addition to the Statutes, at the appropriate times, the Christian Doctrine, Granada's *Symbol of Faith*, the Lives of the Saints and other approved books shall be read.⁴⁹

The *Symbol of Faith* was a translation of a text of 1583 by the Dominican theologian Luis de Granada.⁵⁰ Following the tradition of natural theology, Granada described even the smallest animals, such as spiders, worms, and

46 O'Regan, 'Scandal Averted', 207–09.

47 ASR, S. Caterina, Zitelle, 79, 80, and 81.

48 The Confraternity's Constitutions recommended giving the wards who entered religious life a dowry that was twice that for the girls who married: *Costituzioni della compagnia*, 25–26. On dowries: Esposito, 'Ad dotandum puellas'.

49 *Costituzioni sopra la Regola*, 32. Subsequent page references to this document appear parenthetically.

50 Granada, *Introducción del Símbolo de la Fe*. On Granada, a disciple of the mystic and priest Juan de Avila, see Franklin Lewis, 'Fray Luis de Granada', 318.

bees, as well as plants and human bodily organs. His aim was to use these marvels of the natural world to prove the existence of God as a divine intelligence that shaped a rational order. The prescribed reading of such a book, while not high theology, signalled a desire to foster more than rote learning. Although secular books were disallowed, the novice mistress and the prioress, with the approval of the Confraternity officials and the convent's confessor, could grant permission for other books to be read (32).

Since all the passages in the Rule on the permitted books referred to the Conservatory nuns, we do not know what the wards heard or read beyond the catechism. Because the nuns and wards shared at least some living and working spaces in which the monastic practice of reading out loud took place, it is likely that texts such as hagiographies were shared, but not prohibited secular books.

Although all wards learned basic reading skills, only a few were likely taught handwriting. The nuns who took on leading roles could write (53). In the 1580s, those with administrative and teaching responsibilities included, in addition to the mother prioress and vicar, three mistresses of wards and three of novices, and one work mistress charged with coordinating the institution's textile production. These roles required at least basic writing skills since the nuns had to keep records, write receipts, and list the commissioned work. The manuscript chronicle of the institution's history, written by one of the nuns in the mid-seventeenth century, shows good writing skills and familiarity with the stylistic components of hagiographic literature.⁵¹ But perhaps her accomplishment was exceptional.

Like reading, manual work was valued not only for its practical benefits but also as morally formative. Working with cloth – weaving, sewing, embroidering, and knitting – was prominent in the typical female curriculum. A commonplace already present in classical culture, the association of needlework and good morals, especially in reference to female chastity, continued in the early modern period.⁵² Several early modern theorists reiterated the link by instructing women to cultivate these traditional womanly skills.⁵³ Even the commentators who embraced more innovative ideas on female literacy and encouraged women's reading endorsed handiwork as a path to virtue. In a study of sixteenth-century embroidery pattern books, Stacey Shimizu writes: for the early modern period, 'the value of clothworking lay not so much in the production of textiles as in its role

51 ASR, S. Caterina, Tomi, 56, 3r–7v.

52 Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 6–9.

53 Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 88–89.

in the production of feminine women and good wives'.⁵⁴ In addition, these activities, performed in the enclosed spaces of home or convent, kept girls and women away from the moral dangers of the streets.⁵⁵

At Santa Caterina, the Rule emphasized the spiritual relevance of manual work as a tool against the 'wickedness and sins' that originated from idleness (52). The custom of reading spiritual texts aloud and engaging in religious conversations during working hours reinforced the function of manual work as a sanctifying practice, in line with monastic tradition. The wards, being raised by nuns, became familiar with these practices and shared at least in part in the monastic sensibilities of the institution.

Besides fostering moral virtue, manual skills were crucial, for the girls and for the Conservatory, as a source of securing a livelihood. The institution needed the crafts of the nuns and the wards to pay its bills. Girls who would leave to marry also needed to work to help support the family economy. The section of the Rule outlining the nuns' educative duties acknowledged both moral and practical imperatives (53). The execution of high-quality work in a diligent and serious atmosphere edified not only the nuns and wards who produced it but also the customers who commissioned it (43). Since the quality reflected on the whole community, the mother prefect in charge had to ensure that everything complied with the institution's high standards.

In 1589, a Confraternity meeting discussed the need to broaden the Conservatory's textile production.⁵⁶ Administrators knew that keeping the textile business afloat depended on a network of elite female patrons who would attract more customers from among their peers. Signor Federico Cesi, Duke of Acquasparta and nephew of the homonymous prelate who had been the Confraternity's first Cardinal Protector, volunteered to ask his mother, Beatrice Caetani, and other noblewomen to visit the Conservatory and support the expansion of its textile production. In 1609, the Marchesa Livia Della Rovere appears in the Confraternity's records among the benefactresses purchasing textiles.⁵⁷

The Conservatory's textile crafts became renowned to the point that the nuns were able to sell their instructional expertise to outsiders. In 1606–1607,

54 Shimizu, 'Pattern of Perfect Womanhood', 76.

55 Rome's imbalanced demographic ratio of men to women, associated with a high rate of prostitution and crime, created the perception of a dangerous and debauched city. See Nussdorfer, 'Priestly Rulers, Male Subjects', 110.

56 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 8 December 1589. This was also the case for many early modern shelters for women. One notable example is the Casa della Pietà in Florence, which functioned almost as a factory producing wool and silk. See Terpstra, *Lost Girls*, 60–84.

57 ASR, S. Caterina, Libro 80, f. 131, 18 June 1609.

written permits (*license*) to enter the monastery listed six women ‘who pay to learn how to work in the monastery school’.⁵⁸ These women, of whom at least two were married, were allowed to enter the Conservatory during the day for most of the year (but excluding the hottest summer months) to be instructed in textile production. Such arrangements were beneficial in more ways than one, given that the presence of external trainees helped to enrich and diversify the female community.

Textile skills were evidently valued for girls who expected later to live and work outside the Conservatory. One girl who was admitted in order ‘to learn how to work’ was Cicilia, a weaver’s daughter; the expertise she acquired would have enabled her to contribute to her family’s craft. As the Rule emphasized, women’s ability to participate in the family’s trade was regarded as an asset and the young women’s manual dexterity was believed to increase their chances of finding spouses (53). For example, suggesting that the quality of work indicated the value of a potential wife, a suitor might ask to see the work of the young woman he intended to marry.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, of the brides whose husbands’ identities are known, about 22 per cent were connected with textile trades: tailors, waistcoat makers, linen and silk workers, and weavers.⁶⁰ These men evidently found it advantageous to acquire a spouse whose skills could support their trade. A striking example was the ward Elisabetta Cattanea Parasole, who married Rosato Parasole, a painter and the brother of the printmaker Leonardo Parasole. The embroidery training that Elisabetta received at the Conservatory, together with woodcutting skills probably acquired by working with her husband’s family, allowed her to publish six pattern books for lacemaking, destined to a female audience.⁶¹ Since male authors designed most of the popular, early modern embroidery books, Elisabetta represented an important exception, and her case highlights the Conservatory’s role in fostering young women’s competencies.

Textile production skills were thus an essential component of the Conservatory’s educational programme. Besides using sewing, knitting, and weaving as virtuous exercises that kept the wards occupied and safe from the temptation of idleness, the Confraternity also capitalized on the girls’ work and – through the cooperation of some influential female patrons – secured

58 ASR, S. Caterina, Libro 80, f. 4, 1 April 1606–9 July 1607.

59 Cohen, *Love and Death*, 53.

60 These trades noted in *Alfabeto* and *Libro* represent 25 out of the 113 recorded crafts of the men who married wards from the Conservatory in the years 1563–1607.

61 On Elisabetta’s (or Isabella’s) work, see Lincoln, ‘Parasole, Isabella Catanea’.

a profit that was reinvested to help pay expenses. The monastery's reputation for textile production attracted not only external apprentices but also potential suitors, drawn both by the ideal of virtuous femininity attached to maidens who mastered needlework and by the prospect of income they could gain from their wives' work.

Lastly, not only nuns but also wards of the Conservatory received training in liturgical music. Since they took part in some of the ceremonies at their church, all girls learned chanting and polyphonic singing, and some studied instrument playing.⁶² Because music education was so important, the Confraternity granted several teachers permission to enter 'between the two doors' to give lessons in the presence of two elder nuns.⁶³ To highlight the Conservatory's contributions to Rome's Counter-Reformation music, historian Noel O'Regan has mapped the network of fine musicians, ecclesiastical patrons, and Confraternity sponsors who promoted and facilitated the teaching of music at Santa Caterina.⁶⁴ An outstanding early example of the high-quality musical education provided was a girl named Utilia. Admitted to Santa Caterina in 1561, she took religious vows in 1578 and died one year later.⁶⁵ In a rare annotation, the record reported her special gifts as a soprano singer, since musical ability was prized as a fine quality for nuns. Besides its liturgical and spiritual importance, excellent music was a way to attract donations.

This study reconstructs the religious, moral, and practical education that young women received at the Conservatory of Santa Caterina during its first century. Early modern society assumed low social mobility and constraining gender roles, and young people were expected to learn appropriate behaviours and perform them as adults. So, the Conservatory reached out to marginalized girls in their malleable years and created a space and time for a productive youth. The asylum not only protected young women from sexual exploitation, but also provided them with practical tools to live more respectably than their impoverished families might envision. To accomplish their educative objectives, the Confraternity designed an innovative curriculum that taught and reinforced the most important traditional female virtues of chastity, modesty, and piety. In an enclosed and sheltered setting, the Conservatory also emphasized literacy and

62 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 16 October 1603.

63 ASR, S. Caterina, Decreti, 28 March 1602. The expression 'between the two doors' probably refers to a parlour, a space between an external and an internal door.

64 O'Regan, 'Scandal Averted', 207–12.

65 ASR, S. Caterina, Libro, 79.

vocational skills. This training, together with the institution's prestige for its embroidery and textile work, contributed to making its school desirable even for girls from well-established artisan families. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the Conservatory of Santa Caterina in Rome helped shape expectations and standards for the education of female youth in the early modern period.

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11. The Material Culture of Female Youth in Bologna, 1550–1600

Michele Nicole Robinson

Abstract

Examining the youth of women from both ‘middling sort’ and patrician families living in Bologna between 1550 and 1600, this study considers the role of domestic material culture in the upbringing and education of girls and young women, tracing how their relationships with objects and images developed and shifted over the early stages of life. Bringing together evidence from literary and archival sources as well as artefacts and images in museum collections today, this essay demonstrates that household objects were important and practical teaching tools as well as symbolic of a young woman’s knowledge, age, and social status. Additionally, girls and young women could use these same objects to attempt to alter or determine their own lives and futures.

Keywords: material culture; domestic interior; early modern Bologna; education; housework; youth

In early modern Italy, parents did not see their children as miniature adults, and indeed recognized various stages between childhood and adulthood. Shaped by gender and social status, the future roles that their offspring would play were, however, established early on and appropriate training and social education began from a young age. Some girls, especially from patrician families, were expected to become nuns, though most headed toward marriage. This essay considers young women from ‘middling sort’ and patrician families living in Bologna between 1550 and 1600 who were destined for marriage. Of particular interest are the objects that could be found in these young women’s domestic environments and the ways they were employed to help prepare them for wife- and motherhood. As we will

see, the same objects that supported learning and were put to practical use within the home could also be symbolic, marking transitions through the life course and announcing social status. Thus, early modern women had deep and multifaceted relationships with domestic material culture that began and developed in childhood and youth.

In early modern Italy, marriage was a pivotal event in a young woman's life. It often marked the point at which she left her family home for that of her husband, and was a key moment for the circulation and ritual exchange of objects. In order to marry, brides of all social backgrounds needed a dowry, which was usually composed of a cash portion as well as a trousseau, or *corredo*. In Bologna, depending on her family's wealth and social status, a bride's trousseau included objects ranging from clothing to books, cooking tools to jewellery, and beds to paintings.¹ These items were intended for a woman's use over the course of her marriage and were considered to be hers under the roof of her marital home. At the same time, however, she was also charged with caring for and preserving the objects in her husband's household.² Consequently, women had complex and significant relationships with domestic objects and spaces, which scholars have begun to explore in recent years.³ Much less attention, however, has been paid to the early phases of the lifecycle during which these relationships began; by attending to the material culture of female youth, this essay begins to fill this gap in our knowledge.⁴

Turning to Bologna, a city where women played unusually prominent and public roles, adds a further dimension to our understanding of early modern female youth. In the sixteenth century, as part of the Papal States, Bologna was a city second in importance only to Rome and a natural stopping point on journeys from the south of the peninsula to the north and beyond. Thus, the city was frequently host to aristocrats and dignitaries, and Bolognese noblewomen often played key and visible parts in the social events that celebrated these visits.⁵ Women also made notable contributions to Bologna's artistic life. For instance, Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665) were both successful professional painters, and Properzia de'

1 On Bolognese dowries and trousseaux see, for instance Carboni, 'Economics of Marriage', 371–87, and Sorbelli, *Il corredo*.

2 Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls', 87–89 and Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 216–17.

3 A few examples include: Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, *At Home*; Campbell, 'Prophets, Saints, and Matriarchs'; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 310–29; Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*; and Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*.

4 Recent studies include: Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls'; Evangelisti, 'Learning from Home'; and Brown, 'Children and Education'.

5 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 87.

Rossi (c. 1490–1530), a sculptor, was the only woman that Giorgio Vasari discussed at length in his *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550). Finally, Bologna was a forerunner in the foundation of specialized institutions that supported orphaned girls and young women. For example, the conservatory of Santa Maria del Baraccano cared for orphans from respectable, and usually artisan, families who had fallen on hard times.⁶

Women thus contributed to Bolognese social, cultural, and commercial life in various ways depending on their social class. What many of them had in common, though, were their roles as wives and mothers for which they learned a range of skills from early in life. Also shared across social classes was the employment of domestic material culture to teach these skills, though the form, material, and value of objects could range vastly between humble and wealthy households. The employment of objects as teaching tools, and the inclusion of many of these same practical but also symbolic objects in bridal trousseaux, highlights the significance of material culture over the female life course. The study of women's youth through the lens of material culture therefore extends our understanding of experiences that are otherwise elusive.

To recover the material culture available to girls and young women, and to imagine how objects served in their domestic education, this essay draws on various primary sources. The analysis of physical objects can, to some extent, reveal how and by whom they were used, though relatively few from the early modern period survive today. Therefore, we turn also to contemporary images that depict domestic spaces and objects for evidence about the material culture of the home and the ways in which inhabitants interacted with it. In addition, notarial records documenting a variety of exchanges and transfers often describe objects and help us place them in domestic settings. Household inventories, for example, were sometimes drawn up after the death of a property owner and can offer detailed lists of domestic goods. There were also inventories of brides' trousseaux, which not only reveal the kinds of objects that young women possessed and brought into their new homes, but can also suggest their education and training prior to marriage.

Besides these primary sources, this essay also draws on sixteenth-century conduct books and household treatises, mostly written by highly educated men to represent and encourage ideal behaviour. Inexpensive and extremely popular, these texts covered many subjects, though most important here are

6 The conservatory, founded in 1528, had rigid criteria for entry. Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 461–68; Terpstra, *Abandoned Children*, 66.

those concerning family life and childrearing.⁷ For instance, Silvio Antoniano's *On the Christian Upbringing of Children* (1584) and Giovanni Leonardi's *Institution of a Christian Family* (1591) offered advice on governing a family and raising children.⁸ Others, such as Ludovico Dolce's *Dialogue on the Instruction of Women* (1545), specifically addressed the rearing and educating of girls.⁹ These authors advised parents, including patricians, to have their daughters practise domestic tasks for several reasons: to learn the skills they would need later as wives and mothers; to keep them out of the trouble bred by idleness; and, especially for humbler families, to contribute to the household economy.¹⁰ Writers also offered advice on making learning necessary skills fun (and thus more effective), for instance by using song for the memorization of prayers and providing miniature household tools as playthings.¹¹

Household treatises were prescriptive rather than descriptive of early modern practices. Yet by reading these texts alongside contemporary objects, images, and archival documents we can begin to see some of the ways in which young women were educated for wife- and motherhood. This essay will demonstrate that, as a central component of this preparation, the material culture of the home also assisted with and signalled the transition from childhood to youth to adulthood. As girls grew into young women of marriageable age, their relationships with domestic objects became increasingly complex. Although there was much that young women had to learn before they were married, only a few components of female education can be considered within the scope of this essay. The focus here is on elements of female education most often discussed by pedagogues and moralists of the day alongside objects that were both related to these activities and commonly found within late sixteenth-century Bolognese homes. It must be noted that many of the literary sources used here offer a view of female experience from the perspective of male writers; however, when considered carefully, and alongside other written and physical evidence, instances of female agency can be uncovered, as we will see.

7 Grendler, *Schooling*, 112–18.

8 Antoniano's work was written at the behest of Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584), Archbishop of Milan, and first published in Verona with many reprints. Leonardi was the founder of Lucca's Clerks Regular of the Mother of God, with his treatise published in Rome in 1591 and again in 1673. On these and similar texts, see Logan, 'Counter-Reformation Theories'.

9 Dolce's text, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (1545), is a translation and reworking of Juan Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae Christianae* (1524), dedicated to Queen Catherine of Aragon. See Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 187–91.

10 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Geography', 84.

11 Dolce, *Dialogo*, 10r–11v.

According to the authors of household treatises, the most crucial knowledge that early modern women needed, beginning even from infancy, was religious. Indeed, all children – male and female, rich and poor – needed to learn, understand, and follow the tenets of the Christian faith.¹² Although children might receive a religious education outside of the home, for most girls school was not accessible.¹³ It was therefore generally within domestic space and with female members of the household that they learned to be good Christians, and, for those addressed within the scope of this essay, good Catholics in particular. Objects, and especially images, were central to religious education and practice. Long considered by churchmen and educators as ‘books for everyone’, sacred images offered an easy and even pleasurable way of introducing and explaining key religious figures, stories, and concepts.¹⁴ These same images were also used in domestic devotional practices, and parents were encouraged to have children carefully observe and imitate the ways in which they greeted, prayed before, and treated with reverence representations of holy figures.¹⁵ In addition to imitating adults’ words and actions, children were encouraged to interact with devotional images, for example, offering to them ‘all manner of childish things’ (*alcune cotali cosarelle puerili*), as Antoniano advised (52b).¹⁶ As girls grew into young women and developed more personal relationships with holy figures, the elements of play and imitation in their devotional practices would fade. And, as they built up a foundation of religious knowledge, young women were expected to act as role models and teachers for their younger siblings, helping them learn proper Christian behaviours and actions.¹⁷

This brief summary of the advice from churchmen and moralists cannot be taken to reflect contemporary educational practices with respect to girls and young women. Nevertheless, by the late sixteenth century, inventories show that many Bolognese homes had objects and images to support learning about the Christian faith in the ways prescribed in contemporary treatises. Most notable are the ways in which these objects connect to advice about the importance of the Virgin as an exemplary figure; as Antoniano explains, especially for female children, ‘this highest queen must be proposed as a mirror, and exemplar of humility, and of every virtue’ (*questa altissima regina*

12 Turrini, ‘Riformare al mondo’, 429.

13 Grendler, *Schooling*, 100; Hufton, ‘Istruzione’, 53; and Turrini, ‘Riformare al mondo’, 447.

14 Paleotti, *Discorso*, 106 and 111. Also see Evangelisti, ‘Learning from Home’, 667.

15 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 52a–b.

16 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Grammar and spelling follow the language in the original documents.

17 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 165a; and *Psalterio per putti principianti*, 14v–15r.

deve esser proposta per specchio, et esemplare di humilità, et d'ogni virtù) (52b). As in other northern Italian cities, the Virgin was the most commonly represented figure in Bolognese households during the sixteenth century.¹⁸ She is noted as the subject of paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, and reliefs in the inventories considered here, though the artists' names are never given, nor is there much detail about the types of scenes depicted.

These gaps make it impossible to connect entries in inventories with extant images and objects. The frequency with which some early modern image types survive today, however, suggests their original popularity. For example, scenes of the holy family with the sleeping Christ Child were common in northern Italy in this period, and exist in many museum collections today.¹⁹ One of several versions is by the Bolognese painter Lavinia Fontana, and now in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. The small, trapezoid-shaped painting on panel is set within a richly detailed arc-shaped frame, and shows the Virgin covering the sleeping Christ Child with a blanket.²⁰ An image such as this would have been used to support prayer in the home, but it also has features that would have made it appropriate for teaching young people about the Christian faith, at least according to the advice of moralists. Fontana's painting therefore offers a useful example for unpacking how parents may have put this advice into practice. It features, for instance, the sleeping Christ Child, a sight moralists thought to be pleasing to young viewers, which would draw and hold their interest and attention.²¹ In addition, showing girls images of youthful female saints, as the Virgin is represented in Fontana's painting, was said to inspire them to embrace chastity and other important virtues from early in life.²² Girls were also advised to visit their mother's chamber to watch and listen to the ways in which she engaged with images of the Virgin. By imitating what she heard and saw, a girl would learn not only to pronounce the words to important prayers, but also to interact appropriately with representations of holy figures.²³

As they got older, girls were also encouraged to use devotional images as a path to personal relationships with Christ, the Virgin, and other saints.²⁴ In his *Decor puellarum*, the saintly layman Giovanni di Dio (Juan de Dios) advised

18 On Florence see, for instance, Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 190–228; on Venice, Morse, 'Creating Sacred Space', 154. For examples of images of the Virgin in seventeenth-century Bolognese homes, see Morselli, *Collezionisti e quadrerie*, 517–20.

19 Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 167–70.

20 The painting is reproduced in full colour and discussed in Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 167–69.

