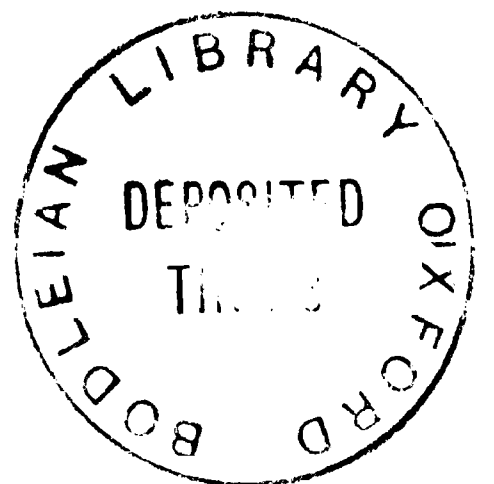


**'Thanks for that Elegant *Defense*'
Polemical Prose and Poetry by Women
in the Early Eighteenth Century**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity Term 2000**



Abstract

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The end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth saw many women writers from numerous social ranks, political affiliations and religious denominations reading, writing, circulating and publishing polemical prose and poetry in defence of their sex. During this surge of protofeminist activity, many of these women decried 'Customs *Tyranny*' by advocating a more egalitarian status for themselves, especially in regard to marriage, education and religion. This thesis, then, is a socio-historic study of the lives and writings of several polemical women writers, namely, Mary Astell (1666-1731), Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656-1710) and Elizabeth Thomas (1675-1731). It also considers how and why protofeminism evolved in the late seventeenth century and reached a climax between 1694, when Astell published *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, and 1710, when Chudleigh published *Essays upon Several Subjects*.

Until now, scholars of early women writers have labelled Astell the foremost English feminist of her day. Consequently, many of her contemporary protofeminist writers have been neglected. By contextualizing their lives and texts within the political and literary activity at the turn of the eighteenth century, this thesis ultimately argues that women polemicists, such as Chudleigh and Thomas, who followed Astell into print, were not merely echoes and disciples. Rather, they furthered the evolution and secularization of a genre that anticipates feminism proper, which began to develop in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In order to uncover and rediscover the personal and professional details of these women's lives—their class, education, friendships and patronage relationships—this thesis relied heavily upon material evidence such as letters, parish records, legal records, prison records and wills. As a result, it combines feminist, materialist

inclinations with traditional methodology, such as historical and archival research.

Acknowledgements

I became interested in early eighteenth-century women's poetry when I was a graduate student in Canada. Roger Lonsdale's anthology *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989) was assigned as compulsory reading for a course I took during my MA. From that moment on, I was mesmerized by the lives and writings of early women writers. When I had the opportunity to work with Professor Lonsdale at Oxford, I could not believe my good fortune. I am deeply indebted to him for sharing his expertise and providing me with motivation over the last three and a half years. A special mention should also go to Dr. Ros Ballaster of Mansfield College, who has been a wonderful role model. I am also grateful for the support that Professor James Miller of the University of Western Ontario has given me, usually in the form of endless reference letters. Moreover, this project would have been impossible for me to complete without funding from a Commonwealth Scholarship from the Association of Commonwealth Universities and a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada. The Committee for Graduate Studies and my college, Christ Church, have also provided much needed research money.

Throughout the last few years, I have met many people who have gone out of their way to help me. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without the help of staff at the Bodleian and British Libraries. Likewise staff at the Christ Church and Worcester College Libraries, the Guildhall Library, the Westminster Archive Centre, the Public Record Office, the London Metropolitan Archives, the Family Record Centre, the Gloucester Record Office and Library, the Devon Record Office and West Country Studies Library and the National Library of Wales have personally provided me with friendly and professional assistance. Numerous others were just as helpful through their correspondence: I would like to thank staff at the Wiltshire Record Office, the Kent Record Office, the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, the National Library of Dublin, the University of Leeds Brotherton Library, the

Beinecke Library, the Huntington Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the University of Florida Libraries, the University of Chicago Regenstein Library, the University of Illinois Library, the Houghton Library, the Duke University William R. Perkins Library, the Rice University Fondren Library and the University of Minnesota Meredith Wilson and James Ford Bell Libraries, all of whom have answered numerous queries for me by post and email.

I received a very warm welcome in Devon, for which I would like to thank the Honourable Hugh Clifford, Baron of Chudleigh for allowing me to visit Ugbrooke House and examine his family papers. The Ugbrooke archivist, Dr Alick (Sandy) Cameron, was also particularly kind, whilst showing me around Ugbrooke and helping me look for relevant material. Lord Clifford's secretary, Mrs Lee Martin, introduced me to the delights of Devon cream tea. I would also like to mention Mrs Rosemary Horsman of Lower Ashton, who gave me a tour of Ashton. She also arranged for me to visit Place Barton in Ashton (Mary, Lady Chudleigh's residence), now the home of Sir John and Lady Emma Birkin, who kindly welcomed me.

When in Gloucestershire, even though I showed up unannounced on their doorstep, Dr and Mrs Alexander Nicol unlocked the church at Badgeworth, so that I could examine the Gwinnett family memorials. Dr Nicol also provided me with further information via the post. When I inquired about early De La Warr women at Buckhurst Park, Sussex, Anne, Countess De La Warr kindly responded with useful information and a colour booklet about the family chapel in Withyham.

I also owe many thanks to my contemporaries, friends and mentors who read rough drafts and offered commiseration over coffee and tea: Lisa Anscomb, Sarah Ross, Michael Londry, Catherine Dille, Meraud Grant Ferguson, Becky Hamid-Khani, Sophie López-Welsch, Hannah Smith, Bridget Hill, Professor Isobel Grundy, Dr Susan Whyman, Dr Alexandra Bennett and Dr Gillian Wright. Participants of the *Women, Text, History 1500-1700* seminar have also provided much needed inspiration and support. I also owe thanks to many Canadian friends, who have emailed me and kept me up-to-date with goings-on at home. Their correspondence has been a life-line

when I have been homesick. Thanks to Nicole, Lea, Angie, Krista, Kathie, Jen, Leah, Steph, Sara, Becky, Jonathan, the Vickers and the Platts.

I am also extremely grateful to many family members, especially my parents, Jill and Paul Mills; my grandparents Jimmy and Nora Farrell; my brothers, Greg and Brendan Mills; my uncle and godfather, John Mills; my mother- and father-in-law, Roma and Ireneus Harasymiak; my brother-in-law, Andrei Harasymiak; and my husband's aunt and uncle, Olya and Ihor Hron, all of whom have offered continued moral and often financial support. Finally, this thesis and move to a foreign country would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband, Denys Harasymiak, who knows more than he would like to about early women's prose and poetry.

To all of the above and anyone I have forgotten, I offer my humble gratitude.

R.M.M.

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Abbreviations

(Full titles can be found in the Bibliography.)

<i>ASPI</i>	Mary Astell, <i>A Serious Proposal to the Ladies</i> (1694), ed. by Patricia Springborg (1997)
<i>ASPII</i>	Mary Astell, <i>A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II</i> (1697), ed. by Patricia Springborg (1997)
BL	British Library, London
BOD	Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DRO	Devon Record Office, Exeter
<i>ECL</i>	<i>Eighteenth-Century Life</i>
<i>ECS</i>	<i>Eighteenth-Century Studies</i>
GH	Guildhall Library, Corporation of London
GRO	Gloucester Record Office, Gloucester
<i>HL</i>	Elizabeth Thomas, <i>The Honourable Lovers</i> (1732)
<i>IGI</i>	<i>International Genealogy Index</i>
<i>MP</i>	Elizabeth Thomas, <i>Miscellany Poems</i> (1722)
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PC</i>	Elizabeth Thomas, <i>Pylades and Corinna</i> (1731)
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
<i>POSO</i>	Mary, Lady Chudleigh, <i>Poems on Several Occasions</i> (1703), ed. by Margaret J. M. Ezell (1993)
PRO	Public Record Office, London
<i>RUM</i>	Mary Astell, <i>Reflections Upon Marriage</i> (1706), ed. by Patricia Springborg (1996)
<i>TLD</i>	Mary, Lady Chudleigh, <i>The Ladies Defence</i> (1701), ed. by Margaret J. M. Ezell (1993)
UH	Ugbrooke House, Devon
WA	City of Westminster Archives, London

Introduction:

'Wife and Servant are the same'¹

The Rise of Women's Polemical Prose and Poetry

The right Education of the Female Sex, as it is in a manner everywhere neglected, so it ought to be generally lamented. Most in this depraved later Age think a Woman learned and wise enough if she can distinguish her Husbands Bed from anothers. Certainly Mans Soul cannot boast of a more sublime Original than ours; they had equally their efflux from the same eternal Immensity, and therefore capable of the same improvement by good Education. Vain man is apt to think we were meerly intended for the Worlds propagation, and to keep its humane inhabitants sweet and clean; but, by their leaves, had we the same Literature, he would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies. Hence I am induced to believe, we are debarred from the knowledg of humane learning lest our pregnant Wits should rival th[e] trowing conceits of our insulting Lords and Masters.²

At the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, many English women from different social ranks, political affiliations and religious denominations read, wrote, circulated and published polemical prose and poetry in defence of their sex. In this surge of activity, many writers decried 'Customs *Tyranny*' and claimed certain rights for women, especially in regard to education, religion and marriage. Moira Ferguson believes this phenomenon 'was the first sizable wave of British secular feminist protest in history'.³ Whether it was the first 'wave' is debatable. Locating the origin of English feminism, however, is not the objective here. Rather this thesis is a historical study that explores the lives and writings of several women, including Mary Astell, Judith Drake, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Sarah (Fyge Field) Egerton and Elizabeth Thomas, all of whom produced prose and poetry at the height of this protofeminist protest. This thesis further considers the socio-political contexts in which polemical prose and poetry by women evolved in the late

¹POSO, 83.

²[Hannah Woolley or Wolley], *The Gentlewomans Companion; or, a Guide to the Female Sex* (London: A. Maxwell, 1675), 1-2. Apparently, this book is not by Hannah Wolley, but 'a male hack writer'. . . 'hired by the bookseller Dorman Newman'. See Elaine Hobby, 'A woman's best setting out is silence: the writings of Hannah Wolley', in *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History*, ed. by Gerald MacLean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 179-200 and *Virtue of Necessity. English Women's Writing 1649-88* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 173-4.

³Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists. British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 15.

seventeenth century and reached a climax in the early eighteenth century—a period between 1694, when Astell published *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* and 1710, when Chudleigh published *Essays upon Several Subjects*. Clearly, protofeminist writings by women continued to be published in the first half of the eighteenth century. After 1710, however, possibly because of the rise of politeness, openly radical and acrimonious texts fell out of fashion. Compared with the demands made by women writers at the turn of the century, during what has been called the 'Astell cluster' or the 'Astell phenomenon',⁴ the texts of the mid eighteenth century by comparison were usually more 'hesitantly and cautiously tendered'.⁵ It was not until the late eighteenth century that women's texts once again adopted an overt revolutionary tone.

By the time Astell made her publishing debut in 1694, her tract was by no means the first of its kind; however, *A Serious Proposal* marked both a culmination and a turning point for protofeminism because of the comprehensive and methodical way in which Astell advocated improvements for women. As Ruth Perry says, 'she wrote with an energy and assurance that seemed several centuries ahead of her time'.⁶ Not surprisingly, Astell has been the focus of much twentieth-century feminist fanfare. As a result, a full examination of how polemical prose and poetry developed in her wake has yet to be undertaken. This thesis attempts to redress the balance by investigating the lives and writings of Astell's contemporaries, particularly those of Chudleigh and Thomas, in order to document their unique contribution to early eighteenth-century polemical prose and poetry.

Feminist Terminology and Early Women Writers:

Twentieth-century critics have often referred to the texts studied in this thesis

⁴Ferguson, 19 and D. N. Deluna, 'Mary Astell: England's First Feminist Literary Critic', *Women's Studies*, 22 (1993), 231.

⁵Ferguson, 19-20. Notable exceptions post 1710 do exist: Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739) and the Sophia tracts, *Woman Not Inferior to Man* (1739) and *Woman's Superior Excellence over Man* (1740), to name a few.

⁶Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell. An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7.

as feminist in nature, but the core belief of feminists—complete equality between men and women—was never advocated by Astell or her contemporaries. Hence problems with anachronism can arise. Polemical, rather than feminist, more accurately describes texts written by the women featured in this thesis. Instead of claiming total equality with men, they participated in controversial debates and wrote aggressive attacks and refutations against those who would deny women their intellectual and spiritual freedom.⁷ In the context of this thesis, though, the term polemical is often used interchangeably with 'protofeminist'. Protofeminism—an adaptation of the term feminism—was coined by Joan K. Kinnaird to describe women writers who openly discussed 'male oppression, the equal intellectual capacity of the sexes, [and] the injustice of barring women from higher learning', but *did not* claim complete equality for women.⁸

A Historical Summary:

At the turn of the twentieth century, A. H. Upham commented on this 'mass of kindred literature then appearing in England', by claiming that 'a search by no means exhaustive, and based in great part on the *Term Catalogues*, reveal[ed] more than fifty related titles in the last thirty years of the [seventeenth] century, increasing in number and importance as the period proceeds'.⁹ Upham was of course referring to the growing body of published works that championed women's rights, usually focusing on their education. There is no doubt that the number of printed texts discussing women—both seriously and satirically—grew rapidly toward the end of the seventeenth century. Included in this expansion were women's histories, polemical tracts, satires, conduct books and recipe books.

Some titles making up this growing literary tide were Thomas Heywood's *The General History of Women* (1657), Anna Van Schurman's *The Learned Maid; or,*

⁷OED.

⁸Joan K. Kinnaird, 'Mary Astell and the Conservative Contribution to English Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, 19 (1979), 53-4.

⁹A. H. Upham, 'English *Femmes Savantes* at the end of the Seventeenth Century', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 12 (1913), 262-64.

Whether a Maid may be a Scholar (1641; translated into English in 1659) and Margaret (Askew Fell) Fox's *Women's Speaking Justified* (1667). Hannah Wolley did very well in the housewifery genre: amongst others, she penned *The Ladies Directory* (1661, 1662), *The Cooks Guide* (1664) and *The Queen-like Closet* (1670), which was reprinted five times by 1684. She was so successful that her name was illicitly printed with books she did not write, most notably, *The Gentlewomen's Companion* (1673), which is quoted at the beginning of this introduction.¹⁰ In the tradition of the *querrelle des femmes*, Robert Gould's satire *Love Given O're: Or, A Satyr Against Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, &c. of Women* (1682/83) provoked several imitations and rejoinders. The most well-known riposte was Sarah Fyge's *The Female Advocate* (1686), reportedly written at the age of fourteen. Other responses included: *Triumphs of Female Wit* (1683), Richard Ames' *Sylvia's Revenge; Or, a Satyr Against Man* (1688) and *The Folly of Love a New Satyr Against Woman* (1693), to name a few. On the more serious side, *Hæc & Hic; or, the Feminine Gender more worthy than the Masculine* (1683), Nathaniel Crouch's *Female Excellency, or the Ladies Glory* (1688) and Nahum Tate's *A Present for the Ladies: being an Historical Vindication of the Female Sex* (1692) appeared in this same period. It is worth noting that women's issues also found their way onto the Restoration stage; popular plays were full of memorable female characters. Periodical publications in the 1690s, such as *The Athenian Mercury*, followed by *The Ladies Mercury*, also began tapping into the women's reading market. The growth of such a variety of publications was probably due in large part to demand, since literacy rates amongst women rose from ten per cent in 1640 to thirty per cent by 1700.¹¹

There were many economic and social changes that occurred toward the end of the seventeenth century that may have impacted on protofeminist writing. As the seventeenth century progressed, new economic and education opportunities were opening up for men. The same, however, was not usually true for women:

¹⁰See Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, 165-77.

¹¹Vivien Jones, 'Introduction', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700-1800*, ed. by Vivien Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3 and Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples, Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 26.

professional women were actually losing ground in some of their traditional occupations, namely, medicine, midwifery and agriculture.¹² In defence of her practice the midwife Jane Sharp campaigned against the erosion of female authority in her field whilst advising women on gynecological matters in *The Midwives Book. Or the Whole Art of Midwifery discovered* (1671). In many families, middle and upper-class women were taking on less active roles in estate management. As Smith notes, 'Social changes decreased upper-class women's useful functions on family estates and encouraged their becoming social ornaments and gadabouts', which infuriated the protofeminists.¹³ Overall, at the turn of the eighteenth century, options for middle and upper-class women, like those studied in this thesis, were fairly limited. Marriage was still probably the most common way to ensure economic security. Writing for a living or becoming a humble companion were other options—both of which Astell and Thomas pursued. Cheryl Turner has documented the rise of the professional women writer from the early seventeenth century via almanacs, domestic manuals, plays and novels.¹⁴ Astell managed to make a respectable living out of political and philosophical writing, combined with healthy patronage. Whilst lagging behind in areas such as politics, business and formal education, however, women were actively formulating the rules of polite society, particularly through the 'visit'. Whyman has convincingly argued that, as patriarchalism gave way to politeness in the early eighteenth century, women controlled much of the social code in London especially.¹⁵ It was in such a women-centric, social environment that Thomas first flourished as a writer and protofeminist.

Determining one reason for the rise of protofeminism at the end of the seventeenth century would be difficult because there were many: political, philosophical and scientific developments also fostered its growth. Although events after the Restoration are more significant for this study, the effect of the civil war and

¹²Smith, 23.

¹³Ibid, 11.

¹⁴Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen, Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London, Routledge, 1992), 26-30.

¹⁵Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England. The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91-9.

the Interregnum earlier in the seventeenth century should not be completely overlooked. In *Reason's Disciples*, Hilda Smith claims that

The ideological origins of seventeenth-century feminism emerged with the fundamental questioning of society during the 1640s and 1650s, but did not follow a straight path from radical or reformist views to feminist ones. The feminists were not radicals in areas relevant to the revolution, but applied the earlier questioning and questing to other fundamental human relationships, particularly sex roles and family relationships.¹⁶

As Ethyn Morgan Williams states, 'an early manifestation of feminism' can be seen in women's pamphleteering and preaching in this period.¹⁷ The political power structures of the state and its religion had been 'turned upside down', so it is not surprising that women began to question power structures that oppressed their autonomy, whether in the family, the church or the state.¹⁸ However, political debates in the later half of the seventeenth century, between contractarians and patriarchalists seem to have had a more palpable influence on turn-of-the-century protofeminists. To avoid repetition, chapter one will detail how these debates gave women the impetus and the vocabulary to denounce Custom and the arbitrary effect it had on their lives.

New science and philosophy also inspired protofeminists to deny the scripture-based arguments for their alleged inferiority. Scientists and philosophers did not usually focus on women's issues in their writings but their methodology of questioning certain customary beliefs provided a framework for protofeminists. Although women were barred from being members of the Royal Society, 'Natural Philosophy' still provided women with justification to question custom and the 'natural' order of the world. Ultimately, it was seventeenth-century philosophy that would provide protofeminists with the ammunition they needed to defend their intellectual autonomy. The turning point came when René Descartes—who often wrote in the vernacular—asserted that classical education was not the key to

¹⁶Smith, 56.

¹⁷Ethyn Morgan Williams, 'Women Preachers in the Civil War', *The Journal of Modern History*, 1 (1929), 561-9.

¹⁸Keith Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past and Present*, 13 (1958), 42-62 and Ellen A. M'Arthur, 'Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament', *English Historical Review*, 24 (1909), 698-709.

understanding the universe but rather self-conscious thought. This simple but radical assertion meant that women, who were usually barred from formal education, could, through meditation and reason, be capable of rational thought—equally ^{capable} /with men.¹⁹ Cartesian rationalism was quickly absorbed by seventeenth-century writers and readers and became dispersed throughout many texts. Examples of popular adaptations of Descartes' work include Nicolas Malebranche's *Recherche de la Vérité* (1674) and *Méditations Chrétiennes* (1683) and Antoine Arnauld's *L'Art de Penser* (1662). Not surprisingly, these titles, amongst others, were ones that John Norris of Bemerton would recommend to Astell and Thomas in their correspondence.

Theoretically, Descartes' dualism offered women intellectual freedom by distinguishing between body and mind. Women's inferior physical capabilities became irrelevant because it was the power of the mind that mattered with rationalists. Predating the women writers featured in this thesis, François Poullain de La Barre, a disciple of Descartes, offered an early example of how to apply Cartesian methodology to the question of women's intellectual capacity.²⁰ Poullain de La Barre's *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (1673) was translated into English in 1677 by A. L., under the title *The Woman as Good as the Man*.²¹ With regard to women's alleged inferiority to men, Poullain de la Barre claims that men often confuse 'Nature with Custom' and that women are equally as capable as men because their brains are 'altogether like to ours'. In true Cartesian style, he goes on to state that

It is the business in All, to think aright: And this we do, by applying seriously our Minds, to the Objects which represent themselves to us; that we may raise from them clear and distinct Notions; that we may eye them in all their different Faces and Relations; and that we may pass no Judgement thereon, but upon what appears manifestly true. With this we need no more, but to dispose our Thoughts in a Natural Order, for the obtaining of a perfect Science: And here, there is nothing too High for *Women*.²²

¹⁹Kinnaird, 52-62 and Ruth Perry, 'Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women', *ECS*, 18 (1984/5), 472-93.

²⁰See Ellen McNiven Hine, 'The Woman Question in early eighteenth-century French literature: the influence of François Poullain de La Barre', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 116 (1973), 65-79 and Michael A. Seidel, 'Poullain De La Barre's *The Woman as Good as the Man*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35 (1974), 499-508.

²¹According to Gerald M. MacLean, A. L. is most likely Archibald Lovell; see the introduction to the recent edition of *The Woman as Good as the Man* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 14.

²²*The Woman as Good as the Man*, 103, 106-7.

Since Cartesian rationalism theoretically put women on a par intellectually with men, it is not surprising that it became the 'cornerstone' of Astell's protofeminism.²³ However, it was not the only Enlightenment philosophy from which Astell and her contemporaries derived their beliefs about women's spiritual and intellectual equality with men. At the turn of the eighteenth century, a combined philosophy of rationalism with certain aspects of Neoplatonism can be found in the prose and poetry of women writers such as Astell, Chudleigh and Thomas. Kinnaird notes that this fusion of philosophies predates protofeminists and originated with Cambridge Platonists such as Henry More, Ralph Cudworth and John Norris of Bemerton, the last of whom knew the three women named above. The Cambridge Platonists had initially embraced Descartes' 'scientific metaphysics, his proofs for the existence of God, and his dualistic epistemology'.²⁴ In contrast to Hobbesian materialism, they thought of the world as essentially spiritual: 'the most important truths about reality had to be divined intellectually'.²⁵ For women like Astell, Chudleigh and Thomas, aspects of rationalism combined with Platonism provided even more ammunition with which to complain about the general neglect of women's education and spiritual development.²⁶ If women were equally capable of reason and if the most important aspects of life were spiritual, then material subjection could be dismissed as extraneous. For true happiness women needed only to concentrate on developing their reason in order to understand their faith in God; rewards would then follow in the afterlife. This focus on what might be deemed metaphysical equality with men is the gulf that divides protofeminists at the turn of the eighteenth century from their future counterparts: the late eighteenth-century feminists, who began to advocate both mental and physical equality between the two sexes in both life and the afterlife.