21 Dominici, *Regola*, 34.

22 Dominici, *Regola*, 34.

23 Antoniano, *Tre libri*, 52a–b.

24 Giovanni di Dio, *Decor puellarum*, 44r–v; and Leonardi, *Institutione*, 78.

unmarried young women to decorate domestic altars with embroidery that they had made with their own hands as well as to make clothing and cut work for statues of the Madonna (44r–v). Although Giovanni di Dio wrote in 1471, his suggestions were echoed by post-Tridentine pedagogues. Antoniano, for instance, suggested that floral garlands be offered to the Virgin as a means of inciting devotion and ensuring she remained a ‘special advocate and protector’ (*spetiale avvocata, et protettrice*) for life (52b). While this kind of behaviour would be easier to carry out with a three-dimensional figure, the curved frame around Fontana’s painting could have supported a garland or other similar offerings. At the same time, the image within the frame, where the Virgin prepares to drape a blanket over her son, is comparable to the actions described by Giovanni di Dio, and which a young woman could imitate with textiles from around the house, perhaps using a doll or even a sibling.²⁵

Over time, prayer was to become an increasingly important part of young women’s daily lives. Leonardi, for instance, suggested they ‘occupy themselves in a number of good and virtuous exercises’ (*occupandosi in varii essercitii virtuosi & buoni*) – waking up early in the morning, praying to God, working, taking lessons, and praying yet again (159). Drawing on what they had learned earlier in life through play and observation, young women might use an image like Fontana’s to support their prayer and meditation at home. Thus, an image that was once used to teach a girl about the Virgin and help her develop a relationship with this key figure might over time become a tool for her own prayer and meditation. And, when she was ready for marriage, a young woman might have a devotional image of her own in her trousseau. For example, when Camilla Zucchini, the daughter of a painter, married in 1594, she had in her trousseau ‘two Madonnas: one painted and the other in relief’.²⁶ These images would support devotional practices within her marital home, but could also be employed to teach her future children the fundamentals of the faith.

Alongside devotional images, books were important tools in religious practice and education. Books of hours and psalters were employed not only to help the faithful remember and clearly recite their prayers at the appropriate times of day but also to teach basic reading skills.²⁷ Extant examples of these texts, some of which were intended specifically for use by children, included not only prayers and accompanying images but also the

25 Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*, 320–29.

26 ‘[te]m due Maddone una dipinta l’altra di rilievo’. Archivio di Stato di Bologna (hereafter ASB), *Notarile*, Pietro Zanettini (1555–1605), 1555–1605, 6/2; 15 January 1594, 1r–2v; 2v.

27 Grendler, *Schooling*, 143–46.

letters of the alphabet, common abbreviations, and occasionally numbers. The *Psalterio per putti principianti con la Dottrina aggiunta*, a children's psalter printed in Bologna in 1575, for example, includes on the reverse of the title page the letters of the alphabet and the words of the Sign of the Cross, Our Father, and Hail Mary (iv).²⁸ Using a book like this, a child would first learn their letters, then syllables, words, and phrases from common prayers.²⁹ Consequently, they developed and practised their reading skills while learning their prayers, which was the driving force behind the 'alphabetization' of the masses in the post-Tridentine period.³⁰

Although the Bolognese primer was intended for use in a catechism school, archival documents locate similar texts in contemporary homes.³¹ For example, the post-mortem inventory describing the goods found in the household of Alessandro Vinconti in 1564 includes five 'alphabet books' or primers. Notably, the inventory also provides the names of Vinconti's five minor children: Giulio Cesare, Marc'Antonio, Claudio, Smiralda, and Samaritana.³² Presumably each child, including the two girls, had their own primer, which they used to learn to read and pray.

Girls growing up in this period did not usually attend school, so if they learned to read it was often with their mothers, nurses, or other female figures as teachers.³³ Sixteenth-century treatise writers generally agreed that all girls needed to be able to read, and social class set the level to which they should be educated. For example, in Antoniano's opinion, noble girls should learn to read and write well and have knowledge of basic arithmetic; middle-class girls should be able to read and write a little; and girls from humble families only needed to know how to read prayers (153b).³⁴ In practice, however, female literacy varied greatly both across and within social classes in this period. Many women were illiterate, while others could follow along as printed words were read aloud, often in texts they already knew by heart.³⁵ Some women could read fluently, usually in the vernacular, and a small minority were trained in Latin and other languages.³⁶

28 Discussed and reproduced in Grendler, *Schooling*, 149–51.

29 Grendler, *Schooling*, 142.

30 Evangelisti, 'Learning from Home,' 667; Grendler, *Schooling*, 338–39; and Turrini, 'Riformare al mondo', 425 and 429.

31 Grendler, *Schooling*, 147.

32 ASB, *Notarile*, Giacomo Simoni (1540–1595), filza 7, 1560–1569, 7/18; no. 178, 2 June 1564, 1r–6v; 2v.

33 Grendler, *Schooling*, 96–101 and Niccoli, 'Bambini in preghiera', 276.

34 See also Grendler, *Schooling*, 89.

35 Miglio, 'Leggere e scrivere', 364.

36 See Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 223.

Despite this range of skills, religious books, and particularly books of hours, were often included in Bolognese brides' trousseaux or given as wedding gifts. For instance, when she married Camillo Chiari in 1582, Artemisia Caprara, a Bolognese noblewoman, had in her trousseau a book of hours covered in velvet.³⁷ The costly fabric used to cover this book made it a luxury object available only to the wealthy; however, books of hours, and other religious texts were not limited to those from elite families, as plain, printed versions with few illustrations were relatively affordable.³⁸ This is probably the kind of book that Camilla Guidetti, a household servant, brought to her new husband's home in 1598.³⁹ Although they were of different quality and monetary value, these two texts intimated the brides' piety and indicated their different social statuses. And, as part of their trousseau goods, the books signalled the brides' transition from youth to adulthood. Finally, like devotional images, the texts might later have been used to provide their children with a religious education, of which basic reading skills could be an important part.⁴⁰

As represented in a post-mortem inventory of 1569, the home of Alberto Zanolini, a Bolognese notary, makes an interesting, though unusual example of young women's access to books and learning. At the time of Zanolini's death, two of his daughters, Smiralda and Pantasilea, were unmarried and living at home. The inventory includes 'three books of saints, printed and used', just the type of reading recommended for young women.⁴¹ In addition, Zanolini's daughters may well have been able to read the Latin works in their father's library, which included a dictionary and a copy of the statutes of Bologna. An entry in the list of debts inherited by Zanolini's sons states:

Smiralda and Pantasilea, sisters of Camillo and Bartolomeo and daughters of Signore Alberto, claim to have owed to each of them, as part of their inheritance, dowries as much as was given to Madonna Orsina, their sister, which was 2400 [*lire*] in cash and 800 [*lire*] in trousseau goods, and this they say to be clear in the laws and statutes of Bologna.⁴²

37 ASB, *Archivio Caprara* (Signora Artemisia Caprara); no. 89, 11 February 1582, 1r–3v; 3v.

38 Grendler, 'Form and Function', 467–69.

39 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 9 January 1598, 1r–2v; 2r.

40 Grendler, 'Form and Function', 467, and Grendler, *Schooling*, 353.

41 'Tre libri de santi tutti stampati e usi'. ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 12 November 1569, 1r–8v; 5r.

42 ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 6r: 'Item m^a Smiralda e Pantasilea sorelle deli detti Sr Camillo e Bart^o figliole del detto gia Sr Alberto si pretendeno haver à [illegible] dotate in detta heredita di tanto qua'to è stata la sopra m^a Ursina lor sorella per ciascheduna scriano lire doe milla e

Thus it appears that the Zanolini sisters used their learning and the material resources available to them in the home to try to advance their marriages.

This example demonstrates that young women were not simply passive participants in domestic training, but could use their education and the material culture around them to attempt to shape their own futures. Distrust of female agency was perhaps why moralists and treatise writers urged that young women's literacy be kept to a minimum. As the conservative Antoniano advised, a father 'should be content with his daughter knowing how to recite the Office of the Virgin and reading the lives of the saints and spiritual books' (*però il buon padre di famiglia si contenti che la sua figliuola sappia dir l'offitio della Santissima Vergine, & leggere vite de' Santi, & alcun libro spirituale*), using the rest of her time to attend to household chores (154a).

Attending to domestic tasks was seen as a means not only of teaching young women necessary skills, but also of keeping them busy and out of trouble. Therefore, authors of conduct manuals advised even elite parents to have their daughters participate in housework.⁴³ For instance, Ludovico Dolce advised that girls learn 'how to adorn a chamber, make a bed, ensure that all the family's goods are arranged with order and in their places', as well as 'how to cook and prepare food' (14v). Acknowledging that some noblewomen may 'scoff and mock' at the thought of their daughters working in the kitchen, he argued that this way things would be done with more order, cleanliness, and care, and at the same time less expense (14v–15r).⁴⁴ To encourage participation in this kind of work, Dolce suggested that parents provide their daughters with miniature household tools. He explained that through these objects girls would learn 'with pleasure' the name and purpose of the implements they would later use as young women and adults (10r–11v).

Although Dolce's work is prescriptive, there is evidence that some Bolognese parents provided their daughters with miniature household objects. The 1574 inventory of the goods in the home of the artisan Giovanni Matteo Fendenti, for example, includes among kitchenware 'a very small

quantocento de denar è ottocento lire de apparati et di questo dicono essere chiare nele legi e statui di Bolog^a. On the statutes, see also 5r–v.

43 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Geography', 84.

44 Dolce: '& vorrei appresso, che non solo questa fanciulla s'addestrasse nelle facende particolari della casa (che molte ne sono) si come adornare una camera, acconciare un letto, far che tutte le masseritie famigliari siano divise con ordine & a luoghi loro, in modo, che paia, che tutta la casa da ogni parte goda, & sia piena d'allegria: ma etiandio della cucina, imparando il modo di cucinare & di ordinar le vivande [...] Ben so io, che alcune delicate Madonne si faranno beffe & mi scherniranno'. See also Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework'.

Figure 11.1 Toy Jug made in Pesaro, Italy, c. 1520–1540

children's pot'.⁴⁵ This object may have been similar to tiny jugs and pots found in museum collections today, such as those now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The jug in Figure 11.1, for example, is only four centimetres tall and made of quite durable material, which would have made it suitable for small, clumsy hands.⁴⁶ The 'very small children's pot' may have been given to Fendenti's daughter for use in imaginative play or in imitation of the actions she saw other female members of the household performing. As she developed greater skill and was able to take on more demanding tasks, perhaps the tiny pot was replaced with larger, more functional items, such as the 'old, medium-sized pot' also found in the Fendenti household.

When a girl had grown into a young woman and was ready for marriage, she might be given her own tools for cooking and cleaning. Elisabetta Pino, from an artisan family, for example, had in her trousseau a pot, kettle, brazier, pan, bed warmer, and other items needed to help her run a household when she married Pompilio Benamati, a locksmith, in 1598.⁴⁷ These were practical

45 'Una caldarina piccola da putti'. ASB, *Notarile*, Aristotele Sigurani (1551–1599), 1571–1599, 7/20 and 6/1; 23 October 1574, 44v–45r; 45r.

46 This item was recovered from a Jewish cemetery in Damascus, but made in Pesaro c. 1520–40. Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls', 87–89.

47 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 25 November 1598, 11r–v; 11r.

tools suited to the domestic tasks expected of an artisan's spouse; they also represented the knowledge and skill that Elisabetta had developed and her readiness to apply these as a wife. Just as the replacement of a miniature pot with a full-sized version might be a marker of the transition from childhood to youth, so the trousseau items related to running a household marked the bride's transition from youth to adulthood.

In contrast to young women from artisan and more humble backgrounds, those from wealthy Bolognese families did not usually have tools for cooking or cleaning in their trousseaux. They and their mothers might have 'scoffed' at the idea of working in the kitchen, and instead elite young women learned to oversee and manage this kind of labour, which was often performed by servants and slaves.⁴⁸ Social status also shaped the ways in which young women participated in various forms of domestic textile work, including weaving, spinning, and sewing. Many moralists criticized noblewomen's apparent distaste for these activities. For instance, as Antoniano explained, rather than 'distain for the needle and spindle [...] [young women should] rejoice at dressing with their own hands, their fathers and brothers' (*hanno à sdegnarsi dell'aco, & del fuso [...] ralleggrinsi di vestire con le mani loro i padri & i fratelli*) (165a), as did Cassandra Ricasoli, noted in Megan Moran's essay in this volume. Even if they did not rejoice at the prospect, elite young women were certainly witness to, if not working at, these tasks.

The inventories considered here show that many Bolognese households featured tools for working with textiles. Notable were looms and equipment for weaving, even when the heads of these households were not employed as weavers, tailors, or merchants of silk or wool. When practised as a principal craft (and so by men), the production of textiles took place in a workshop rather than within living space. Therefore, the presence of equipment such as looms in kitchens, bedchambers, and other domestic spaces suggests that in these instances weaving was performed by female members of the household.⁴⁹ For example, the residence of Master Simone Tamburini featured both a loom and a warper for silk, with which his daughters, Cassandra and Domicella, may have learned to weave.⁵⁰ Similarly, Alberto Zanolini had in his home not only Latin books but also 'two looms for silk made of poplar' and 'a pair of warpers for canvas, [both] old and made of wood'.⁵¹

48 Sarti, *Europe at Home*, 160.

49 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 157 and Brown, 'A Woman's Place'.

50 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 March 1589, 1r–2v; 1v.

51 'Due para de Tellari da seda de fioppa novi' and 'uno par de ordidori da tella de legno vecchii'. ASB, *Notarile*, Simoni, no. 35, 5r.

Zanolini's daughters perhaps oversaw the production of cloth by servants or learned to weave themselves using this equipment, which, notably, was kept next to a cradle. Finally, when Count Filippo Manzoli died in 1560, he had in his *palazzo* 'a loom, a warper [and] two pairs of combs for hemp'.⁵² Manzoli's daughter, whose name is lost today, probably did not weave fabric herself, but may have learned to oversee the production of textiles by other women.⁵³ She and other young women from elite families were more likely to have been taught to work with a needle and thread than a loom.⁵⁴

Social class determined how a young woman might participate in domestic textile production, though it seems to have had little bearing on how the skills necessary for this kind of work were learned. There is evidence of children working to produce textiles, but there do not seem to have been tools for spinning thread, weaving cloth, or sewing made specifically for child-sized hands.⁵⁵ Although inventories list many spindles, looms, lengths of fabric, spools of thread, and sewing baskets, these are seldom described as being specifically for use by girls or young women, unlike the children's psalter or miniature pot discussed above. This suggests that girls learned to spin thread, weave textiles, and embroider silk using the same tools as their mothers, sisters, or other female members of the household. As seems natural, images of women's textile work imply that skills and knowledge were shared from one generation to the next. The title page to Nicolò Zoppino's book of embroidery patterns, *Convivio delle Belle Donne*, dated to 1531, for instance, shows a group of females in a range of ages at work with textiles, one woman with an infant in her arms.⁵⁶

Perhaps, as we have seen with learning to be good Christians, girls started as somewhat passive observers of spinning, weaving, and sewing and, when they were better able to handle tools, moved on to more active, hands-on learning. As a young woman became more proficient in weaving or sewing, she might be given her own equipment, particularly when she married and left her family home for that of her husband.⁵⁷ For example, when Caterina Tomiati, the daughter of a smith, married Master Giovanni Giacomo Brigadelli in 1589, she had in her trousseau a loom and other equipment

52 'Un paro de tellari[,] un ordiduro[,] dui para de pettini da tela'. ASB, *Notarile*, Francesco Nobili (1558–1560), 1558–60, 6/1; no. 144, 3 February 1560, 1r–16v; 12v.

53 Crescenzi, *Corona della nobiltà*, 529.

54 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 157–58.

55 See Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 475–81; Hufton, 'Istruzione', 66–73; Caracausi, 'Beaten Children', 99–105. For evidence for child-sized tools in later periods, see Beaudry, *Findings*, 111–12.

56 Ajmar, 'Women as Exemplars', 213–14.

57 This was also the case in Florence. See Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 180–89.

for silk weaving.⁵⁸ Caterina likely learned this craft before her marriage, and her output would have been sold to supplement her family's income.⁵⁹

Caterina Tomiati also brought a sewing cushion to her marital home, and items related to sewing were more often included in Bolognese brides' trousseaux than equipment for spinning and weaving.⁶⁰ For example, in addition to her two images of the Madonna, Camilla Zucchini, the painter's daughter, possessed three sewing baskets along with various sorts of thread.⁶¹ Brides from elite families, too, had tools for sewing and needlework, which were often of expensive materials. The noblewoman Artemisia Caprara had three sewing baskets in her trousseau in addition to her richly decorated book of hours. The baskets contained sewing cushions of satin and damask trimmed with gold, a silver thimble, knives, shears, and tools for making cord.⁶² Similarly, the inventory of the trousseau belonging to Margherita de' Serli, who married into a lesser branch of the prominent Gozzadini family in 1587, lists silk and damask sewing cushions, two pairs of shears, a silver thimble, and over 200 *braccia* (128 metres) of fabric for sewing undershirts, handkerchiefs, and other items.⁶³

These examples suggest that although not all young women learned to spin or weave, most would have been proficient with needle and thread by the time they married.⁶⁴ As girls gained skill and knowledge, their tools, whether a loom or a needle, did not necessarily change. Yet the quality of their handiwork surely did, and likewise the purposes of their output. As we have seen, girls might make garlands of flowers, cloths for altars, or clothing for the Madonna with their own hands. As they got older and closer to marriageable age, young women began to make and embellish textiles for their trousseaux.⁶⁵ Artemisia Caprara and Margherita de' Serli, both from wealthy families, had numerous pieces of embroidered clothing and accessories, including undergarments, sleeves, head coverings, and handkerchiefs. Although professional embroiderers likely did much of this work, the sewing tools in their trousseaux suggest that they themselves

58 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 19 September 1589, 1r–2v; 1r.

59 Brown, 'A Woman's Place', 215.

60 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 19 September 1589, 1v. This seems to have also been true in Florence. See Musacchio, *Art, Marriage, and Family*, 185.

61 ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 January 1594, 2v.

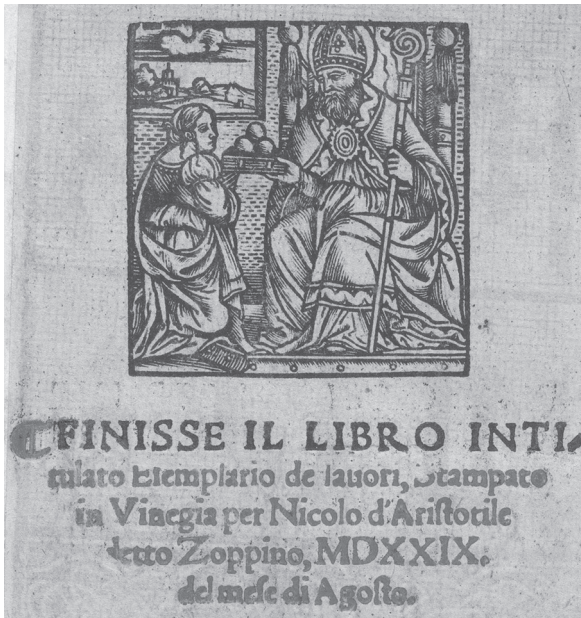
62 ASB, *Archivio Caprara*, no. 89, 11 February 1582, 3r.

63 ASB, *Notarile*, Tommaso Passarotti (1552–1592), vol. 1, 1586–1587, 6/1; 5 May 1587, 224r–228r; 227r–v.

64 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 162; Beaudry, *Findings*, 155; and Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 73.

65 Ajmar-Wollheim, 'Housework', 158 and Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 87.

Figure 11.2 Saint Nicholas Dowering a Maiden (detail), from Nicolò Zoppino, *Esemplario di lavori*, 1529



were capable with needle and thread.⁶⁶ Brides from more humble families also had textiles featuring needlework, which they were more likely to have produced with their own hands.⁶⁷ For instance, Camilla Zucchini's trousseau had two pairs of embroidered pillowcases, one of which was 'not yet formed'; perhaps she would finish this project after she was married.⁶⁸

The ability of young women to weave, sew, or embroider not only enabled them to make and personalize items for their trousseaux, but could also be a means of earning money for a dowry.⁶⁹ The final illustration in Nicolò Zoppino's embroidery pattern book from 1529, reproduced in Figure 11.2, shows Saint Nicolas handing three balls to a young woman, a reference to his providing dowries to three poor but deserving maidens. Aligning himself with Saint Nicolas dowering young women with gold, Zoppino, through

66 Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 118.

67 Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 70.

68 'Uno paro d'endime nove tutte di maglia lavorate' and 'uno altro paro d'endime di renza con la maglia lavorate nove non ancora formite'. ASB, *Notarile*, Zanettini, 15 January 1594, 2v.

69 Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 492; Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 43; Ricci, 'Donzelle in pericolo'; Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 85.

his pattern book, was helping to dower young women with needlework skills. These skills not only made them more attractive as potential wives, but could also be put to use by young women in order to earn money for a dowry.⁷⁰ For instance, orphans between the ages of ten and twelve living in the Bolognese conservatory of Santa Maria del Baraccano were set to work weaving and embroidering textiles.⁷¹ This kept the young women busy and out of trouble, but also enabled them to earn a small amount of money for a dowry so they could eventually marry.⁷²

When considered in relation to visual, literary, and archival sources, material culture can reveal some of the experiences that shaped female youth in the early modern period. Domestic objects are particularly valuable as evidence of these experiences; they were part of everyday life and work and, in addition, helped young women learn and hone the skills they would need to fulfil future roles as wives and mothers. As we have seen, domestic objects were not only needed for household tasks and learning, but were also symbolic. Items such as holy images, books, pots, or sewing baskets that were often included in bridal trousseaux might signify a young woman's social status. They would also indicate the skills and knowledge she was bringing to her marriage, and her readiness to apply them as a wife and mother.

The subjects in which a young woman might be educated, such as religion, reading, cooking, and textile work, were intended to be used in the service of the family and household. Training and education complied with ideal female behaviour set out in conduct literature and household treatises; but young women could also use their skills and knowledge for their own purposes. The Zanolini sisters and the orphans of Santa Maria del Baracanno, for instance, drew upon different skill sets in their efforts to ensure or better their futures. Although these and other young women were operating within a context where decisions about their lives were made by others, they could claim a sense of purpose and control through their relationships and interactions with the material culture they encountered within their domestic environments.

70 On the importance of these skills for orphans, see Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 477.

71 Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 475–81 and Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 80. Compare Franco's essay in this volume (Chapter 10).

72 Carmignani, *Tessuti, ricami e merletti*, 166; Ciammitti, 'Fanciulle', 492; and Rocco, 'Maniera Devota', 79.

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12. Becoming a Woman in the Dutch Republic

Advice Literature for Young Adult Women of the
Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Marja van Tilburg

Abstract

In the Dutch Republic, female youths could turn to advice literature for help. These conduct books focused on young women's behaviour towards the other sex. A close reading of two widely distributed works reveals continuity: both Jacob Cats in the seventeenth century and Adriaan Loosjes in the eighteenth try to instil a specific habitus in the reader rather than instruct her on what (not) to do. Yet the analysis also highlights change. Cats admonishes attractive but vulnerable female readers to exercise restraint in their dealings with men, while the Enlightenment *philosophe* Loosjes instead emphasizes young women's freedom, urging his readers to live up to an ideal notion of femininity. Not the guidelines themselves, but the authors' perceptions of the young woman changed.

Keywords: advice literature; gender; young adulthood; bourgeois culture; Enlightenment

This essay explores how female youth was represented in early modern Dutch advice literature written by men. This type of writing intended to offer guidance to young women in the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, with the second stage closely associated with marriage.¹ This

¹ In the Dutch Republic youth started at the age of twelve to fourteen; Groenendijk, 'Jeugd en deugd', 101. In the early Republic female youth was considered nubile at twelve. See Sneller and Thijs, 'Nawoord', 144.

essay analyses two influential conduct books, one composed by Jacob Cats in the seventeenth-century heyday of the Republic when Dutch bourgeois culture developed, and the other written by Adriaan Loosjes during the Republic's decline and showing the influence of Enlightenment thinking on female youth. Both manuals present models of femininity to young women connected to specific cultural currents in Dutch and in wider European culture. Furthermore, textual approaches to the readership reflect Enlightenment concerns with personal freedom and societal responsibility. Although the advice offered to young women remained focused on marriage and motherhood, a comparative close reading of these texts shows both continuity and change. By the late eighteenth century, guidelines left more room for individual dreams of love and even sexual desire.

Advice literature proliferated across Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, both in Latin and in several vernaculars. Most were destined for boys and men, such as Erasmus's widely distributed *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), which taught rules of etiquette to young men. A smaller body of advice literature for and about women also began to emerge. Erasmus's friend Juan Luis Vives, who attended the Habsburg court in Brussels, wrote *De institutione feminae christianae* (1523) for Mary Tudor. Several female authors joined the discussion, and the Flemish nun Anna Bijns in particular gained recognition for her *refereinen* ('refrains').² On the whole, women's writings were more edifying than pragmatic. These examples show that authors in the Low Countries were part of a wider European culture.

After the secession from Habsburg rule in 1568, authors from the northern provinces shifted direction and addressed women as members of a family as part of a strategy for developing a distinct Protestant culture.³ Consequently, writers offered their advice to young women within the context of the marriage manual.⁴ Only towards the end of the eighteenth century did Dutch advice literature diversify. Then, new formats were developed, intended for specific groups, occupations, or purposes. In this context, manuals were published destined for women in general or for young women in particular. Half of these books were written by Dutch authors inspired by the Enlightenment, and the other half were translated from German,

2 Bijns' writings circulated in print and manuscript from 1528. See Pleij, *Anna Bijns*.

3 See Price, *Dutch Culture*, 143–44; Dekker, 'Moral Literacy', 140–44; Sneller, 'Reading Jacob Cats', 30–31; and Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 7–8.

4 Tilburg, *Hoe hoorde het*, 13–17.

French, or English.⁵ Dutch advice literature had once more become oriented towards general European trends.⁶

Intended to further specific developments within Dutch culture, the two conduct books discussed here were written by widely read authors who held prominent social positions in Dutch society. Jacob Cats (1577–1660) hoped to establish unity among the culturally and religiously diverse inhabitants of the new state.⁷ Following the truce negotiated between the United Provinces and the House of Habsburg in 1609, the Dutch elite focused on overcoming the divide between federalists and particularists. The political strife was fuelled by different economic interests that pitted trade-oriented Holland and Zeeland on the one hand, against the agricultural provinces on the other. Cats's extensive marriage manual, *Houwelick* ('Marriage'), published in 1625, presents a civic ethic that could be practised alongside various religious doctrines.⁸ Adriaan Loosjes (1761–1818) sought to mitigate the economic crisis of his age. He considered traditional Dutch family values instrumental in solving the problems of the middle and lower classes. His conduct book *De vrouw in de vier tijdperken haars levens* ('The Woman in the Four Phases of her Life'), published in 1809, elaborated these values from an Enlightenment perspective. He hoped to revive the age of Cats – the Dutch Golden Age.

Even though the two authors had distinct aims in mind, both their writings participated in general European literary trends. While following the rules of established formats, they apply well-known and much-loved literary devices to enhance the appeal of their conduct books. Cats, for instance, presents his guidelines in verse and adapts the Renaissance emblem to suit his didactic purposes. Loosjes, for his part, opts for a fictitious biography of an exemplary woman. Every time her life takes a turn, she receives advice from her fictive mother. Each author's literary skill is particularly apparent in the ordering of the text. Both arrange the guidelines according to a popular representation of the life cycle, the *Lebenstreppe* (literally, 'steps of life'), in which the illustrations show the stages of life from childhood to old age. Often, the life phases are arranged in pyramid form with mature adulthood on top. At other times they are ordered in a circle following the example of the medieval wheel of fortune. Each phase has its own symbol, usually

5 New Dutch advice literature of Protestant or Catholic persuasion was not published until the mid-nineteenth century, following the emancipation of the orthodox Protestant and Catholic lower middle classes. See Tilburg, *Hoe hoorde het*, 31–37.

6 Tilburg, *Hoe hoorde het*, 13–17, 18–22, 40–46, and 83–90.

7 Sneller and Thijs, 'Nawoord', 137–42.

8 Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 7–8 and 567–69.

a reference to flora and fauna, such as a pair of doves.⁹ Cats adapts this predominantly pictorial genre to structure his marriage manual. Offering another example of the strategy to develop a Protestant imagery, his illustrator, Adriaen van de Venne, chose to represent social functions.¹⁰ Although this idea was copied by other Dutch illustrators and publishers, Loosjes is the only author to have followed Cats's example. His conduct book includes distinctive illustrations communicating a new concept of femininity. The combination of text and image of the *Lebenstreppe* thus enhanced the communicative quality and resulted in larger audiences for both publications.¹¹

Seventeenth-Century Guidelines: Jacob Cats

Jacob Cats was one of the most influential people in the early Dutch Republic: as *Raadspensionaris* ('Grand Pensionary') he held a central position in government, and he was a well-known poet. Although these two occupations were very different, for Cats they were connected: in the first capacity he furthered political unity among the seven provinces, and in the latter he exhorted the inhabitants to consider the societal requirements of the new state. This merging of political interest and literary aspiration is evident in the widely read *Houwelick*. Here he presented a distinct civic perspective on marriage in order to go beyond different religious teachings.¹² Even though Cats was a devout Christian, he tried first and foremost to serve the *res publica*.

As an author, Cats emulated traditions in both classical and Renaissance literature. The classical tradition suited his purposes because it pairs eloquence with morality. His first publications were in Latin, following the tradition of the Dutch elite. His first book in Dutch, *Sinne- en Minnebeelden* ('Images of Love', 1618), was a collection of emblems on love and marriage. Here he presented contrasts between 'true love' and popular notions of love that centred on the societal requirements of the marital relationship. Encouraged by the public response, he ventured into writing edifying stories for young women. *Maechden-plicht* ('Virgin's Duty', 1618) discusses young

9 Joerissen, 'Lebenstreppe', 30–34; and Schenda, 'Alterstreppe', 16–24.

10 Cole, *Journey of Life*, 3–31.

11 Price, *Dutch Culture*, 135.

12 The term 'civic' is to be distinguished from 'secular'. Cats had been engaged with the *Nadere Reformatie*, a Pietist current within Dutch Calvinism.

women's attitude towards men from the same vantage point. When this book proved a bestseller, he decided to write his marriage manual.¹³ Only after this tour de force did he start exploring other themes. Most popular among his later publications was *Spiegel van den Ouden en Nieuwen Tyt* ('Of the Old Times and the New', 1632), a eulogy on traditional Dutch culture. This critique of the many changes brought about by recently acquired wealth struck a chord with the general public. In addition to broadening the themes of his writing, he diversified his style; for instance, he retold traditional Dutch tales and wrote adaptations of contemporary foreign novels. Because Cats's writings remained popular, his publisher decided to issue a folio edition of his collected works in 1655. This was reprinted twice, shortly before and again shortly after Cats's death in 1660.

When composing *Houwelick*, Cats followed the established format of the *Lebenstreppe*. In representing the female life cycle, Cats distinguishes seven phases, dedicating a chapter to each.¹⁴ These chapters are organized into four parts, addressing the young woman, wife, mother, and elderly woman respectively. Cats starts each part as well as each chapter with an emblem, adapting the format to fit his requirements. Whereas an emblem's *pictura* usually presents an allegorical image, Cats's version shows scenes of everyday life similar to those painted by contemporary genre-painters. Instead of the customary single *subscriptio* or explanatory comment, this text offers several, presenting each topic from different angles. These verses often refer to different aspects of life, differentiating between a personal perspective, societal requirements, and religious musings.¹⁵ These innovations contributed to the success of the manual: the layering of explanatory verses enhanced the didactic effect, while the illustrations appealed to the lower social strata. Cats could thus convey the message without becoming overtly preachy.

Over time, *Houwelick* became, after the Bible, the most widely distributed book in Dutch society. This success is due in part to Cats's civic approach as well as to the rise in literacy. The book was read among all religious groups in the Republic, and sold especially well from the 1640s onwards.¹⁶ By 1655 it had sold 50,000 copies, and by 1700, one quarter of the Dutch people

13 Frijhoff and Spies, 1650, 228.

14 Although only six life stages are named on the title page, Cats also discusses childhood in an extended verse on the games boys and girls play to prepare themselves for adult life. Compare these seven stages to those depicted in Hans Baldung Grien's *The Seven Ages of Woman*, 1544–1545, reproduced as Figure 1.1 in this book's Introduction.

15 Prak, *Gouden Eeuw*, 248–49.

16 Frijhoff and Spies, 1650, 228.

who owned books possessed a copy. These middle classes made up half of the total population.¹⁷ Publishers also contributed to the success of *Houwelick* by producing several cheap editions for the lower social strata.¹⁸ This publication set the standard for marriage manuals until well into the eighteenth century.

In *Houwelick*, female youth is addressed from three perspectives in the first section of the book in chapters entitled *Maeght* ('Virgin'), *Vrijster* ('Spinster'), and *Bruyt* ('Bride'). These titles present young women primarily in terms of their relationships to men. While the manual aims to change women's role in the family, it targets young women's attitudes towards the opposite sex.¹⁹ The first chapter on the 'Virgin' focuses on socializing with young men; the next, 'Spinster', discusses strategies for finding a husband; and the third, 'Bride', offers advice for the bride-to-be. With each chapter, the author's commentary moves a bit closer to marriage; yet this order also suggests a connection to age so that the chapters address pubescence, young adulthood, and betrothal respectively. However, the verses make no reference to physical growth or personal development. Furthermore, there are hardly any references to aspects of youth or the characteristics of young people. When youth is mentioned, the reference is general, not to females specifically. Therefore, the distinctions do not seem particularly meaningful in terms of maturation or education.²⁰

The first chapter on the 'Virgin' opens with an emblem presenting its theme: the *pictura* shows a coat of arms depicting a tulip in bud encircled by bees (Figure 12.1). The accompanying *motto* reads '*Maeghde-wapen*' ('Virgin's arms') and the *subscriptio* starts with a short eulogy on young women's power to conquer men without weaponry. The verses continue with the young woman's need for protection: she should have a '*wapen*', denoting both a coat of arms and arms in the sense of weaponry. The rest of the poem warns the addressee that at this tender age she should consider herself under threat. In keeping with classical motifs, the danger is conveyed in the analogy of the flower and the bee. The bee may seem harmless just sucking honey from the flower; however, it should be kept at a distance for now. In this indirect way, the female youth is taught to gird herself against the advances of men.

17 Prak, *Gouden Eeuw*, 248–49.

18 Kloek, 'Burgerdeugd of burgermansdeugd', 103–04; Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature*, 31; and Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 4–6.

19 Tilburg, 'Where has "the Wise, Old Woman" gone?', 151–54.

20 Groenendijk, 'Jeugd en deugd'.

Figure 12.1 The Virgin's Arms (*Maeghde-wapen*) from Jacob Cats, *Houwelick*, 1625.



Cats elaborates this theme in a drawn-out dialogue between two fictitious young women, Anna and Phyllis. Anna tries to convince the carefree Phyllis of the need for certain rules of conduct. They discuss going out and dallying with young men, with Anna arguing that the best pastimes are at home. When they speak of showing interest in a particular man, Anna cautions that doing so can affect one's reputation. She adds that if her friend has special feelings for a man, she should talk to her mother. Finally, in line with established practice, Anna reminds her friend to trust her father with

the choice of her partner.²¹ Furthermore, Anna argues that these rules of conduct will have the opposite effect to what Phyllis expects: keeping aloof in the company of men does not put them off – on the contrary! Towards the end of the chapter and this fictitious conversation, Anna explains that the rules are strict to help Phyllis stand firm. These verses have a double meaning: firstly, the author applies the stylistic device of irony, pointing out the opposite of the intended goal. Secondly, he plays with the young reader's apprehensions in order to make her comply. Clearly, the emblem and dialogue aim to persuade young women to keep young men at bay by restraining themselves.

The second chapter, 'Spinster', elaborates on this advice in the context of romance, and addresses young men as well as young women. The emblem conveys the overall message straight away: the *pictura* bears a coat of arms showing a bunch of grapes lifted from a plate by a firm hand (Figure 12.2). The accompanying verse explains the analogy between the young woman and the grapes; it stresses the delicacy of the grapes by pointing out the blush of dew covering the tempting fruit. Other lines suggest a further analogy between the hand and marriage. The author first admonishes the young male reader to have marriage in mind when approaching a young woman. Then, he reminds the female reader that the grapes should be grasped by the stalk only. With a shift in style, Cats addresses young males in a different tone, and his words denoting the young man suggest boldness and lust. Again, Cats sends a dual message: at first glance he appears to be warning young men, but a closer look shows him shaping female readers' perceptions of young men as seeking sexual encounters first and foremost. This narrative strategy not only explains the picture, but also enhances its didactic effect.

This chapter continues with another dialogue between two fictitious friends, the newlywed Sibille and her unmarried friend Rosette. These protagonists discuss strategies to attract the attention of suitable men. According to the married woman, there is only one way: prepare for marriage, act accordingly, and you will be noticed. Sibille draws a comparison to a woman crossing a river by boat: while rowing, she has her back to the other side. On the bank is a man, watching her. The single woman is not convinced: Rosette questions the wisdom of keeping young men at a distance, and suggests several other strategies, such as wearing fashionable clothes, adopting a sophisticated lifestyle, or using love potions.²² Each

21 See Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin*, 105–09.

22 The author may have discussed this last strategy because belief in magic was still common among the less-educated lower strata. See Price, *Dutch Culture*, 58–60.

Figure 12.2 The Spinster's Arms (*Vrijster-wapen*) from Jacob Cats, *Houwelick*, 1625.



suggestion is met with a specific answer, but together the answers come down to a simple response: take marriage seriously and behave decently. Cats continues to teach the readership to have marriage on their minds in their dealings with young men.

The third chapter on the 'Bride' is very different from the others in that from the start Cats addresses both sexes. The opening verses sketch the ideal couple: the husband governs the household and provides for his family, while the wife adjusts her behaviour to his wishes in order to ensure harmony in

the house. Next, Cats turns to the choice of partner. Here, once again, he assumes difference between the sexes; he reminds the male reader of the traditional rules regarding marriage such as parity of religion, class, and age, but tells the female reader that her happiness depends on her ability to adjust to the new situation. The chapter finishes with a short warning: in the new state, common law marriages are no longer valid. Here, Cats reasons not only as a moralist but also as a statesman. This chapter also focuses to a large extent on premarital sexual activities. Time and again the readership is admonished to wait until after the wedding ceremony. To drive the message home, the author contrasts fleeting pleasure and lasting happiness. These verses centre on lust and gratification, and one has a reference to youth:

Listen, young people, listen; if you wish,
 To meet requirements, to balance demands;
 Learn first and foremost to be virtuous,
 Learn to be wise and sober, also in loose youth.²³

In the last line, the noun 'youth' is paired with the adjective 'loose', with its connotations of carelessness and irresponsibility. The combination fits the early modern perception of youth as lacking control over their impulses.²⁴ Youth of both sexes share this feature. This is the only time Cats mentions the traditional perception of youth in general. Warning both sexes to control their impulses fits with the rest of this chapter. Here, Cats addresses both men and women on their future responsibilities as husband and wife.

In sum, *Houwelick* addresses the young woman's attitudes towards the opposite sex. The advice admonishes the readership to attune their relationships with young men to marriage. The actual rules of conduct prescribe keeping a distance at social gatherings and controlling emotions if one has feelings for someone. Thus, this manual tries to impose self-control. The text represents female youth as attractive to young men as well as vulnerable to their advances. It presents young men as a threat because of their carefree and irresponsible attitudes. The placing of these representations in the text suggests these remarks are made for didactic reasons, to stress the need for female youths to guard themselves.

23 Cats, *Houwelick*, I, Section III, 5a. All translations are by this essay's author.

24 Groenendijk, 'Jeugd en deugd', 103–06.

Enlightenment Perspectives: Adriaan Loosjes

Adriaan Loosjes can be said to have followed Cats's example by combining Enlightenment activism with writing widely read books. He became a member of several Enlightenment societies, the most influential being the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* ('Society of the Common Good'). This society hoped to alleviate the poverty of the lower social strata by furthering education; it published educational treatises and schoolbooks and established schools and public libraries.²⁵ Loosjes also joined the political movement trying to transform the Republic into a constitutional state. In this context he was appointed to the government of the County of Holland, and represented this body in the legislative assembly that discussed the constitution of a unitary state in 1797.²⁶ From this perspective, he contributed in important ways to improving Dutch society.

Loosjes' latter concern is evident in his work as an author and publisher in Enlightenment circles. His writing career took off when he entered a literary society competition at the age of eighteen. His treatise praised the new genre of the novel as a means of unravelling the complexity of human beings.²⁷ His writings had educational aspirations as much as literary ones, as seen in his choice of protagonists, with Dutch burghers offering examples of traditional values. The novel *Het leven van Maurits Lijnslager* ('The Life of Maurits Lijnslager', 1814) was the first Dutch historical novel situated in Cats's age,²⁸ and the novel *Historie van mejufvrouw Susanna Bronkhorst* ('The History of Miss Suzanna Bronkhorst', 1807) praised the women of that time. The same effort to revive the past is also evident in the many biographies of important seventeenth-century Dutchmen: the painter Frans Hals (1789), the lawyer Hugo de Groot (1794, and again in 1808), and the statesman Johan de Wit (1805). This interest saw Loosjes also contribute to ethnographic descriptions of the late eighteenth-century Republic by tracing Dutch values in contemporary society.²⁹ Many historical writings were reprinted until the mid-nineteenth century, their subject matter influencing Dutch authors of the Romantic Movement. Loosjes' influence on Dutch culture thus reached well beyond his lifetime.

His literary skill can also be seen in the two conduct books, both published in 1809: *De man in de vier tijdperken zijn levens* ('The Man in the Four Phases

25 See Mijnhardt, 'Dutch Enlightenment'. This society still exists today. See Mijnhardt and Wichers, *Om het algemeen volksgeluk*, 7–19.

26 Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 486.

27 Kloek and Mijnhardt, 1800, 454.

28 Kloek and Mijnhardt, 1800, 213 and 458.

29 Kloek and Mijnhardt, 1800, 409 and 458–60.

of his Life') and *De vrouw in de vier tijdperken haars levens*. These books are arranged according to the *Lebenstreppe*, and discuss childhood, youth, adulthood, and seniority through fictional biographies of a man and woman. Every time these protagonists arrive at crucial moments in their lives, the author offers advice, not by telling the man and woman what to do, but by offering options. Using stylistic devices, the narrator indicates which choice will bring happiness and which will result in misery. These discussions present the author with the opportunity to explain a topic in great detail, as, for instance, by showing what partnership in marriage looks like. The *Lebenstreppe* framework allows him to illustrate how choices made in youth bear upon later phases of life. In this indirect way the author admonishes the readership to comply with the rules of conduct. Both books were well received in Enlightenment circles and were reprinted in one volume in 1809 and again in 1816.

Loosjes opted to write these conduct books in order to adjust the rules of conduct to current notions of sexual identity that ascribe different but complementary natures to men and women. This aspiration is apparent throughout the texts: the fictive male spends his time at the workplace and at home, using settings familiar to readers. He makes decisions autonomously, already as a young adult. More importantly, he rarely has difficulty making up his mind; he simply wants the best for everybody. The fictive female, talking all the time, is situated in a web of familial relationships. At every turn in her life, even as a married woman, she turns to her mother for advice. The happiness of her extended family is her first and foremost concern. This approach is also evident in the frontispieces illustrating the sections: the conduct book for men depicts a male person engaged in an activity specific to his phase of life. Next to the scene is a tree that, as the protagonist makes his journey through life, becomes larger. Thus, the life of the male is represented with reference to society and nature. The conduct book for women depicts females carrying various objects that refer to the passing of time and eternity, as in the image of a woman with an hourglass. The women are dressed in tunics or wear veils, resembling ancient mythological figures. Clearly, the conduct books present the sexes differently: they depict the man taking on distinct social roles at each new phase of life, and the woman as living in a separate sphere and within a feminine tradition.