²³Perry, 'Radical Doubt', 491.

²⁴Kinnaird, 59.

²⁵Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 50.

²⁶Deluna, 233.

Method and Scope:

In many ways this thesis is influenced by the twentieth-century, feminist scholars it frequently criticizes: it combines feminist, materialist inclinations with traditional methodology such as historical and archival research. Several influential works on early women writers inspired this project: Ruth Perry's writings on Mary Astell, particularly *The Celebrated Mary Astell* (1985); Isobel Grundy's work on Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, especially her detailed biography on the same subject, published in 1999; Carol Barash's book, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1717* (1996), with its combined use of politics, history, literature and feminist theory; Susan Whyman's cultural study of letters in her book on the Verney family, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England* (1999); and Margaret Ezell's writings on women's literary history in both *The Patriarch's Wife* (1987) and *Writing Women's Literary History* (1993) and more recently on social authorship, in *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (1999). Similar to the above examples, this thesis is interdisciplinary in its study of literature, history and politics as it attempts to broaden the contexts in which the texts of protofeminists are usually read.

In the end it was the extant material evidence that determined the scope and focus of the project. As a result, the thesis became a detailed analysis of a small group of women, namely, Astell, Chudleigh and Thomas, primarily because documentation of their socializing together survives. Originally this thesis was meant to include much more detail on Judith Drake and Sarah (Fyge Field) Egerton. Whilst their contributions to protofeminism are discussed within the body of the thesis, they do not feature in their own chapters. In Drake's case, it was not for lack of trying. Of all the women researched, she proved the most elusive. Material connections between Egerton and Thomas are worth exploring and will hopefully bear fruit in a future project. Inevitably, choices had to be made and limits had to be set.

Material Evidence:

There are many challenges in researching women writers from the turn of the

eighteenth century. In the case of the women featured here, they were chosen because a body of their published work survives for analysis. Aside from Astell, however, none of the women writers are known to have left a significant amount of manuscript material. If indeed manuscripts have survived then they are yet to be found. As a result, this project relied heavily upon public records and letters: parish records, legal records, prison records and wills were useful sources of information. Wills, though, could be a cause of some frustration, since many women did not write them and because few have survived. In Chudleigh's case, her will—had one been written—would probably have been proved in the peculiar of the Bishop of Exeter, along with ~~that of~~ her neighbour and possibly ^{her} friend, Lady Elizabeth Clifford, who *was* known to have written one. Unfortunately, many West Country records housed in Exeter were destroyed in World War II and have been lost forever. Tracing details and events through male friends and relatives as well as neighbouring landed families were employed as research tactics when no obvious leads were apparent.

The other main source of material evidence for this thesis was letters. Letters were a crucial tie that bound friends and family together in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They sustained social networks, allowed people to develop new friendships, to gain and give patronage and to discuss and share literature. All the women featured in this thesis were avid letter writers, which provided vital evidence when attempting to piece together their literary networks. Letters allow researchers to get a sense of the writers' characters and, ultimately, expand the contexts in which their work has been traditionally read.

Chapters and Themes:

Aside from the introduction and conclusion, this thesis is divided into five chapters, two of which are theme-based and three of which are author-based. The first chapter examines the influence that late seventeenth-century (male) political writers had on turn-of-the-century protofeminists. Chapters two through four focus on individual women writers and the contexts in which they have been traditionally

read. The fifth chapter offers a case study that delves into the importance of socializing between men and women writers and the impact it had on the production of polemical prose and poetry. Overall this thesis addresses several issues relevant to the twentieth-century, feminist debates about early women writers, including what brought about women's attitude of defiance in relation to their intellectual and spiritual autonomy; how polemical women writers were perceived by contemporary as well as future generations of readers; how their relationships with each other influenced their writings; and where they fit into the history of feminism. Ultimately, each woman writer featured in this project contributed in a unique way to the defence of her sex, but she also flourished within a supportive community of men and women, that, to date, has never been fully explored.

Chapter one opens with an analysis of how late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century women writers discuss Custom in their polemical prose and poetry. Literary critics have rightly considered natural philosophy's and Cartesian rationalism's influence on protofeminist literature, especially since both allowed women to challenge scripture-based beliefs about their alleged inherent inferiority. An overlooked but equally important influence was the seventeenth-century, political debates between patriarchalists (Tories) and contractarians (Whigs). Whilst claiming their rights as free men, male Whig authors would often denounce Custom's arbitrary influence over political power structures and succession within the state, but they did not usually extend their arguments about Custom's tyranny to include its negative effects on women. Exasperated by double standards, late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century women writers adapted the rhetoric of Whig partisan politics in their protofeminist texts in order to highlight both the shortcomings of Whig logic and the inequalities between men and women in the state and the family. By decrying Custom's adverse effects on women, protofeminist writers carried liberal logic through to their gender debates where Whig authors had faltered in partisan politics. What becomes apparent after examining a range of texts by women of differing political allegiances is that for many women gender politics became just as significant

as partisan associations, if not more so.

Chapter two considers Mary Astell's texts and her position in the study of early protofeminist writing. Whilst acknowledging her influence and giving a close reading of her major prose tracts, this chapter also points out some of the negative effects of Astell's predominance on her contemporaries. Many twentieth-century critics have classified her as being the 'first' feminist in British literature, and, as a result, they have often interpreted the polemical writings by other women from the same period only in relation to Astell. The combined effect of homage paid by present-day scholars and texts reinscribed in modern editions has created an Astellian hegemony in the study of early protofeminists. Consequently, contemporary women writers have been classified as mere Astellian disciples and echoes; other contexts in which they could be read have been almost completely overlooked. This chapter attempts to redress this issue in order to pave the way for in-depth studies of two of Astell's contemporaries.

Chapters four and five are extended studies of both the lives and writings of Mary, Lady Chudleigh and Elizabeth Thomas. Both women held many beliefs in common with Astell, especially in relation to the two major protofeminist issues of the day: the education of women and their treatment in marriage. In Chudleigh's case, biographical details were investigated in order to expand the context—specifically the social context—in which her poems and prose are usually read. The exploration of her singular contribution to the ongoing debate about women's inherent right to spiritual and intellectual autonomy reveals her to be much more tolerant, religiously and politically, than Astell.

Chapter five follows a similar format to chapter four. Elizabeth Thomas' life story and misrepresentation in literary history are discussed in detail. Thomas has often been dismissed by literary critics as not only one of Astell's many disciples but also a 'hack authoress' who was 'intimately acquainted' with both Henry Cromwell and Alexander Pope.²⁷ The calumny to which her reputation has been subjected has

²⁷*The Works of John Dryden*, 18 vols, ed. by Sir Walter Scott (London: William Miller, 1808), XVIII, 164, *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, Now First Collected: with Notes*

been relentlessly, although not necessarily maliciously, perpetuated by Pope and Dryden scholars. This chapter counteracts the typical claims against Thomas and broadens the context in which she has been traditionally remembered. Aside from being involved in the scandal of selling some of Pope's letters, Thomas was a well-respected, social author who wrote and circulated a significant body of protofeminist poetry at the turn of the eighteenth century, which she finally published in 1722. An associate of Astell as well as a friend and protégée of Chudleigh, Thomas is finally reconsidered on her own merits.

Chapter six continues to examine Thomas' social networks in order to explore the influence that friendships and patron/protogée relationships had on the development of polemical prose and poetry at the turn of the eighteenth century. From the material evidence that survives, it seems that like-minded men and women often developed friendships that overcame class boundaries; this pattern can be found in many of the relationships that Thomas formed with people who were interested in the intellectual and spiritual potential of women. Many theses could have been written about these early women writers—enough evidence survives to supply an entire dissertation on Thomas herself. It is hoped that this project will encourage readers to question how turn-of-the-eighteenth-century protofeminists have been read, interpreted, criticized, anthologized, republished and, in cases like Astell's, canonized.

and Illustrations; an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, Grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of His Letters, the greater part of which has never before been published, 3 vols, ed. by Edmond Malone (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), I, 352 and *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*, 4 vols, ed. by Robert Carruthers (London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1853), III, 201.

Chapter One:

'They have *Custom* on their side'¹

The Politics of Custom in the Poetry and Prose of Augustan Women Writers

Shall jealous Man to Woman then deny,
In these Debates her Faculties to try;
And spend the Moments which unheeded fly?
For this must our unhappy Sex engage
Relentless Malice, and *Barbarian* Rage?
While Tyrant Custom Reason over-awes;
And partial Humour to the World gives Laws.
Yet these may conscious Innocence defy,
Approv'd to Virtue, and secure to dye:
No Doubt remains, that Fame shall then be just,
When Spleen and Censure shall be laid in Dust;
That future Ages shall reverse their Doom,
Nor impious Envy violate the Tomb.²

Custom, which rules 'by the Authority of Example',³ is often assumed to possess the power of Nature — 'it hath the force of Nature it self',⁴ complains Bathsua Makin in *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673).

Custom's prevalence in so many aspects of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century life makes it a capacious subject to tackle. It can refer to anything from fashion and duelling to law and political authority. A cursory glance at the indices of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* reveals that the evils of Custom were often featured. Whilst criticizing gambling, ^{*The Tatler* characterizes} Custom as 'the most powerful of all Laws'⁵ and ^{*The Spectator*,} in relation to mourning apparel, Custom is also personified in negative terms:

The most improper things we commit in the Conduct of our Lives, we are led into by the Force of Fashion. Instances might be given, in which a prevailing Custom makes us act against the Rules of Nature, Law, and Common Sense.⁶

¹Elizabeth Johnson, 'Preface to the Reader' in *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by Philomela* (London: John Dunton, 1696), A2^v.

²Elizabeth Tollet, *Hypatia* in *Poems on Several Occasions. With Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle* (London: John Clarke, 1755), 71-2.

³John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), ed. by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), I:58, 183.

⁴Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues. With an Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education* (London: J. D., 1673), 3; See also *The Augustan Reprint Society*, 202 (1980).

⁵*The Tatler*, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 390.

⁶*The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, 275.

In terms of law, Custom was deeply ingrained in theory and practice. In *A Law Dictionary* first published in 1608 and repeatedly thereafter in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Cowell says that '*Custom* is a Law or Right not written, which being established by long use, and the consent of our Ancestors, hath been, and is daily practised'.⁷ Almost one hundred and fifty years later, Samuel Johnson was still quoting Cowell for the 'Custom' entry in his own *Dictionary of the English Language*.⁸ Furthermore, male authors often invoked Custom to validate or repudiate political authority, depending on their political leanings. Writers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke summoned the power of Custom when it suited them and ridiculed it when it did not. Commenting on the fickle nature of Custom, Francis Bacon said that

the predominancy of custom is everywhere visible; insomuch as a man would wonder to hear men profess, protest, engage, give great words, and then do just as they have done before; as if they were dead images, and engines moved only by the wheels of custom.⁹

The particular Custom to be the focus of this chapter is the one maligned in the texts of women writers from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They believed that Custom enforced the so-called 'natural' order of things, which in turn suppressed the development of women's formal education, ensured their second-class or lack of status in relation to business, property and the civil state and perpetuated their precarious position in the marriage market and in marital relationships. Diametrically opposed to its thematic rival, Reason, which represents everything good, true and rational, women polemicists habitually blamed Custom for subduing women and making them miserable.

The late seventeenth century, with its religious, political, scientific and philosophical upheavals, saw a rise in the number of women who read, wrote and published polemical texts in defence of their sex. Many literary critics have noticed

⁷John Cowell, *A Law Dictionary: or, the Interpreter of Words and Terms Used either in the Common or Statute Laws of that Part of Great Britain, call'd England; and in Tenures and Jocular Customs* (London: D. Browne et al., 1708), N1.

⁸Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols (London: W. Strahan et al, 1755), I, 6E.

⁹Francis Bacon, 'Of Custom and Education', in *Bacon's Essays*, ed. by J. M. McNeill (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1959), 114.

and attempted to explain the reasons behind this phenomenon at the turn of the eighteenth century. According to Hilda Smith, natural philosophy and Cartesian rationalism were critical in influencing protofeminist women writers. She states that late seventeenth-century feminists found 'impetus and justification for their questioning of customary beliefs and relations' in the writings of natural philosophers. In Cartesian rationalism, she says, 'they found the ideology that best answered their desire to assert equality and to develop a framework for questioning the status quo', especially the scripture- and nature-based beliefs in women's inherent inferiority.¹⁰ From another perspective, Catherine Gallagher argues that Toryism and protofeminism converged in the late seventeenth century. Tory women writers began to claim a type of intellectual determination 'because the ideology of absolute monarchy provide[d], in particular historical situations, a transition to an ideology of the absolute self'.¹¹ In contrast to Gallagher, Carol Barash claims that women related to the notion of the monarch, particularly Queens Mary II (1689-94) and Anne (1702-14), not as individuals but as a 'community of women'. She states that women writers saw Anne, when she was princess and then queen, as a powerful ally, patron and protectress to whom they could write panegyrics and dedications. They used Anne's symbolic protection 'to sanction what we might call "feminist imperialism", that is, the woman writer's movement into emotional and intellectual domains previously considered men's'.¹² There is no doubt of Mary Astell's emphasis on women's need for self-reliance or the influence of Cartesian rationalism on her texts, of Mary, Lady Chudleigh's interest in natural philosophy, or of Sarah Fyge Egerton's identification with Queen Anne as an embodiment of female authority. However, Smith's natural philosophy, Gallagher's Tory feminism and Barash's feminist imperialism alone do not completely explain the frequency with and the manner in which women declared certain rights and, in particular, decried the power of Custom. For many women

¹⁰Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples, Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 60.

¹¹Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders*, 1 (1988), 25.

¹²Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714. Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 236-7.

writers, Custom epitomized the social ills that limited women's autonomy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; hence denouncing its tyranny became a familiar literary battle cry. Smith claims that seventeenth-century political theories 'proved unhelpful to nascent feminism',¹³ but it was from the political debates over monarchical sovereignty and succession waged between patriarchalism and liberalism in the seventeenth century that women writers gleaned the politically-charged vocabulary to censure Custom's influence. From dissenters to Jacobites, women polemicists repeatedly refer to the 'Tyranny of Custom' as a source of misery for women.

If complaints about Custom were so common in writings by women, one might wonder where this trend originated. Discussions and personifications of Custom were recurrent long before the late seventeenth-century proliferation of women's defensive texts. New scientists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such as Sir Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke, would be influenced by Bacon and carry on in his tradition of questioning customary scientific beliefs. Philosophers, such as Descartes, also frequently questioned the authority of Custom. New ideas from both science and philosophy were to have a far-reaching effect, especially on women writers. Moreover, arguments about the rights and limitations of the Monarchy and government found in Civil War literature were resurrected by authors after the Restoration, when it became apparent that Charles II's successor was to be his Catholic brother, James, Duke of York. Whig authors who opposed a Catholic inheriting the throne asserted the rights of Englishmen to resist such tyranny¹⁴ and to choose a Monarch who would govern the state with principles to which the people consented. In the course of establishing their rights as free men, Whig authors would decry the power of Custom in certain situations relating to political, power structures and succession within the state. They did not, however,

¹³Smith, 57.

¹⁴Popery was often equated with Tyranny.

extend these rights to women in the civil state nor did they apply their arguments about Custom's arbitrary power with the same rigor to the family domain. In fact, women were still considered naturally inferior to men in this new social order: 'the order of nature [was] reflected in the structure of conjugal [and other familial] relations'.¹⁵ Exasperated by double standards, women began to question both the authority of Custom and the irrational tenets that held it in place and to assert their right to a certain amount of freedom, especially intellectual and spiritual freedom. Women writers adapted the rhetoric of Whig partisan politics in their polemical texts in order to highlight both the shortcomings of Whig logic and the inequalities between men and women in the state and in the family. By decrying Custom's adverse effects on women, protofeminist writers carried liberal logic through to their gender debates where Whig authors had faltered in partisan politics.

Hobbes and Custom:

Custom was often discussed in political writings of the late seventeenth century, especially those dealing with the authority of the Monarchy and government. For Royalists backing the Stuart cause and absolute monarchy—who later became known as Tories—Custom carried the weight of the law to enforce the 'natural' order of things and to justify the political status quo in relation to the Monarchy. In contrast, those in favour of a more limited, constitutional monarchy—who were known at different times in the seventeenth century as Parliamentarians, Republicans and ultimately Whigs—were concerned with maintaining a Protestant monarchy in order to uphold Protestant interests in England and elsewhere on the Continent. They criticized the irrational basis of granting Custom authority. In his influential treatise on power and peace, *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes, who had Royalist connections but was not writing clear-cut Royalist propaganda, says in relation to men and Custom,

they appeale from custome to reason, and from reason to custome, as it serves their turn; receding from custome when their interest requires it,

¹⁵Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), 52.

and setting themselves against reason, as oft as reason is against them.¹⁶

Hobbes astutely draws our attention to what would become the crux of the argument for women polemicists. When Custom served men's interest, they could argue for or against it but they would not usually argue against it for women's sake. Thus after years of Whig propaganda in which Custom was demonized in political rhetoric to increase the rights of men, women began to use Whig political terminology to describe how Custom adversely affected them. At the turn of the eighteenth century women did not pretend to ask for freedom in the state or even equality with men within the family, but rather they sought intellectual and spiritual sovereignty. They adopted political terminology and applied it to aspects of their lives.

Even though Hobbes comments on the arbitrary nature of Custom, there is no doubt about the palpable power invested in it in the later seventeenth century, especially when it came to control of the state. For instance, whilst outlining his theory of succession in the Commonwealth, Hobbes grants Custom 'naturall' political authority:

But where Testament, and expresse Words are wanting, other naturall signes of the Will are to be allowed: whereof the one is Custome. And therefore where the Custome is, that the next of Kindred absolutely succeedeth, there also the next of Kindred hath right to the Succession; for that, if the will of him that was in possession had been otherwise, he might easily have declared the same in his life time. And likewise where the Custome is, that the next of the Male Kindred succeedeth, there also the right of Succession is in the next of the Kindred Male, for the same reason. And so it is if the Custome were to advance the Female. For whatsoever Custome a man may by a word controule, and does not, it is a naturall signe he would have that Custome stand.¹⁷

Thus Hobbes assigned Custom the power to determine succession in the state, an issue which would become hotly debated during the 1670s and 80s over James, Duke of York's succession. Although Hobbes grants Custom power within the context of his civil society he frequently calls attention to its arbitrariness when he discusses women. In his 'state of nature', Hobbes gives women—specifically mothers—

¹⁶Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), in *Hobbes Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I:11, 73.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, II:19, 137.

superior power to claim dominion over their children:

For as to the Generation, God hath ordained to man a helper; and there be alwayes two that are equally Parents: the Dominion therefore over the Child, should belong equally to both; and he be equally subject to both, which is impossible; for no man can obey two Masters. And whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not alwayes that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War.

He explicitly argues that women are not inherently inferior but that in civil society, Custom has made them so. In the Commonwealth he says that competition between men and women 'is decided by the Civill Law: and for the most part, (but not always) the sentence is in favour of the Father'.¹⁸ For Hobbes, then, women's subjection in the state is based more on tradition than any other reason. In *De Cive* (1642),¹⁹ Hobbes repeats his belief that women *are* capable of inheriting and controlling power within the Commonwealth, but that it is Custom that has decreed men dominate:

Among children the males carry the pre-eminence; in the beginning perhaps, because for the most part, although not always, they are fitter for the administration of greater matters, but specially of wars; but afterwards, when it was grown a custom, because that custom was not contradicted. And therefore the will of the father, unless some other custom or sign do clearly repugn it, is to be interpreted in favour of them.²⁰

Hobbes, who goes to great lengths to explain the process behind power in the state, could not offer a rational explanation for women's subjection, aside from the fact that it had 'grown a custom'. For many women writers, this was not reason enough for their continued subordination, and at a time when analogues between the state and the family became prevalent, women writers began to discuss their arbitrary subjection more and more.

The Tories and Custom:

The 1670s and 80s saw another Monarchical crisis unfolding. Charles II did not have a legitimate male heir and his brother James was Catholic. In the throes of

¹⁸Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II:20, 139.

¹⁹Translated in 1651 by Hobbes and published as *Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society*.

²⁰Thomas Hobbes, *Man & Citizen*, ed. by Bernard Gert (London: Harvester, 1978), 9:16, 219.

anti-papal hysteria, heightened not only by James' Catholicism but also his brother's close ties with France's Louis XIV, the problem over who should control sovereignty—the people or the Monarch—came to a head. A proliferation of political texts debated both Tory (Absolute Monarchy) and Whig (Limited Monarchy) sentiments. In Sir Robert Filmer's treatise defending Absolute Monarchy and the divine right of kings, *Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings* (most likely written between 1635 and 1642 but not published until 1680), he defends a theory of patriarchalism that relies on scriptural authority and the authority of Custom. In turn, Filmer's patriarchal model for the Commonwealth was often used as a model for the familial power structure: 'if we compare the Natural Rights of a Father with those of a King, we find them all one, without any difference at all but only in the Latitude or Extent of them'.²¹

Filmer's treatise was published as Tory propaganda to defend James, Duke of York's succession after the Popish plot scandal of 1678 and the first of the Exclusion Bills in 1679. In his defence of Absolute Monarchy, Filmer states that 'the greatest Liberty in the World (if it be duly considered) is for a people to live under a *Monarch*...all other shews or pretexts of Liberty, are but several degrees of *Slavery*, and a *Liberty* only to destroy *Liberty*'.²² His second chapter, entitled '*It is unnatural for the People to Govern, or Chose Governours*', is also indicative of the Tory position on succession to the throne. Like Hobbes, Filmer grants political authority to Custom within the Commonwealth. In fact for Filmer, Custom carries the weight of Common Law behind it, something for which his critic, James Tyrrell (1642-1718), would ridicule him:

The Common Law (as the Lord Chancellor *Egerton* teacheth us) is the Common Custom of the Realm. Now concerning Customs, this must be considered, that for every Custom there was a time when it was no Custom; and the first President we now have, had no President when it began; when every Custom began, there was something else than Custom that made it lawful, or else the beginning of all Customs were unlawful. Customs at first became Lawful only by some Superiour, which did either Command or Consent unto their beginning. And the

²¹Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings*, (London: Ric. Chiswell et al., 1680), 24.