The conduct book for females has only one chapter on youth, entitled *De Maagd* ('The Virgin'). Loosjes made this choice for an obvious reason: he connects the difference between the sexes to reproductive physiology.³⁰

30 O'Brien, 'Sexual Distinctions', 3 and 5.

Thus, youth starts for the female sex at menarche, and ends with marriage and motherhood. The author goes to great lengths to communicate this relatively new perception of femininity to readers. The chapter presents a dialogue between the young protagonist and her mother. Here, the mother explains the meaning of the protagonist's first menstruation, namely that 'the secrets of nature [reveal] the true aim of her destiny'.³¹ She should 'remember this moment as the most solemn in [her] life' (90). This short dialogue is embedded in a long exposé on virginity. Here, the author speaks systematically of 'The Virgin', invoking an abstract concept rather than a phase of life. He refers to 'The Virgin' as 'the purest being in all Creation' (83). This ideal young woman knows intuitively how to behave in the company of young men. She has a clear sense of socializing with the opposite sex without being coquettish. In this representation, the young woman's disposition follows from her being a virgin. Not stopping at sociability, the author continues his description with beauty and chastity as well as virtue and vulnerability. He compares 'the idea of the Virgin', for instance, to 'the tender blush covering grapes in soft dew' (83). This phrase is, of course, a reference to Cats's emblem of youth, testifying to that author's enduring influence on Dutch culture. At the same time, this phrase illustrates the extent to which Loosjes sketches an ideal. From the perspective of the readership, growing up female may have seemed a precarious process.

Loosjes manages to intersperse this exposition with actual rules of conduct. At first glance, these differ only from Cats's rules of conduct in their attention to detail. In discussing socializing with young men, for instance, the golden rule is to be prepared: the young woman should expect to attract the attention of young men. She should enquire in advance as to which men tend to misbehave in public. Of course, she should try to avoid these individuals or, should she come across them, keep her distance. But she should treat other young men in a respectful and friendly manner. Furthermore, she should be tolerant of small mistakes. A young man who makes a risqué remark is not necessarily bad. Such behaviour can result from a poor upbringing; his parents may have failed him. A young man should be avoided only if he does not change his behaviour. The young woman can check this by

[C]onvey(ing) her displeasure clearly, all the while sparing him the humiliation of being corrected in public; from that instance on, she is to avoid him, as much as possible, within the rules of etiquette, in order

31 Loosjes, *De vrouw*, 89.

to convince him of the earnestness of her judgement – and she should accept the excuses, which he probably will offer, only on the condition that he will change his ways, and a repetition of the same liberty should make her avoid him. (143–44)

This passage shows how the reader is being prepared for socializing with young men. The advice seems to refer to women's role in Enlightenment circles and a culture of sociability. The rules offer some space for agency: the young woman is entitled to decide on a young man's propriety, although she is admonished to do so carefully.³² Clearly, Loosjes' advice shows the dual character of Enlightenment education, pointing out distinct occasions for making individual choices on the one hand, while disciplining people in greater detail than ever before on the other.

In addition to these familiar themes, Loosjes discusses a few new topics in the chapter on youth that pertain to the Dutch Enlightenment view of marriage. Authors of newly published marriage manuals argue that married couples should meet specific societal requirements, such as prioritizing the children's education and managing the household carefully. To make the family a cornerstone of society, the couple should share responsibility. To work as partners, they must support one another, and they can do so only if they love each other. For these reasons, Dutch *philosophes* argued for the free choice of partner for both parties.³³ Loosjes tries to prepare the young woman accordingly. For instance, he lists specific requirements of a husband to use in judging suitors. More importantly, he admonishes the young woman to monitor her own feelings closely and ask herself if she can get along with her suitor. He explains that the marital relationship will turn sour if she cannot control her irritation.³⁴ Loosjes thus tries to prepare young women to cope with their new responsibility.

Enlightenment advice literature destined for young Dutch adults assumes any marriage starts with mutual sexual attraction. These authors think it wise to address this aspect of the choice of partner.³⁵ Loosjes agrees; he presents guidelines on meeting men and getting acquainted with someone special. These teach the female reader to monitor her emotions carefully for two reasons. First, to live happily ever after in marriage, her desire should

32 Goodman, *The Republic*, 8–11; Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex*, 18–20 and 30–34.

33 Tilburg, *Hoe hoorde het*, 22–31.

34 Loosjes also addresses this issue more explicitly in the chapter on the married woman. See *De vrouw*, 186–88.

35 Tilburg, *Hoe hoorde het*, 97–132.

blend with true appreciation of the partner's personality; sexual attraction is not enough to marry. Second, in establishing a close relationship with her suitor, she should monitor her feelings in order to prevent any premarital sexual activity:

[T]he Virgin may give her trust to the young man more easily than is wise, and retire with him to a lonely spot. Surely, the natural tendency of the sexes to each other, even in a civilised society that has changed relationships and masked initial drives, is too strong not to enlighten the hearts of people of both sexes and further this behaviour. (146)

Note how this passage builds upon the contrast between correct and incorrect behaviour. Clearly, the author places sexual attraction within the realm of correct behaviour, and we can infer that he has no problem with sexual attraction in female youth. In accordance with the Dutch Enlightenment approach, Loosjes' text acknowledges sexual desire in young women as well as in young men. The conduct books for young adults teach both sexes to monitor their emotions in order to control them better. They admonish both to behave responsibly, although they warn young women more explicitly about the consequences.

Loosjes finishes this chapter in the same vein as he started: he paints an idealistic picture of the bride. Here, he repeats the garland of abstractions of the opening paragraphs. This becomes apparent in the very last paragraphs, which describe the young woman leaving home, or rather leaving her mother. The protagonist starts weeping at the thought, and turns to her mother for comfort. The latter reveals she felt the same way on the eve of her wedding. She advises her daughter to do as she did, to put her trust in the Supreme Being (157). Here, the author repeats the narrative strategy of having the young woman turn to her mother. Furthermore, he underlines that the two women respond in the same way to a given situation. The author thus suggests the existence of a distinct, feminine nature. As he did earlier in the chapter, he provides the outlines of a separate sphere for women.

All in all, Loosjes' advice aims at instilling a specific habitus in female youth linked to the general role of woman in family and society. It offers many guidelines to prepare his readers to function within the context of Enlightenment sociability, coping with the attention of members of the other sex, and choosing a partner for life. The advice presents the late Enlightenment perception of femininity by connecting women's role to reproductive physiology. It reveals the influence of the Enlightenment

concern with education, especially in its elaborate exposés and its detailed advice. Throughout the chapter, Loosjes presents the young woman as an icon of beauty and purity. Due to her feminine nature, she has the potential to develop into an inspiration for others.

Conclusion

In the early Dutch Republic educational literature for and about female youth was limited to edifying writings. Young women looking for explicit rules of conduct had to turn to marriage manuals. Only towards the end of the eighteenth century did conduct books for young women become available. The genre of advice literature diversified because of the Enlightenment concern with education.

A comparison of two influential conduct books of the Dutch Republic evidences continuity. Both books aim to instil a specific habitus in young women regarding their relationships with the other sex and recommend that they should have marriage in mind in their dealings with young men. From the perspective of both authors, this habitus is intended to shape the young woman's relationships so that she will never engage in mere pleasure-seeking, and will remain aloof from attention-seeking young men. More importantly, this attitude will draw the attention of young men who are looking for a wife.

The comparison also shows change. Cats focuses on the habitus of the young woman to the extent that he offers only a few guidelines. Throughout the text he stresses her vulnerability to young men's devious ways. She should therefore not only keep young men at bay but also restrain her own impulses to behave light-heartedly. To enhance the message, he connects youthful looseness to the male sex. This author expects young women to behave decently in youth.

Loosjes also tries to promote this habitus, but he combines exposés on men and marriage with detailed rules of conduct to help readers consider choices carefully and behave responsibly. Like other Dutch Enlightenment authors, he is convinced that some personal freedom will enhance people's compliance. More specifically, if a couple marries for love, the spouses will try their utmost to make their marriage a success. In his advice to young women on their choice of partner, he addresses the role of mutual sexual attraction in the budding relationship. Sexual desire is thus represented as being as natural in young women as in young men. This author expects young women to long for love.

Finally, this comparison points out two distinct representations of female youth. Cats depicts the young woman as attractive and vulnerable. She has to restrain herself in order to avoid the attentions of carefree young men. If she complies with the rules and prepares for marriage, she will find a decent husband. Loosjes pictures her as a lively and outgoing person in need of guidance. In this context the *philosophe* stresses women's specific social role and presents the reader with an ideal, that of 'The Virgin'. All the while, he contends that failure to live up to this ideal would call her femininity into question and, consequently, diminish her chance of happiness. More than the guidelines themselves, shifting concepts of female youth testify to a change in ideas about gender in the Dutch Republic.

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Part 4

Courtship and Becoming Sexual



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13. Straying and Led Astray

Roman Maids Become Young Women circa 1600

Elizabeth S. Cohen

Abstract

For female youth, the slow transformation into sexual maturity recast the social expectations of family and outsiders, of women and men. It also changed how the teenager saw herself. Sexuality brought new opportunities and duties, but also vulnerabilities. Becoming sexually attractive turned girls into potential brides. It also opened them up to illicit male attention and abuse. Especially among those of lower status, the supervision and protection of nubile girls by parents and their surrogates sometimes lapsed. At the same time, some agency did fall, for better and worse, to young women themselves. Personal stories reconstructed from criminal trials in early modern Rome show how three non-elite teenagers navigated their first sexual experiences.

Keywords: sexual maturation; female teenagers; girls at risk; early modern Italy; partial agency; judicial records

Although early modern culture did not often concertedly articulate a life stage of female youth, during their teenaged years women went through distinctive changes that altered their physical capacities and social identities and prepared them for new adult roles. Social maturity brought more, and different, responsibilities and, though constrained, a greater measure of agency. Girls as they became young women had much to learn: dealing with people outside their household, leaving home, working for their own keep, and fending for themselves as well as for kinfolk and allies. In parallel with all these, youth also involved becoming sexual. Beginning well before the time that most women married, emerging sexual maturity was a novelty that carried complicated social and cultural resonances, opportunities, and risks.

Parents, masters and mistresses, and others responsible for young women's physical well-being and public reputation were supposed to protect nubile girls by surveillance and correction. For non-elite families, however, these strategies were not easy to practise consistently. Furthermore, with growing if always limited autonomy, the female youths themselves, if sometimes unwisely, deployed their new sexuality.

Comparing three stories, reconstructed from criminal court trials, of non-elite teenaged women in Rome around 1600, this essay explores the little studied but common female experience of acquiring a sexual persona long before marriage. These particular young urban women were in various ways vulnerable and fell victim to abusive exploitation by more powerful men. That is not, however, the only narrative that I want to recount. Tales of seduction from the Roman trials involved not only force but also negotiation, if from a position of weakness. These young women in whom an unfamiliar sexual allure was blossoming knew the rules. Yet some, like their age peers in other eras, knew less than they thought about social relations and were tempted by the attention and gifts on offer. Nor were female youth alone in these encounters. Adults with some responsibility for the young women, including family members and neighbours, also took part, responding with a mix of measures that, amidst the contradictions of real life, conformed imperfectly to moral proprieties.

Broadly, this essay rests on a view of a kind of everyday, non-elite culture around sex.¹ Disciplining precepts rooted in religion, honour, and law were influential, but did not dictate popular expectations or habitual practices. Rules often discounted the varieties and complexities of real experience, especially for the great mass of women and men who struggled with limited and unpredictable resources. For example, where most people lived at close quarters and had little privacy, the corporal mechanics and social stakes of sex were not easily isolated. Christian religion propounded strictures to corral all sexual appetite and to channel activity into only a few licit forms. Honour norms intensified the constraints on women and the costs, for them, of compromise, whether voluntary or not.

1 Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 30–47, describes the early modern European basics of most people's sexual lives. Much of this synthesis, like others, emphasizes, on the one hand, cultural or ideological sources penned by educated men and, on the other, institutional documents about the discipline of sex. Age does not figure often, but Ferraro, 'Youth in Peril', 761–68, argues that ordinary Venetians were more 'casual about age than legal theorists', but still sought to protect childhood innocence from exposure to sex. I would propose another, not mutually exclusive, reading of archival sources that seeks to reconstruct what more routine sexual experiences and attitudes might have been like for ordinary women and men. The judicial records selected for this essay describe heterosexual acts. Other desires and practices may be tracked elsewhere.

Nevertheless, as scholars assume was normal for early modern men, there were also for women substantial gaps between the codes governing sex and expectations of practice. For adult women, married and unmarried, sex was part of their everyday knowledge and direct or indirect experience. Women informally consulted about their husbands' failures, about unwanted attention from other men, or about their own romantic attractions.² Imagery that crammed women into a sexual binary – as madonna or whore – failed to capture either non-elite sensibilities or even the practical aims of authorities seeking to make order. Where breaches of the rules inevitably arose, they called for negotiation, but did not routinely relegate women to perdition, permanent shame, or worldly punishment.

Trials from the Governor's criminal tribunal in Rome provide distinctive access to the lives of young women who are seldom visible in most early modern records. Because this court gave weight to the words even of women and others of modest standing, the transcripts provide extensive and close to verbatim testimonies in many voices, including those of the illiterate, young, poor, and dependent. Testimony, more and less strategic, was not simple truth. Yet bearing witness was a serious and often intimidating business, and from their varying perspectives women and men tried to tell at least plausible stories that now serve the canny historian well. Criminal prosecutions involving illicit sex often concern the sexual misuse of young, mostly unmarried women. *Stupro*, meaning less generically rape, and more specifically defloration of virgins, along with *sviamento*, or seduction and leading astray, were the more common charges. As framed by the law, these victims of men who could not or did not intend to marry them lost a major personal and social asset. To wrest compensation, as in the rape trial of Artemisia Gentileschi, young women had to give credible accounts that matched the stipulations of the law.³ In the process, and in their own defence, they also sometimes supplied details of a more personal reading of their experience.

The girls most vulnerable to sexual predation were those socially and economically exposed: lacking an intact family; coping with even the temporary absence of either father or mother; or poor and so susceptible to offers of food and money, or just to vague promises of 'good things to come'. Certainly, there were costs to honour – both the girl's and her family's – if a loss of

2 For examples, Archivio di Stato di Roma, Governatore, Tribunale Criminale (GTC), Processi secolo xvi, busta 134, case 10, ff. 58r–66r; Querele, busta 8, f. 90v. Later citations will appear as GTC with series and location details. All translations are by the author.

3 Cohen, 'Trials of Artemisia'.

virginity and, especially, an illegitimate pregnancy could not be socially or financially remedied. At the same time, for some young women – among them those already at risk – the new attention that sexuality attracted was exciting and might hint, if misleadingly, at power or desirable assets to those who had little. A few young women learned to wield sexuality instrumentally or, in the words of Lucia Ferrante, ‘as a resource’, a means to try to secure a husband, an income, or other more ephemeral but still useful boons.⁴ There were emotional temptations as well. As portrayed in literature and drama, young women were prone to falling, inappropriately, in love. For example, in the later sixteenth century the role of the *inamorata*, played by a woman, was capturing admiration on the Italian commercial stage.⁵ And in trial records witnesses used the same language of romantic love.⁶

For the most part, the transformation into sexually mature beings was not marked by precise signals, and perhaps least for the girls themselves. Socially, what did happen was that, over time, young females came to look ‘grown up’, like someone who was ready, in one sequence or another, to marry, to have sex, and to get pregnant. Some young women acquired, for good or ill, notable sexual attractiveness that not only invited suitors but also tempted men to seek illicit relations. A young woman’s own feelings, including pleasure at men’s interest, could compound the risks. The transition of social identity was a product of interactions – fragmentary, inconsistent, semi-conscious – between other people’s responses and the girl’s own shifting sense of herself.

Young women who appeared in the Roman courts participated in the everyday culture of sex. As witnesses, they were not expected to plead ignorance and, when necessary, often testified to their sexual encounters in quite matter-of-fact language. Although the term was not used in early modern criminal law, the female youth at the centre of these trials – along, no doubt, with many others – were victims of sexual assault. Young, non-elite women, including the many servants, did move routinely around the city. While they might be subject to taunts or insults, trials give little evidence of sexual injury in daytime streets. Night, or even twilight, could be another matter. For example, in the dim, empty city at daybreak two bravos accosted and threatened a quartet of married washerwomen as they approached a private fountain with loaded baskets on their heads. Picking out by lantern

4 Ferrante, ‘La sessualità’.

5 Brown, ‘Traveling Diva’, 254. For Italian comedy, Collier, *Women, Rhetoric*, 19–40, elaborates on love and other themes linked to female youth.

6 For example, Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds*, 103–24.

light the youngest and prettiest of the women, the bigger man jumped her, his erection evident, as she reported, through her skirts. After the women's cries brought people to their windows, the bullies decamped, and the laundresses pressed charges against 'men unknown'.⁷ More typically, assaults, including those I describe here, involved not strangers outside but encounters inside households or at social gatherings where teenaged girls were often first seduced before being manhandled into compliance.

In the Roman court records several terms designated girls; one in particular clearly signalled, in context, a sexually mature and desirable young woman.⁸ When a witness spoke of a female youth, two terms, *zitella* and *giovane*, appear often. *Zitella* labelled an unmarried woman, but also notably a virgin. It included the relatively uncommon older spinsters, but usually referred to nubile younger women whose sexual honour needed protection. The other term, *giovane*, as both adjective and noun and grammatically applicable to males and females alike, meant 'young' or 'young person'. In the trial testimonies, the word appeared describing young women in various circumstances. Mostly, however, when referring to a female youth, the term suggested a physical maturity that incorporated size, womanliness, and a distinct sexual attractiveness. When a young woman was called *giovane*, it was often coupled with adjectives that highlighted her good looks: *bella*, *bionda* ('blonde'), *avistata* ('eye-catching'), or *vagheggiata* ('desirable').⁹ Sometimes the term carried an edge suggesting that attractiveness made a young woman suspect. Both unmarried and married women might be called *giovane* in this sexualizing way.

The young women labelled in the trial testimonies as *giovane* were usually what we would call teenagers; the youngest were twelve or thirteen and the older ones eighteen to twenty. For Roman female youth, the teenage years framed timetables of possibilities for marriage and domestic service. Two pivots had special resonance: onset at age twelve, and then a second moment at fourteen or fifteen. The malleable years between twelve and fourteen, when gendered and sexual identities were just emerging, marked a time of particular risks. Based on classical learning, age twelve was the youngest that a girl could be married. This hypothetical threshold implied sexual maturity and the ability to procreate, although very few early modern

7 GTC, Processi secolo xvii, busta 87, ff. 450r–460v, especially f. 457v.

8 Evidence comes from context of use in many trial records.

9 GTC, Processi secolo xvii, busta 25, f. 18r; busta 36r, ff. 65v, 84v, 87v; busta 65, f. 400r–v; Investigazioni, busta 353, f. 102v; busta 383, f. 63r; Querele, busta 8, f. 104v. The term *giovannetta* suggested a girl who was not yet fully mature.

twelve-year-olds, even in the Mediterranean, had probably passed through menarche.¹⁰ Though there were exceptions, even aristocratic or patrician Italian brides of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were usually at least in their mid-teens, and most working-class women did not marry until later.¹¹ In practice, in Rome, the age of fifteen was more likely than twelve for some non-elite girls to become sexually active. Fifteen-year-old brides were not surprising, and girls who entered prostitution young were often around the same age.¹² At the same time, while the age of fifteen was acceptable for an early start to regular sexual activity in marriage or prostitution, it was certainly not typical of most female youth.

Domestic service, a common recourse for teenaged girls of modest rank, fit into a similar age framework. For families with precarious incomes, if a daughter's work was not needed at home, in another household she at least earned her own keep.¹³ She was likely to go into service at the age of eleven or twelve. Having proved herself, she might begin earning money beyond her expenses at fourteen or so. If she stayed on for some years – seven or eight was the usual stint according to formal contracts – she could expect a substantial payment toward a dowry. Although such long-term service seems to have been an exception in Rome, it figured a path to marriage for those of few means. Furthermore, high mortality meant that many children moved into adolescence without both parents. For girls, the death of a mother in particular posed problems, and becoming a servant supplied a gender-suited kind of fosterage. Besides practical training and physical supervision, service could address youthful needs for social education. Surviving fathers, brothers, or uncles – charged with responsibility for younger girls of six, seven, or nine years – paid for their maintenance until they were of an age when their service was useful enough to earn their keep.

Within this framework for the lives of female youth, let us turn to the stories of three teenaged Roman girls as they experienced the fraught opening of their sexual lives. All three were motherless, and two also lacked fathers. In the place of parents, other adults provided more or less formally constituted supervision for all three girls. Around each was also a cluster of other people, notably older women, who took part in or observed these

10 See Introduction, 20–21.

11 For Florence, see Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families*, 203–10; Litchfield, 'Demographic Characteristics', 198–200. For Venice, Chojnacki, 'Measuring Adulthood', 188–93; Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 4–6.

12 For example, early serial data with ages can be found in the Archivio storico del Vicariato di Roma (ASVR), Stati delle anime, Santa Maria del Popolo, 1604.

13 Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 99–106, 129–52, and 152–56.

sexual initiations. Although trial records do not provide straightforward accounts of what happened, their multivocality offers varied assessments of female youth at a critical moment, including words from the young women themselves. We begin with two girls of impoverished backgrounds, Anna and Delia, who lost their virginity while servants in households facing some financial and social precarity. The third young woman, Virginia, lived in a more secure, bourgeois setting, but still became sexual before respectably married.

Among our three Roman maidens, Anna di Benedetto had the least control over her own youthful fate. With close male family members and several female neighbours nearby, she came somewhat unwittingly into her sexuality while a servant in a modest Roman household. Her father, Benedetto, had migrated to the city from a village in Rome's hinterland with his two young children, but evidently no wife.¹⁴ His urban work is obscure; but, as Anna and, three years later, her brother Colantonio reached the customary age, the single father arranged to reduce expenses or supervisory responsibilities by putting them into service with the same couple. Then, in February 1595, Benedetto complained formally to the Governor's court about the abuse of his daughter by her master and mistress (741r–742v). The subsequent judicial inquiry yielded testimonies from father, daughter, and son, as well as from the accused husband and wife and several neighbours.

Sometime early in 1592, Benedetto had placed his motherless daughter, aged eleven or likely twelve, as a servant with Florestano and Lucretia, who lived suitably for their station on a small street behind the church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte (740r). Benedetto and other witnesses described Anna, in retrospect, as then *grandetta*, well grown but still a child (741r, 744r, 752v). With no children, the couple lived in several rooms and had access to a fountain which served their livelihood doing laundry for, among others, the household of Cardinal Colonna (749v). Lucretia had also for a while fostered the daughter of a courtesan neighbour (753v). The pair had come to Rome more than a decade before from Bologna, where they had met as servants in a large household. In Rome they lived as husband and wife and attended church as was customary. In fact, they were not married, and indeed Florestano had a wife still living in Bologna (743v–744r). Among Roman working people, however, *de facto* divorce was not uncommon, and the unspoken absence of nuptial rites did not compromise their local reputation.

14 GTC, Processi secolo xvi, busta 286 (1595), ff. 740r–759r. Folio references to these principal documents appear parenthetically in the text.

Benedetto made standard arrangements for his children's employment in Florestano's household. In 1592, aged twelve, Anna did not require expenses for fosterage, but was old enough to earn her keep, if not much more. The father first committed Anna to serve the couple for a year receiving only 'board and clothing' (*vitto e vestito*) (741r, 752v). If things worked out, the adults would later draw up a contract either to convey a dowry, if Anna served for seven years or until about the age of 20, or to pay wages.¹⁵ The first year or so seems to have gone smoothly. Anna later confirmed that she had received a skirt (*gonella*) that she was still wearing at the time of the trial (749v). Then, two years later, in March 1594, Benedetto arranged to place his son Colantonio, who had by then reached the age of eleven or twelve, also to serve in Florestano's household for his keep (741v). Sister and brother then both slept in the room 'where the fire burned' (*dove facemo il foco*), Anna on a mattress under the table (750v). At the time of Colantonio's arrival, it was also agreed that Anna was now to receive wages of one scudo per month (741v, 749v).

In his legal complaint in 1595, Benedetto described his small family as 'poor folks'. This language invoked economic straits and invited pity. Yet, for someone of scant means, the father also insisted vigorously on the family's good reputation – 'I esteemed honour above all else' (*io stimava piu l'honore che qualsi sia altra cosa*) – and asked that Anna never be left alone (741r–v). His son absorbed this paternal lesson. It is unclear why Benedetto put his pubescent daughter into this particular couple's hands, but he presumably would not have done so if he was worried about the moral environment. He acknowledged the risks, however, when he later sent the younger Colantonio to keep an eye on his sister (741v).

During her three years of service Anna's body matured, as was evident to the adults around her. A neighbour woman described her in February 1595 as 'now a grown woman' (*adesso é donna fatta*) (744r). Anna's youthful sexuality had many months earlier piqued her master's interest. At the trial, the same witness reported that one day during the previous May, Colantonio had called her son and another boy, saying 'run, run [...] come see what Florestano is doing to my sister' (*corri, corri [...] a vedere quello che fa Florestano a mia sorella*) (748v–749r). Peering through a keyhole, they saw the master on top of Anna. Shocked, Colantonio then started crying and shouting against his master and his sister. To calm the boy, Florestano

15 Interestingly, Anna herself testified: 'I don't know what age [*tempo*] I have, but my father said [when the contract was arranged] that I needed six or seven years to arrive at twenty' (f. 750r).

urged Anna to come out, so that, in tears, she hobbled painfully down to the courtyard where the women were gathered (751r). Suggesting that Colantonio was decrying offended honour, a widow wiped drops of blood from the stairs, but no one else intervened (748v–749r, 751v). The master countered the flailing protests of the twelve-year-old brother by promising to make him a pair of trousers if he would not tell his father, but the boy refused the bribe (749r, 751v). Colantonio's testimony many months later veiled the spying and the sights of sex, but his distress at discovering Anna closeted with their master still reverberated.

For many months a conspiracy of silence about the resulting pregnancy prevailed. Pregnancies often went unrecognized by inexperienced youths, but more discerning onlookers also turned away. Whatever her feelings about her errant husband, Lucretia cared most not to disrupt her livelihood, and deflected inquiries (752v–753v). In February, however, with a baby imminent, she arranged for a Venetian laundress to tend Anna, with a modicum of discretion, at a nearby house. Neighbour women reported that the newborn, wrapped in bloody clothes, had been immediately carried off to the foundling hospital at Santo Spirito (744v, 749v–750r). During these months Benedetto may have been, like many workers, in and out of the city; nonetheless, he was notably inattentive until, two weeks after the birth, he apparently received word of the arrest of Florestano and Anna. According to the father's tardy complaint, Colantonio had alerted him to this dubious alliance even before the defloration. The son had reported looks and touches between Anna and Florestano that suggested that they 'loved each other' (*se volevano bene*) (742r). It is not clear who introduced this language of love, or how much Colantonio had told of what he had seen. Yet, for all his claims to family honour, Benedetto had failed to take steps when first he heard from Colantonio in the spring, and even after the assault in May. At one point the father enquired of Lucretia, but seemed willingly put off by her denials and accepted payment of Anna's wages (753v). Indeed, he did nothing until, well after the fact, someone else denounced the illegitimate child to the officials. Benedetto's belated protests of honour rang empty.

Anna's feelings around these events we can only imagine. Yet there were hints that, while she was clearly misused, her master's attentions were not, at least at first, wholly unwelcome. Testifying, Anna answered simply and directly to questions of fact intended to pin down Florestano's crimes. There were no other men in the household, she said, nor any male visitors. She had been a virgin girl (*ragazza zitella*) when she arrived, and had never had a husband (749v). She had had sex only with her master; she said at first that it had been only one time, although later she admitted to repeated

encounters (750v, 754r). Switching gear, the court then asked about Anna's part: is she entangled by love (*amore capta*)? She answered, as she must for the logic of the trial, 'I am not in love with anyone, and no one is in love with me' (*io non sono innamorata de nessuno ne nessuno é innamorato di me*) (750v). These claims, however, geared to minimize Anna's legal culpability, conveyed only part of the story. Clearly, the sexual initiation had been embarrassing and painful, and its aftermath, nine months later, was more damaging still. But what of the brother's earlier observations, reported to their father more than once, that the master and his sister appeared to be touching, even cuddling? Possibly, Florestano's seduction might initially have flattered an inexperienced and neglected young teenager, who then found herself in over her head and without support from those who should have taken responsibility.

A decade later, in a tale with a very different tone, another fourteen-year-old servant, Delia di Angelo, bartered her virginity quite brazenly to a powerful man for promises of maintenance and a dowry. Delia's is one of several women's tales embedded in a very long murder trial of 1602–1603 against Valerio Armenzano, the overbearing, lustful head of Rome's largest police brigade.¹⁶ Concerning Delia, Armenzano spoke dismissively as part of his broader need to deflect the serious charges against him, but the testimonies of Delia herself and her mistress, Sveva Gualtieri, give interesting accounts of the transformation from girl to young woman. Here an orphan with meagre assets grasped the chance to exchange her sexual appeal for tangible benefits; she also craved paternal protection and even affection.

Delia passed her later girlhood in two non-familial households in Rome. Born in the city, she was orphaned so young that she did not know her parents. Her paternal uncle, a canon in the nearby small town of Palestrina, took over the infant's care, and Delia lived with him there until the age of seven (168v). Then, as propriety deemed fit, her clerical kinsman took her to Rome to place her with a respectable woman (*donna da bene*), an elderly widow named Virginia.¹⁷ Because she was young, Delia received no payment for her work; instead her uncle gave the widow a monthly sum, 'so that she would have care for my person as if I were her daughter' (*accio havesse cura della persona mia [...] come se fusse stata sua figliola*) (169r–170r). For five

16 GTC, Processi secolo xvii, busta 23 (1602–1603), ff. 167r–198r, 214r–216r, and 274v–276v. See also Cohen, 'Back Talk'.

17 Another example of early fosterage and service: GTC, Processi secolo xvi, busta 273, ff. 664r, 666r.

years, Delia served her mistress and sometimes also helped out women neighbours.

After Madonna Virginia's death, when Delia was twelve or thirteen, her uncle arranged a second placement with a gentlewoman, Signora Sveva Gualtieri. Since Delia was now of an age where custom gave value to her work, Sveva promised her uncle to keep and clothe her and eventually to provide a dowry to marry her off. Delia shared a bed with another, slightly older *giovane*, Lunidia da Amelia. Together, the two servants attended to all necessary tasks inside the house, and regularly accompanied their mistress when she went out to Mass and other devotions (170v–171r). This practice both provided Sveva respectably with company in the street and exposed her charges to the benefits of religion. Sveva also took Delia with her when she left the city to visit her daughter (171v–172r).¹⁸

Sveva Gualtieri herself had a complicated personal history. She was the daughter of a prominent family in Orvieto and the wife of Saracinello di Saracinelli, who belonged to another noble house in that city (185v). Living in Rome in 1592, she was described as a widow of about 40 years old, and the mother of two grown sons and a daughter. That year two lovelorn letters addressed to an unnamed recipient and signed 'Sveva Gualtieri' figured incidentally in the prosecution of a Roman tavern keeper also from Orvieto for pimping.¹⁹ Though we know nothing further of the widow's romance, she evidently actively sought consolation, or at least male assistance.²⁰ The middle-aged Sveva then reappeared in 1602, keeping two servants and renting an apartment in the fashionable Corso opposite the large hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili that treated venereal disease in men and women. For these quarters, she owed a substantial 55 scudi a year (185v). All was not well, however, for Sveva had not paid her rent, and her landlord requested a formal confiscation of her belongings until she made good her debt. So, on the last day of carnival, rough officials carried away mattresses, bedding, and other household effects from the gentlewoman's rooms (186v). Seeking help from her own contacts in the police, Sveva received a visit from their corrupt and libidinous chief, Valerio Armenzano, who then became acquainted with Delia, her fresh, young serving girl.

18 Lunidia then left Sveva's employ; she appears in parish records in later years living as a courtesan with a young son. ASVR, Stati delle anime, Santa Maria del Popolo 1605, f. 41v, and San Lorenzo in Lucina 1609, f. 9r.

19 GTC, Processi secolo xvi, busta 256, ff. 492v, 497r, 498r, 501r–v, 503v.

20 Armenzano testified that he had first met Sveva Gualtieri through another police chief who, while working for the papal Tribunal of the Rota in the mid-1590s, had had a sexual alliance her. GTC, Processi secolo xvii, busta 23, f. 222r.

Signora Sveva's own complicated circumstances inflected her commentary in the trial about the youthful Delia and her sexual initiation. Sveva knew her custodial responsibilities but yet, as a woman on her own in awkward circumstances, she was beholden to male patrons. Sveva later explained that she had carefully kept Delia, who had come to her house a virgin, always by her side. And she protested repeatedly that she wanted nothing to do with a sexual arrangement involving her servant (190r). Yet, driven by financial distress and a need to keep a powerful man sweet, she allowed Armenzano to approach Delia in her house (175r–v). Seeking to absolve herself of responsibility, Sveva described the teenager to the police chief as 'grown up and knowing her own mind' (*grande e grossa e sa il fatto suo*), but also of good parentage and a virgin (189v–190r). So, Armenzano made Delia a direct proposition, and she quickly picked up the offer. For her virginity and sexual accommodation at his pleasure he would maintain her and later set her up for an adult future of her choice (175v–176r). She was not the only young woman to appear thus in the trials, trading their sexual assets for a promise of economic security.²¹

The first sexual encounter between Armenzano and Delia took place almost immediately at Sveva's house. It was preceded, as often in the initiation of sexual relationships, by the man sending out for food from a tavern so that all present could sup together. Because it was Friday, they ate fish (188r–v). Afterwards, the police chief led Delia into a bedroom, where he took her virginity on a bare straw mattress because the rest of the bedding had been confiscated (176r). Sveva later asked to see the bloody shift to confirm the deal (177r). Afterwards, Armenzano gave the girl '5 or 6 scudi in *paoli* and *testoni*' (small coins), which she tucked into her bodice and later transferred to Sveva's storage chest to pay for food and drink. The mistress also used the funds to buy slippers and stockings for the girl (177v–178r). In the months that followed Armenzano met Delia often, sometimes at Sveva's. At other times his henchmen came to fetch her in a carriage to spend the night at his house when his live-in mistress, Antonia, was absent. Afterwards, the police chief usually gave Delia 'a few scudi' (178v–180v).

Delia presents this liaison with Armenzano in very forthright terms. But it was for her more than mercenary. It is a guess to say that the young woman was a bit intoxicated by the powerful man's attentions. More explicit is her expression of affection and concern for him. Months later, when Armenzano was arrested for arranging the arquebus murder of a painter whom he suspected of pimping for his concubine, Delia was much distressed

21 Cohen, 'No Longer Virgins'.

over her lover's troubles. The court at this time was keen to collect any dirt about the police chief, and questioned her closely. She in turn aimed to defend Armenzano. She was likely a good actress, but her words spoke also to her own attachment: 'I wanted and needed to know about Captain Valerio's condition because I loved him and I cared for him' (*Io desideravo et mi appartenevo di sapere del stato del Capitano Valerio perche l'amavo et gli volevo bene*) (174r). Repeating a question about why she felt so much, the court pressed the teenager to tell the truth. In response, she paused and then began to cry:

I know [him] and I have spent time and kept company with Captain Valerio since carnival last [about eight months]; he had sex with me and took my virginity, for I was a maiden and a virgin.

Io cognosco et ho conversatione et practica con detto Capitano Valerio da Carnevale prossimo passato in qua, che hebbe che fare con me carnalmente et mi tolse la mia virginità, che io ero zitella et vergine. (174v).

Asked whether Armenzano had sweet-talked her or made any deceptive promises, Delia recounted at length the history of their relationship, including a very upbeat, initial offer, that:

If I wished to become his, he wanted to maintain me in all my needs and he would arrange to marry me off with a dowry or have me become a nun [...] and with all these fine words he got me to agree to his proposal without any violence or force.

Che se io volevo esser sua che mi voleva mantenere di tutto quanto quello che mi bisognava, et che mi haverebbe maritata datami la dote, ovvero fattomi mi far monica, [...] et di molte altre parole buone che mi fece acconsentire á quello che lui volse senza alcuna violentia ne forza. (175v)

Emotional, but also impressively confident for a fifteen-year old, Delia presented herself as making the most of her attractive sexual assets.

The third story, taking place in a more affluent and clearly respectable milieu, shows us a young woman who succumbed to sexual seduction as she took steps, explicitly condoned by older women, to have a social life of her own. In 1603 Virginia lived in the centre of Rome, near the Chiesa Nuova, with and under the guardian eyes of her married sister, Prudentia, and her brother-in-law Carlo Folli, a goldsmith.²² Virginia was evidently an orphan:

22 GTC, Processi secolo xvii, busta 26 (1603), ff. 723r–735r.

though her mother is never mentioned, her deceased father was Alessandro Chigi, probably a member, if not necessarily a notable one, of a prominent family of bankers and men of affairs (725). Clearly, Virginia lived among prosperous and honourable kinsfolk who ensured, in Carlo's self-justifying words, that she 'lacked for nothing, neither clothing nor food, indeed perhaps [enjoyed] even more than was required' (*che mai l'ho fatto mancare niente ne di vestire ne di magnare, et forsi di piu che non si doveva*) (724r).

Virginia's age in years was never given, but depositions clearly designated her status as a female youth. Launching the trial, her brother-in-law's formal complaint called her a *giovane zitella*, that is, a marriageable and likely attractive virgin (724r). In confirmation, the midwives who assessed Virginia's defloration both called her a *giovane*; one elaborated that she was a 'grown woman' (*donna fatta*) and the other 'big and beautiful' (*grande bella*) (728r, 731v). That Virginia was not just a female teenager but a *giovane* in this sexualized sense was one key to what happened.

Virginia's story comes in a trial launched on Sunday, 11 May 1603, immediately after the events. The day before, Virginia had left by carriage for an excursion to the Seven Churches, a fashionable pilgrimage circuit in the outskirts of the city. According to her married sister, who had approved the outing, the young woman should be home by nightfall. But she did not come back and, indeed, stayed away overnight. Carlo had been out of the house when Virginia left; when he returned at the end of day and asked after her, his wife burst into tears (724r). It is not clear whether her sister's fate or her husband's displeasure caused Prudentia greater anxiety. Making his own enquiries early the next morning, the goldsmith learned that his ward was at a *vigna*, an ex-urban country place of a sort where Romans – rich and poor, male and female – often went both for work and for recreation. At Carlo's request, the police went to arrest the girl and her companions and to bring them back to the jail for interrogation. In the meantime, Carlo made his formal complaint to the Governor on charges of defloration and leading a young woman astray. The accused were a French gentleman, known in Italianized form as Pietro Eschinardo, and three male associates – two coachmen and Giovanni Battista, a stocking-maker with a sideline in private event planning.

As was common in trials involving sexual compromise of respectable women, the state did not initiate proceedings. The family had discretion as to the best way to minimize the dishonour of publicity. In this instance Carlo resorted unusually quickly to the public authorities. The trial record consisted of his complaint, two interrogations of Virginia, during which her tale changed, and two separate examinations of her body by midwives.

As happened in some other trials, several underlings also testified, but the culpable French gentleman was never called.

Reconstructed from these testimonies, the seducer, with his assistants, had an elaborate plan. All the first steps fit local demands for a maiden's good conduct. On the Friday, Pietro Eschinardo, whose rooms backed onto the courtyard where Virginia lived, caught the girl's attention through a window and proposed an outing for the next day. Having duly secured her sister's permission, Virginia agreed (726r–v). On Saturday morning, the Frenchman hired a coach and driver and arranged for a respectable chaperone, Francesca, the wife of a minor official in the ecclesiastical court (724r–725v). After picking up Virginia, wearing a white dress and black cloak, at her house, the coach lurched out of the city – not to the Seven Churches, as first proposed, but south toward a *vigna* (731v). How this change of direction happened we can only guess, but clearly the destination was familiar to Virginia, since she gave directions to the driver (732v–733r).

A mixed party assembled at the *vigna* and, joined by the gentleman Pietro, shared a convivial meal. After socializing for some hours, the older woman announced that she 'was afraid of her husband' (*che haveva paura del marito*) and had to leave (730r). Virginia, thus losing her chaperone, wanted to go home, too. Pietro countered with promises of a ride to another town, and Virginia joined him and the fixer Giovanni Battista in the coach that rolled along until after nightfall. When, at last, the carriage dropped the pair off at Pietro's lodgings, Virginia protested that they were supposed to be somewhere else. Although the location was near her home, she appeared not to recognize her surroundings in the dark. Pietro urged her to come in with him. When she hesitated, he wrapped her cloak over her and with a firm hand led her to his room. Upon her refusal to sleep with him, he began to undress her with some force and put her into the canopied bed. After shedding his own clothes, he climbed in, had sex with her one time, and claimed her virginity (727r, 730r).

Virginia had succumbed to the seducer's pressure, but continued to try to manage her plight. After both woke up early Sunday morning, Pietro locked Virginia in a room, left the key with his manservant, and told him to put the girl in the carriage that would come (729v). The Frenchman then again organized a coach with a different driver and another chaperone, Lucretia, an artisan's wife, and sent them with Giovanni Battista to collect Virginia and take her to a different *vigna* north of the city (728v–729r). Pietro later made an appearance, coaxed Virginia 'not to worry, that he had fixed everything' (*che io stesse alegramente, che lui haveva remediato ad ogni cosa*), and then left, giving instructions to take her home (727v).

Virginia, concerned to cover her tracks, refused in turn to go without a chaperone; and she wanted someone who would lie about where she had been, which Lucretia refused to do (727v, 729v). Giovanni Battista then went to seek help from Virginia's sister. Prudentia, however, now more worried about her husband's reaction, washed her figurative hands and said that Virginia should stay wherever she had spent the night (725v). Shortly after this failed mission returned to the *vigna*, the police sent by Carlo arrived and took Virginia and two of the lesser men to jail.

Although Virginia's willingness to join the excursion might seem imprudent, her behaviour, as reported not only by herself but also by others, was not out of line for women of her circle. Religious destinations like the Seven Churches justified women venturing out, even when it was understood that social recreation was part of the programme. A coachman reported having carried Virginia herself to Saint Peter's the previous March, perhaps to take part in Easter celebrations (732v–733r). Women's work – to gather fruit and process vegetables, for example – also justified leaving urban domesticity and travelling to the *vigne*. In this trial, the driver said that he had carried two women who wanted to spread laundry out to dry in the fields, and a *vignarolo* testified to having seen Virginia herself with her married sister visiting two weeks earlier to rinse laundry (730v–731r). Although it seems unlikely that Virginia's trip was really about laundry, the explanation justified women moving in an ex-urban orbit. As guardian, Prudentia not only approved Virginia's trip to the Seven Churches, but also the two of them had recently been on a similar junket outside the city gates together. At the same time, while agreeable for fresh air and a casual atmosphere, the *vigne* also posed some dangers. Because away from so many eyes of family and neighbours, these were places where assignations, and sometimes illicit sex, could easily happen.