²²*Ibid*, 6-7.

first Power which we find (as it is confessed by all men) is the Kingly Power, which was both in this and in all other Nations of the World long before any Laws, or any other kind of Government was thought of; from whence we must necessarily infer, that the Common Law it self, or Common Customs of this Land, were Originally the Laws and Commands of Kings at first unwritten.²³

Thus for Filmer, who bases his general arguments for power on scripture, the Power of Custom was founded upon the first 'Kingly Power', ultimately sanctioned by God, because God gave Adam (the first king, according to Filmer) power first. If the source of Custom was actually God, then its power could indeed carry the force of nature. In relation to their intellectual subordination, however, women writers would deny the divine power of Custom and instead claim that it was created by men to control women.

The Whigs and Custom:

Although some of the more radical Whigs would go so far as to argue for a Republic during the Exclusion crisis, most were concerned with maintaining a Protestant Monarchy in order to uphold their interests in England and Europe. Whigs were usually opponents of Absolute Monarchy and supported instead a Constitutional Monarchy, whereby power was distributed between the sovereign and the government. In reaction to Tory propaganda, specifically Filmer's *Patriarcha*, James Tyrrell published *Patriarcha non Monarcha. The Patriarch Unmonarch'd* in 1681, in which he champions England's constitution, limited monarchy and the people's right to resist tyranny. At the time, he became 'more famous for Lockean arguments than Locke'.²⁴

In his preface Tyrrell claims that the purpose of *Patriarcha non Monarcha* is to unveil 'the dangerous consequences' of Filmer's principles, specifically Filmer's arguments in favour of the divine right of the Monarchy.²⁵ He also criticizes Filmer's

²³Filmer, 101-102.

²⁴Patricia Springborg, 'Mary Astell (1666-1731), Critic of Locke', *American Political Science Review*, 89 (1995), 622.

²⁵James Tyrrell, *Patriarcha non Monarcha. The Patriarch Unmonarch'd: Being Observations on a late Treatise and divers other Miscellanies, Published under the Name of Sir Robert Filmer Baronet. In which the falseness of those Opinions that would make Monarchy Jure Divino are laid open: and the true Principles of Government and Property (especially in our Kingdom) asserted* (London:

assertions that Custom was founded by an original 'Kingly (and thus divine) Power'. Tyrell argues instead that Custom's power originates 'from the Consent of the People' and not the Monarchy. Criticizing Filmer, he says, 'But if he say it is a Fundamental Law, because long custom hath made it so, then it is apparent such a Law hath its ~~force~~ [original] from the Consent of the People at first or since, Custom being nothing else [but general consent]'.²⁶ Tyrrell agrees that Custom has had a part to play in relation to succession; however, he does so in order to highlight its arbitrary nature:

But as for the Right of bequeathing Crowns or Kingdoms by Testament, as I will not deny but some Kingdoms may have been so bequeathable by their Constitution, and others become so by Custom; yet I cannot grant that this Right belonged to the Prince or Monarch by the Law of God or Nature, but proceeds purely from a continued Custom of the Kingdom, or Civil Law thereof; else why had not *Henry VIII*, or *Edward VI*, power to limit or bequeath the Crown to whom they pleased, as well as *William the Conquerour*? And to look into other Countries, what now renders Women incapable of succeeding to the Crown of *France*, yet capable of inheriting that of *England*, *Spain*, and divers other Kingdoms of *Europe*, but the Customs or particular Constitutions of the Estates of these Kingdoms? which no Will or Testament can alter. What else hinders the Grand Seignior, that he cannot disinherit his eldest Son if he survive him, but the Custom of the *Ottoman Empire*? And what is this Custom, but (as the Author himself acknowledges in the case of *England*) the Common Law of the Country, which is said to be Common Custom? *Thus to protect the Customs which the Vulgar shall chuse, is [according to our Authour] to protect the Common Laws of England.*²⁷

Tyrrell, a Whig, had a vested interest in proving the arbitrariness of Custom within the state, especially in relation to succession. The Whigs did not want James, Duke of York to succeed after his brother died; instead they wanted the Protestant, William of Orange, who was married to James' daughter, Mary, to succeed. By arguing that the power of Custom to rule initially came from the consent of the people, the Whigs could then argue that the people could retract their consent—if subjected to tyranny. Although William III did ~~seize~~ the throne, he would not necessarily approve of arguments which were used by the Whigs to substantiate his authority because he, in turn, came under the same restrictions as James II did before him.

Richard Janeway, 1681), A5.

²⁶Tyrrell, 51. The square brackets indicate manuscript changes made in the author's hand (See BOD 8° Rawl. 432).

²⁷Ibid, 50.

In relation to the status of women within the state and family, Tyrrell's stance was 'not wholly successful'.²⁸ In language that makes the analogy between the state and the family unmistakable, Tyrrell argues that a husband can lose his 'prerogative' if he is incapable of governing, and that a husband, like a king, does not possess 'despotick power'.²⁹ Contrary to believers in Absolute Monarchy, Tyrrell grants both men and women the power to reject passive obedience as the only course of action with which to deal with tyranny. Of a wife, he says,

It is evident, she never so absolutely submitted her will to his, as not to reserve to her self the faculty of a rational woman, as not to judge when her Husband would evidently destroy her self or Children, or absolutely ruine the Family, when he was not in a capacity to govern himself.³⁰

Tyrrell, however, like most of his contemporary authors, relegates women to what was considered to be the private, non-political half of society by reiterating the customary belief in women's inherent inferiority. He says that they are 'unfit for civil business',³¹ and that 'by the Law of Nature (which is confirm'd by the Law of God) the Woman, as the weaker vessel, is to be subject to the Man'.³² Tyrrell's liberalism ultimately falters when he discusses women; he can reject the biblical basis for their political subordination, but he does not counter the 'empirically-based arguments which showed women naturally unfit for political life'.³³ Thus when it serves his political interest, Tyrrell disavows the authority of Custom as the 'Law of Nature', but he does not carry his disavowals through to similar or consistent conclusions when it concerns women. Along with Tyrrell, contract theorists such as Edward Gee, Algernon Sidney and John Locke also floundered when it came to women. Melissa Butler claims that this

stemmed from their inability to dismiss patriarchalism completely in all its manifestations. They wished to destroy the patriarchal base of monarchy, and sever the connection between patriarchalism and

²⁸Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth Century English Political Thought', *Western Political Quarterly*, 32 (1979), 87.

²⁹Tyrrell, 109 & 110.

³⁰Ibid, 110-11.

³¹Ibid, 83-4.

³²Ibid, 14.

³³Melissa A. Butler, 'Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy', *American Political Science Review*, 72 (1978), 141-2.

divine-right politics, yet they were unable to reject less comprehensive forms of patriarchalism as basic organizing principles of government and society. They developed a new theory of human nature, but did not foresee or develop the implications of that theory. This point can be illustrated specifically by examining the position of women in their theories.³⁴

When it served men's interest, they could argue for or against Custom but they would not usually do so to benefit women. Thus after years of Whig propaganda in which Custom was demonized in debates about succession and monarchical power, women writers—even writers who abhorred Whiggism, such as Mary Astell—adapted the Whig political stance on Custom and applied it to gender politics. Custom was blamed for a myriad of sins, particularly the double standards that existed between men and women.

Locke, Astell and Custom:

"Tis Custom therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very contrary to our *present* interest and pleasure, as well as to our Future', writes Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694).³⁵ Astell, who abhorred Whig ideologies and favoured a Stuart succession, adopted the Whig stance on Custom and applied it to women's general situation in the state and family. As a result, she was able to assert women's right to intellectual determination and undermine Whig political rhetoric simultaneously. Astell, who was keenly aware of the politically-charged double standards that existed between men and women, often referred to them in her texts. Ironically alluding to the one-sidedness of parliamentary political propaganda, she says, 'how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not *Milton* himself wou'd cry up Liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny'.³⁶ By highlighting the self-interest of certain authors from the seventeenth century, Astell undermines the analogy between the state and family, which was still taken for granted even by men who criticized the balance of

³⁴Butler, 139.

³⁵*ASPI*, 15.

³⁶*RUM*, 46-7.

power in the state. For example, Astell responds to *An Enquiry Into the Measures of Submission To the Supream Authority* (1688), in which Bishop Gilbert Burnet, who was by this time representing the interests of William III and the Whigs, argues in a Lockean fashion that civil society and governments are built on compromise. The freedom he claims for men, however, is not granted to women; on the contrary, Burnet ascribes servitude to women:

It is certain that the Law of Nature has put no difference nor subordination among Men, except if be that of Children to Parents, or of Wives to their Husbands; so that with Relation to the Law of Nature, *all Men are born free*.³⁷

In a rather rhetorical rebuttal, Astell asks in the preface of her 1706 edition of *Reflections Upon Marriage*, 'If *all Men are born free*, how is it that all Women are born slaves?'.³⁸ Blatant double standards such as the one above inspired Astell and other women writers to criticize the customs that held them back.

Astell's most recent editor, Patricia Springborg, has convincingly argued that *Reflections Upon Marriage* is not only a critique of issues concerning marriage, but also one of the earliest criticisms of Locke and 'the absurdity of voluntarism on which social contract theory is predicated'.³⁹ Astell uses similar language to Locke when she criticizes him to undermine illogical aspects of his arguments, especially when they do not take into account women's right to intellectual autonomy. A particular target of Astell's, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) is one of the most well-known Whig texts from the late seventeenth century. For Locke, those who held power did so by the consent (a compact) of the electorate, which was entirely male, in order to protect their lives, liberties and properties. In his repudiation of Filmer, Locke, like Tyrrell, often criticizes the authority granted to Custom. When refuting Filmer's claims of Adam's title to sovereignty because of fatherhood, Locke ridicules Custom and says that it rules mainly 'by the Authority of Example' and not for any rational reason. To highlight the irrational nature of Custom, he says

³⁷Gilbert Burnet, *An Enquiry Into the Measures of Submission To the Supream Authority. And of the Grounds upon which it may be Lawful, or Necessary for Subjects to Defend their Religion, Lives, and Liberties*, (London, 1688), A2.

³⁸*RUM*, 18. See Springborg's note 20 on the same page.

³⁹*Ibid*, xxviii.

And when Fashion hath once Established, what Folly or craft began,
Custom makes it Sacred, and 'twill be thought impudence or madness,
to contradict or question it.⁴⁰

He frequently calls attention to the arbitrary influence of Custom in relation to hierarchies of the state and the power of the Monarch, especially since he was arguing for power to rest with the people. Astell, too, repeatedly discusses Custom's arbitrary power, only she does so to benefit the cause of her fellow gentlewomen. In *A Serious Proposal* she says,

For Custom has usurpt such an unaccountable Authority, that she who would endeavour to put a stop to its Arbitrary Sway and reduce it to Reason, is in a fair way to render her self the *Butt* for all the Fops in Town to shoot their impertinent Censures at.⁴¹

If the pronouns 'she' and 'her' were altered to 'he' and 'him', this passage could be attributed to any number of contract theorists, including Locke. In the context of gender debates amongst women writers, however, words such as 'usurpt' and 'unaccountable Authority', whilst recalling and alluding to political debates of the late seventeenth century, also draw attention to the double standards to which women were habitually subjected in both the state and the family.

In relation to women, Locke outlines the contract made between husband and wife; in certain situations—if a husband had broken his contract—Locke argues that women have the right to leave a marriage because 'The *Power of the Husband* being so far from that of an absolute Monarch, that the *Wife* has, in many cases, a Liberty to *separate* from him'.⁴² Locke explores the relatively arbitrary power relations between husbands and wives, but he does not argue for women's autonomy with the same rigor that he does for men within the state. Men, not women, are the 'individuals' who make up the body Politic he envisions.⁴³ Ultimately, he says women should be subject to their husbands because 'the Laws of Mankind and customs of Nations have ordered it so', and he notes that there is 'a Foundation in Nature' for this subjection.⁴⁴

⁴⁰Locke, I:58, 183.

⁴¹*ASPI*, 33.

⁴²Locke, II:82, 321.

⁴³Pateman, 52.

⁴⁴Locke, I:47, 174.

Thus Locke, like so many of his contemporary authors, is inconsistent in his criticism of Custom, since he perpetuates a form of patriarchalism that relies on 'nature' and not scripture. Modern feminist critics have heralded Locke—despite inconsistencies in his theories—as being instrumental in the 'shift in consciousness which paved the way for the sexual revolution'.⁴⁵ Contemporary protofeminists from the turn of the eighteenth century, however, who did not have the benefit of hindsight, often criticized the inconsistencies of his theories, especially as they related to women and Custom. In reaction to the general notion that there is a foundation in nature for women's inherent inferiority, Astell says that:

The Incapacity, if there be any, is acquired not natural... Women are from their very Infancy debar'd those Advantages, with the want of which, they are afterwards reproached, and nursed up in those Vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them. So partial are Men as to expect Brick where they afford no Straw; and so abundantly civil as to take care we shou'd make good that obliging Epithet of *Ignorant*, which out of an excess of good Manners, they are pleas'd to bestow on us!⁴⁶

Astell's criticism of Locke, especially in regard to his analogy between the social compact and the marriage contract discussed in *Two Treatises*, is nowhere more evident than when she asks:

Again, if Absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State, how comes it to be so in a Family? or if in a Family why not in a State; since no Reason can be alledg'd for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other? If the Authority of the Husband so far as it extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the Prince? The Domestic Sovereign is without Dispute Elected, and the Stipulations and Contract are mutual, is it not then partial in Men to the last degree, to contend for, and practise that Arbitrary Dominion in their Families, which they abhor and exclaim against in the State? For if Arbitrary Power is evil in itself, and an improper Method of Governing Rational and Free Agents it ought not to be Practis'd any where; Nor is it less, but rather more mischievous in Families than in Kingdoms, by how much 100000 Tyrants are worse than one.⁴⁷

Here she is a caustic critic of Locke and seems to enjoy highlighting deficiencies in his political argument especially as it relates to women and familial hierarchies. For many seventeenth-century male writers, even those who argued against tyranny in the state, the macrocosmic and microcosmic connection between the state and family was

⁴⁵Butler, 136.

⁴⁶ASPI, 10.

⁴⁷RUM, 17.

still taken for granted. Astell and other women writers began to problematize this simple analogy in their discussions of Custom.

Like many contemporary women writers, Astell also undermines, to some extent, the Tory/patriarchal line on women when she uses divine and scriptural authority to justify her arguments against Custom and assert women's right to intellectual and spiritual liberty. She says, 'For since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?'.⁴⁸ Within the texts of a writer such as Astell, party politics and gender politics often seem at odds. However, despite the fact that Astell decries the ill effects of Custom and vigorously argues for women's intellectual and spiritual freedom, she does not argue, as one might think, for equality with men or for the end of women's subjugation in the state and the family. Astell ridiculed Locke's theory not because she wanted complete freedom for women but because she believed that men were equally subject to the authority of God and the monarch. The claim that a monarch should be subjected to the consent of the people was anathema to her. She was a high Tory who ardently supported the divine right of the monarch, rigid class structure and the authority of husband over wife. The only true freedom worth having, according to Astell, was the liberty to study and become closer to God in order to prepare for the afterlife.⁴⁹ This seeming conundrum is summed up by Astell in *Reflections*:

Superiors indeed are too apt to forget the common Privileges of Mankind; that their Inferiors share with them the greatest Benefits, and are as capable as themselves of enjoying the supreme Good; that tho' the Order of the World requires an *Outward* Respect and Obedience from some to others, yet the Mind is free, nothing but Reason can oblige it, 'tis out of the reach of the most absolute Tyrant.⁵⁰

In theory Astell's bid for everyone, regardless of class or gender, to achieve a type of Neoplatonic or metaphysical autonomy seems plausible but not very practical. In her comedy *The Basset Table* (1706), Susanna Centlivre parodies Astell's somewhat lofty sentiments. She models the character Valeria after Astell. Valeria is a caricature of

⁴⁸ASPI, 22.

⁴⁹Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁵⁰RUM, 56.

a learned lady, who becomes 'enslaved' by her studies. She says of the mind's power,

Custom would bring them as much in Fashion as Furbeloes, and
Practice would make us as Valiant as e're a Hero of them all; the
Resolution is in the Mind,—Nothing can enslave that.⁵¹

Custom and Women's Polemical Prose:

Whilst men debated political power, subjection and freedom, Astell was by no means the first or the only woman writer to speak up for her intellectual freedom. Women writers from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries repeatedly decried the 'Tyranny of Custom' as it adversely affected women's intellectual and spiritual autonomy. In their prose and poetry bemoaning the ill-effects of little or no education for women, Custom is frequently blamed. Moreover, the language these writers used when personifying Custom's evils is reminiscent of the debates that raged over who should control political power in the late seventeenth century. However, unlike later eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century women writers who began the battle for complete equality between men and women, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Augustan women writers were more concerned with ameliorating women's lives by improving their education and their treatment in marriage. In fact women polemicists considered better education to be instrumental to the improvement of women's lives, and they were quick to point out the far-reaching, 'instrumentally feminist',⁵² benefits for the rest of society: educated women would make better wives, mothers and Christians.

In 1673 Bathsua Makin, a loyal Royalist and believer in the Stuart cause, comments on the negative force of Custom on women's education in her prose tract,

An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen:

Custom, when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of nature itself. The Barbarous custom to breed Women low, is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially amongst a sort of debauched Sots) that Women are not endued with such Reason, as Men; nor capable of improvement by Education, as they are.⁵³

⁵¹Susanna Centlivre, *The Basset-Table, A Comedy*, (London: William Turner, 1706), 18.

⁵²Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 5-6.

⁵³Makin, 3.

Thus Makin characterizes Custom's power in the liberal, political discourse of her day, only instead of succession, her subject is women's education. Nature, usually understood to be the art or power of God, is granted political power in many texts of the period. One only has to look at how Hobbes begins *Leviathan*. He says that Nature is 'the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World'.⁵⁴ Makin, like Tyrrell and Locke, makes a distinction between Custom and Nature, but she does so in order to highlight its arbitrary influence over women's education instead of succession in the state. She rejects the idea that Nature/God made women less capable of learning than men. Custom, she claims, does not possess the true force of Nature; it only seems to because it 'hath prevailed' in her society, ruling through its 'inveterate' nature. Makin undermines Custom's ascendancy by insinuating that, although the Custom 'to breed Women low' has 'grown general', at some point it was neither general nor prevalent and certainly never natural. Since there is no sensible reason for women not to learn, Makin claims they should be better educated. Moreover, Makin's motives for publishing her essay were not completely altruistic, since she was advertising her school for gentlewomen as well as defending women's intellectual potential. Nonetheless, excoriating personifications of Custom such as hers would become commonplace in texts by women writers of different political allegiances during the next forty years. Gender politics shared some of its vocabulary with Whig political rhetoric, but, in the early eighteenth century, it would exist largely as a separate discourse peripheral to partisan politics.

Reason, Custom and education also feature in the prose tract, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), attributed to Judith Drake, another little-known, Tory writer, who flourished between 1696 and 1723. The *DNB* claims that she was sister to the notorious Tory pamphleteer, Dr James Drake (1667-1707); however, based on the material evidence that survives, it seems more likely that she was his wife. In two letters that survive in the British Library she is referred to as the mother of James Drake the younger (1702-36), son of James the elder above and also a

⁵⁴Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 9.

doctor. In the first letter to Sir Hans Sloane, president of the Royal College of Physicians, dated 1 September 1723, Judith Drake defends herself against ^{charges of} malpractice.⁵⁵ In the second letter, dated 4 September 1723, James Drake the younger, defends Judith, whom he calls his mother: 'I beg the concern I am in for the Violent illness of my Mother, I occasion'd by the calumny of an illnatur'd Fellow'.⁵⁶ To add to this piece of evidence, the *Annals of the Royal College of Physicians* (1723), which reports on the incident above, states that Judith Drake is the 'relict of Dr Drake'. Moreover, listed in the christening records of St. Andrews, Holborn, on 17 September 1700, is the following: 'Ann daughter of James Drake Dr of Phisick & Judith'.⁵⁷ Politically, it seems that Judith Drake sympathized with her husband's Tory leanings. Her latest editor argues that *An Essay* can be

read as a Tory tract operating indirectly to support Anne's succession. Drake's Toryism manifests itself throughout the work from her approbation of Charles II (1660-85) and advocacy of Restoration writers, to her scorn for Whig writers, such as Elkanah Settle, and Richard Blackmore.⁵⁸

Once again party politics and gender politics intermingle in the text of an Augustan woman writer. Like Astell, Drake employs Whig political rhetoric to assert women's intellectual potential whilst simultaneously undermining Whiggism. She discusses the tyranny of Custom in terms that recall Whig political language of the late seventeenth century. In the beginning of her *Essay* she states that:

The defence of our Sex against so many and so great Wits as have so strongly attack'd it, may justly seem a Task too difficult for a Woman to attempt. Not that I can, or ought to yield, that we are by Nature less enabled for such an Enterprize, than Men are; which I hope at least to shew plausible Reasons for, before I have done: But because through the Usurpation of Men, and the Tyranny of Custom (here in *England* especially) there are at most but few, who are by Education, and acquir'd Wit, or Letters sufficiently qualified for such an Undertaking.⁵⁹

Like other women polemicists, Drake refuses to concede that women are 'by Nature'

⁵⁵BL, MS Sloane 4047, fols. 38^r and 39^r.

⁵⁶Ibid, fols. 42^{r-v}.

⁵⁷ Information came from Hannah Smith of Newnham College, Cambridge, who is currently editing *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (Exeter: The Rota, forthcoming in 2000).

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Judith Drake, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex. In which are inserted the Characters of A Pendant, A Squire, A Beau, A Vertuoso; A Poetaster; A City-Critick, &c. In a Letter to a Lady. Written by a Lady* (London: A. Roper et al., 1696), 2-3.

intellectually less capable than men; rather, it is women's lack of education that diminishes their potential. Due to the 'Usurpation of Men' and the 'Tyranny of Custom', women are prevented from improving their minds. Drake specifically refers to women's subordination when she uses words such as 'Tyranny' and 'Usurpation', but they also have a greater political significance—Drake adds for emphasis in parentheses, 'here in *England* especially'. No doubt the word usurpation also refers to the events of the 1680s, which saw the repeated exclusion attempts against and final downfall of James II, whom the Tories believed to be the rightful heir of Charles II.

In light of the political events of pre- and post-Restoration England, during which male authors frequently discussed power and the abuse of power in the state but not in the family, it is not surprising that women frequently adopted and adapted political jargon to describe their own struggles. Male authors had battled against tyranny, a king had been murdered and another had ~~lost~~ ^{his kingdom} usurped, and yet women writers still had to defend their right to a decent education and intellectual freedom, let alone any kind of comprehensive autonomy within the civil state.