Respectable women preferred not to venture from home without female companions. And Virginia, as a proper young woman, sought to observe this rule. When the seducer Pietro planned to lead the girl astray, he was careful to provide chaperones on both mornings. Similarly, at the *vigna*, Virginia wanted to have other women around. When, on the fateful Saturday afternoon, Francesca announced that she must return to the city, Virginia claimed to be uneasy left alone among men. And on Sunday, even after the defloration, for appearances and for reassurance, Virginia again wanted a woman's company in the carriage taking her home.

As a *giovane*, Virginia was an attractive sexual conquest, and seemed to Pietro susceptible to being led astray. Though careful to play by the rules, the youthful Virginia's appetite for sociability and admiration got

her into sexual trouble. Her report of the sexual assault was, compared to some testimonies, muted, but also notably detailed. Likely shocked to find herself in jail, Virginia stumbled trying to parry trouble not only from her assailant but also from Carlo, her familial guardian. In her first interrogation where, like all witnesses, she faced the magistrates alone, Virginia made improbable claims about an excursion to a distant town and passing the night sleeping in a chair fully dressed (725v–726r). Under pressure from the court, she soon revised this tale. In the second version, after a day of recreation and coach rides, she was dismayed to find herself after dark alone with Pietro at his front door. Pietro had then reassured her – ‘come, come, don’t be afraid’ (*venite, venite, che havete paura*) – and bundled her in with some force (727r). Again, a language of fear described a womanly response to gestures of male power.

Yet Virginia observed Pietro’s bedroom carefully, noting the location of the bed and its dark purple canopy. She used the language of ‘sleeping’ (*dormire*) with him. She resisted, but evidently not too much, and he resorted to the standard blandishments, saying that he wanted to marry her. ‘I don’t want a husband’ (*che non volevo marito*), she replied. ‘He had sex with me one time and deflowered me’, she reported, ‘but I didn’t pay much attention to whether there were signs of blood’ (*hebbe che fare con me una volta [...] carnalmente, che me sverginò, ma io non posi cura, se ce fussero segni di sangue*) (727r). Since there was not much time for her to have learned from lawyers what to say, Virginia must have known the ‘signs’. Yet, neither then nor later did she appear engaged with these details of her predicament. At the end of this long interrogation, however, she did reiterate, almost pro forma, that Signor Pietro had taken her virginity, that she wanted justice, and that, despite her earlier words, Pietro should marry her and restore her honour (727v).

Immediately following this interrogation came another stressful legal routine, a physical examination to assess Virginia’s virginity. Alone with the young woman in a small room in the jail, a midwife performed the usual tactile investigation and found Virginia’s genitals recently damaged (728r). When confirming this result two days later, a second midwife asked the young woman who she was and who had deflowered her. In reply, the girl, ‘because ashamed (*vergognata*), gave only her first name and described her abuser simply as ‘a man’ (732r).

Virginia’s distress, however, did not preclude her taking active part later in castigating her seducer. As was not uncommon in the Governor’s court, after an initial flurry Carlo’s case against the Frenchman lapsed. Although Pietro had given Virginia a ring with a blue stone at the time of the defloration, no

marriage appears to have been considered. Carlo reported that in May, rather than further parading his soiled family honour in public, he had, 'begged by many' (*pregata da molti*), agreed to a settlement. In a formal injunction Pietro promised not to speak – 'for good or ill', as the legal language went – about Virginia, Carlo, or his family (733v–734r). The goldsmith had thus opted for an official silence over more direct or material remedy. To mitigate embarrassment, Virginia had 'retired' temporarily to the house of another gentleman (734r–v). *Retirata* designated a socially recognized, atypical, deeper seclusion into which Roman women, or girls, sometimes withdrew when, as here, their public appearance attracted unwelcome risk. Nevertheless, the shameless Pietro tried to renew contact with Virginia, even as he sued Carlo for restitution of the ring. In October, Carlo, along with Virginia, again denounced Pietro's schemes to the magistrates. Using subterfuge and gifts, he had sent an older woman as a go-between to speak with Virginia in her private seclusion and to inveigle her to meet him again. Infuriated at his presumption, the feisty young woman first berated the messenger in unladylike terms and then went back to court against Pietro (734v–735r).

To conclude, while none of these three stories of Anna, Delia, and Virginia represents more than itself, each suggests some of the challenges and temptations that many Roman maidens faced as they acquired visible sexual maturity. This transformation was a particular feature of female youth. The ideals of religion and honour aimed to restrain women's sexual activities before, and during, marriage. One consequence was an ideological inclination to minimize an interval of youth between a largely asexual girlhood and the necessary sexuality of married adulthood. But everyday urban life in many ways resisted that tidy scheme. With many women not marrying until their twenties, most became potentially sexual long before they became brides. As 'grown-up' women, they attracted risky but not always unwelcome interest and offers. Family members, masters and mistresses, and female neighbours were therefore charged with protecting and correcting maids. Yet often enough these folk wrestled with conflicting economic needs and social goals so that their oversight produced irregular results. Young, unmarried women, especially those many with fragmented families, had relatively few personal and social resources, and were more often vulnerable to misuse. But, as female youths, they were not without their own aspirations, and sometimes plans, that some played out for themselves.

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14. A Room of Their Own

Young Women, Courtship, and the Night in Early Modern England

Eleanor Hubbard

Abstract

In early modern England, poor young women were usually freer from patriarchal control and more independent in courtship than their more prosperous sisters. However, accounts of night-time merriment in church court records suggest that wealthy young women did sometimes enjoy their own semi-secret spaces for recreation and courtship. The late hours of the night could transform the enclosed, respectable space of the home into a space for youth culture when the house was large enough to accommodate several young people and a separate bedchamber for unmarried women. While nocturnal youth culture is often associated with young men carousing in public places, these incidents prompt us to consider how the meanings of domestic space changed after elders went to bed.

Keywords: night; youth; women; early modern; courtship; England; London

One morning in 1617, a maidservant was washing the parlour floor in the house of the wealthy Levant Company merchant Thomas Symonds when her master's daughter approached her with an exciting request. Joan Symonds 'entreated [Elizabeth Graves] to make her a posset at night when her father was gone to bed, and promised to get all things ready'. Hours later, when the house was dark and the doors locked against the outside world, Elizabeth made her way to Joan Symonds's room, where she found a fire burning merrily, and several young people. These were Joan herself, two menservants, Elizabeth's fellow maidservant Mary Mason, and Joan's sweetheart James Cartwright, who had been let into the house by one of the menservants, Edmund Markes. The servants made the posset, mixing hot milk with wine

or ale so that it curdled, then spicing the heady mixture. The young people shared their treat, and 'were all merry at the eating thereof.'¹ Elizabeth went to bed when the posset was eaten, weary from her work and mindful that she would be called to rise early the next morning to undertake the daily round of household chores. But the others stayed up until one or two in the morning, talking, laughing, and, in the case of Joan and James, kissing, while the merchant and his wife slept unawares in a different part of the house.

This posset party was no mere frivolous amusement for Joan Symonds, however much she might have enjoyed it. For young women in early modern England, courtship was of critical importance, offering them a limited but significant chance to determine the course of their future lives.² For both men and women, and their respective families, personal and pragmatic considerations shaped the making of marriage, and parental approval was desirable if not always necessary. For many poor young women, who married relatively late and could expect little in the way of marriage portions from their parents, the path to a promising bridegroom was more likely to be impeded by poverty than by patriarchal control, at least on their side. The real challenge was finding a young man with good prospects who would take a penniless girl, and whose parents did not object. These young women often met and courted prospective husbands on their own, sometimes while working away from home as maidservants; their independence from familial control and support was very much a mixed blessing. In contrast, wealthier parents took a more active role in matchmaking, negotiating with one another and using the promise of substantial marriage portions to influence their children's choice.

While even the daughters of richer families expected to be able to reject undesirable suitors, it is generally thought that they were more likely to play a comparatively passive role in courtship, marrying young to candidates presented to them by their parents. However, the posset incident in St. Peter Cornhill and other similar escapades suggest that young women from wealthy families did sometimes have opportunities to create more or less secret spaces for youthful recreation and courtship. By meeting her suitor at night, abetted by other young people in the household, Joan Symonds demonstrated a striking ability to elude parental control by putting her material and social surroundings to good use. The late hours of the night

1 London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), Deposition of Elizabeth Graves, DL/C/225/139r. Spelling and punctuation have been modernized throughout the text.

2 On women's agency in courtship, see Adair, *Courtship*, 134–36; O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*; and Hubbard, *City Women*, 48–78.

could transform the enclosed, respectable space of the home into a freer and more adventurous space, especially if the house were large enough to accommodate several young people and a separate bedchamber for unmarried women. While nocturnal youth culture is often associated with young men carousing in public places, these incidents prompt us to consider how the meanings of private, domestic spaces changed in the dark hours of the night, offering young women as well as men a reprieve from adult supervision and a chance to pursue illicit courtship.

Joan Symonds was a determined young woman, and this night meeting was not the only way in which she challenged convention. Indeed, a variety of witnesses, and even Joan herself, testified to her readiness to defy her father and stepmother in pursuit of her chosen match. However, the secret merriment in Joan's room illustrates both the opportunities young women in wealthy households had to carve out space and time for youthful recreation and courtship, and the dangers they faced in doing so. Inviting a young man into private female space put a young woman's reputation at risk even if the couple met in the company of other young people, and James Cartwright was well aware that he could gain leverage over his chosen bride by coming to her room at night. If Joan's daring enterprise in courtship strengthened her position relative to her father, it only undermined her ability to negotiate successfully with her suitor, leaving her disappointed and humiliated when their plans for marriage unravelled.

Youth Culture, Time, and Space

Before the later seventeenth century, ordinary people and the gentry alike generally shunned the night, rising early and going early to bed, locking their doors against the threat of the dark.³ Shops shut early and honest people stayed at home, leaving taverns and alehouses – if they remained open – to the dubious patronage of less respectable drinkers. Since people of good fame were not generally expected to be up and about at night, the dark hours remained the province of less reputable sorts, people whose poverty or youth excluded them from honourable responsibilities. Indeed, male youths were central denizens of the night. Male youth culture in England was not as elaborated as in some continental countries, but on occasion, some young (and sometimes older) men in early modern English cities and other places seized the night as their own. Rowdily roaming unlit streets,

3 Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 111; and Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, 332–42.

beating up the watch, getting drunk, and insulting honest folk, they used the cover of darkness to mock the patriarchal expectation that young bachelors should demean themselves modestly and discreetly toward their elders and betters.⁴ Sometimes they revelled in disorder, while at others they mimicked the disciplinary stance of men of authority, like the Cambridge scholars who found a woman hiding under a hedge, made her take off her clothes, and whipped her as a whore.⁵

Sexual dominance was a potent ingredient in young men's night-time performances, and respectable young women were well advised to stay away from nocturnal wanderers, who were apt to assume that any woman out at night was fair game for harassment or rape. While wives and widows could walk the streets at night on their way to attend another woman's labour, there were no generally sanctioned occasions on which young, unmarried women could venture out, and both legitimate watchmen and groups of drunken men were likely to accost them. Young women who did walk abroad at night were regularly hauled into Bridewell as 'nightwalkers', liable to punishment even if they were not specifically accused of sexual offences. In theory, both men and women could be called 'nightwalkers', but in seventeenth-century London magistrates increasingly directed the accusation toward women, suggesting that their presence on night streets was particularly problematic, and objectionable in and of itself.⁶

Of course, young women who stayed up late could do so indoors, where the late hours of the evening provided some relief from the labours of the day. Once it was too dark to sew, with shops closed and the children asleep, even in modest households young people might sit up talking over neighbourhood happenings, eager to extend a brief moment of enjoyment. If their parents or employers were in bed, their talk could be especially free, and these conversations by the light of the kitchen fire sometimes took dangerous turns when servants felt free to dissect the behaviour of their elders. The 20-year-old apprentice John Pruddon reported in August 1639 that he, his younger fellow Richard Nicholson, and the maidservant Alice Stanley were all 'together at night in the kitchen' of their master, Philip Mote, when they began to discuss a man named Baker 'and a wench which was supposed to have been begotten with child by him'. The girl, a domestic servant, had lost her job because of the rumours, and, according to Pruddon, Alice Stanley criticized the girl's mistress for dismissing her, saying: 'Come, come, she

4 See Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*; and Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 166–70.

5 Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 98–99.

6 Griffiths, 'Meanings of Nightwalking'. See also Beaumont, *Nightwalking*, 37–40.

had not need be against her [...] she had a child before she was married'.⁷ She spoke with too much freedom, for Pruddon deposed against her in a defamation case.

In rural areas, where long distances between houses might prevent young men and women from meeting during working hours, the night could be a valuable time for courtship. In communities where some amount of mutual sexual exploration was expected and customary, nocturnal courtship could be explicitly or tacitly condoned by a young woman's friends and family. In France, for example, young women gathered in private houses on long winter evenings to work and chat together in spinning bees that were frequently visited by young men.⁸ Such formalized nocturnal gatherings do not seem to have been common in England, but there too, country people sometimes courted at night.⁹ In the 1650s, for example, the tailor Leonard Wheatcroft frequently visited his sweetheart in the evening, even spending whole nights with her in deep conversation and loving embraces.¹⁰ Her family's tolerance for these trysts was not particularly unusual. Even in the English Lowlands, where attitudes toward sex were generally stricter than in the Highlands, in the late sixteenth century, '[w]hen a marriage was looming, family and society alike were happy to condone a very marked relaxation of the usually tight norms governing sexual relations', according to Richard Adair. Unsurprisingly, a significant proportion of brides went pregnant to the altar.¹¹

Even if young rural women's parents or employers disapproved of their suitors, they were more likely to find opportunities to escape supervision than their urban counterparts, snatching moments of illicit privacy behind hedges or in quiet gardens. Correspondingly, rates of illegitimacy and bridal pregnancy were lower in urban areas than in the country, and especially low in the busy London metropolis.¹² The capital was a crowded place, with busy streets and houses often divided into lodgings, sometimes with the flimsiest of separations.¹³ Whether they sought romantic privacy or simply longed to breathe freely and enjoy themselves in youthful company, London girls struggled to escape watchful eyes and ears. Kitchen gossip might easily be overheard by a mistress in bed only steps away, for example, and many

7 LMA, Deposition of John Pruddon, DL/C/235/267v.

8 Ekirch, *At Day's Close*, 195.

9 Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 203–08.

10 Adair, *Courtship*, 170; and Parfitt and Houlbrooke, *Courtship Narrative*, 53.

11 Adair, *Courtship*, 170 and 100.

12 See Crane, 'Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces'; and Adair, *Courtship*, 197, 208, and 222–23.

13 Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, 163–72.

housewives spent their days at work on the threshold, where they could see both the house and the street.¹⁴ The night offered no reprieve. Often, maidservants slept in a trundle bed in the same room as their master and mistress; at other times, beds were stuck wherever they fit, in kitchens, halls, and shops.¹⁵ The charm of walking out into green fields on Sundays was surely not due only to the pleasant surroundings.

How, then, did Joan Symonds conceal her night courtship from her parents, who were wholly opposed to her love for James Cartwright? In her case, living in a large household appears to have made the difference: her father's house was large enough to contain a room specifically allocated to Joan and her kinswoman Mary Mason, a room that could become the site of women's nocturnal youth culture. Even in substantial households, young women were unlikely to have private rooms, and might even share beds: Sir Martin Frobisher's stepdaughter slept in the same room as the waiting women and the chambermaids, for example.¹⁶ Shared rooms and beds may have made personal privacy and solitude elusive even in wealthy households, but they offered opportunities for late-night conversations that could be more intimate than daylight gossip. It was in bed, for example, that one Mary Fox asked her parents' maidservant, Elizabeth Page, whether she ever 'had to do with any man', and then confessed that she herself had twice had sex with a Mr. William Milward.¹⁷ The divisions of rank between servants and the daughters of their employers were blurred though not erased by the ubiquity of service as a life-cycle stage for unmarried women. Almost all female domestic servants were unmarried maidservants, and girls of almost any social rank might spend a portion of their youth serving in another household.¹⁸ Whether they were in service or not, sleeping together and sharing their own space fortified a sense of shared identity between young women.

Youthful bedfellows and the intimacy of the bedchamber play a prominent role in one of the few autobiographical texts by a young girl in the seventeenth century. In her memoir of the year 1603, Anne Clifford, the daughter and heiress of the Earl of Cumberland, recalled that as a thirteen-year-old girl she had formed her most intimate friendships with other young ladies with whom she shared a bed. In spring 1603, she became close to two young

14 Hubbard, *City Women*, 149.

15 Flather, *Gender and Space*, 69–70; and Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 60.

16 Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, 172.

17 Cited in Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 70.

18 Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 3; and Hubbard, *City Women*, 24.

kinswomen during the first night they spent together: 'I lay all night with my cousin Frances Bouchier and Mrs Mary Cary, which was the first beginning of the greatness between us'.¹⁹ With frequent visits, the girls became 'more inward', and sometime later, when Anne's mother wished to punish her for riding ahead with a gentleman, she 'in her anger commanded that I should lie in a chamber alone, which I could not endure'. Fortunately, Anne escaped this dreadful fate when, that night, 'my cousin Frances got the key of my chamber and lay with me which was the first time I loved her so very well' (55). In her memoir, Anne did not disclose what she and Frances talked about or what they did, but for these young aristocratic women, the companionship of the bedchamber and the shared escape it offered from the careful surveillance of their formidable elders was clearly of deep emotional significance. Anne also recounted sleeping in the chamber of an older noblewoman as evidence of a valued relationship: before Queen Elizabeth's death, she wrote, 'I used to go much to the Court, and sometimes did I lie in my aunt of Warwick's chamber on a pallet, to whom I was much bound for her continual care and love of me' (43). However, the gracious favour the Countess of Warwick showed Anne by allowing her to sleep on a pallet in her room was quite different from the mutual intimacy that flourished between the teenage girls when they shared a room of their own.

Lena Cowen Orlin writes that shared beds and bedrooms 'allowed for a high level of mutual surveillance', which is why beds appeared relatively infrequently as sites of sexual transgressions.²⁰ But even for courtship, companionship at night had its uses; young women might well wish to meet their suitors without their parents' knowledge or presence, but that did not necessarily mean they wanted to be entirely alone with them. The company of other young women made nocturnal courtship safer, rather than making it impossible. Youthful bonds between daughters of the house and maidservants and shared enjoyment of nocturnal merriment encouraged young people to keep one another's secrets from their elders. When Susan White met George Houghton late at night in 1615, for example, she seems to have entertained him in company with a maidservant and her own sister, at least part of the time. She confessed that he 'was divers times let in to [her] mother's house in the evening when her mother was in bed, and the maid prepared victuals ready and gave as good entertainment to the said George as they could'. Sometimes Susan's sister stayed up also, but sometimes George stayed after she had gone to bed, and the couple 'did sometime sit

19 Clifford, *Memoir and Diary*, 47–49.

20 Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, 172.

up till twelve or one of the clock in the night'.²¹ Like Joan Symonds, Susan wished to marry her suitor, but her parents were opposed to the match.

Night courting also occurred in large aristocratic households, where young women in service had enough space and critical mass to pursue romantic adventures. Some of these might be humble domestic servants, but even young gentlewomen frequently entered service in noble houses, in hopes of gaining valuable connections, fashionable skills, and social polish. One of these was Elizabeth Willoughby, who served Lady Constance Lucy and Sir William Bowyer among others in the fashionable parishes of St. Anne Blackfriars and St. Margaret's Westminster. When she sued one John Goodyear for a matrimonial contract, most of her fellow maidservants supported her case, usually signing their depositions in elegant if unpractised italic hands.²² However, their credit was impugned by some other witnesses, mostly men, who drew attention to the young women's close friendships and eventful romantic lives. In particular, they reported that Elizabeth and her close friend Anne Johnson had entertained young men who climbed 'into the chamber through the window' at night when they were fellow servants in the house of the Dean of St. Paul, namely Anne's suitor James Johnson.²³ The two gentlewomen were thought to have abetted one another's escapades: a man who had often visited Elizabeth at the time noted 'great love and familiarity between them'.²⁴ While they were not accused specifically of sexual laxity, Elizabeth was reported to be a dashing young woman, who once boasted of having drunk 'seven pints of sack hand to hand to a waterman'.²⁵ She and Anne had had numerous suitors: one rejected swain had supposedly tattooed Elizabeth's name on his chest before departing to Bermuda, while another had given her expensive gifts of jewellery, money, 'silk stockings, silk garters, Spanish leather shoes and roses on them'.²⁶ Another rejected suitor, the tailor John Stonyer, reported telling Goodyear that Elizabeth 'was not a fit marriage for such tradesmen as [he] and the said John Goodyear were, for [...] if she had, she had been married long before that time'.²⁷ The

21 LMA, Personal answer of Susan White, DL/C/223/70v.

22 LMA, Depositions of Anne Johnson (DL/C/222/14), Anne Ranger (DL/C/222/75v), Margaret Usman (DL/C/222/132v-34r), and Mary Davies (DL/C/222/150-51).

23 LMA, Depositions of Thomas Blundell (DL/C/222/40r), and John Stonyer (DL/C/223/146v).

24 LMA, John Stonyer, DL/C/223/146r.

25 LMA, Thomas Blundell, DL/C/222/40r.

26 LMA, Depositions of Richard Waller (DL/C/222/38v-39r), Joyce Mowlso (DL/C/223/142v), and Thomas Blundell (DL/C/222/40r).

27 LMA, John Stonyer, DL/C/223/146v.

gallantry that flourished in these great households was out of place in the sober world of London tradesmen.

Shared youth seems to have been an essential ingredient in nocturnal merriment. In Joan Symonds's case, young people of substantially different status shared in her posset party. Joan herself was the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and James Cartwright had high hopes of prosperity. In contrast, Mary Mason was a poor relation who worked for her keep, while Elizabeth Graves, a maidservant from Cambridgeshire in her mid-twenties, was humbler still: her labour involved scrubbing the floor and she slept in a different place from Joan's room, perhaps in a garret or the kitchen. The menservants probably occupied an intermediate position. The social hierarchy was not erased by the participants' shared youth: the humblest servant made the posset, and all those present surely deferred to the wishes of Joan and James. However, for all her fiery independence, as an unmarried daughter living at home, Joan was also a subordinate member of the household, and no social inhibitions seem to have prevented the master's daughter and the master's servants from enjoying the forbidden pleasure of a midnight treat together. All were subjected to the authority and moral surveillance of their elders during the day, and for them night festivities may have provided a welcome reprieve. If youth united the merry-makers, however, gender divided them, for young women were more vulnerable to scandal than young men, and secret courtship exposed them to potential harm.

Compromising Courtship

Shared youth and shared space combined to create the opportunity for nocturnal festivity, spiced with a hint of danger, for, aside from the risk of parental wrath, a young woman's reputation could indeed suffer if a suitor went too far or if stories reached the wrong ears. But if danger made night meetings especially delicious, it could also leave daring young women with a bitter aftertaste. As Joan Symonds's case makes clear, early modern English cultural narratives that cast young women as castles to be besieged or treasures to be won left them in a vulnerable position when they allowed their lovers into their homes late at night. By all accounts, Joan was deeply in love with James, and her depth of feeling left her at risk of exploitation on the part of her subtler suitor. The fact that their secret nocturnal meetings took place on her ground helped her mitigate the danger, but in the end she surely looked back on the night episodes with hurt and anger. If these cases show how determined young early modern gentlewomen could be in pursuit

of a chosen bridegroom, they also reveal the constraints that hampered their ability to act, and the heavy price that could be exacted for their daring.

The specific circumstances of the legal suit that led Elizabeth Graves to depose about making a posset render her testimony particularly valuable. James Cartwright claimed that the two had entered a matrimonial contract by uttering the formulaic words that bound them together in God's sight. In such suits, some deponents often presented vivid, detailed depictions of courtship that were flatly denied by other witnesses, making it hard to untangle fact from fiction. However, Joan Symonds never denied that she had been in love with James Cartwright or engaged in courtship with him, that she had intended and hoped to marry him, or even that she had previously asserted they were contracted together. Instead, she repeatedly affirmed that her promise to marry James had been contingent on his proving that he had an estate of 2000 pounds, and obtaining her father's good will. Since he had fulfilled neither condition, and had showed through his behaviour that he had no intention of trying, she argued that she was completely free of any obligation to him. Crucially, she did not dispute spending time with James at night without her parents' knowledge.

Like many young Londoners, Joan Symonds grew to esteem a member of her own household, her father's apprentice. During the first years of his apprenticeship, as he prepared to journey to the Levant on his master's business, James Cartwright presumably learned as much as he could about the eastern Mediterranean trades, the intricacies of book-keeping, and useful languages. He also lived on close terms with his elderly master's young daughter; at a time in which business could be conducted at home as well as at the Exchange or the counting house, there must have been innumerable occasions for the young people to meet and talk together. They developed an understanding that persisted after he sailed for Istanbul to serve as a factor for his master, and to do as much business as he could.

Levant Company factors often found life abroad to be full of cares, for, in addition to figuring out how to negotiate the exotic, polyglot world of the Ottoman Empire, they had to develop their relationships with people in England. Unlike the East India Company, the Levant Company was not a joint stock company, but rather just an association of merchants who shared in a monopoly on English trade with the Ottoman Empire and Venice. For young factors, wealth was by no means certain, but depended on their ability to nurture ties with English investors who would trust them to trade on their account, rewarding them with a percentage of the goods. James Cartwright would trade for his master, but also on his own account and those of others, if he could convince them to trust him. Like others,

he probably spent a great deal of time writing home, trying to establish his professional reputation as a competent and skilful merchant.²⁸

In addition to writing feverishly to his relatives, friends, and commercial contacts, Cartwright seems to have kept in touch with Joan Symonds, writing to her in an assured, even boastful style of his success. Thomas Symonds later remembered that it might have been during James's absence that Joan first approached him to talk about her marriage. As he recalled, she told him 'that she could be well contented to have [James] for her husband', arguing that even though he was still only an apprentice, he was rich enough to marry a gentlewoman of her standing: 'James should show [him] that he had an estate of £2000 whereby he might be able to maintain her', she asserted.

To Joan's dismay, her claim had the opposite effect from that which she had intended. Rather than being impressed by James's alleged wealth, Symonds immediately became suspicious. James had had only had 300 pounds when he began his apprenticeship, and so Symonds believed that if he had indeed become so rich, he had done so through fraud.²⁹ He was especially concerned because, in fact, James's performance as a factor had been far from satisfactory. Recently, by his own account, the young man had lost a large sum of money 'by a Jew in Constantinople'. Faced with Joan's brave words, Thomas Symonds suspected that James had lied to him about the supposed loss, and had embezzled at least part of the sum.³⁰ Given the great distance between London and the Ottoman capital, it was difficult if not impossible for London-based merchants to verify the probity of their agents abroad, and, once raised, Thomas Symonds's doubts were not easily put to rest. James's alleged fortune proved to be a fatal stumbling block.

James Cartwright appears to have returned to London soon after this conversation, perhaps having been recalled by his angry master; ordinarily he would have spent several years abroad. When he returned from the Levant, Symonds called him into his counting house and asked him whether he loved his daughter; James denied it, and refused to provide Symonds with any proof of his estate. Unconvinced, Symonds took the precautionary step of putting a 'caveat into the court' to stop any marriage licence being issued for Joan, so that the couple would have to publically state their intention to marry well in advance before any church ceremony could be performed.³¹

28 Games, *Web of Empire*, 90.

29 LMA, Deposition of Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/127.

30 LMA, Personal answer of James Cartwright (DL/C/192/25v), and deposition of Humphrey Peate (DL/C/225/134r).

31 LMA, Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/127v.

Awkwardly, James Cartwright continued to live in the Symonds household, at least for a while, and he and Joan found many occasions to spend time together. Elizabeth Graves, the maidservant, deposed that 'they desired to be private and would for the most part be together alone without other company'. When James fell gravely ill, Thomas Symonds hired a nurse-keeper to look after him, but Joan also tended him devotedly, being 'very tender over him and desirous he should have anything that he wanted'.³² She even 'lay upon the bed and held his the said James Cartwright's head when he did cast and ease his stomach', according to her sister. The illness was severe: Joan recounted to a friend that 'she thought he was at the point of death, which sight struck her with such grief that if her sister had not come in and cut her lace she thought she should have died'.³³ There was some talk about James being sent to Aleppo for years to serve as consul, perhaps because Symonds was so eager to remove him from his daughter's vicinity. Anne Edgeworth, another maidservant, heard her say that she would wait seven years for him if need be.³⁴

James did not sail to Aleppo, but he did leave Symonds's service, and his house, ostensibly moving out because of a disagreement with his master's son. After that, the couple met at the house of Mary Norman, a painter's wife, where they remained 'together sometimes by the space of an hour and sometimes by the space of two hours kissing and dealing together in familiar manner showing great love and affection one to the other'. Mary Norman thought Joan was 'very desirous to be married [...] and to have it speedily effected'. Not all of their talk was happy, however: Joan was 'very importunate' with James 'to show his estate unto her father whereby they might have his good will', but he 'said he could not do it, and asked why that should be required of him more than it was of those that married his other daughters'. Joan, no fool, replied that that there were doubts about how he had gotten his money.³⁵

Joan was playing a dangerous and difficult game. To fulfil her desires, she had to convince James to reveal his estate, and hope that her father would forgive any irregularities in its provenance. She had more success, it seems, with her father than her lover, for James kept mum despite repeated efforts to get him to reveal his estate and behave like a respectful suitor.

32 LMA, Elizabeth Graves, DL/C/225/138.

33 LMA, Depositions of Mary Peate, married sister of Joan Symonds (DL/C/225/136r), and Mary Norman (DL/C/225/136r).

34 LMA, Deposition of Anne Edworth, DL/C/225/140r.

35 LMA, Mary Norman, DL/C/225/136v-37r.

Appreciating his formidable daughter's force of will, Symonds reportedly tried to tempt Joan with other marriage prospects, beginning with two linen drapers. Joan remained cold to the proposals, and even affirmed that she 'could not undo that she had done with the said James Cartwright and that she was contracted or made sure to him'. In fact she was not contracted, she later deposed, but rather said she was as a strategy 'to draw her father to like thereof [...] she used those speeches only to get her father's goodwill'.³⁶

Having had no luck with the linen drapers, Symonds progressed to bribery, offering Joan an unusually large portion if she would marry a knight. He deposed that 'hearing that Sir John Suckling [...] was a suitor to one Mistress Hawkins a widow, and that she was worth 3000 pounds', he said merrily that 'a maid with 2000 pounds was as good as a widow with 3000 pounds [...] Joan, how likest thou of Sir John Suckling? I could be contented to give 2000 pounds with thee in marriage for such a preferment. If I bring him to thee shall he be welcome?'³⁷ In her own deposition, Joan said her father offered her 3000 pounds, and threatened that if she 'would not give entertainment to [Suckling] he would presently turn her out of his doors', but she remained obdurate, stating that 'although he would give her three times as much to her portion yet her conscience would not suffer her to forsake the said James Cartwright'.³⁸ The wealthy Levant Company merchant Benjamin Barron met with an equally positive refusal: 'they were all base fellows in respect of James Cartwright', she told her sister.³⁹ Thomas Symonds seems to have tried to exercise some strict paternal authority by sending Joan into the country, where it was supposed that the purer air would help with her green sickness, but she would not go, threatening to run away with James 'if her father went about to force her to go'.⁴⁰

Her strategy seems to have worked. Thomas Symonds deposed that he eventually offered James that he could marry Joan with a good portion and keep his ill-gotten gains if he would only 'deal plainly' with him, but to no avail. In conversations with Joan, James apparently claimed that he had wagered a large sum of money that he could marry her without disclosing his fortune – a story Symonds met with withering scepticism.⁴¹ James's stubborn silence confused and frustrated both Joan Symonds and her father. It is possible that throughout the negotiations, he was more

36 LMA, Personal answer of Joan Symonds, DL/C/192/10r, 9r.

37 LMA, Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/130r.

38 LMA, Joan Symonds, DL/C/192/10v.

39 LMA, Mary Peate, DL/C/225/135v.

40 LMA, Joan Symonds, DL/C/192/12v.

41 LMA, Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/128v.

interested in using her love for him as a bargaining chip in his complicated financial dealings with Thomas Symonds than anything else. He may well have embezzled a large amount of money from his erstwhile master. If he were able to convince Joan to marry him without her father's consent, then presumably Thomas Symonds would be under considerable pressure to forgive him for his daughter's sake. Otherwise, he could hope to be bought off, forgiven his theft if he would only go away and leave Joan Symonds alone. He did, in fact, admit that he had said that if Thomas Symonds 'would refer a difference of accounts for monies of this respondent lost by a Jew in Constantinople to arbitration, that then he [...] would be contented to give the said Joan a discharge'.⁴²

It is in this precarious situation that James Cartwright visited Joan Symonds twice at night. The first time, she expected his presence, and got things ready for a posset. The second time, he came as a surprise. Joan reported that one evening, when she had put her father to bed and went to her chamber to go to her own bed, she was astonished to find James Cartwright there. She told him 'it was no fit time to come to her at that time of the night, and prayed him to go out', but he protested that he would 'offer no unkindness unto her'. In any case, he could no longer leave the house: Edmund Markes, the manservant who had let him in, 'said that the keys were carried up into her father's chamber so as he could not then get out of the doors'. So, Joan deposed, James stayed all night in her room 'against [her] mind'. This time there was no party, but Markes stayed until 'about two or three of the clock in the morning', and he went away and Mary Mason, Joan's bedfellow, went to bed. Joan and James 'sat up and were in familiar talk and discourse all night', sitting on the bedside where Mary was sleeping, 'there being no other bed in the same chamber'. Joan first said that they were 'sometimes kissing each other', but the phrase was subsequently struck out.⁴³ The next morning, in a turn worthy of the stage, James hid in a springlock closet, shut up securely until Thomas Symonds went to the Exchange, and Markes let him out.

James's intentions in this nocturnal visit do not seem to have been innocent. He continued to press his love to Joan in person, while refusing to speak with her father about his suit or his fortune. According to Joan's father, when she persisted in refusing to marry James without her father's consent, he suggested that she had no other choice, having compromised herself with him: 'if she would not be married to him [...] then he would

42 LMA, James Cartwright, DL/C/192/25v.

43 LMA, Joan Symonds, DL/C/192/11v-12r.

publish her for a whore whereby she should be fit for no other man and that then he would go beyond the seas'. If he hoped to intimidate Joan, he miscalculated. Joan could forgive James's crooked dealings with her father, but this insult rankled. Afterward, Thomas Symonds claimed, Joan swore 'that if there were no more men in the world she would never be married to the said James Cartwright'.⁴⁴

Despite her elaborate efforts to influence her father on the one hand and her lover on the other, Joan failed to obtain the marriage she wanted – no surprise given that the very same assertions that strengthened her hand with her father weakened her ability to bring her suitor to terms. However, James did not make good on his threat; in court at least, he shied away from asserting that they had committed fornication. Mary Mason did not depose in the case, but her presence in Joan's bedchamber allowed Thomas Symonds to assert indignantly that of course the couple had never been together alone at night.⁴⁵ Young gentlewomen like Joan Symonds could create secret spaces for youthful courtship and recreation, away from the eyes and ears of their elders, but they were well advised to do so in the company of female companions. Caught between controlling parents and calculating suitors, they would need whatever allies they could muster.

Of course, not all young women who shared night spaces were emotionally intimate or supportive friends. Mary Mason, the poor relation, may have kept Joan's secret grudgingly; she may have been prevented from deposing because her evidence would have been harmful. However, the incidents described above are a useful reminder that in wealthy households, unmarried women's bedchambers were not just sites of sleep and labour. At night, they were also spaces where young women could speak without being overheard by their elders, exchange confidences, and even engage in secret courtship, both protected and constrained by one another's company. These moments of youth culture – if they deserve that name – may have been fleeting and hushed, but in a society that often consigned young women to silence and subordination, they were probably precious all the same.

44 LMA, Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/131v.

45 LMA, Thomas Symonds, DL/C/225/130v.

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15. In Search of a ‘Remedy’

Young Women, their Intimate Partners, and the Challenge of Fertility in Early Modern France

Julie Hardwick

Abstract

In Old Regime France, specific conventions framed young women's intimate relationships with men. This essay examines fertility as a site of negotiation and contention. It explores practices of licit, age- and stage-appropriate intimacy during the decade-long phase of emerging adulthood when women were single workers. It examines their efforts to manage intimacy and fertility through a range of ‘remedies’ in the context of official and local attitudes and with their intimate partners. Young women's fertility provided a marker, a milestone, and a malleable process integral to the ambiguous and complex transition in youthful intimate relations between walking out and matrimony.

Keywords: France; Old Regime; intimacy; fertility; courtship; youth

In 1722, 25-year-old Leonarde Bergeron, a servant, took up with Antoine Soutel, a gardener who worked just outside the Lyon city walls. Their courtship took all the usual forms, and, as the months passed, he started to promise to marry her. With this expectation, they started to have sex. Soon Leonarde found herself pregnant. When she told Soutel, he said that he would have to talk to his uncle about getting the necessary legal permission to marry. By the time she was six months pregnant, Leonarde began to press him to keep his promise. One evening when he came to visit her, he brought ‘a bottle of Spanish wine’ for them to share, and claimed it was from the cellar of his employer. When she drank it, she noticed it had ‘an unnatural taste’ and seemed to have some sand or salt in it. Soutel gave her some bread to eat with it, perhaps for a snack or perhaps to counter

the taste of the wine. She suspected he had some 'evil plan' and threw the bread away. Soutel left without saying another word. Leonarde examined the bottle closely and noticed it contained 'a liquid similar to wine' with 'some substance that looked like sand, salt or powder'. She gave some of the liquid to a cat, which died a few hours later, and she herself was very ill despite the little she drank. Leonarde left much unsaid in her account to the judicial officials. She avoided any articulation of the negotiation and conflict that must have accompanied Soutel's stalling so that their marital status remained unresolved through many months of pregnancy. Nor do we see anything of any other conversation that preceded his storming off after she declined to partake of more wine.¹

Like Leonarde Bergeron, many young working women in France were sexually active before marriage. They sometimes had to find ways to cope with the consequences of fertility. Pregnancy often led to marriage, and illegitimacy rates were low. Yet some urban couples, unwilling or unable to marry, faced the need to resolve an unwanted pregnancy in other ways. Procuring an abortion through the use of 'remedies' was a serious transgression of religion and law. Even official ideologies, however, could not readily discipline the mysteries of female bodies or young people's desires to control their fertility. Young intimate partners in cities lived in an everyday culture that offered strategies for young, unmarried women – servants and silk workers – and their male partners to manage with varying success the unwelcome results of sexual intimacy. Among the records for the Lyon *sénéchausée*, a royal court of first instance, between 1658 and the mid-eighteenth century, we find rare but telling examples.

These issues intersect with several threads in the early modern historiography of sexuality, medicine, and youth culture. The study of courtship often elides the role of intimacy and sexuality beyond the management of the illicit – for example, brothels where young men could sow their oats, to use an old expression – or illegitimacy as an outcome. Indeed, Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay have recently highlighted a broader scholarly tendency to ignore the historically specific construction and evolution of heterosexuality for the pre-modern era. Historians have also emphasized the role of midwives and other women in early modern management of fertility.² In the Lyon

1 Archives Départementales du Rhône (hereafter ADR) BP3543 Dossier of Bergeron and Soutel. All translations are my own.

2 Phillips and Reay, *Sex before Sexuality*. For a brief summary of reproduction as a female realm argument, see Toulalan and Fisher, 'Introduction', 8; and for an example, see Gowing, 'Secret Births'. For caveats that do note, if only in passing, the involvement of men in cases that ended in criminal court, see Ferraro, *Nefarious Crimes*, 162; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 61–62;

judicial narratives, women were very involved in dealing with out-of-wedlock births as landladies, midwives, and wet-nurses, and likely offered advice or assistance during early stages of pregnancies. Strikingly, however, men too were integral to the networks that managed unwanted pregnancies.

In Old Regime France, historically specific, popular conventions framed young women's intimate relationships with men. This essay examines the place of fertility in particular as a site of negotiation and contention. It explores practices of licit, age- and stage-appropriate intimacy for young women during the phase, lasting a decade or so, of emerging adulthood when they were single workers. It examines their efforts to manage intimacy and fertility through a range of 'remedies' in the context of official and local attitudes and in collaboration or conflict with their intimate partners. Young women's fertility in all these ways provided a marker, a milestone, and a malleable process integral to the ambiguous and complex transition in youthful intimate relations between walking out and matrimony.

Legal Contexts: Historicizing Intimacy and Fertility for Women

An immensely rich judicial archive dating from the 1660s survives in Lyon, one of the largest and most economically important cities in early modern Europe. These records provide an extraordinary window into young people's heterosocial relationships. As all the plaintiffs were young women, and many others appeared as witnesses, these records foreground female perspectives on the experience of physical intimacy and on the attitudes towards the use of remedies as a response to the challenge of fertility. Like all such documents, they provide us with narratives that are heavily filtered by legal protocols, by the circumstances, and by the stakes and strategies of those testifying.

Even when young couples whose intimacy led to pregnancy did not marry, most resolutions were handled informally and without generating any written record beyond perhaps a baptismal certificate.³ Nevertheless, the usual trajectories of young women's intimate relationships become clear in the timelines of months or years that were embedded in the Lyon

and Rublack, 'The Public Body'. For more direct examination of the role of non-elite men and clergy: for early modern Italy, see Christopoulos, 'Nonelite Male Perspectives'; and Baernstein and Christopoulos, 'Interpreting the Body'; on France, see Choudury, *The Wanton Jesuit*.

3 French historians have used such records since the early 1970s to study illegitimacy; they focused on the legal end point that produced the judicial records, even though it was highly unusual for young couples' relationships to end in court. Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

lawsuits about courtships gone awry. These documents were classified, as in other archives, as 'pregnancy declarations'. In fact, they were petitions filed by young, pregnant women seeking recourse from the alleged fathers of their babies, and often included depositions from witnesses as well as the women's initial complaints. The files provide backstories for the course of intimate relationships between young workers, which could be rough as well as smooth. The records describe common causes for negotiation and contention and the many possible solutions to out-of-wedlock pregnancy besides marriage.

Because the use of 'remedies' – substances to purge a pregnancy – was illegal and sinful, and often not central to the judicial drama, the practice was seldom mentioned. In these particular juridical actions, usually called *plaintes* or complaints, young women sought legal decisions that would lead to financial support or even marriage. The court officials sought to understand the situation by asking a routine set of questions focused on whether they had in fact been a stable couple and likely to marry: what was history of the relationship; had the young woman told her intimate partner that she was pregnant; had she previously had sex and babies with other men? Court officials did not ask about remedies, as it was legally irrelevant, because the pregnancy was the *sine qua non* for these particular cases.

This essay draws on the relatively few instances in which remedies were mentioned, sometimes directly and sometimes elliptically – that is, in fewer than 20 per cent of the hundreds of complaints of this kind brought in the Lyon *sénéchausée*. Because young women and their male partners needed to defend their reputations, they usually saw risk rather than advantage in bringing up the subject of remedies. Young women had to persuade the court that they were respectable because, despite facing out-of-wedlock pregnancy, they had engaged in intercourse only in expectation of marriage. Any mention of remedies fit awkwardly with that project. A young woman who admitted to willingly having considered using remedies would likely have been quickly associated with the kind of behaviour associated with girls who had many partners, and her case would be dismissed. Meanwhile, young men who sought to avoid legal responsibility for a pregnancy had to persuade the court that they were not involved. Consequently, remedies appear in the written record only when pregnant petitioners or other witnesses made either incidental or, occasionally, strategic observations about them.