Custom and Women's Polemical Poetry:

The examples of early eighteenth-century women writers who discuss the ill effects of Custom by using politically-charged vocabulary reminiscent of late seventeenth century texts are plentiful. Prose was not their only written medium: polemical poetry was also a genre frequently employed to criticize Custom. Two friends and correspondents, Elizabeth Thomas (1675-1731) and Mary, Lady Chudleigh (1656-1710), were part of a community of intellectual women who circulated poetry and who believed in the amelioration of women's lives through religion and education. Although Thomas is reported to have been accused of being 'too much a WILLIAMITE' by Astell, she does not express her political leanings explicitly. She was not a dissenter but rather professed herself to be a loyal member of the Church of England.⁶⁰ She states in her autobiography:

⁶⁰PC, 29n and xiv-xix.

Religious Thoughts having engrossed her Soul for many Months, and being eased of the Perplexity they had occasioned, she proceeded farther, I THINK, *therefore*, I AM; was the *Postulatum* on which DES CARTES found his *whole System*. I have a *Rational Soul*, (thought she to herself,) a WILL of ELECTION, and must be saved by my own FAITH, and not *Another's*: I am bred a *Protestant*, and hope I am *Right*, but I may be *Wrong*: Shall I therefore go on, *Errare cum Patribus*, and not make use of the Faculties God has given me, by judging for my self; and being able to say, why I am a *Protestant*, and not A Quaker, or a *Roman Catholick*.⁶¹

Unlike Astell, whose patrons were almost all high Tories, Thomas sought patronage from both Whigs and Tories alike. *Miscellany Poems on Several Subjects* (1722) contains a poem dedicated to the powerful Whig politician and universal patron, Charles Montagu, first Earl of Halifax, but it also contains two poems dedicated to Lady Hester Pakington, the wife of high churchman and Tory, Sir John Pakington. If anything, gender politics are much more prevalent in Thomas' writing than partisan politics.

Like many of her protofeminist contemporaries, Thomas' polemical arguments in defence of women appropriated the political vocabulary used by men in debates over sovereignty, subjecthood and liberty to reveal the layering of tyranny to which women were continually subjected. For instance, she strongly criticizes Custom in her poem, '*On Sir J----- S----- saying in a sarcastick Manner, My Books would make me Mad. An ODE*', which is a blend of formal verse satire and protofeminist polemic. She accomplishes this combination by having two diametrically opposing views: on the one hand, the voice of Reason, a woman, laments the ill effects of Custom on women's education, whilst on the other, various male speakers are made to sound irrational. In the first stanza, a speaker begins with an apostrophe to her fellow women and a complaint against the tyranny of Custom:

Unhappy Sex! how hard's our Fate,
By Customs Tyranny confin'd
To foolish *Needle-work*, and *Chat*,
Or such like *Exercise* as that,
But still deny'd th'Improvement of our Mind!⁶²

Thomas sets her polemical arguments in a satirical dialogue, but her object is similar

⁶¹PC, xvii.

⁶²MP, 181.

to that of Whigs, such as Tyrrell in *Patriarcha non Monarcha* and Locke in *Two Treatises*, who both engage in extended (sometimes implicit) dialogues with the patriarchalist, Filmer, and other Absolute Monarchists. Tyrrell and Locke are locked in a literary battle of old versus new ideas within the civil state, whilst in Thomas' poem, a metaphoric battle is played out between men and women, with men representing narrow-minded Custom and women being Reason. This contrast between irrationality and Reason is achieved through satire and Thomas' clever use of political vocabulary. Below the surface, in the irrational speeches by men, there is a political undercurrent:

"Women! Men cry, alas, poor Fools!
 "What are they but domestic Tools?
 "On purpose made our Toils to share,
 "And ease the Husband's *Oeconomick* Care.
 "To *dress*, to *sing*, to *work*, to *play*,
 "To watch our *Looks*, our *Words* obey,
 "And with their little *Follies*, drive dull Thoughts away.
 "Thus let them humbly in *Subjection* live;
 "But Learning leave to *Man*, our great Prerogative. ⁶³

The men in this poem begin by sentencing women to domestic drudgery, which is highlighted by the anaphora of infinitives, 'To *dress*, to *sing*, to *work*, to *play*', etc. By the close of the stanza, however, men's hypocrisy comes to the fore when they claim their 'great Prerogative' to subordinate women's intellectual potential. Thus the stanza begins with a female voice lamenting the tyranny of Custom and closes with men acknowledging that tyranny is their prerogative to enforce. The last two lines of the stanza also reveal the political and polemical undercurrent that runs throughout the poem. Words such as 'subjection' and 'prerogative' have a double meaning. On the microcosmic level, they refer to hierarchies in families occupied by men and women, but on a macrocosmic level, they refer to the power structures of the state. (Recent history had not been kind to Kings who exercised their prerogative privileges in the extreme.) This analogy becomes even clearer in the second stanza when the female voice addresses men in general as 'mighty *Sov'reigns*':

Most mighty *Sov'reigns* we submit,
 And own ye Monarchs of the Realms of *Wit*:

⁶³MP, 182.

But might a *Slave* to her Superiours speak,
 And without *Treason* Silence break,
 She'd first implore your royal *Grace*,
 Then humbly thus expostulate the Case.⁶⁴

The analogy, of course, is ironic. Just as citizens in the state petition the Crown, the female voice pleads for women's intellectual autonomy: 'But if born ignorant, tho' fit for more,/Can you deny we should improve our Store?'. This question and most others in the poem are rhetorical in nature. The answer is yes, women should be able to 'improve' their minds. Moreover, this rhetorical debate is laid out against the backdrop of the past political events. If men were able to shake off their 'subjection' and 'improve their store' by questioning and defeating the prerogative of James II and acquiring a Protestant Monarch, how could men in turn be so petty about women wanting to improve their education?

The double meanings can be read throughout the poem. In response to more irrational rhetoric espoused by the male voices that are opposed to women reading too much, the female voice says,

What is it from our *Sex* ye fear,
 That thus ye curb our Pow'rs?
 D'ye apprehend a *bookish* War,
 Or are your Judgements less, for raising ours?
 Come, come, the real *Truth* confess,
 (A Fault acknowledg'd is the less)
 And own it was an *avaricious* Soul,
 Which would, with greedy Eyes, *monopolize* the whole:
 And bars us *Learning* on the selfish Score:
 That conscious of our native Worth,
 Ye dread to make it more.⁶⁵

The men are described as private absolute monarchs and tyrants who block the efforts of women to learn because of selfish reasons—their uncontrolled prerogative. The ironic double meanings converge in the last two lines of the poem. The female speaker says, 'Then thanks to *Heav'n*, we're *English* born and free,/And thank our gracious *Laws* that give such *Liberty*'.⁶⁶ These words are reminiscent of Tyrrell and Locke; in the voice of the female speaker, however, they emphasize the double standards that affected women who were not really free or protected by the laws of

⁶⁴*MP*, 182.

⁶⁵*Ibid*, 185-6.

⁶⁶*Ibid*, 186.

the state. Thus Thomas in a satiric dialogue also makes her polemical point in defence of women by employing the political vocabulary used by men in debates over sovereignty, subjecthood and liberty to reveal the levels of tyranny to which women were habitually subjected.

Thomas' friend, correspondent and patron, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, was the quintessential, rational Augustan woman. Influenced heavily by both the Cambridge Platonists and Cartesian rationalism, she says in the preface to *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703), 'Tis impossible to be happy without making Reason the Standard of all our Thoughts'.⁶⁷ Aside from her notorious anti-marriage poem, 'To the Ladies', her most celebrated defence of women is the verse dialogue, *The Ladies Defence* (1701)—an answer to John Sprint's *The Bride-Womans Counsellor* (1699). As with Thomas, reason, embodied and eulogized by the female speaker, Melissa, is the weapon Chudleigh employs in her literary battle on behalf of women. Melissa repeatedly outlines how the Tyranny and Customs of men have inhibited women's development:

The Tyrant Man may still possess the Throne;
Tis in our Minds that we wou'd Rule alone;
Those unseen Empires give us leave to sway,
And to our Reason private Homage pay.⁶⁸

Chudleigh positions the 'Tyrant Man', who endorses Custom, in opposition to Reason, and the 'Throne' versus women's 'Minds'. The 'Throne' metonymically refers to both fathers/husbands and the Monarch—the heads of families and the head of the civil state respectively. Since women had little or nothing to do with the civil state that was the subject of so much debate in the seventeenth century and because they were subordinate in the domestic state to their husbands and fathers, Chudleigh imagines a third sphere—the female mind—as the only place where women could have complete sovereignty. Through the female speaker, Melissa, Chudleigh outlines how women could resist tyranny and achieve a type of Neoplatonic autonomy, as long as they could 'Study to be Good, and Wise'.⁶⁹ She repeats this theme in her panegyric to

⁶⁷*POSO*, 44.

⁶⁸*TLD*, 34.

⁶⁹*Ibid*, 31.

Mary Astell entitled, 'To Almystrea', when she states that women can free themselves from the bonds of 'Tyrannick Custom' by submitting to the rule of Reason:

Let envious Men by barb'rous Custom led
Descant on Faults,
And in Detraction find
Delights unknown to a brave gen'rous Mind,
While we resolve a nobler Path to tread,
And from Tyrannick Custom free,
View the dark Mansions of the mighty Dead.⁷⁰

The 'nobler Path' of which she speaks is the path of Reason which will lead women to enlightenment and ultimately to God. Chudleigh's suggestion that women take an internal quest to find freedom recalls not only Astell, but also Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73), who created a world in her own mind so that she could rule as '*Margaret the First*', in both the preface and the epilogue of *The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World* (1656). Cavendish writes:

and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as *Alexander* and *Caesar* did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own.⁷¹

In the epilogue, Cavendish asserts that anyone 'may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please'.⁷² Although Cavendish's novella is a fantastical utopian text, her impetus for writing seems to have been to expand her imagination. Thus *The Blazing World* is a practical exercise and an extended metaphor of the limitless possibilities of the female mind.

Although there are many more, Sarah (Fyge Field) Egerton (1670-1723) is my final example of an Augustan woman writer who published polemical poetry infused with seventeenth-century, political vocabulary. She is usually remembered for her 1686 publication, *The Female Advocate: or, An Answer to a Late Satyr Against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy of Woman*, a reactive polemic to Robert Gould's satire against women, *Love given O're: Against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, &c. of Women* (1682/83). In *Poems on Several Occasions, Together with a Pastoral* (1703),

⁷⁰POSO, 67.

⁷¹Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666), in *Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. by Kate Lilley (London: William Pickering, 1991), 124.

⁷²Ibid, 225.

one can also find polemical pieces that defend the rights of women, especially their right to intellectual freedom. As Hilda Smith notes, 'Egerton's "The Emulation" stated the usual feminist case against "Tyrant Custom" strikingly'.⁷³ 'Emulation' here seems to have the archaic meaning of a grudge or dislike of superiority, in this case the superiority of men.⁷⁴ The female speaker begins by saying,

Say Tyrant Custom, why must we obey,
The impositions of thy haughty Sway;
From the first dawn of Life, unto the Grave,
Poor Womankind's in every State, a Slave.⁷⁵

Like many male authors who raised a clamour against tyranny in the state when they felt threatened by a Catholic monarch and his prerogative, the female speaker in Egerton's poem does the same in relation to the tyranny of Custom. The use of 'State' here has political undertones and brings to mind again the binary opposition of the public state, where men were constantly vying for more political power, and the private state, where they already possessed power and were loath to give it up. By saying that women are slaves in 'every State', the speaker highlights the double standards between men and women. Unlike their male counterparts who expect liberty within the civil state, women are always subject to many types of subordination. For Egerton the worst state for women is marriage: 'Then comes the last, the fatal Slavery,/The Husband with insulting Tyranny'.⁷⁶

The political references to recent history become even more discernible when the speaker makes an analogy between women and James II. She says, 'We yield like vanquish'd Kings whom Fetters bind,/When chance of War is to Usurpers kind'.⁷⁷ James II, who was 'fettered' by his Catholicism and overblown sense of prerogative, feared the 'chance of War' with William III. Subsequently, he yielded his crown by fleeing to France, which made the usurpation of his throne relatively easy for his enemies. There is an analogy between women and the 'vanquish'd' monarch because

⁷³Smith, 184.

⁷⁴OED.

⁷⁵Sarah Fyge (Field) Egerton, *Poems on Several Occasions, Together with a Pastoral*, (J. Nutt: London, 1703), 108.

⁷⁶Ibid, 108.

⁷⁷Ibid, 108.

they are fettered by Custom and have their autonomy usurped by men. Egerton complains that this usurpation is both physical and intellectual: women 'Submit in Form' and men their 'Thoughts controul'.⁷⁸ The female speaker claims that the time is right for women to make an effort to achieve more autonomy and intellectual equality with men: the title, 'The Emulation', is indicative of this theme because it also refers to the speaker's efforts to imitate or equal men intellectually.⁷⁹ She argues that men have more freedom than they did in previous ages, so why can women not have more as well:

But in this blessed Age, such Freedom's given,
That every Man explains the Will of Heaven;
And shall we Women now sit tamely by,
Make no excursions in Philosophy,
Or grace our Thoughts in tuneful Poetry?
We will our Rights in Learning's World maintain,
Wits Empire, now, shall know a Female Reign.

The poem ends with a theme that can be frequently found in texts by women writers. Just like Cavendish, Astell and Chudleigh before her, Egerton envisions a metaphysical, intellectual realm—'Learning's World'—where women can rule their own minds. The speaker's reference to 'a Female Reign', undoubtedly an allusion to Queen Anne, lends authority to her claims against Custom.⁸⁰

In one relatively short poem, then, Egerton deftly adapts political vocabulary from a range of political events to draw attention to the unequal positions of men and women in civil and domestic society. Egerton's efforts to defend women's intellectual freedom evidently struck a chord with one of her readers. In a prefatory poem, '*To Mrs. S. F. on her Poems*', the anonymous 'M. P.'—possibly Mary Pix (1666-1709)⁸¹—thanks Egerton in a protofeminist panegyric.⁸² It seems M. P. may have had the poem 'The Emulation' in mind because the eighth line ('And Tyrant Custom forc'd us to obey') echoes Egerton's opening line ('Say Tyrant Custom, why must we obey').

⁷⁸Egerton, 109.

⁷⁹In fact Egerton's 'The Emulation' may be a polemic response to Richard Ames' poem by the same name, attached to the end of *Sylvia's Complaint, of Her Sexes Unhappiness. A Poem. Being the Second Part of Sylvia's Revenge, or, a Satyr Against Man*, (Richard Baldwin: London, 1692), 21-4.

⁸⁰Barash, 250.

⁸¹Jeslyn Medoff, 'New Light on Sarah Fyge (Field, Egerton)', *Tulsa Studies*, 1 (1982), 171.

⁸²Egerton, A6^{r-v}.

Although M. P.'s poem has the typical pomp and circumstance one expects from an eighteenth-century prefatory poem, its polemical, almost militant tone reflects gender politics in action.

Astell aside, Augustan women writers and their responses to seventeenth-century political debates have not been the focus of many scholarly investigations. Although Smith claims that seventeenth-century political theories 'proved unhelpful to nascent feminism',⁸³ there seems little doubt that political rhetoric did have a manifest effect on the cluster of polemical writing from the turn of the eighteenth century. Since their male contemporaries did not often include women's issues in their discussions of Custom's tyranny, women writers appropriated vocabulary from political debates to discuss how Custom negatively affected their lives. The lines that were more clearly drawn over Custom's power in the partisan politics of male authors in the late seventeenth century were sometimes blurred when women writers debated Custom's authority in gender politics. One explanation for this seeming anomaly is the fact that these women began to distinguish between gender and party political issues. Another is that women writers became incredulous at the way in which contractarian, male (often Whig) authors argued against Tyranny and Custom in the civil state for men's benefit and not women's. To make matters worse, many of these same male authors rejected scripture as the basis of proving women's inferiority, only to embrace nature to demonstrate the same thing. Whilst men gained new found religious and political freedoms (as Egerton states, 'such Freedom's given,/That every Man explains the Will of Heaven'), women were still relegated to a subordinate role in the state and family.

Unlike later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers who undertook the battle for complete equality between men and women, early eighteenth-century women writers began to assert their right to, at the very least, intellectual and spiritual autonomy. Overall they were mainly concerned with ameliorating women's lives by

⁸³Smith, 57.

improving their education and their treatment in marriage—a subject that will be explored in detail in the following chapters. A direct link does not exist between the polemical, early eighteenth-century women writers who criticized the inconsistencies of the contract theorists and the feminist revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; however, one could argue—especially with the benefit of hindsight—that their repeated insistence on women's intellectual potential and worth certainly *anticipates* later feminist movements.

Chapter Two:

'Attracted by the Glory of your Name'¹ Some Reflections on Mary Astell

The excellence of her design, and the fact that hers were the earliest efforts for the good cause of her sex, entitle Mary Astell to a very honourable place in the ranks of distinguished women.²

No other woman writer picked up where Astell left off. No other tried self-consciously and publicly to live up to the dignity of her nature and to do something with her life for posterity to remember her by.³

Ruth Perry, quoted in the second passage above, has done a great deal to increase the profile of early women's writing, particularly that of Mary Astell. In view of the importance that Perry and other feminist critics assign to Astell's influence on men and women writers at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Augustan period could also be referred to as the Astellian age. Hailed as one of the earliest feminist writers, as well as a theologian, philosopher, literary critic and political campaigner, Astell's reputation as a woman ahead of her time has been gaining momentum throughout the twentieth century. In the last twenty years, Astell has gone from being a forgotten woman writer to an established feminist critic whom modern scholars acclaim. There is now a significant body of (growing) Astellian scholarship, and several of her writings have recently been republished in modern critical editions.⁴ This reinscription of Astell is a milestone for scholars who have been battling for recognition of early women writers. With modern editions available, integration of

¹ *POSO*, 66.

² Karl D. Bülbring, 'Mary Astell, An Advocate of Women's Rights Two Hundred Years Ago', *Journal of Education*, April and May (1891), 23 (off print). See Taylorian Library Annex, Oxford, Morf.A1.M5 (13).

³ Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 330.

⁴ Bridget Hill ed., *The First English Feminist. Reflections Upon Marriage and other writings by Mary Astell* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Company Ltd., 1986). In this text, Hill edited *ASPI* (1694), *RUM* (1706), *A Fair Way with the Dissenters and their Patrons* (1704) and the preface to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* in full as well as excerpts from all of her other texts. In 1996 Patricia Springborg edited *RUM* (1706), *A Fair Way with the Dissenters* (1704) and *An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion* (1704) under the general title of *Astell Political Writings* in the Cambridge University Press series called, 'Texts in the History of Political Thought'. And in 1997, Springborg also edited parts I and II of *ASP* for Pickering and Chatto.

texts by early women writers in research and curricula becomes much easier, which in turn increases their profiles at all levels of academia. Astell's reintegration has been so successful that one cannot discuss polemical prose and poetry by women at the turn of the eighteenth century without mentioning her contributions—it would be like trying to deliberate on seventeenth-century social contract theory without including a discussion of Locke. On the one hand, Astell's success has heightened scholars' awareness of protofeminist prose; on the other hand, the intense concentration by critics almost exclusively on Astell has been at the expense of contemporary, polemical women writers.

There is no doubt about Astell's unique contribution to the development of protofeminism, or, for that matter, to philosophical, religious and political thought. Moreover, Astell's writings in defence of women and her actions in support of their right to education were a source of inspiration for contemporary women writers, such as Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Elizabeth Thomas and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, to name a few. The problem lies with the degree of emphasis placed on Astell's predominance. 'Initiated by *A Serious Proposal*', Perry claims that Astell 'fanned into being' the feminist movement of the early 1700s, Moira Ferguson refers to women's polemical texts from the period as being part of 'the Astell cluster' and D. N. Deluna refers to the movement as the 'phenomenon of Astell'.⁵ Thus, in current criticism, there exists an unchallenged presumption that early eighteenth-century, protofeminist texts, written shortly after 1694, the year *A Serious Proposal* was published, are inextricably and overwhelmingly tied to Astell's influence in some way. This Astellian hegemony has had a negative effect on the study of other early women writers who also wrote in defence of women at the turn of the eighteenth century. Perry would have her readers believe that 'no other woman writer picked up where Astell left off'. However, protofeminism did not stop developing with Astell and remain dormant as a genre until Mary Wollstonecraft began to publish toward the end

⁵Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 330, Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists. British Women Writers, 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 19 and D. N. Deluna, 'Mary Astell: England's First Feminist Literary Critic', *Women's Studies*, 22 (1993), 231.

of the eighteenth century. As well as discussing Astell's protofeminist precepts, this chapter examines the myth of how her singular dominance at the turn of the eighteenth century developed.

Astell was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1666 to a coal merchant family.⁶ Although she was born a gentlewoman, Astell's father died when she was only twelve and left her family in poor circumstances. Tradition has it that she was educated by her clergyman uncle, Ralph Astell, in philosophy, mathematics and logic. Sometime in the mid-1680s she moved to London to make her way in the world and settled in Chelsea where she remained until she died in 1731. It seems that she had some financial problems in 1688 and 89 and appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Sancroft, who was well known for his charity.⁷ Sancroft assisted her with money and introductions. In gratitude, Astell sent him a collection of manuscript poems which is now housed in the Bodleian Library.⁸ Probably as a result of her networking, aided by Sancroft, Astell met her bookseller Rich Wilkin, who was known for being a conservative Tory. Her partnership with Wilkin would prove to be fruitful: he published her protofeminist texts and she wrote Tory pamphlets for him. Astell was assisted in her career by several men but by far the most influential people in her life were her women friends. Chelsea was home to several aristocratic women—Lady Catherine Jones, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Ann Coventry and Elizabeth Hutcheson were her four greatest patrons—who were known for their pious good works. It is not surprising that Astell developed friendships with them.⁹

Astell's first publication in print was also her first polemical text on behalf of women: *A Serious Proposal To the Ladies, For the Advancement of their true and greatest Interest* was published anonymously in 1694, and it went into four editions by 1701. Perry and others have shown how *A Serious Proposal* generated much

⁶For a comprehensive biography, see Perry's *The Celebrated Mary Astell*.

⁷Ibid, 66-9.

⁸BOD, MSS Rawlinson Poet 154, fols. 50-93. Perry rediscovered these poems in 1982; see Ruth Perry, 'A Seventeenth-Century Feminist Poet', *Times Literary Supplement*, 41-42 (1982), 911.

⁹A more in-depth discussion of friendship and patronage can be found in chapter five.

discussion amongst literati at the turn of the eighteenth century. Besides Chudleigh, Thomas and Montagu, *A Serious Proposal* probably made an impression on other contemporary women writers such as Judith Drake, Lady Damaris Masham, Elizabeth Elstob and Jane Barker, to name a few. Astell became a positive role model for many women writers because she achieved a certain level of financial independence—through publishing and patronage—whilst maintaining her good reputation and delivering her message about women's (especially gentlewomen's) inherent right to seek a certain level of autonomy within religious and educational contexts. Although *A Serious Proposal* caused quite a stir, her reputation was further enhanced when the letters she and John Norris of Bemerton exchanged were published in 1695 under the title, *Letters Concerning the Love of God, Between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr. John Norris*.

Published in 1697, *A Serious Proposal, Part II: Wherein a Method is offer'd for the Improvement of their Minds* also made a significant impact on the literary scene, as did *Some Reflections Upon Marriage, Occasion'd by the Duke & Dutchess of Mazarine's Case*, which was anonymously published in 1700. This critique of the marriage market was republished in 1703 and then again in 1706 under the title, *Reflections Upon Marriage, To which is added a Preface in Answer to Some Objections*. In 1704, Astell published three of her political tracts, *Moderation truly Stated: Or, A Review of a Late Pamphlet Entitul'd Moderation a Vertue; A Fair Way with the Dissenters and their Patrons*; and *An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in this Kingdom*, which confirmed Astell's position as one of the leading Tory pamphleteers of her day. Her *magnus opus* was published in 1705 under the title of *The Christian Religion, As Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* in which she gives her most comprehensive refutation of Locke. In 1709, her last major political tract to be published was *Bart'lemy Fair: Or, An Enquiry after Wit*.¹⁰ All of her writings brought her notoriety of sorts, but it was *Reflections upon Marriage* in conjunction with her political pamphleteering that confirmed her

¹⁰For a complete publication history, see Appendix F in Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 459-66.

reputation as a formidable intellect of the London literary scene.

Having achieved a certain amount of financial security, Astell withdrew from public life to work on the school she had helped establish in 1709 for children of the pensioners of the Royal Hospital. With the support of her women friends and benefactors, Astell devoted many years to the running of the school and was only replaced as the headmistress in 1724. After that, she continued to participate in the school's administration and fund-raising. Astell died in 1731 after a battle with breast cancer. She underwent and survived a mastectomy, but it seems very likely that the disease metastasized, killing her two months after the operation.

Astell's Canonization:

During her lifetime, Astell was hailed by many writers as a remarkable woman. For instance, John Evelyn read and highly approved of Astell:

Among those Royal and Illustrious Ladies, we do not forget the late Dutchess of *New-Castle*, either for her Learning, offer at^{tax} or Love of Learning; nor for both, Mrs. *Philips*, and our *Sappho* Mrs. *Behn*; Mrs. *Makins*, the Learned Sister of the Learned Dr. *Pell*; nor without the highest Ingratitude for the Satisfaction I still receive by what I read of Madam Astalls of the most Sublime: Besides, what lately she has proposed to the Virtuous of her Sex, to shew by her own Example, what great Things, and Excellencies it is Capable of.¹¹

Daniel Defoe liked Astell's proposal so much, that in 1697 he published *An Essay upon Projects*, which contained his own proposal on women's education, called 'An Academy for Women'.¹² In the beginning of his proposal, he opens by describing the 'barbarous Customs' of the world, whereby, he says, 'We reproach the Sex every day with Folly and Impertinence, while I am confident, had they the advantages of Education equal to us, they wou'd be guilty of less than our selves'.¹³ He evidently approved of Astell's basic idea—and he had 'a very great Esteem' for her¹⁴—but found her planning 'impracticable'. A social engineer rather than a philosopher, Defoe grounded his

¹¹John Evelyn, *Numismata. A Discourse of Medals, Antient and Modern. Together with some Account of Heads and Effigies of Illustrious, and Famous Persons, in Sculps, and Taille-Douce, of Whom we have no Medals extant; and Of the Use to be derived from them. To which is added A Digression concerning Physiognomy*, (London: Benj. Tooke, 1697), 265.

¹²Daniel Defoe, *An Essay upon Projects*, (London: R. R., 1697), 282-304.

¹³Ibid, 282.

¹⁴Ibid, 286.

interest in Astell's idea in the practicalities of setting up a school system for women and not saving their souls.¹⁵

By that time Astell died in 1731 knowledge of her remarkable life and writings had become fairly scarce. She was duly catalogued in several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthologies which commended worthy women writers, such as George Ballard's compilation, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences* (1752). And her influence can also be found in several mid-eighteenth-century novels that feature female education as a social issue; two examples are Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), and Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762).¹⁶ The 'celebrated' reputation she had enjoyed at the turn of the eighteenth century, however, had almost completely subsided. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that scholars became interested in her life and texts again.¹⁷ Florence Smith, an early twentieth-century biographer of Astell, believed that the renewed interest in her life and writings had a lot to do with Astell's protofeminist ideologies and, as a result, she claimed that Astell belonged 'more to this century than to her own'.¹⁸ Although Astellian scholarship experienced a brief renaissance earlier this century, it was not until the 1980s and 90s that Astell was incorporated in the literary canon.

Since the 1980s many feminist historical and literary scholars have focused on retrieving early women's writing from obscurity and incorporating their texts and analyses of them into mainstream literary discourse. Not surprisingly, the impulse to republish Astell's writings has been part of this general movement to retrieve forgotten women writers—for the 'Judith Shakespeares' waiting to be rediscovered.

¹⁵Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 129-31.

¹⁶See Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, in three parts, ed. by Jocelyn Harris (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), II, 355.

¹⁷See Karl D. Bülbring, 'Mary Astell, An Advocate of Women's Rights Two Hundred Years Ago', *Journal of Education*, April and May (1891), 1-23; Harriet M'Ilquham, 'Mary Astell: A Seventeenth-Century Advocate for Women', *The Westminster Review*, 149 (1898), 440-9; A. H. Upham, 'English Femmes Savantes at the end of the Seventeenth Century', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 12 (1913), 262-76; Florence M. Smith, *Mary Astell* (1916) (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966); and Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920).

¹⁸Smith, 164.

Scholars were looking for patterns of feminist thought in early women's writings that could be traced diachronically to present day feminist movements. Elaine Showalter encapsulated the motivation behind this recovery program in 1977 when she stated, 'when we look at women writers collectively we can see an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images from generation to generation'.¹⁹ Whilst Showalter evidently meant well, not all early women writers fit into the so-called feminist continuum.

This general urge in feminist criticism to establish a coherent, linear historiography explains why some critics have gone to great lengths to establish links between Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, even though no direct connections have been found to date.²⁰ It might also explain why scholars of Astell's work are so attached to the notion that she was the 'first English feminist'. For example, Karl B. Bülbring is typical in his assertions when he states that 'we must allow Mary Astell the honour of being the first writer who formally and decidedly advocated the rights and abilities of the fair sex', as is Cynthia B. Bryson when she says, 'Astell, as a Cartesian feminist, was a woman of definite "firsts," both philosophically and politically'.²¹ In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, many writers argued for the amelioration of women's lives through education; however, advocacy of complete equality between men and women did not fully evolve until a few centuries later. When referring to early women writers, Regina Janes states that the term feminist is a 'vile anachronism', whilst Joan K. Kinnaird claims that 'feminism proper' should not be associated with the early eighteenth century because it only began to develop in the late nineteenth century.²² In relation to Astell, Perry warns about the dangers of branding her: 'To write of her as a feminist is to create a special

¹⁹ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 11.

²⁰ See Lissette Ferlet Carpenter, 'Sarah Fielding: A Mid-Century Link in Eighteenth Century Feminist Views', *Dissertations Abstracts International*, 1990; Regina Janes, 'Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary Or, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft Compared', *Studies in 18th-Century Culture*, 5 (1976), 121-39; and J. McCrystal, 'Revolting Women: The Use of Revolutionary Discourse in Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft Compared', *History of Political Thought*, 14 (1993), 189-203.

²¹ Bülbring, 4 and Cynthia B. Bryson, 'Mary Astell: Defender of the "Disembodied Mind"', *Hypatia*, 13 (1998), 40.

²² Janes, 121 and Joan K. Kinnaird, 'Mary Astell and the Conservative Contribution to English Feminism', *Journal of British Studies*, 19 (1979), 74.

version of her—almost to reinvent her—with her collaboration and the aid of historical hindsight'.²³ Bridget Hill also points out some of the dangers of labeling Astell:

Many of those who have written about Mary Astell, and even those referring to her in passing, have attempted to label her. She has been variously described as a Platonist, a Cartesian rationalist, a Lockean feminist, an English Femme Savante, and 'the first major English feminist'. If some of these labels are more relevant to her than others, there is not one that, by itself, adequately describes her ideas.²⁴

Hence Astell scholars adapted the term 'feminist' to describe Astell's ideological stances on women's issues and accommodate her conservative peccadilloes more accurately. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Kinnaird coined the term 'protofeminism' to describe women like Astell who openly discussed 'male oppression, the equal intellectual capacity of the sexes, [and] the injustice of barring women from higher learning' without arguing for equality between men and women.²⁵ Catherine Gallagher uses the term 'Tory feminism' in order to explain some of the conundrums one encounters with an ultraconservative writer such as Astell, who advocated certain rights for women within rigid class and religious hierarchies.²⁶ Finally, Alice Browne employs 'instrumental feminism' to describe writers such as Astell who, 'argue for improvements in women's education and women's position in society because such changes will benefit men, children, and society as a whole, rather than because justice to women demands them'.²⁷ The adaptation of the term 'feminist', particularly the use of protofeminism, has allowed critics to discuss more accurately the contributions made by women writers, who sought to ameliorate women's circumstances without attempting to alter the social and political hierarchies in which they lived.

By the 1990s, problems with the Showalterian continuum had become apparent and feminist critics began to question the legitimacy of the initial recovery

²³Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 13.

²⁴Hill, *The First English Feminist*, 49.

²⁵Kinnaird, 53-4.

²⁶Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders*, 1 (1988), 24-39.

²⁷Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 5-6.

project. Margaret J. M. Ezell complained that assumptions about the existence of a woman's 'tradition' and an evolutionary model of feminism helped to shape new canons of women writers, which only served to privilege certain types of writing, especially fiction. This canonization of women's writing mainly served to bring women novelists who published (in print) to the fore, to the detriment of women who wrote in 'sub-genres' (such as non-fiction, letters, diaries and common-place books) and may have only circulated their texts rather than publish them in print.²⁸ Although she did not pen any novels, Astell did publish a significant body of polemical texts in print. Early in the restoration movement of the late twentieth century, Astell became a good candidate for rediscovery and feminist literary criticism.²⁹ As a result, it was not long before Astell had been assigned a dominant place in the feminist canon, which, as mentioned above, has caused contemporary women writers who also wrote prose and poetry in defence of women to be overlooked.

The ~~Augustan~~ Astellian Age:

A period in literary history which came some time after the Restoration but before the onset of Romanticism, the Augustan age will probably bring to mind the reign of Queen Anne, male authors such as John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele; and general themes such as common sense, reason and polite elegance. Any standard dictionary of literary terms will tell you that this was a period when neoclassical literary forms flourished, and that it was a time of

²⁸Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 14-38.

²⁹See Carol Barash, "The Native Liberty . . . of the Subject": Configurations of Gender and Authority in the Works of Mary Chudleigh, Sarah Fyge Egerton, and Mary Astell', in *Women, Writing, History: 1640-1799*, eds. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 55-69; Ruth Perry, 'The Veil of Chastity: Mary Astell's Feminism', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 9 (1979), 25-43; 'Two Forgotten Wits', *The Antioch Review*, 39 (1981), 431-38; 'Mary Astell and the Feminist Critique of Possessive Individualism', *ECS*, 23 (1990), 444-57; Catherine Sharrock, 'De-Ciphering Women and De-Scribing Authority: The Writings of Mary Astell', in *Women, Writing, History: 1640-1799*, eds. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 109-24; Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples, Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1982); "All men and both sexes": Concepts of Men's Development, Women's Education, and Feminism in the Seventeenth Century', in *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*, eds. Donald C. Mell, Theodore E.D. Braun, and Lucia M. Palmer (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1988), 75-84.

great 'elegance in writing, a time of harmony, decorum and proportion'.³⁰ What that same dictionary will leave out is the fact that the Augustan period saw the rise of many writers and genres that did not fall under one of the categories mentioned above. In particular, the Augustan age witnessed an increase in polemical women's writing, and Astell is now considered to be one of the preeminent women writers of this genre from this period.

Whether Astell was debating with John Norris about God's love or criticizing Locke's notion of 'thinking matter',³¹ she always maintained that women were rational beings created to serve God. For instance, in *The Christian Religion*, she states that

If God had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason, He wou'd not have given them any, for He does nothing in vain. If they are to use their Reason, certainly it ought to be employ'd about the noblest Objects, and in business of the greatest Consequence, therefore in Religion.³²

It was her inalienable belief in this basic premise that motivated her to encourage women to achieve educational autonomy so that they could ultimately achieve spiritual freedom. However, in the midst of what seems like a radical (feminist) ideology, one will discover that Astell was fundamentally conservative when it came to politics and religion. Reconciling seeming incongruities in her writings is particularly challenging for twentieth-century, feminist scholars who may find some of Astell's traditional political and religious beliefs unpalatable.

In relation to literature, history, religion and politics, Astell was strongly influenced by 'Enlightenment' thinking, even though she disagreed with some of its pivotal tenets, such as religious toleration and individual rights. Rather than religious toleration and class leveling, Astell

subscribed to the Enlightenment ideal of Universal Reason—that all people were endowed by their Creator with the capacity for thought. But this divinely granted Reason was to be directed first at understanding religious concepts and used in the service of straining to

³⁰J. A. Cuddon, ed., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1991), 66.

³¹Kathleen M. Squadrito, 'Mary Astell's Critique of Locke's View of Thinking Matter', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 433-9.

³²Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion, As Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* (London, R. Wilkin, 1705), 6.

understand God.³³

Like her contemporaries John Norris of Bemerton and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Astell was influenced by both Christian Platonism and Cartesian rationalism. She was politically aware of the repercussions and consequences on her society of the previous century's civil war, the Restoration, the Exclusion Crisis and subsequent Glorious Revolution, facts alluded to in her texts, especially in pamphlets she published on behalf of the Stuart-loyal Tories. In relation to women's issues, Astell seems forward-looking—the ideal early English feminist—but her belief in women's intellectual potential is firmly tied in with the tradition of an absolute monarchy and rigid class structure: 'Thus, in the very contradictions of her life and thought, she illustrates for us important cultural shifts of the era in which she lived.'³⁴

In terms of her theories on education, Astell was certainly not the first person to argue for improvements in women's education or for the establishment of an institution modeled after a nunnery. Astell had many predecessors from whom she could get ideas. A. H. Upham makes a note of the 'mass of kindred literature then appearing' in England after 1670 in defence of women and their right to education.³⁵ For example, in 1673 two texts with similar educational ideas to Astell's proposal appeared: *The Ladies Calling* by Richard Allestree and *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* by Basthua Makin. One can find textual echoes in Astell from both. In the preface to *The Ladies Calling*, Allestree says,

It may therefore upon this account be a necessary Charity to the Sex, to acquaint them with their own valu, animate them to som higher thoughts of themselves; not to yield their suffrage to those injurious estimates the World hath made of them, and from a supposed incapacity of nobler things to neglect the pursuit of them; from which God and Nature have no more precluded the Feminine, then the Masculine part of mankind.³⁶

Hence Allestree, too, believed that women were intelligent creatures meant to serve God and that it was necessary to motivate them to engage in rational and religious

³³Ruth Perry, 'Mary Astell's Response to the Enlightenment', in *Women and the Enlightenment*, eds., Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Phyllis Mack and Ruth Perry (New York: The Haworth Press, 1984), 14-5.

³⁴Perry, 'Astell's Response to the Enlightenment', 38.

³⁵Upham, 262.

³⁶Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling in Two Parts* (Oxford, 1673), B1^v.

thought. In *The Christian Religion*, Astell praises Allestree's stance on religious education for women when she says,

There are some peculiar Duties indeed, suited to their several conditions of Life, which so far as they relate to a Gentleman and to a Lady, are very Piously and Ingeniously describ'd, by an excellent Author in the *Gentleman's* and *Lady's Calling*, who does not suppose that they are to have different Religions; for their Creed must be the same and their Practice in the main, if they hope for the same End, even the Salvation of their Souls.³⁷

Makin's essay, already discussed in chapter one, opens with a curse upon Custom, and its negative effect on women's education:

Custom, when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of nature itself. The Barbarous custom to breed Women low, is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially amongst a sort of debauched Sots) that Women are not endued with such Reason, as Men; nor capable of improvement by Education, as they are.³⁸

Makin's characterization of Custom is particularly close to Astell's: the phrase 'it hath the force of nature' is reminiscent of Astell's reference to, 'Custom, that merciless torrent that carries all before'.³⁹ Astell had a wealth of antecedents from which she could have gleaned some of her basic concepts regarding women's inherent worth and the importance of education to their lives. Determining what seventeenth-century books Astell actually read is not as important as recognizing the fact that ideas about women's educational and spiritual needs could be found in dozens of texts in the last few decades of the seventeenth century.

Literary scholars coming into contact with Astell's texts for the first time may be surprised by what they read. Whilst Astell may have been at the forefront of much critical fanfare, as one of the earliest British feminists, her views do not easily fit into late twentieth-century feminist paradigms. Perry notes that 'whoever reads Astell carefully will not find a feminist heroine of the past with whom it is easy to identify.

³⁷Astell, *The Christian Religion*, 2.

³⁸Basthwa Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues. With an Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education* (London: J. D., 1673), 3; See also *The Augustan Reprint Society*, 202 (1980).

³⁹ASPI, 14.

The stamp of her ultraconservative attitudes are impressed on everything she wrote'.⁴⁰ With that caveat about Astell's conservatism in mind, she did make a crucial contribution to the debate over women's rationality and intellectual capacity at the turn of the eighteenth century. Although her ideas on education were not all new, her writings struck a chord—both positively and negatively—with many of her readers. In the growing, market-driven publishing world, controversial polemical texts could often be lucrative for booksellers. Thus the cyclical relationship between her own popularity/notoriety and the numerous reprints of her texts ensured that her ideas became incorporated into the general literary discourse at the turn of the eighteenth century. Moreover, her influence was enhanced when large parts of her texts, especially from *A Serious Proposal, Part II*, were pirated, a point which will be developed later in this chapter.

In her three best-known texts in defence of women, Astell's arguments take the form of highly-structured, rhetorically-sophisticated prose tracts in which she vehemently opposes the Custom of not giving gentlewomen decent educations.⁴¹ In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, she proposes that a vowless, Protestant monastery be established for gentlewomen so they can undertake religious educations cloistered from the temptations of society. This community would serve a dual purpose: it would provide a safe place for the daughters of wealthy families to be educated, most likely in preparation for marriage; and it would provide refuge and potential employment for gentlewomen who did not want to or could not afford to marry in accordance with their class station. Bridget Hill has argued that Astell was by no means original in her proposal for an English women's nunnery. Since 1539, when the last of the English nunneries were dissolved, many writers had lamented their disappearance not so much for religious reasons but rather for practical ones. Nunneries had been convenient places for wealthy families to keep their daughters

⁴⁰Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 13.

⁴¹For a discussion of Astell's use of classical rhetorical techniques, see Christine Mason Sutherland, 'Mary Astell: Reclaiming Rhetorica in the Seventeenth Century', in *Reclaiming Rhetorica. Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. by Andrea A. Lunsford (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 93-116.

safely confined before marriage. In an age when women were either 'married or to be married', Hill argues that Astell's proposal was original not for its suggestion that women needed better educations, but rather for its suggestion of 'spinsterhood as a real alternative to marriage'.⁴² Unmarried women were valuable in Astell's view because she believed that they, like anyone else, were created to love and serve God.

The education Astell imagines for her fellow gentlewomen is not intended to alter existing power relations between social classes or genders. Her monastery would only give 'the best Education to the Children of Persons of Quality'.⁴³ As for the gender roles associated with men and women, Astell says, 'We pretend not that Women shou'd teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow'd them; permit us only to understand our *own* duty, and not be forc'd to take it upon trust from others'.⁴⁴ It becomes clear that Astell fears for the salvation of her fellow gentlewomen; her main motivation for wanting to establish a religious institution for them is so that women could come to understand what it is to be a true Christian and be able 'to give a Reason *why*' they are so.⁴⁵ Women, she believes, could only prepare properly for the hereafter if they rationally understood their faith in God. Her belief that women were rational beings meant to serve God is what makes her plead so ardently for improvements in their education. Hence the crux of Astell's ideology is explicitly Cartesian in nature. She makes a distinction between the material world and the metaphysical one. As Bryson states:

One of the main reasons why women, such as Astell, had so widely accepted and embraced Descartes's philosophy was "that his rules and method for discerning truth could be used by anyone, of either sex. His dualistic separation of mind and body strengthened the Augustinian concept of mind as a place 'where there is no sex'". By dividing the body from the essence of an individual (the rational, "thinking thing"), the corporeal extension could be construed as nothing more than a meaningless dwelling place.⁴⁶

Descartes' dualism was adopted by many protofeminist writers like Astell because it

⁴²Bridget Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', *Past and Present*, 117 (1987), 109.

⁴³*ASPI*, 39.

⁴⁴*Ibid*, 23-4.

⁴⁵*Ibid*, 16.

⁴⁶Bryson, 46. The internal quotation comes from Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Version and submersions of rational discourse in the old regime* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3.

enabled them to distinguish between their material and spiritual existence. Although in the material world, men and women were still considered unequal, Cartesian protofeminists latched onto the notion that minds and souls were free, equal and sexless.

Most likely influenced by Restoration wit and satire, Astell lays out her proposal with rhetorical acumen. For instance, she frequently uses satire and irony simultaneously to expose gender inequalities. In the passage below, Astell juxtaposes reason and folly. In the voice of Reason, she carefully fashions her prose to inspire gentlewomen to abandon their frivolous lives of leisure. She asserts that women's alleged intellectual feebleness is learned and not inherent:

The Incapacity, if there be any, is acquired not natural... Women are from their very Infancy debar'd those Advantages, with the want of which, they are afterwards reproached, and nursed up in those Vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them. So partial are Men as to expect Brick where they afford no Straw; and so abundantly civil as to take care we shou'd make good that obliging Epithet of *Ignorant*, which out of an excess of good Manners, they are pleas'd to bestow on us!⁴⁷

Astell's biting irony serves to emphasize the basic inequalities between men and women and the unreasonableness of attaching the 'Epithet of *Ignorant*' to women, especially since they were habitually denied educational opportunities. She uses this technique repeatedly in her proposal to highlight how reasonable the idea of a religious education for women is and how irrational (and tyrannical) the social custom of under-educating them is. She says, "Tis Custom therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very contrary to our *present* interest and pleasure, as well as to our Future'.⁴⁸ In fact, Astell goes so far as to equate 'Custom' with the pestilence of a flood or the blindness of a raging river that stops for nothing and no one and holds it (and people who capitulate to it) responsible for perpetuating vices in society: 'Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education, lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up. Custom, that merciless torrent that carries all before'.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ASPI, 9-10.