If the elaborate performances of naivety and innocence by both partners surely reflected the legal context, other factors also shaped the surviving

record of often complex, long-running situations. The decision to go to court was highly unusual for young women who found themselves in this situation, often being a last resort after many months of waiting and pressing, and the shift to a legal action no doubt sharpened for them and spotlights for us contestation between couples. In many similar situations, other young couples who could not or did not want to marry also used remedies, whether consensually or reluctantly, and these solutions sometimes worked, probably as we have seen simply by making the woman so ill that she spontaneously miscarried. These outcomes did not generate any written record. So the cases that we can read today represent a particularly contentious slice of a much wider practice.

Social Contexts: Young Women, Work, and Heterosociability in an Early Modern City

Young women developed intimate relationships with young men that were widely accepted as long as they observed conventions and practices that marked intimacy between them as licit. As emerging adults, they explored heterosocial relationships in full view of their co-workers, friends, and neighbours; and indeed the public aspect of their intimacy was a key safeguard to their reputations and to a perhaps surprisingly wide range of licit intimacy. For communities, this stage provided for young people's normal desire for intimacy, giving them a chance to work out being part of a couple and to find a balance between compatibility and the pragmatic elements of early modern marriage. For young women and men, sexuality was organized around age as well as gender and work.⁴

The transition phase of young adulthood lasted about ten years between the mid-teens when young people began to work and the mid- to late twenties when most people married. Taking work often meant living away from home. A rapidly growing silk industry dominated Lyon's economy from about 1650, and young women as well as young men, many of them migrants from the surrounding countryside, worked in silk production or in the allied trades. In this city, as elsewhere in early modern Europe, domestic service was the most frequent form of work for young women, and a single female servant was a ubiquitous part of most urban households. Being a servant could also mean doing whatever work other household members did. Many Lyon depositions show that young female servants did silk trade

4 Trumbach, 'From Age to Gender'; and Toulalan and Fisher, 'Introduction'.

work for at least some of the time. Young workers lived in rented rooms in the densely populated multi-storey tenements that sprang up, often in the same building where their employer lived. Indeed, the silk guild required masters to provide young female workers with accommodation, a sign of their importance if not their formal status.

Age was a key variable when young people's relationships appropriately progressed to intimacy for them and their communities. The demographics of marriage and reproduction provide contextual clues. The average age of marriage in early modern northwestern Europe was the mid twenties. Registered illegitimacy rates were very low, perhaps 2 or 3 per cent, although premarital conception was very common and indeed not regarded as problematic. In eighteenth-century Lyon, the average age of first marriage for women was 27.5.⁵ This well-established pattern of relatively late marriage suggests that although sex frequently preceded marriage among couples in their mid-twenties who were of feasible marriage age, younger, single people mostly avoided intimacy as far as intercourse. Otherwise, illegitimacy rates would have been higher or marriage ages lower since their inability to control their fertility effectively meant regular intercourse was very likely to be followed quickly by pregnancy.

Among Lyonnais intimate partners who appeared in court, very few women were younger than 20 or older than 25, and only a small number of women were teenagers or older than 30, the latter usually widows. But men had a wider age range. This gendered pattern points to the age-related organization of sexuality. Men's ages were likewise clustered in the early to mid twenties, although middle-aged men were a bit more common. These older men were almost without exception the already married employers of the young women who usually had a clear narrative of unwanted, coerced relationships.⁶ The records also reveal a few cases of what we would clearly identify today as rape even between young people of the same age. The vast majority of young women in these complaints, however, were involved in consensual relationships with men of their own age because this particular legal avenue addressed paternity and its responsibilities in couples who were feasible marriage partners.

These demographic indicators suggest a well-understood, age-appropriate progression of conventional intimate behaviour in consensual relationships before couples engaged in intercourse and had to deal with possible

5 Flinn, *European Demographic System*; Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais*, 90–92.

6 These age patterns are based on the information in 204 cases between 1658 and 1722 where ages were given (ADR BP3540–43).

pregnancies. Teenagers knew themselves that early intercourse was unacceptable and impractical because marriage was not economically or socially feasible. Late puberty – probably at around age sixteen for girls – as well as intense pressure to delay marriage seems to have quite effectively staged experiments with physical intimacy. Marriage was closely associated with intercourse, and the phrase ‘as husband and wife do’ was a common euphemism. Therefore, younger couples likely walked out together, had outings as part of larger groups of their friends and kin, and experimented with many forms of intimacy short of intercourse. Couples approaching customary marriageable age were very likely to agree to premarital intercourse in the wake of discussions about marriage, and usually followed through with marriage if or when pregnancy occurred, if not sooner.⁷

Workplaces were the principal sites where young people formed their social and intimate relationships. Young couples most often said they had met through work even if occasionally they were introduced by friends or at social events. They were co-workers, customer and client, or served different employers in different stages of the production process, and thus met, for example, delivering supplies or goods. These encounters facilitated consensual relationships between young men and women who were peers, similar not only in age and rank but also in shared experiences of work in the silk and allied trades.

Young partners explored youthful desire and physical intimacy while their communities actively policed the boundaries between licit and illicit in a wide range of ways. Couples came to self-identify as a stable, monogamous pair when they started to walk out together, a public performance that women remembered as pivotal and that peers and elders regarded as a distinct social marker. Friends, neighbours, and co-workers observed couples like Françoise Namy and Guillaume Bergeron who walked out most evenings between eight and ten and saw them being ‘very friendly’ with each other and ‘kissing and caressing’. As one observer noted, public intimacy of this kind did not involve any ‘inappropriate behaviour’.⁸ Relationships were appropriate when conducted in public spaces, whereas ducking out of view or into rooms with closed doors earned great suspicion.

7 For age of puberty as around sixteen in eighteenth-century France, see Seidel Menchi, ‘The Girl and the Hourglass’. For the rarity of ‘precocious’ marriage under the age of 20, except for elite families, see Bardet, ‘Early Marriage’. For expectations of marriage as a prerequisite for intercourse in women’s narratives, see Hardwick, ‘Policing Paternity’.

8 ADR BP3542 Dossier of Namy and Bergeron, 17 October 1686. On the myriad ways in which young people, their friends, kin, co-workers, neighbours, and other community members energetically marked the line between licit and illicit, see Hardwick, ‘Policing Paternity’.

Young couples also experimented with emotional compatibility, if not modern conceptions of romantic love. Young women's narratives typically emphasized the warm feelings that developed between partners. To articulate these, the complaints used varied terms of 'love and affection'. When women spoke of first intercourse, they consistently emphasized that the prospect of marriage was pivotal in the shift from the routine public kissing and touching of walking out couples to the private intimacy of future spouses.

Remedies: Official Attitudes, Local Knowledge, Young Couples' Strategies

When young women and their partners shifted to intercourse in expectation of marriage, a new stage of physical intimacy brought the pressures of fertility. These could lead the couple to negotiation and sometimes conflict. Retrospectively in lawsuits, young women and their witnesses highlighted these fault lines in narratives about premarital conception and indicated the role of men in managing the challenges of fertility. Legal logic meant that women often described themselves as reluctant partners to these efforts and foregrounded the role of male intimate partners and surgeons in efforts to find solutions to an untimely pregnancy. But women themselves often had vested interests in delaying reproduction if they were not going to marry or were not yet ready to do so. Moreover, beyond the couple, the larger community had a stake in the matter. Despite formal religious, medical, and legal prohibitions on terminating pregnancies, a widespread local acceptance of the use of remedies indicates a grey area of practice around fertility. The seeming near inevitability of intercourse and marriage suggests that routine out-of-wedlock pregnancies required some hard decisions.

In the seventeenth century, procuring an abortion was a serious offence, both a sin and a crime. Religiously and legally, culpable abortion was defined as intervention after the baby could be felt moving at about four or five months' gestation.⁹ Yet many ambiguities complicated the views of medical and legal authorities. Early modern medicine standardly relied on purging the body as the solution for many health issues, including such threatening female maladies as menstrual blockages. Also, pervasive uncertainties

9 Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 61–62, and 78 for the definition of abortion. For the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties around menstruation and reproduction, see McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation*.

troubled the diagnosis of early pregnancies. These contexts meant that when a pregnancy ended prematurely, it was difficult to distinguish what we would call a miscarriage from a deliberate effort to terminate through use of a remedy.

Legal contexts reflected similar ambiguity. For example, in 1677, the mayor of Dijon, a city north of Lyon, acknowledged that 'remedies and potions' were often used to end pregnancies. He was discomfited by this crime and sought to enlist Catholic clergy to help: he requested a special kind of a judicial order (*monitoire*) that required priests to publicize this criminal charge at Masses and to compel witnesses who had information to come forward on pain of excommunication. The Dijon mayor explicitly associated the use of remedies with women of 'libertine ways'.¹⁰ A century later, Jean-François Fournel, a jurist who wrote the definitive late eighteenth-century text on 'seduction', rehearsed the distinction in law and theology between termination of 'the hope of a man' and of 'a man'. However, he acknowledged that only the latter carried criminal punishment in his time, and conceded that abortion 'by drinks, drugs or deadly efforts to prevent the accomplishment of motherhood' was a well-known practice.¹¹ Notably, Fournel, like the mayor of Dijon, focused on the mother as the liable criminal party, an attitude that suggests why young women often sought to distance themselves from court actions for paternity claims.

Nevertheless, the early modern judges in Lyon seemed strikingly unconcerned in everyday practice about references to remedies, or even to damaged foetuses. In paternity cases, court officials did not initiate questions about the use of remedies because the subject was not pertinent to the legal issue at hand. So it was complainants or witnesses who occasionally introduced remedies. Even though judges sometimes voiced scepticism about the truthfulness of testimony that denied all knowledge of and responsibility for them, no evidence indicates any kind of follow-up. Instead, court officials who heard references to remedies apparently shrugged and focused on the issue of financial compensation. Furthermore, in Lyon, as in other cities, prosecution of abortion was rare; there are only three cases between 1720 and 1790.¹² Pragmatism about the pre-term use of remedies seemed to prevail. This wide latitude was perhaps rooted in the consensus regarding young

¹⁰ Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 129–30.

¹¹ Fournel, *Traité de la seduction*, 391, and 390–96 on abortion.

¹² For the numbers of abortion cases in the Lyon criminal court records, I thank Dr. Cathy McClive for sharing her in progress work with me. This very low rate of prosecution seems in line with other places. For Dijon, for instance, see Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 129–32.

couples that their marriages were not always feasible or even desirable for many reasons.

For example, court officials were dubious about Françoise Blanchet's claim that Gilbert Behal had given her money to buy drugs to abort her pregnancy. If he had seduced her as she said, why would he have given her money to use 'so badly as she has told us'. A midwife recalled that she had chastised him for giving Blanchet money 'to abort her fruit' (the usual term for an unborn baby) and he had not responded.¹³ In court, Behal denied giving money with 'such pernicious advice', and said 'she [Blanchet] had told him she was pregnant and asked for the money to buy remedies that she promised were for a malady'. Yet although the judges remarked that payment for such a purpose was 'a very serious and very punishable action', their commentary seems to have been no more than a marking of the he said/she said quality of the dispute. They released Behal from prison as he requested, and ordered him to pay Blanchet's costs and take charge of the baby as she asked. That was a mundane outcome to such legal claims.

In different ways, male and female intimate partners tried in court to disclaim responsibility for the use of remedies. Young women's judicial narratives always emphasized that they were shocked and dismayed at these suggestions of their male partners. Or they expressed surprise that what their partners proffered was a 'remedy' or that the men tried to dupe them. Young women spoke of remedies or purges, of drinks, powder, or drugs, or of bleeding, usually in the foot if specified. The narrators usually framed their reproductive intentions ambiguously. In part because of the general understanding of interventions to restore women's periods as routine health measures, the relationship between a possible pregnancy and the remedy might be left unarticulated, perhaps between partners as well as in the legal record. For example, Anne Julliard said her partner had given her 'remedies to prevent dropsy', a common malady involving water retention that was frequently offered as an alternative explanation to abortion.¹⁴ Meanwhile, young men typically denied intent to do anything other than restore health, and often rejected any role in the provision of remedies. Given the multiple legal filters, this disclaiming rhetoric used by women and men must be regarded with scepticism. Local knowledge about

¹³ ADR BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1753.

¹⁴ ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1755. For the common resort to explanations of dropsy as a response to allegations of abortion, see Christopoulos, 'Nonelite Male Perspectives', 161-62.

such remedies was widespread and their use broadly accepted. Despite the legally strategic repackaging of what had happened, intimate partners clearly saw the use of 'remedies' as feasible and legitimate, especially in early pregnancy.

Young couples sometimes persisted in their efforts to resolve the problem of a suspected pregnancy, even at the risk of notable discomfort. François Page, a surgeon and the son of a master surgeon, gave his partner Anne Juilliard a series of remedies, bled her himself in the foot three times, and dosed her repeatedly on the same day. Some weeks later, however, she 'felt something move in her stomach' and told François that she thought she was pregnant. They recommenced the remedies that still did not seem effective, and finally he sought to give her 'a dose of white liquid' that would 'injure' her.¹⁵ Another woman, Antoinette Berthaud, recalled that Louis Poulet, a 'billiard player', often gave her remedies and had had a surgeon come to bleed her eight or nine times. She remembered having 'two losses of blood'. She did not know, she said, if these bleedings and other remedies had 'drained' her of pregnancies or if she had never been pregnant.¹⁶ Her narrative indicates that the couple frequently resorted over nearly three years to remedies of different sorts. This account questions the efficacy of available remedies yet illustrates how familiar and accessible they were. These same young women also recalled how sick the remedies made them. Antoinette Berthaud claimed that she sometimes vomited blood, and Anne Juilliard said that she fainted repeatedly. A neighbour also noticed that Izabeau Marquet stayed in her room for two weeks after taking remedies while pregnant, an observation that both hinted at suspicion about intent and suggested the high level of discomfort endured by young women who took remedies.¹⁷

Young women often claimed ignorance about the culpable aims of their actions. Some perhaps did understand the procedures as restoration for their health; others were gullible. Since some, no doubt, edited their recollections to suit the context of a court action, many probably did understand that the intention was to terminate their pregnancies. Marie Antoine Faure reported that her intimate partner gave her 'powder' after she told him she was feeling ill, which presumably they both took to be a possible symptom of pregnancy. When she got pregnant a second time, she declined to take

15 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Juilliard and Page, 13 June 1753.

16 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685.

17 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685; BP3555 Dossier of Juilliard and Page, 13 June 1753; BP3542 Dossier of Marquet and Bernard, 16 February, 1689.

what the man offered her as she now recognized what had happened the first time. Antoinette Berthaud claimed that she only realized the remedies were tied to possible pregnancies when the couple ceased having intercourse for five months. Louise Charvet claimed that Jean De Juif, though he denied it, had advised her several times to 'take remedies that would damage the baby in her'.¹⁸

These testimonies drew a fine line between early and late interventions in pregnancy, between restoration of health and termination. They also played on a trope of female naivety and gullibility. Anne Julliard said that she was 'horrified' when her intimate partner gave her a white liquid that would 'injure' her. Françoise Blanchet claimed that Behal made 'black propositions' that she would buy drugs to end her pregnancy with money he gave her, and that he wanted to 'abort her fruit'. Antoinette Berthaud said the realization that the remedies were designed to damage her fruit 'caused her great grief'.¹⁹

In these women's tellings, the providers of reproductive health remedies were always male, often intimate partners, and sometimes explicitly surgeons who had provided the remedy or come to do the bleeding. Although historians often highlight women, above all midwives, these were noticeably absent in these accounts either as providers or as witnesses. Here instead young men were apparently able to source remedies either from surgeons or apothecaries under the cover of purchasing purgatives to restore health. Perhaps a kind of informal vernacular knowledge about effective powders and liquids circulated among men too. Male intimate partners were closely involved with potential remedies, providing potions or even performing bleedings that 'restored' menstrual cycles.

The young couples appear as the key actors in efforts to terminate pregnancies. While friends and co-workers often recounted discussions with one or the other of the young partners about their behaviour and plans, talk of remedies seldom figured in court testimony. Since male elites associated female users with criminal remedies, young women had cause to spotlight the role of their male partners in wrongdoing in order to protect their own reputations. Discussions with other people were of no relevance to the legal action and could be elided in testimony. Young couples may have felt that this particular aspect of extramarital pregnancy should be handled

18 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685; BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1743; BP3542 Dossier of Charvet and De Juif, 23 July 1687.

19 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1753; BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1743; 3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685.

between them, and perhaps their kin and co-workers likewise preferred a knowing silence.

Young couples, their communities, and even legal professionals saw the use of remedies as familiar and frequent. On the whole, everyone seemed ambivalent at worst and accepting or supportive at best. Witnesses had no legal prompt to recount more general discussions, but in a rare example where they did, the kin and neighbours of Anne Julliard had often seen her partner, François Page, visit her. They knew that she had been 'ill', and had observed him twice bring 'remedies' and instruct her grandmother to have her take them. This became talk of the neighbourhood. Her uncle told a woman neighbour that Julliard was pregnant and that Page was the father. A neighbour then enquired if Page's remedies were not meant to 'injure' his niece. The uncle said no, because they had kept company with the intention of marriage; if he had thought the remedies were for that end, he would not have put up with it. Another female neighbour saw similar events, and even watched Page try to bleed Julliard in the foot. She did not know why, but when she later learned that Juilliard was pregnant, she asked if that was why she had taken the remedies. Julliard replied that she did not know why he had given them to her.²⁰

Such discussions show a widespread awareness of the circulation of remedies, and some ambiguity in responses. However, many kinfolk and neighbours watched Julliard and Page negotiate their fertility, and most seem to have chosen to take the treatments as restorative purgatives rather than object to them as a serious offence. Such efforts were likely successful for other couples, even if not spoken in court. Their rhetoric suggests a popular as well as elite awareness of the medical and legal divide between restoring menstrual health and termination. In practice, however, pragmatism and the need for social peace led to overlooking such distinctions in local communities and by the judiciary.

20 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1753. Statements of disapproval were rare. For example, Claudine Larandon, a 'female journeyman', claimed that her intimate partner, Louis Antoine Petremont, had suggested she get bled and take 'purgative' remedies when she told him she was pregnant. He denied he had given her 'such bad advice'. Their case was overlaid with a register of community and legal disapproval as he was her employer, and the court and local jurisprudence regarded employers as in serious breach of their responsibilities when they got their employees pregnant, so Petremont had multiple motivations to deny such a suggestion. ADR BP3547, 22 September 1727.

Conclusion

Leonarde Bergeron's retelling, in our opening example, of her intimate partner's 'evil plan' to solve their fertility problem, complete with adulterated Spanish wine and a dead cat, was unusual in these records for its detail and drama. Yet it spotlighted fertility as a recurrent concern for young women. The shift to penetrative sex was typically a marker of a commitment to marriage, and often launched young women quickly into a new regime of experiences with fertility. The resulting pregnancies might indeed dictate matrimonial timing, or they might force the couple to explore ways of handling the reproductive consequences outside of marriage. Relying on demographic findings of low illegitimacy and various authoritative prescriptions against the termination of pregnancies, historians have linked premarital pregnancies tightly to marriage. They have examined the availability of remedies and their place in the religious, legal, and medical lexicons of early modern vernacular and learned science, and have positioned midwives as influential actors in a predominantly female world.

Less easily visible but significant were the cases of young couples who found themselves pregnant but who could not or would not marry. These young single women's efforts to manage their fertility called on local knowledge about remedies and the pragmatic attitudes of their male intimate partners as well as of neighbours, kin, friends, and even authorities. The resort to these familiar remedies appears as a sidebar in stories told by young women who sought judicial aid in holding their intimate partners responsible for paternity. While only a few young people's relationships ended up in court, the female plaintiffs and witnesses allow us to historicize young women's sexuality and to see their participation in intimacy as conventional and quotidian.

As emerging adults, young women calibrated phases of intimacy with their partners in response to community expectations of youthful desire and heterosociability. These stages might extend over a span of years from the girls' mid to late teens to what was regarded as appropriate marriageable ages in their mid twenties. Older teenagers could start to hang out together, as we would say, in public places. These encounters safeguarded their reputations and calibrated their initial experiments with intimacy in ways that usually stayed short of intercourse.²¹ In their early twenties,

21 For the use of public spaces as keys to reputable intimacy, see Hardwick, 'Sex and the (Seventeenth-Century) City'.

young women became part of stable couples who walked out together for extended periods as the prospect of marriage became more feasible. With a clearly expressed and frequently reiterated sequence in which intercourse followed promises to marry, many young women came to engage in potentially reproductive sex.

Young intimate partners viewed the use of remedies as a recognized, if not always welcome, practice in consensual relationships. Although judicial records highlight conflict, negotiation around the problems of unwanted pregnancy was surely very common, especially among the far larger cohort of couples who resolved their untimely pregnancies outside of marriage and without resort to the legal system. Young men were important collaborators in resolving these dilemmas of out-of-wedlock pregnancy.²² Couples discussed using remedies, male partners procured them (as young women may well also have done, although these efforts go unrecorded in court documents), and they both observed the results to determine whether subsequent rounds of intervention were required.

Furthermore, the attitudes of their peers, communities, and the authorities were more complex and ambivalent than legislation or prescriptive discourse suggests. Even if the Lyon judges occasionally embellished their questions with a rhetorical flourish about how wrong abortion was, they seemed remarkably unconcerned in practice about the use of remedies, as long as the intervention was pre-term.²³ Among working people, knowledge about remedies was widespread and accepted, tacitly at least, under cover of the broad uncertainties about the status of pregnancies and the acceptance of therapeutic purging as the cure for many amorphous ills. An ambiguous medical and legal regime gave young intimate partners some flexibility in the time after the cessation of menses. 'Remedies' to 'restore' young women's health were permissible not only to couples, but also to their wider communities.

22 For the ways in which young men who did not marry their pregnant partners were expected to help resolve the situation rather than just walk away, see Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

23 Nor were Lyon judges alone. Baernstein and Christopoulos, in 'Interpreting the Body', for example, demonstrate the seemingly pragmatic attitudes of authorities even in cases of elite families in early modern Italy.

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