⁴⁸Ibid, 15.

⁴⁹Ibid, 14.

Throughout her proposal, Astell claims more credibility for her arguments by asserting that God would never create a creature in vain. She also claims that God gives women rational souls and questions why they are prevented from developing them: 'For since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?'.⁵⁰ She reiterates this belief in *The Christian Religion* as well,

A Christian Woman therefore must not be a *Child in Understanding*; she must serve GOD with *Understanding* as well as with *Affection*, must love Him with all her *Mind and Soul*, as well as with all her *Heart and Strength*; in a word, must perform a *reasonable Service* if she means to be acceptable to her Maker.⁵¹

Furthermore, second to her religious motivations, her designs are what Browne refers to as being 'instrumentally feminist'. Astell claims that well-educated wives and mothers would benefit society as a whole:

One would be apt to think indeed, that Parents shou'd take all possible care of their Childrens Education, not only for *their* sakes, but even for their *own*. And tho' the Son convey the Name to Posterity, yet certainly a great Part of the Honour of their Families depends on their Daughters. 'Tis the kindness of Education that binds our duty fastest on us.⁵²

Regardless of her motivations for wanting to establish an educational haven for gentlewomen and despite her finding potential funding for it from a powerful woman patron, Astell's Protestant nunnery failed to materialize—perhaps on the grounds that it seemed too Popish. In a letter to George Ballard, dated 13 July 1738, Elizabeth Elstob wrote,

I don't remember that I ever heard Mrs Astell mention the Good Lady's name, you desire to know, but I very well remember, she told me, it was Bishop Burnet that prevented that good Design by diswading that Lady from encouraging it.⁵³

Despite his alleged interference with Astell's plans for a monastery at the turn of the century, Burnet later responded positively to the general idea in print. In the posthumously published *History of His Own Time*, Burnet says,

The ill Methods of Schools and Colleges give the chief Rise to the

⁵⁰ASPI, 22.

⁵¹Astell, *The Christian Religion*, 6.

⁵²ASPI, 10.

⁵³BOD, MSS Ballard 43, fol. 53^r.

Irregularities of the Gentry; as the breeding young Women to Vanity, Dressing and a false Appearance of Wit and Behaviour, without proper Work or a due Measure of Knowledge and a serious Sense of Religion, is the Source of the Corruption of that Sex: Something like Monasteries without Vows would be a glorious Design, and might be so set on foot, as to be the Honour of a Queen on the Throne: But I will pursue this no further.⁵⁴

In response to the reception of her proposal, Astell published *A Serious Proposal, Part II* in 1697. *Part II* serves two main purposes: Astell tells her women readers how to educate themselves at home and she responds to the critics of the first part of *A Serious Proposal*. In *Part II*, Astell endeavours to put into 'Practice' what she mentions in *Part I*, and, in four chapters, she supplies her readers with a detailed outline of how they should educate themselves. As in *Part I*, Astell attempts to motivate her women readers into action:

Can you be in Love with servitude and folly? Can you dote on a mean, ignorant and ignoble Life? An Ingenious Woman is no Prodigy to be star'd on, for you have it in your power to inform the World, that you can every one of you be so, if you please your selves.⁵⁵

Her reasons for wanting women to become enlightened Christians are also reiterated in *A Serious Proposal, Part II*: 'the Grand Business that Women as well as Men have to do in this World [is] to prepare for the next'.⁵⁶ Aside from targeting potential women proselytes, Astell also challenges critics of *A Serious Proposal, Part I*. Astell says in the introduction to *Part II* that 'she is very indifferent [to] what the Critics say, if the Ladies receive any Advantage by her attempts to serve them'.⁵⁷ *Part II* is not only significant for its more in-depth advice to women on how to gain intellectual 'Freedom', but also for its engagement with Cartesian rationalism. In each of the four chapters, Astell methodically takes the precepts of *Part I*—that women, by custom, are 'nursed up' in folly and vice—to a higher philosophical level. She challenges Locke and Hobbes and, as her most recent editor notes, Astell

⁵⁴Gilbert Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time. Vol. II. From the Revolution to the Conclusion of the Treaty of Peace at Utrecht, in the Reign of Queen Anne* (London: Joseph Dowing and Henry Woodfall, 1734), II, 653.

⁵⁵*ASPII*, 72.

⁵⁶*Ibid*, 147.

⁵⁷*Ibid*, 71.

entered a metaphysical thicket far above the plane of educational theory, joining the company of René Descartes (1596-1650), Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), Antoine Arnauld (1612-94), Pierre Nicole (1625-95) and Locke himself, in a full-scale debate over the consequences of the Cartesian *cogito*.⁵⁸

The ingeniousness of her tract is reflected in the fact that a large portion of it was plagiarized⁵⁹ ^{in a contemporary publication.} With no reference to Astell, over 140 pages of *Part II* were used in *The Ladies Library* (1714), which was published by Richard Steele. Astell publicly draws attention to the piracy in the advertisement to the 1722 edition of *An Enquiry After Wit* (originally published in 1709 as *Bart'lemy Fair*) when she says of *A Serious Proposal, Part II*,

*our honest Compiler [she is referring to the editor of The Tatler, Richard Steele] has made an honourable Amends to the Author, (I know not what he has to the Book-seller) by transcribing above an hundred Pages in to his Ladies Library, verbatim; except in a few Places, which if the Reader takes the Trouble to compare, perhaps he will not find improv'd.*⁶⁰

Because of this expropriation, *The Ladies Library* ensured that some of Astell's main tenets would be continuously present in the minds of eighteenth-century readers, especially since it went through eight impressions by 1772 and was also translated into Dutch and French.⁶¹ With its continuous publication one can begin to see, albeit indirectly, how Astell's polemic in defence of women *anticipates* Mary Wollstonecraft in the later half of the century.

Astell claims to have been motivated to write her third polemical tract in defence of women, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), after reading the scandalous divorce case of the Duchess of Mazarine, who had run away from her despotic husband in France to live in England. As in parts I and II of *A Serious Proposal*, in *Reflections upon Marriage*, her defence of women may not be completely palatable to the modern reader. Astell believed that women, once married,

⁵⁸ *AST*, xvii-xviii.

⁵⁹ See Richard H. Dammers, 'Richard Steele and *The Ladies Library*', *Philological Quarterly*, 62 (1983), 530-6.

⁶⁰ Mary Astell, *An Enquiry After Wit: Wherein the Trifling Arguing and Impious Raillery of the Late Earl of Shaftsbury, In his Letter concerning Enthusiasm, and other Profane Writers, Are fully Answer'd, and justly Exposed*, 2nd ed. (London: John Bateman, 1722), A2^v.

⁶¹ Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 230.

had to tolerate whatever their husbands did and should not expect '*settled* Happiness in this present World'.⁶² Astell believed that the only freedom worth having, for men or women, was freedom of the mind and that it should be used to improve religious comprehension so as to gain rewards in heaven.

Astell begins *Reflections* by warning her readers that under-educated and ill-prepared women could be involved in more Mazarine-like scandals. Astell proceeds to explain how to avoid such scandals in a critique of the current state of marriage. It was not holy matrimony that was problematic for Astell but rather the poor choices made by both men and women in the marriage market (i.e. such as marrying for money, beauty or wit). Astell believed that women who were given the right sort of education and guidance in making appropriate choices could be 'reasonable' wives:

But according to the rate that young Women are Educated, according to the way their Time is spent, they are destin'd to Folly and Impertinence, to say no worse, and which is yet more inhuman, they are blam'd for that ill Conduct they are not suffer'd to avoid, and reproach'd for those Faults they are in a manner forc'd into.⁶³

For Astell a sound religious education was the answer to almost all of women's problems and consequently problems associated with marriage. She later restates the tenet that 'the foundation indeed ought to be laid deep and strong, she shou'd be made a good Christian and understand why she is so, and then she will be everything else that is Good'.⁶⁴ She believed that women who were well-versed in their Christian duties would possess the skills with which to uphold their reason, virtue and patience, even if they happened to find themselves in the worst of marriages. She also makes it clear that women who cannot readily submit to their husbands whilst maintaining their dignity will never be fit for marriage:

A Woman that is not Mistress of her Passions, that cannot patiently submit even when Reason suffers with her, who does not practice Passive Obedience to the utmost, will never be acceptable to such an absolute Sovereign as a Husband.⁶⁵

In the political atmosphere of the early eighteenth century words such as 'Passive

⁶²*RUM*, 37.

⁶³*Ibid*, 65.

⁶⁴*Ibid*, 74.

⁶⁵*Ibid*, 61.

Obedience' and 'absolute Sovereign' remind us that power struggles within a family often reflected conflict in the state. Although Astell criticizes inequalities between men in the state and women in the family, there is no doubt that she believes in traditional power structures and urges women to accept familial confines if they do choose to marry.

Astell does not attempt to challenge the physical and material inequalities between a husband and a wife but rather the spiritual and intellectual ones. As Bryson points out, 'Astell simply wants each woman to move beyond her designation as "female" to nongendered reasoning and pure rationality in a disembodied "self"'.⁶⁶ Only a wife who could overcome metaphysical inequalities to achieve intellectual autonomy through religious education would be able to tolerate the physical and material inequalities between her and her husband. Astell sums up her admonitions to women about their need to be able to tolerate complete submission in the following statement:

She then who Marrys ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her Husband must govern absolutely and intirely, and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey. She must not attempt to divide his Authority, or so much as dispute it, to struggle with her Yoke will only make it gall the more...She who can't do this is no way fit to be a Wife.⁶⁷

Despite her statements about her belief in the sanctity of marriage and the necessity of it to propagate England, Astell comes to the rather radical conclusion that it is not always 'good for a Woman to Marry'.⁶⁸

In the third and best-known edition of *Reflections*, published in 1706, Astell added her famous preface. Both Bryson and Springborg make the case that Astell, in this third edition, became one of the earliest critics of Locke after Charles Leslie, who published *The New Association, Part II* in 1703.⁶⁹ Springborg goes so far as to claim that *Reflections* is 'a truly political work whose target is less the injustice of traditional Christian marriage than the absurdity of voluntarism on which the social contract

⁶⁶Bryson, 55.

⁶⁷*RUM*, 62.

⁶⁸*Ibid*, 77.

⁶⁹Astell also attacks Locke's materialistic philosophy in *The Christian Religion*; see Bryson, 44-6.

theory is predicated'.⁷⁰ Springborg, however, overstates her case. Astell does take Locke's theories to task in her 1706 preface, especially when she calls attention to the double standards between the macrocosm of the social contract and the microcosm of the marriage contract:

Again, if Absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State, how comes it to be so in a Family? or if in a Family why not in a State; since no Reason can be alledg'd for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other? If the Authority of the Husband so far as it extends, is sacred and inalienable, why not of the Prince? The Domestic Sovereign is without Dispute Elected, and the Stipulations and Contract are mutual, is it not then partial in Men to the last degree, to contend for, and practise that Arbitrary Dominion in their Families, which they abhor and exclaim against in the State?⁷¹

What becomes apparent to Astell's readers is that she believes all men and women are subject to various hierarchies under the state, the church and, ultimately, God.

Astell's true motivations for writing *Reflections* is not for 'the liberation of women but the rather more dismal prospect of obedience to authority as a duty for everyone'.⁷²

What Springborg loses sight of is that Astell's original reason for writing her polemical tract—defending women's right to seek salvation—never wavers. Her defence of women is inextricably bound up in the belief that 'embracing the absolute'⁷³ will lead to freedom in the afterlife:

and if any Woman think her self Injur'd, she has a Remedy in reserve which few Men will Envy or endeavour to Rob her of, the Exercise and Improvement of her Vertue here, and the Reward of it hereafter.⁷⁴

Astell's thesis, which may seem contradictory to some modern readers for its justification of social hierarchies, stipulates that material subjection in this life will be rectified with freedom in the next.

Limits of the Astellian Context:

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries an ongoing debate over women, especially in relation to education and marriage, occurred in England

⁷⁰*RUM*, xxviii.

⁷¹*Ibid*, 17.

⁷²*Ibid*, 4.

⁷³Gallagher, 24.

⁷⁴*RUM*, 80.

and throughout the rest of Europe, in which both men and women participated. Despite the number of writers engaging in protofeminist debate at the turn of the eighteenth century, Astell has received a high proportion of attention from current scholars for her contributions. As previously stated, they seem convinced that Astell was the foremost protofeminist of her time and that contemporary women writing in defence of their sex were mere imitators. Although by no means the only one, a good example of this overzealous emphasis on Astell's significance can be found in Perry's literary biography of her. Perry credits Astell with motivating almost all protofeminists writing at the turn of the century. Furthermore, she refers to Astell's contemporaries as imitators and echoes and ignores the possibility that they may have been innovators in their own right or of there being a wider context in which to read them. She claims that:

A Serious Proposal had an enormous impact on the contemporary women who read it. Such women as Judith Drake, Lady Damaris Masham, Elizabeth Thomas, Lady Mary Chudleigh, Elizabeth Elstob and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu—these we know of—were encouraged by her book to think of women as a misunderstood and oppressed class of people. Their lives were changed by Astell's texts and by her example; she showed them how to take themselves seriously as thinkers and writers.⁷⁵

Whilst Astell *was* influential, scholars interested in turn-of-the-eighteenth-century, protofeminist writers should consider a wider context. Astell was not ^{only} the factor that induced other women to write in defence of their sex. Below is one example of the shortcomings of reading a protofeminist text primarily as an Astellian imitation.

According to Perry, Judith Drake, author of *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696), was Astell's 'first imitator'.⁷⁶ Ironically, authorship of this text has long been associated with Astell; however, it is now widely accepted to be by Drake, whose biographical details are outlined in chapter one. At a quick glance, one can see how Drake's essay might be mistaken for an Astellian imitation: Drake's tone is overtly protofeminist and she published it only two years after *A Serious Proposal*. Upon closer inspection, however, Perry's analysis is not completely accurate. Whilst

⁷⁵Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 106.

⁷⁶Ibid, 106.

Drake may have read Astell's *A Serious Proposal*, she was not overtly responding to or imitating it at all. Drake's most recent editor, Hannah Smith, notes,

Astell's stature as a feminist theorist has ensured that *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* has frequently been viewed only in the context of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. However, it is equally vital to see *An Essay in Defence* as belonging to the tradition of feminist writing represented by [William] Walsh and [Nahum] Tate.⁷⁷

Rather than an echo or imitator of Astell, Drake's feminist apologetic is actually a corrective response to William Walsh's text, *A Dialogue Concerning Women, being a Defence of the Sex, Written to Eugenia* (1691).⁷⁸ Drake seems particularly annoyed with his charge that women's conversation is dangerous.⁷⁹ In his *Defence*, Walsh's pro-woman speaker, Philogynes, the opponent of Misogynes, recounts the accomplishments of a few women throughout history, but Drake accuses Walsh of falsely defending women; unconvinced by his sincerity, Drake says,

'Tis true, a Feint of something of this Nature was made three or four Years since by one; but how much soever his Eugenia may be oblig'd to him, I am of Opinion the rest of her Sex are but little beholding to him. For as you rightly observ'd, *Madam*, he has taken more care to give an Edge to his Satyr, than Force to his Apology; he has play'd a sham Prize, and receives more thrusts than he makes; and like a false Renegade fights under our Colours only for a fairer Opportunity of betraying us...He levels his Scandal at the whole Sex, and thinks us sufficiently fortified, if out of the Story of Two Thousand Years he has been able to pick up a few Examples of Women illustrious for their Wit, Learning or Vertue, and Men infamous for the contrary.

Drake's tirade against Walsh's 'sham' defence of women continues with a further complaint against his method of listing only a few memorable women from the past that do not represent women overall.

I have neither Learning, nor Inclination to make a Precedent, or indeed any use of Mr. W's. labour'd Common Place Book; and shall leave Pedants and School-Boys to rake and tumble the Rubbish of Antiquity, and muster all the *Heroes* and *Heroines* they can find to furnish matter for some wretched Harangue, or stuff a miserable Declamation with instead of Sense or Argument.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Judith Drake, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*, ed. by Hannah Smith (Exeter: The Rota, forthcoming in 2000). Smith is referring to Walsh's, *A Dialogue Concerning Women, being a Defence of the Sex, Written to Eugenia* (1691), and Tate's, *A Present for the Ladies: Being an Historical Vindication of the Female Sex* (1692).

⁷⁸Brenda Tooley, "'Like a False Renegade': The Ends and Means of Feminist Apologetics in *A Dialogue Concerning Women* and *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*", *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 32 (1995), 157-77.

⁷⁹William Walsh, *A Dialogue Concerning Women, Being A Defence of the Sex. Written to Eugenia* (London: R. Bentley and J. Tonson, 1691), 1.

⁸⁰Judith Drake, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex . In which are inserted the Characters of a*

In contrast to Walsh, Drake's defence concentrates on the value of women's domestic contribution in contemporary society, although her essay also includes *exempla* of male characters whom she satirizes. Brenda Tooley argues that Drake's argument whilst seemingly simplistic is actually rather subversive: 'Her argument involves radical change only in that she consistently refuses to overvalue those skills and spheres of activity that men esteem'.⁸¹ Unlike Astell, who urges women to concentrate on their spiritual development, Drake is more concerned with women's material existence and considers—in a direct riposte to Walsh—'whether the Time an ingenious Gentleman spends in the Company of Women, may justly be said to be misemploy'd, or not?'.⁸² Even more striking is the fact that, early on in her essay, Drake specifically states that she does 'not intend' to make her defence 'a religious Argument'.⁸³

Although Drake acknowledges the ill effects of Custom on women, she does not demand access to formal education for them in the way Astell did. The education Drake recommends for women is, at its core, social and practical, which is very different from Astell's ideal of seclusion in a Protestant monastery. For Drake, the greatest education could be had through life experience, everyday conversation in mixed company and reading widely in books from the English language. Drake and Astell also differ stylistically. Whilst Astell's proposal owed much to the tradition of classical rhetoric, both Drake's and Walsh's texts contain elements of verse satire and *querelle des femmes*.⁸⁴ David Buchanan points out that writers of the late seventeenth century combined these two genres to create a new hybrid genre in their debates about men and women:

Works in the satiric debate, which consist of attacks on women (by men) and defences of women and counterattacks on men (by men and women), were mostly in verse (although some were in prose). They

Pedant, a Squire, A Beau, A Vertuoso; A Poetaster; A City-Critick, &c. In a Letter to a Lady. Written by a Lady (London: A. Roper et al., 1696), 4-5.

⁸¹Tooley, 169.

⁸²Drake, 5.

⁸³Ibid, 11.

⁸⁴The tradition of *querelle des femmes* dates back to Mediaeval and Renaissance debates about women in which writers debated the virtues and vices of women with hypothetical antagonists. See Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 2-28.

take the form of either a dialogue or a speaker/persona addressing an opponent (real or hypothetical). Employing elements of both the classical judicial oration and stock rhetorical techniques of antifeminist verse satire, these works address the nature of 'woman' and 'man', in general, using *exempla* and stereotypes; also they sometimes attack categories of men or women, or individuals. The resulting mixed form is a curious combination of rant and rational critique; elaborate rhetorical argument and name-calling; scholarship and dirty jokes. The satiric debate is part literary game and part genuine attempt at social reform.⁸⁵

Buchanan specifically refers to Drake's and Walsh's texts as prose examples of this hybrid genre. Thus even though Astell and Drake fundamentally agree that women suffer from defects in their educations, Drake's suggested reforms and writing style are distinct from Astell's. Scholars do Drake's *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* a disservice if they read it only in relation to Astell. She was not merely an Astellian imitation, but rather one of many writers who participated in a general debate about women at the turn of eighteenth century.

Drake is not the only early women writer whose protofeminist texts have been overshadowed by twentieth-century interpretations of Astell. Mary, Lady Chudleigh and Elizabeth Thomas are usually considered as mere Astellian disciples as well.⁸⁶ Perry states that Chudleigh 'echoed Astell's celebration of the mind and rejection of the world' and that Thomas 'was still another contemporary writer who followed in Astell's footsteps'.⁸⁷ Chudleigh and Thomas were impressed by Astell, but they deserve to be reconsidered in a wider context.

Proof of Chudleigh's and Thomas' regard for Astell can be found in the panegyrics they both wrote to her called 'Almystrea', an anagram of Mary Astell.⁸⁸ In 'To *Almystrea*', Chudleigh, under the guise of her pen name, Marissa, idolizes and thanks Astell for her texts written on behalf of women: 'Permit *Marissa* in an artless

⁸⁵Information came from David Buchanan, 'Sharper Answers: Women's Contributions to the Late Seventeenth-Century Satiric Debate about Women', unpublished thesis chapter from the University of Alberta.

⁸⁶Chudleigh's and Thomas' texts will be discussed in much more detail in subsequent chapters.

⁸⁷Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 107 and 111.

⁸⁸These titles are unique to Chudleigh and Thomas. They may have collaborated—a subject that will be discussed in more detail later on.

Lay/To speak her Wonder, and her Thanks repay'.⁸⁹ Chudleigh articulates how reading Astell inspires her to write:

But taught by you, she [Marissa] may at length improve,
And imitate those Virtues she admires.
Your bright Example leaves a Tract Divine,
She sees a beamy Brightness in each Line,
And with ambitious Warmth aspires,
Attracted by the Glory of your Name,
To follow you in all the lofty Roads of Fame.⁹⁰

Likewise, in her panegyric, '*To Almystrea, on her Divine Works*', Thomas also responds by thanking Astell for her defence of women:

Too Long! indeed, has been our Sex decry'd,
And ridicul'd by Men's *malignant Pride*;
Who fearing of a just Return forbore,
And made it criminal to teach us more.
That *Women* had no *Souls*, was their Pretence,
And *Women's* Spelling past for *Women's* Sense.
When you, most generous *Heroine!* stood forth,
And show'd your Sex's *Aptitude* and *Worth*.
Were it no more! yet you bright *Maid* alone,
Might for a World of *Vanity* atone!
Redeem the coming Age! and set us free
From the false Brand of *Incapacity*.⁹¹

Thomas, too, evidently felt Astell's writings vindicated women's intellectual and spiritual worth. Her words, 'Too Long! indeed, has been our Sex decry'd' reveals her relief in reading a woman writer who was willing to criticize women's intellectual subordination. Based on the compliments found in these two panegyrics, it is evident that Chudleigh and Thomas greatly admired Astell. However, both Chudleigh and Thomas wrote panegyrics to many other people, including John Dryden, John Norris of Bemerton, and many other women, some of whom are known only by their pseudonyms. To read Chudleigh and Thomas solely in light of Dryden and his translations of Latin texts would be narrow-minded indeed, just as reading them only in relation to Astell is.

There is no doubt that Astell had a significant impact on protofeminism at the turn of the eighteenth century, but she was not the only factor that induced women

⁸⁹*POSO*, 66.

⁹⁰*Ibid*, 66.

⁹¹*MP*, 219.

writers to publish in defence of their sex. And although Astellian critics such as Bülbring would like scholars to believe that 'Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and [John Stuart] Mill form a perfect gradation towards perfection' in relation to the development of feminism, protofeminist texts by women did not stop developing with Astell and then remain dormant as a genre until the arrival of Mary Wollstonecraft.⁹² In response to the biased view that Chudleigh and Thomas were mere Astellian echoes, their lives and writings will be reconsidered in the next three chapters.

⁹²Bülbring, 22.

Chapter Three:

'The Rules of right Reason'¹

Mary, Lady Chudleigh's Indefatigable Defence of Women

'Twas thine O CHUDLEIGH (name for ever dear
 Whilst wit and virtue claim the lay sincere!)
 Boldly t'assert great Nature's equal laws,
 And plead thy helpless injur'd sex's cause:
 For that, thy fame shall undecaying bloom,
 And flow'rs unfading grow around thy tomb.²

'Tis impossible to be happy without making Reason the
 Standard of all our Thoughts, Words and Actions, and
 firmly resolving to yield a constant, ready, and cheerful
 Obedience to its Dictates. Those who are govern'd by
 Opinion, inslav'd to Custom, and Vassals to their
 Humors, are Objects of Pity, if such as are wretched by
 their own Choice, can be properly said to deserve
 Commiseration.³

'She was a lady of great virtue as well as great understanding', who, by 'her own love of books, her great industry in the reading of them and her great capacity to improve herself by them enabled her to make a very considerable figure among the literati of her time', wrote George Ballard in praise of Mary, Lady Chudleigh in *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752).⁴ His adulation of her, combined with the polemical nature of some of her poetry, was largely responsible for her lasting—albeit marginalized—standing in literary history. From the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, her reputation has endured through a handful of anthologies and biographical dictionaries under various appellations, including a 'Great Lady', a 'Female Worthy', a 'British Poetess', and, ultimately, in the late twentieth century, a 'First Feminist'. Since the 1980s, in particular, feminist literary critics have been interested in her polemical poetry, especially *The Ladies Defence*

¹Mary, Lady Chudleigh, *Essays upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse* (1710), in *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed. by Margaret J. M. Ezell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 249.

²Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate; A Poem, Occasioned by reading Mr. Duncombe's Feminead* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1774), 14-15.

³POSO, 44.

⁴George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences* (1752), ed. by Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 353.

(1701) and 'To the Ladies' (1703), because of its protofeminist themes. They usually classify her as being part of the early feminist movement associated with Mary Astell—what A. H. Upham referred to as a 'large and well-defined movement, an early "liberation-war" of the sex'.⁵ Chudleigh enjoyed respect and praise in her own lifetime, for both her protofeminist and devotional writing, but, unlike Astell, she did not seem to court quite as much controversy. Chudleigh also had an acerbic wit, but her writings were slightly more accessible in style and content as well as being much less politically factional than Astell's. Moreover, whilst Chudleigh and Astell were both devout Anglicans, unlike her contemporary Chudleigh expressed a certain amount of religious tolerance in her writings. Despite obvious differences, many late twentieth-century scholars, as discussed in the previous chapter, have dismissed Chudleigh and other contemporary women protofeminists as being mere Astellian disciples. This chapter attempts to redress the shortcomings of current feminist historiography and literary criticism concerning Chudleigh's life and writings, by exploring her unique contribution to protofeminism in the early eighteenth century. On 12 November 1743, Thomas Rawlins wrote to Ballard to recommend Chudleigh for his book of worthy women; he reported that Chudleigh was 'ye Author of Several admirable Poems & other useful Discourses', who was known 'for rare Wit, Learning & Eloquence as well as Piety and Virtue [and] was justly esteemed ye Hon^r. & Glory of her Sex'.⁶ Although Astell and Chudleigh shared many beliefs and influences, Chudleigh was not merely an Astellian echo—she left a protofeminist legacy in her own right.

 Titled through marriage and a gentlewomen by birth, Chudleigh had distinguished ancestors. As a privileged gentlewoman, she enjoyed involvement in London and Bath literary circles, as well as living much of her life at her husband's country seat in Devon. She was politically, religiously, philosophically, historically

⁵A. H. Upham, 'English *Femmes Savantes* at the end of the Seventeenth Century', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 12 (1913), 262.

⁶BOD, MSS Ballard 41/2/12, fol., 250^r.

and scientifically literate, and was involved in manuscript circulation, correspondence networks and print culture.⁷ Although none of her writings seem to have survived in manuscript, a few of her letters are still held in the Bodleian and British Libraries. Her first printed publication was *The Ladies Defence* in 1701; *Poems on Several Occasions* was published in 1703 and again in 1709 with *The Ladies Defence* attached. This version, with minor changes, was reprinted in 1713, 1722 and 1750. *Essays upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse* was published in 1710. These writings range in tone, form and genre from epistles, lyrics, pindaric odes, satires, pastoral dialogues, religious paraphrases to didactic and devotional essays. If one considers the extant material evidence, a picture begins to emerge of a woman who, despite living a large part of her life in physical and geographical retirement, actively participated in many aspects of Augustan culture.

The typical late twentieth-century biographical sketch of Chudleigh, however, usually reads differently from the dynamic description above. After interpreting much of her protofeminist writings biographically, many scholars have come to the conclusion that she was bitter towards men and unhappily married. A recent feminist critic noted that 'writers about Chudleigh, even feminist writers, have often assumed that bitter personal experience inspired her critique of marriage'.⁸ Despite the proliferation of autobiographical interpretations of her poems, little is really known about Chudleigh's life. To date Margaret J. M. Ezell provides the most extensive biographical sketch in her edition of Chudleigh's writings.⁹

Mary, Lady Chudleigh was born Mary Lee to Richard and Mary (née Sydenham) Lee in the summer of 1656 and was baptized on 19 August of the same

⁷I refer to Paula McDowell's use of the term 'politically literate' where women had an 'active involvement' in the acquisition of knowledge rather than a passive political consciousness in *The Women of Grub Street. Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 11.

⁸Marilyn L. Williamson, *Raising Their Voices. British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 321, n. 29.

⁹In February 1999, I undertook research at the Devon Record Office and the West Country Studies Library. I also visited the villages of Ashton and Chudleigh and was fortunate to be able to explore the mediaeval courtyard house, Place Barton, in Ashton, the country seat of Mary, Lady Chudleigh's husband, Sir George Chudleigh, Bart., now owned by Sir John and Lady Emma Birkin. In May 1999, I went to research the family papers held at the large country estate, Ugbrooke House, owned by the fourteenth Lord Clifford, Baron of Chudleigh, whose ancestors were related to Chudleigh's husband through marriage.

year.¹⁰ She had two brothers, William (1661-66) and Richard (1676-1701) and a sister, Martha (baptized 14 December 1672-buried 24 December 1672), all of whom she outlived.¹¹ Both sides of her family were 'good stock'. Her mother's family, from Wynford Eagle, Dorset, had been active in the Civil War on the Parliamentary side; moreover, ^{one of} her mother's uncle^s was the distinguished Dr. Thomas Sydenham, friend of Richard Boyle and physician to Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway. Her father's side of the family, the Lees of Winslade, Devon, had been wealthy landowners since the early seventeenth century, as can be confirmed by the number of leases and releases that survive in Richard Lee's name.¹² Aside from these details, very little is known about Chudleigh's early life, but according to a memoir written by one of her descendants and sent to George Ballard, she was well educated and encouraged in her intellectual pursuits from an early age by both her parents.¹³

With 'her father's consent', on 25 March 1674, at Clyst St. George, Devon, Mary Lee married George Chudleigh of Ashton, who became the third Baronet in 1691 upon his father's death.¹⁴ Chudleigh's biographers have made much of the grief this marriage allegedly caused her. For instance, as late as 1993, in the *Oxford Guide to British Women Writers*, Chudleigh is described as having a 'marriage [that] was not happy'.¹⁵ However, in a letter to Thomas, dated 8 October 1703, Chudleigh, who was considering wintering in London, writes, 'I believe I shall not, because I find Sir George will not leave the Country, and 'twill be Melancholly for me to be alone in Lodgings, it tired me the last Winter'.¹⁶ From this quotation, one is left with the distinct impression that Chudleigh and her husband did care for each other. Whatever the actual emotional circumstances between Chudleigh and her husband, there is no

¹⁰*The Registers of Clyst St. George, co. Devon 1565-1812*, transcribed by Rev. John Lomax Gibbs (London: Printed Privately for the Parish Register Society, 1899), 41.

¹¹*The Registers of Clyst St. George*, 46, 54 and 52.

¹²DRO, MS 53/6/Box 35: 32-35; MS 53/6/Box 36: 1-2.

¹³BOD, MSS. Ballard 74, fol. 301^r.

¹⁴*The Registers of Clyst St. George*, 53. In *London Marriage Licences 1521-1869*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1887), 279, Joseph Foster lists their marriage as taking place on 21 February 1673/4.

¹⁵*The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 102.

¹⁶*Whartoniana: or, Miscellanies, in Verse and Prose. By the Wharton Family, and Several other Persons of Distinction. Never before published*, 2 vols (London: Edmund Curll, 1727), II, 113-4 and HL, 253.

doubt where she believed her duty lay. In the preface to *The Ladies Defence*, she states,

And tho' 'tis extreamly difficult, yet I woul'd advise 'em [wives] to pay 'em [husbands] as much Respect, and to obey their Commands with as much readiness, as if they were they best and most indearing Husbands in the World.¹⁷

Rather than a love match, it is quite possible that Mary Lee's marriage to George Chudleigh was some sort of a business arrangement between himself and her father, Richard Lee, both of whom were involved in numerous land deals in Devon and Cornwall. The Devon Record Office holds records of their collaboration in overseeing a marriage settlement (not for Mary Lee) on 1 September 1676 and an 'Exemplification of a Common Recovery', dated 4 July 1677.¹⁸ It is not surprising that two local, prominent families united through marriage; well into the eighteenth century, marriages were still arranged to benefit families socially and financially. Unfortunately Mary Lee's actual marriage settlement does not survive, so those interested will never know the exact amount settled upon her. There is extant evidence, however, to suggest that her father had provided her with a very generous dowry, which would have made Mary Lee an attractive match for George Chudleigh.

Collateral evidence that suggests Mary Lee was well provided for upon her marriage to George Chudleigh survives in the will of her father, dated 30 January 1702/3. Richard Lee, senior, bequeathed almost everything he owned to the widow of his son Richard (1676-1701), Agnes Lee and her children Richard and Mary, whilst he bequeathed only a token amount to his daughter, Mary and her sons: 'I give and bequeath unto Dame Mary Chudleigh my daughter and to George and Thomas her sons and to each of them one guinea of gold'.¹⁹ Aside from long-standing tradition of entailing property to the eldest son and his heirs, it seems quite likely that Mary, Lady Chudleigh would have *already* been provided for in her dowry when she wed in 1674. Moreover, in the same will Richard Lee, senior, set aside £1500 for when his granddaughter, Mary, turned eighteen, a good indication of the amount he would have

¹⁷TLD, 5.

¹⁸DRO, MS 49/1/75/2: 3 and MS 49/1/76/1.

¹⁹PRO, PCC, PROB 11/477/175, fol. 350.

provided for his daughter twenty-seven years earlier. Further anecdotal evidence of Chudleigh's financial standing exists in the Muniment room at Ugbrooke House, near the village of Chudleigh, in boxes organized by the Devon Record Office for the current (fourteenth) Lord Clifford. A receipt survives signed 'Mary Chudleigh', dated 1694, for money she received from Hugh, the second Lord Clifford, Baron of Chudleigh (1663-1730) and Elizabeth (née Martyn), Lady Dowager Clifford (c.1630-1709) on a mortgage Chudleigh owned. The short document is transcribed below,

These presents witnesse that I Mary Chudleigh of Ashton in the County of Devon Gentlewoman have this day Received of the Right hono:^{ble} Hugh Lord Clifford & the Lady Dowager Clifford his Mother the sume of one hundred & fifty pounds principle money and fower pounds & foure shillings in full for interest thereof due & payable unto mee on a mortgage of a certaine messuage & Tenement wth thappurtence called Cutridge also Wilsons lying in the parish of Chudleigh in the County aforesaid formerly granted unto me by the said Lord & Lady as a security for the said money for the ^{terme} ~~xxx~~ of one Thousand yeares by Indenture bearing date the Eleaventh day of ffebruary in the yeare of our Lord God one thousand six hundred nynety one And I doe hereby Release assigne & transfour the said Messuage & Tenement with thappur ~~unto th~~ and all my estate right hitherforme interest clayme & demand whatsoever ofin & unto the same unto said Lord & Lady Clifford To have & to hold the same unto the said Lord & Lady Clifford their heires & assignes forever And I doe hereby Covenant & promise to deliver upp unto the said Lord or Lady the beforemented Indenture to be cancelled In witnesse whereof I have here unto sett my hand & seale the Thirteenth day of August Anno Dni 1694.²⁰

Acting on her own behalf in land deals, Chudleigh seems quite likely to have been a woman of some means. Her family's social standing in Devon, combined with their wealth, would have made her an appropriate wife for a future Baronet.

The Chudleighs of Place Barton, Ashton were also a well-established, local family, who had been lords of the manor since 1320; Sir George Chudleigh (*d.* 1657), Mary, Lady Chudleigh's husband's grandfather, was first made a baronet by King James I in 1622, a title that remained in the family until it became extinct in 1745.²¹

²⁰UH, Muniment Room, Clifford Family, Box III/8D/3.

²¹See *DNB*, William Courthope, *Synopsis of the Extinct Baronetage of England; Containing the Date of the Creation, with the Succession of Baronets, and Their Respective Marriages and Time of Death* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1835), 44 and John Burke and John Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England* (London: Scott, Webster & Geary, 1838), 115-16.

The Chudleighs, too, were active during the Civil War on the Parliamentary side: the first baronet, Sir George Chudleigh, a commander, and his son, James, a major-general, fought against the king's forces. However, both switched to the king's cause: James after he had been accused of treachery, and Sir George after James died from a musket shot in 1643 at Dartmouth whilst fighting for the Royalist forces.²² From the records that survive, George Chudleigh (c.1640-1719), Mary, Lady Chudleigh's husband, the third Baronet, became a very successful landowner.²³ He matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford 17 March 1653/54²⁴ and was admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1655.²⁵ He and Mary, Lady Chudleigh had several children, but only two of their sons, George (1683-1738) and Thomas (1687-1726), survived to adulthood. Parish records indicate that Chudleigh and her husband probably resided in Winslade, in the parish of Clyst St. George, from their marriage until some time in 1687, since their son Thomas was the last child to be baptized there 11 August 1687.²⁶ They probably made the move to Place Barton, Ashton, the Chudleigh family seat, some time in 1688 because their son Richard (baptized 4 November 1685 in Clyst St. George) was buried in Ashton Church, having died 10 July 1688.²⁷ His monument is still visible on a ledger stone at the west end of the nave in the Church. Maxwell Adams reports that the Latin inscription as being well worn in 1899, so when I saw it in February 1999, one hundred years later, it was even more so.²⁸ A rough translation of the Latin inscription is as follows:

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever — my dear second son
Richard Chudleigh born October 18 . . . died . . . 10 Julij . . . 88 buried in
the hope of the Resurrection — he is not born in vain who dies well [for
me] death is the birth of immortal glory and eternal life I shall rise
again.²⁹

²²See *DNB*, Burke, 115 and Maxwell Adams, *A Brief Account of Ashton Church and of some of the Chudleighs of Ashton, in Devon* (Plymouth: W. Brendon and Son, 1899), 13-16.

²³DRO, MS 531M/1-2, MS 516M/T71-3, MS 49/24/5/4, MS 55/10/13/1, MS Z8/1/10 and MS 162M/T2.

²⁴Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1500-1714*, 4 vols (Oxford: Parker & Co., 1891), I, 275.

²⁵W. H. Cooke, *Students Admitted to the Inner Temple, 1547-1660*, (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1877), 361.

²⁶*The Registers of Clyst St. George*, 60.

²⁷*Ibid*, 59.

²⁸I was very fortunate to have received a guided tour of Ashton and its church from two local historians, Rosemary Horsman of Ashton and Dr. Alick Cameron of Trusham.

²⁹Marion Glasscoe, *Ashton Church, Devon* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1993), 21.

Ezell hypothesizes that Mary, Lady Chudleigh and her husband moved to Place Barton around this time because her mother-in-law, Elizabeth (Fortesque), Lady Chudleigh, had probably died, although Ezell claims that no record of her death survives. In Ashton Church, however, in the north aisle there is a granite slab inscribed with the following, 'Here lyeth the body of the Lady Elizabeth Chudleigh, who died and was buried the XVth of July, 1668', with the heraldic arms of Chudleigh and Fortesque families together in one crest.³⁰ Since her mother-in-law had long been dead by 1688, it seems much more likely that the couple moved to Place Barton in order for Chudleigh's husband to take over the family estates; Sir George Chudleigh was getting on in age and he eventually died in 1691.

As it happens much of the material evidence that survives from her life revolves around illness and death, both of herself and other family members. Wills, letters, epitaphs and panegyrics often reveal the saddest moments of her life. Her youngest child, Eliza Maria (1693-1701/2) was elegized in the touching autobiographical poem, 'On the Death of my dear Daughter *Eliza Maria Chudleigh*' as was her mother, Mary (Sydenham) Lee (1632-1701), in the poem 'On the Death of my Honoured Mother Mrs. *Lee*'. To make matters worse, Chudleigh's own health was not very strong. She is known to have suffered from a severe rheumatic condition, which at the turn of the eighteenth century could refer to a number of illnesses. Aside from arthritis, rheumatism was a medical term used to describe conditions such as gout, colic, fevers and melancholia. In a letter to Thomas, dated only the 'last of May', probably written in 1701 or 2, Chudleigh describes how her living environment adversely affected her health: '*Ashton* is healthy enough in the Summer, but I cannot be here in the Winter without hazarding my Life'.³¹ Indeed, Place Barton and its environs, whilst being lush, are still extremely damp, since they sit in a valley with a small creek running by them. Inside Place Barton today, it is still quite chilly, even though the house has been modernized with central heating. It must have been very damp and draughty in the early eighteenth century.

³⁰Adams, 12.

³¹*PC*, 267.

Given the seriousness of her condition and the environment in which she lived, it is not surprising that Chudleigh moved to Exeter, Bath and London during the winter months. Whilst in Exeter, Chudleigh may have sought the expertise of a local rheumatologist, named William Musgrave (1655-1721), to whom she wrote a panegyric, entitled, 'To the Learn'd and Ingenious Dr. *Musgrave* of *Exeter*', in which she praised his efforts to cure her daughter, Eliza Maria. In 1703 Chudleigh retreated from Ashton to Exeter for treatment, possibly with Musgrave, and in a letter, dated 13 or 15 October of the same year, she reported to Thomas that

now my *Body* sinks under the Pressure, and will not keep Pace with my *Mind*: Life is what I have for many Years had no Reason to be fond of, and a Grave has appeared to me the happiest and best Asylum; I know 'tis my Duty to maintain my Post, to keep the Station God has assigned me; this Consideration made me leave *Ashton*, and 'tis that which keeps me here; when I am fully recovered, I will return to my Home.³²

Musgrave, whose three main medical works concerned arthritis, *De Arthritide Symptomatica Dissertatio* (1703), *De Arthritide Anomala Sive Interna Dissertatio* (1707) and *De Arthritide Primigeria et Regulari Dissertatio* (posthumously published in 1726), often described the clinical symptoms of his patients in his books.³³ Musgrave describes treating a woman with rheumatic symptoms who may have been Chudleigh, since doctors often housed patients during bouts of acute illness. Alick Cameron kindly translated the following Latin passage from Musgrave's *Arthritide Symptomatica*:

For a long time now there has lived in our house a notable and illustrious lady, remembered by everybody as having an exceedingly sanguine temperament; born of a father with arthritis, which may have been started by a fever in middle age: this was severe and became increasingly frequent, recurring, and seldom absent in a full year, causing damage.³⁴

Although Chudleigh is not actually named in Musgrave's notes, she did visit Exeter for medical treatment on more than one occasion. In fact, Chudleigh was being treated there shortly before her death. In a letter from Exeter, dated 8 October 1710,

³²*Whartoniana*, II, 114-15 and *HL*, 254.

³³Alick Cameron, 'A West Country polymath: William Musgrave MD FRS FRCP, of Exeter (1655-1721)', *Journal of Medical Biography*, 6 (1998), 166-70.

³⁴Alick Cameron, private correspondence, 20 January 1999; the translation is based on his copy of William Musgrave's, *De Arthritide Symptomatica Dissertatio* (Geneva: Fratres de Tournes, 1715), 61.

Chudleigh wrote to Sophia, Electress of Hanover, mother of the future George I, to thank her for accepting the essays she had dedicated to her earlier that same year:

When I had the Honor, of receiving your Royal Highnesse's Letter, I was so very ill, as to be in danger of Death: I continued, in that deplorable state, for several days; and extremely weak, for several weeks.

The surprising Honor, you were then pleas'd to doe me, in Vouchsafing to accept the Book, I presum'd to send your Royal Highness, proved a much greater Cordial to me, than any, my Physitian was capable of prescribing, & contributed much more to my Releif.

To find myself taken notice of, by one of the Greatest, as well as the most Accomplisht Princesses in Europe, fild me wth a Transport of Joy.

Had I had strength to write, I had much sooner return'd your Royal Highness, my most humble Acknowledgements, for an Honor so infinitely beyond my utmost Ambition: an Honor, I shall ever remember, with an unspeakable Delight.³⁵

Chudleigh eventually succumbed to the rheumatic symptoms from which she suffered, after being bedridden for some time, on 15 December and was buried on 20 December 1710 in Ashton.³⁶ Her will, if she wrote one, does not survive.

Chudleigh's younger son, Thomas, wrote back to the Electress from Exeter on 2 January 1710/11 to thank her for the special honour she had bestowed upon his mother:

The joy which my deceased Mother receiv'd from the great condescension and goodness expressed in your Royall Highness's Letter, having given her that strength and ease which She had not known dureing the continuance of a long Sickness; She with great earnestness and pleasure imployed that last remaines of Life in dictateing the acknowledgements of Her thanks and gratitude; which in obedience to Her dying commands I presume to send; and with it beg leave to assume your Royall Highness that no instance of my Mothers affection is more dear to me than leaving me the markes of yo^r. Royall Highness's favour to Her, which I shall ever preserve as the greatest honour to the Family; and will allwayes be remembred with the most profound respect and duty.³⁷

³⁵BL, MS Stowe 223, fols. 398^r and 399^r.

³⁶DRO, Ashton Church Parish Register, MF 3.

³⁷BL, MS Stowe 224, fols. 1^r and 2^r.

Madam.

When I had the Honor, of receiving your Royal Highness's Letter, I was so very ill, as to be in danger of Death: I continued, in that deplorable State, for several days, and extremely weak, for several weeks.

The surprising Honor, you were then pleas'd to do me, in vouchsafing to accept the Book, I presum'd to send your Royal Highness, proved a much greater Cordial to me, than any, my Physician was capable of prescribing, & contributed much more to my Relief.

1. Letter from Mary, Lady Chudleigh to Sophia, Electress of Hanover, 8 October 1710.
MS Stowe, fol. 398^r, (first page). By permission of the British Library.

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To find myself taken notice of, by one
of the Greatest, as well as the most Accomplish'd
Princesses in Europe, fill'd me wth a Transport of Joy.

Had I had strength to write, I had
much sooner return'd your Royal Highness,
my most humble Acknowledgements, for an
Honor so infinitely beyond my utmost Am-
bition; an Honor, I shall ever remember
with an unspeakable Delight; and which
will, always, make me to be, with the
greatest Awe, & profoundest Reverence,

Madam!

Your Royal Highness's

most devoted humble
Servant

Exeter.
Oct: 8. 1710.

Mary Chudleigh

2. Letter from Mary, Lady Chudleigh to Sophia, Electress of Hanover, 8 October 1710.
MS Stowe, fol. 399^r, (second page). By permission of the British Library.

It is usually noted that Chudleigh wished herself to be buried without a monument at Ashton and certainly none survives today.

All the material evidence discussed thus far does not paint a happy, healthy picture for Chudleigh's life. To focus only on the hardships she had to endure, however, would not be doing justice to her literary legacy. In all of her writings a stoic determination reveals itself; combined with her strong Christian faith and the belief of happiness in the afterlife, Chudleigh does seem to have been surprisingly 'sanguine'. From the few letters that survive, it becomes evident that despite her hardships, she attempted to make the most out of life and continued to contribute to contemporary literary culture, even when she was very ill. At the very least, unlike some of her contemporaries, such as Astell and Thomas, Chudleigh did not suffer from the indignities associated with poverty.

Social Publication Patterns

Chudleigh was a quintessential turn-of-the-eighteenth-century learned lady and author; she straddled the two worlds of manuscript and print culture, which seems to have been the norm for many upper-class men and women writers. In *The Patriarch's Wife, Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (1987), Ezell points out that the modern, critical emphasis on print publication distorts the accomplishments of writers, especially women, who may not have always 'published' their texts in the twentieth-century sense of the word. She states that

the seventeenth century was a turning point in the history of print. The slow acceptance of publication as a respectable activity is well documented among male writers at the beginning of the century. John Donne saw no need to publish his secular verse and Ben Jonson was ridiculed for doing so. This attitude was not extinct by the end of the century. The court satirists took little or no care to publish their works. . . . Reluctance to commit one's words or name to print, therefore, cannot be seen as a peculiarly female trait, but a manifestation of a much more general, and much older, attitude about writing, printing, and readership.³⁸

Many of Chudleigh's contemporaries, such as Astell and Thomas, also circulated their

³⁸Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife, Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 64-5.

Thomas' father. As a result of Dryden's letter, it becomes evident that Mary, Lady Chudleigh's poetry was known to her neighbours/cousins at Ugbrooke Park. Subsequently, it achieved a certain amount of circulation through Dryden in London in 1697.

Chudleigh seems to have continued her involvement with Dryden's literary circle after 1697, particularly with his son, Charles Dryden (1666-1704). In fact, it might have been through Dryden or his son that Chudleigh and Elizabeth Thomas met for the first time. In a letter written from Charles Dryden to Thomas, dated Easter Eve, circa 1700, Charles says,

Notwithstanding I have been seizd with a feaver ever since I saw you last, I have this afternoon endeavourd to do my selfe y^e honour of obeying my Lady Chudleighs commands. My feaver is still encreasing, and I beg you to peruse the following verses according
own sense &
to your [^] discretion, which farr surpasses mine in all respects. . . . Be pleasd to tell me what you find amiss, or correct it your selfe, and excuse this trouble.⁴³

Chudleigh, it seems, had requested a poem extolling the virtues of an intelligent woman. Charles Dryden describes a woman in the typical hyperbole of panegyric verse: 'But you, such solid learning add to Rhymes,/Your ^{wit} sense looks fatal to succeeding times'. Thus Chudleigh was actively participating in exchanges with both men and women at the turn of the century. These examples of manuscript circulation, sometimes referred to as 'scribal publication', were an important outlet for many male and female writers.⁴⁴ As Ezell states,

Through manuscript circulation and epistolary exchange, channels did exist for women to cultivate their intellectual and literary interests. This method also provided the opportunity for a readership outside their own families without losing control over their productions. It could lead to a reputation as a poet, scholar, or controversialist without a word having been published.⁴⁵

Before Chudleigh's reputation as a writer began to extend to London, however, she probably began circulating her work closer to home. The Devon Record Office and neighbouring country houses in Devon were the obvious place to start looking for this

⁴³BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 56^{r-v} and *Miscellanea*, I, 154-5.

⁴⁴Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁴⁵Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, 83.

sort of evidence.

Held in the Ugbrooke House library, a curious diary survives written by a Roman Catholic priest. The journal was begun in 1735, which is too late for Mary, Lady Chudleigh, but still may shed light on her family's social patterns. The Cliffords of Ugbrooke were Roman Catholics and in February 1735 the Rev. James Dominic Darbyshire, O.P. came to stay with them to administer to their religious needs and tutor their children.⁴⁶ The early eighteenth century could be dangerous for Catholics, a situation that was exacerbated by the two Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. Thus during his stay at Ugbrooke, Father Dominic did quite a bit of work about the estate so as not to raise suspicions about his real vocation. During his time at Ugbrooke, he kept a journal written in a combination of Flemish (even though English was his first language) and a secret language of symbols. Cameron has spent a good deal of time translating this journal and has very generously shared his findings. Not surprisingly, amongst many other visitors, Father Dominic chronicles several visits from the Chudleighs of Ashton between the years 1735 and 1752. He even marked the death of Sir George Chudleigh, Mary, Lady Chudleigh's eldest surviving son, on 10 October 1738 with a skull. Although the journal was begun twenty-five years after Chudleigh's death, it confirms the continuing relations between the two families—relations that went on before and during Chudleigh's lifetime, especially since they were such close neighbours and had been connected by marriage since the mid-seventeenth century. These two points aside, there were few gentry and aristocrats with whom the Chudleighs and Cliffords could have socialized in their part of Devon.

If members of the Chudleigh family were fairly regular visitors between 1735 and 1752, it may be argued that earlier members of the family might have been regular visitors as well. Whilst Mary, Lady Chudleigh was the lady of the manor at Place Barton, there were two significant women in residence at Ugbrooke whom Chudleigh surely would have known: Elizabeth (Martyn), Lady Dowager Clifford (c.

⁴⁶Information comes from Alick Cameron, 'The Journal of the Rev. James Dominic Darbyshire, O.P., a worker-priest of the 18th century' (unpublished article).

1632-1709) and Lady Anne (Preston) Clifford (1667-1734). Elizabeth, Lady Dowager Clifford, was known as a well-respected, devout woman who brought up her children alone, after her husband died in 1673. She was definitely literate because, alongside several manuscript books of accounts, two of her receipt books from 1689 and 90 still sit in the Gillow (centre section, bottom shelf) in the Morning Room at Ugbrooke House. The receipt books are folio sheets bound in cardboard and vellum with indices. Lady Clifford may have even known a bit of Latin, since she wrote *probatum est* after her favorite recipes. Although she exchanged recipes with other prominent Devonshire women, such as 'Lady Courtney' and 'Lady ffortoscue', none are from Mary, Lady Chudleigh. It would have been exciting if more evidence of friendship survived between Chudleigh and the Clifford women, which, in turn, might have shed some light on the coterie of pseudonymous women to whom Chudleigh wrote in her *Poems*. Unfortunately, no letters between any of them survives. There is evidence, however, that Elizabeth, Lady Clifford did hold the Chudleigh family in high esteem. A 'Declaration of Trust' exists in the family archives, dated 1 November 1710, signed by Sir George Chudleigh, Mary, Lady Chudleigh's husband.⁴⁷ Apparently, in her will Lady Clifford asked Sir George to act as an executor to hold in trust some land she had left for her only surviving daughter, Lady Mary Teresa Leach (1658-1715).⁴⁸ In the 'Declaration', Sir George confirms that he would be honoured to undertake the task. Such a confidence must have been indicative of the regard and trust in which Sir George and his family were held by the Cliffords, Lady Clifford in particular.

The Ugbrooke Library holdings, most of which were sold to the National Library of Australia in Canberra in 1964, might have held some clues about the connections between the two families. Again, however, the evidence that survives is inconclusive. Currently, in the library, on a large table, sits a leather bound typescript (probably dating from 1964) entitled, *Library Catalogue*. It lists two copies of

⁴⁷UH, Muniment Room, Family Settlements, 1685-1749.

⁴⁸Lady Clifford's will does not survive at Ugbrooke or in the records of the PCC, and, unfortunately, most eighteenth-century wills proved in the peculiar of the Bishop of Exeter were destroyed in 1942 during the blitz.

Chudleigh's published *Poems*, one dating from 1703, which was part of the original collection, that dates back to the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and one dating from 1709, which came into the collection in 1915. The 1709 edition of her poems managed to survive the 1964 sale, possibly because it was hidden on top of a shelf in the corner of the room. Disappointingly no inscription or marginalia exists in the 1703 edition owned by the Cliffords, now housed in the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Even after Chudleigh began to publish in print, she continued to participate in manuscript circulation—the example of Dryden reading her verses in manuscript was not unique. For instance, in Letter III of *Pylades and Corinna*, from Elizabeth Thomas to her fiancé, Richard Gwinnett, Thomas describes viewing a poem in manuscript called 'The Grove at *Long-Leate*', which she initially attributes to Chudleigh, who, after the publication of *The Ladies Defence*, was sometimes referred to as Melissa.

Now to regale you with a Collation of solid *Wit*, after such an Antipast of *Folly*; I must inform you that I have been shewn a POEM which is said to be written by one of the most ingenious Ladies in the *West of England*. I pressed to know her Name, to which my Friend gave me such dubious Answers, that I concluded it was our good-natured Heroine MELISSA. But, before I had read ten Lines, I discovered such a Genius, such learning, so much Depth of Thought, such Harmony in the Numbers, and such Elegance in the Expression, that I cried out, *O! Sir, it is in vain, you strive to deceive me, this can be no other than the charming PHILOMELA that Sings so sweetly.*⁴⁹

The poem turned out to be by Elizabeth Singer (later Rowe), but the fact that Thomas suspected the poem to be Chudleigh's indicates how common circulating poetry was and how likely it could have been hers.

In another letter from Thomas to Gwinnett called 'A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MELISSA (Lady *Chudleigh*), MUSIDORA (Mrs. *Bridgeman*) CORINNA, the STOIC, (Captain *Hemington*) &c.', Thomas reports a manuscript exchange between herself and Chudleigh. Thomas says that Chudleigh dropped a paper in her lap called 'WOMAN *the Crown of the CREATION*', which had the following subtitles, 'Of *their*

⁴⁹PC, 189. Philomela was the pen name of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737).

LEARNING, PRUDENCE, etc.'.⁵⁰ Perhaps these were the beginnings of Chudleigh's *Essays*, later published in 1710, an excerpt from a commonplace book or some other manuscript in circulation. A letter to Thomas reveals that as early as 1703 Chudleigh was working on her *Essays* and that she was inclined to share her progress with others:

Morality has been my chief Study since I saw you; the ESSAYS I've writ, are on *Knowledge, Friendship, Life, Death, Humility, Grief*, and on *several other Subjects*; you shall see them if I come to *London* this Winter, but that I believe I shall not, because I find Sir *George* will not leave the Country, and 'twill be Melancholy for me to be alone in Lodgings, it tired me the last Winter.⁵¹

Clearly, Chudleigh willingly circulated her writings before they went into print. Thus even though Chudleigh often refers to her isolated country life, she actively participated in literary culture through various forms of manuscript circulation.

The material evidence that survives also suggests that Chudleigh was involved in several correspondence networks. Ezell claims that such networks 'provided educated women as well as men with opportunities for intellectual engagements and insights which their circumstances, excluded from universities and learned societies, might not immediately suggest'.⁵² The epistolary exchange that occurred between John Norris of Bemerton (1657-1715) and Mary Astell, published as *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695), is one example of such an intellectual exchange. As a result of its publication, Elizabeth Thomas was also encouraged to write to Norris and, in turn, their exchange was eventually published.⁵³ Their letters first appeared in print in the second volume of *Whartoniana: or, Miscellanies, in Verse and Prose, By the Wharton Family* in 1727 (reprinted in 1731 as *The Poetical Works of Philip, Late Duke of Wharton*) as 'Letters from Mr. Norris to Corinna, for the Direction of Her Studies', and then again in 1732 in *The Honourable Lovers* under the same title.⁵⁴ Such exchanges were common and frequently published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 'Such practices argue that correspondence of a

⁵⁰HL, 75-82.

⁵¹Whartoniana, II, 113-14 and HL, 253.

⁵²Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, 73.

⁵³A few of the original letters survive in manuscript; see BOD, MS. Rawlinson, Letters 90.

⁵⁴Whartoniana, II, 95-105 and HL, 199-216.

certain type was viewed not as a discreet communication between two people only, but a formal composition to be preserved and perused by others as well'.⁵⁵

Correspondence also offered Chudleigh, who was often resident in Devon, the chance to exchange poetry and to participate in the London literary world from a distance. Chudleigh and Thomas kept up a correspondence for many years which was published primarily in *Whartoniana*, *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*. From remarks Thomas makes in *Pylades and Corinna*, it seems they visited regularly in the first few years of the eighteenth century when Chudleigh came to London, and Thomas may have even visited her in Devon and Bath.⁵⁶ Their correspondence, which will be discussed at length in chapter five, began some time before October 1701 and lasted until 1706. Chudleigh seems to have been pleased with having Thomas as a correspondent: in a letter dated 8 December 1701, Chudleigh wrote, 'The Correspondence you have so obligingly begun, shall (if you please to continue it) prove as lasting as our Lives, and I shall think my self very happy in the Conversation and Friendship of so ingenious a Person'.⁵⁷ Thomas, too, seems content with the idea of continued correspondence with her social superior:

I must confess, Madam, your obliging Condescension has produced two very different Passions in me; for at the same time when I rejoice at my good Fortune, I cannot but blush at the Exchange you will make by entering into a Correspondence with one who has neither Genius enough to answer your inimitable Letters, nor Merit sufficient to preserve those kind Thoughts you have entertained of her.⁵⁸

Chudleigh's deteriorating health may have contributed to the end of their literary exchanges. As early as 13 or 15 October 1703, Chudleigh complains of ill health: 'my *Body* sinks under the Pressure, and will not keep Pace with my *Mind*'.⁵⁹ As well as exchanging letters, Thomas also delivered letters on behalf of Chudleigh to her friends in London. In a letter dated 15 October 1703, Chudleigh says, 'I think my self infinitely obliged to Dr. [Samuel] Garth, to whom I desire you to do me the Favour to

⁵⁵Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, 73.

⁵⁶PC, 267-8.

⁵⁷BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 61^r.

⁵⁸PC, 264.

⁵⁹*Whartoniana*, II, 114 and *HL*, 254.

present the inclosed Letter';⁶⁰ and in one dated 31 May 1706, Chudleigh thanks Thomas for passing on messages to a Mrs. Bridgeman and Mrs. Hemington.⁶¹ Their letters provide an example of manuscript and epistolary networks at work, not just between themselves but also in relation to a wider circle of men and women.

It is clear, then, through manuscript circulation and literary correspondence, that Chudleigh's literary career began long before she ever published in print. Chudleigh claims that she published her *Defence* which had already been read by some of her friends in manuscript for the following reason:

'Twas written with no other Design, but that innocent one of diverting some of my Friends; who, when they read it, were pleas'd to tell me they lik'd it, and desir'd me to Print it, which I should never have had the Vanity to have done, but in a Compliment to them.⁶²

Thus *The Ladies Defence*, had it stayed in manuscript, would still have reached an audience. When Chudleigh reports in the preface to her *Essays* that the *Defence* is 'known to be mine', even though she claims to have taken 'great Care' to conceal her identity, she reveals the fact that her literary reputation had already been established to some extent through scribal publication. Unfortunately, no manuscript copies of the *Defence* have been found to date, so we do not know how widely it circulated before being printed. After *The Ladies Defence*, Chudleigh claims she published *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703) and *Essays upon Several Subjects* (1710) for didactic reasons—'chiefly design'd' for women.⁶³ Regardless of her reasons for publishing, stated or otherwise, Chudleigh's publication patterns were similar to those of many contemporary men and women writers. Moreover, her practice of circulating manuscripts did not stop once she ventured into print, a fact which only further suggests the complementary relationship between manuscript and print culture, both of which had a public audience.

⁶⁰*Whartoniana*, II, 115 and *HL*, 255. A member of the Kit-Kat club, Dr. Samuel Garth (1661-1719), who eventually became a good friend of Pope, is best known for his poem *The Dispensary* (1699).

⁶¹*PC*, 268.

⁶²Chudleigh, *Essays*, 248.

⁶³*POSC*, 44.

The Ladies Defence or, The Bride-Woman's Counsellor Answer'd (1701)

John Sprint was the non-conformist minister who delivered an infamous sermon on 11 May 1699 at Sherborne in Dorsetshire which was published later that year as *The Bride-Womans Counsellor* after it had 'circulated enough privately to generate angry reaction'.⁶⁴ In his 'Epistle to the Reader', Sprint defends his decision to publish in order to vindicate his reputation:

When thou hast perused this Discourse, thou wilt see Cause enough to believe me if I tell thee it was designed only for the Pulpit, not for the Press; but it hath so fallen out, that the Doctrine therein contained is so unhappily represented to the World by some ill-natur'd Females, that I am necessitated to offer it to a Publick View'.⁶⁵

Sprint's sermon instigated two known responses in print: by the pseudonymous writer Eugenia, *The Female Preacher* (c. 1699), later published as *The Female Advocate; or A Plea for the just Liberty of the Tender Sex, and particularly of Married Women. Being Reflections On a late Rude and Disingenuous Discourse, Delivered by Mr. John Sprint* (1700) and by Mary, Lady Chudleigh *The Ladies Defence: Or, The Bride-Woman's Counsellor Answer'd* (1701).⁶⁶ Although no manuscript copies are known to have survived, it seems that both *The Female Advocate* and *The Ladies Defence* circulated before being printed and that Eugenia and Chudleigh were the 'ill-natured Females' to whom Sprint refers in his preface. Chudleigh—whose mother originally came from Wynford Eagle, Dorsetshire, which was not that far from Sherborne—may have read the sermon while it was still in manuscript form. Chudleigh reports in 'The Preface to the Reader' of *The Ladies Defence* that 'The Book, which has been the occasion of the insuing Poem, was presented to me by its Author'; however, she does not tell her readers if she ever read a manuscript version of the sermon.⁶⁷ That Eugenia and Chudleigh were aware of each other's writing is

⁶⁴Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples, Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 165.

⁶⁵John Sprint, *The Bride-Womans Counsellor. Being a Sermon Preach'd at a Wedding, May the 11th, 1699, at Sherbourn, in Dorsetshire*, (London: H. Hills, 1699), 2.

⁶⁶Although, some literary historians have attributed *The Female Advocate* and the earlier edition of the same work, *The Female Preacher*, to Mary, Lady Chudleigh—as late as 1982, in *Reason's Disciples*, Hilda Smith claims that Chudleigh was responsible for 'two replies' to Sprint, one prose, one poetry—most scholars now accept that Chudleigh did not write the prose reaction to Sprint's sermon (Smith, 164).

⁶⁷TLD, 11.

highly likely. Chudleigh acknowledges Eugenia's reaction to Sprint, when she says in her prefatory address, 'To All Ingenious Ladies', 'it also troubl'd me to find that but one of our own Sex had the Courage to enter the Lists with him'.⁶⁸ Chudleigh also wrote a poem entitled 'To *Eugenia*', which appeared in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703). In it Chudleigh admires Eugenia's 'Goodness' and 'Wit' and states, 'Methinks I see the Golden Age agen,/Drawn to the Life by your ingenious Pen'.⁶⁹

Sprint's stance on women and marriage was based on a staunchly conservative vein of 'domestic patriarchalism' which looked to scripture as an authority to uphold the hierarchy of power in society with the monarch, fathers and husbands firmly at the top.⁷⁰ From the seventeenth century, Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings* (most likely written between 1635 and 1642 but not published until 1680), discussed in chapter one, is one of the best known examples of a text proposing the merits of domestic patriarchalism. Aside from John Sprint's *The Bride-Womans Counsellor*, there were other publications from the turn of the eighteenth century that espoused this theory, such as William Fleetwood's *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* (1705) and William Nicholls' *The Duty of Inferiours towards their Superiours* (1701).

Fleetwood, for instance, outlined his patriarchal views in *Relative Duties*:

Though there be many Women superiour to many Men, in strength of body, and abilities of mind, in fineness of parts, greatness of capacity, soundness of judgment, and strength and faithfulness of memory, yet the number of such, neither is, nor ever was, nor ever will be, great enough, to shew that Nature intended to give that Sex the Superiority over the Men.⁷¹

In *The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind*, Alice Browne asserts that, by the turn of the eighteenth century, many readers would have found Fleetwood's and Sprint's assertions absurd. She says that 'Sophisticated readers probably treated the stronger and more naive assertions of male dominance as a kind of misogynist satire...[*The*

⁶⁸TLD, 3.

⁶⁹POSO, 74.

⁷⁰Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, 16.

⁷¹William Fleetwood, *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants, Consider'd in Sixteen Sermons: With Three more upon the Case of Self-Murther* (London: Charles Darper, 1705), 169.

Bride-Womans Counsellor] was probably read as a joke as much as for serious edification'.⁷² With the movement toward polite sentimentalism in the eighteenth century, hard-line domestic patriarchalism would have seemed quaintly old-fashioned to many readers. In 1732, Sprint's essay appeared in the two volume publication called *Conjugal Duty: set forth in a Collection of Ingenious and Delightful Wedding-Sermons*, a book which was 'clearly aimed at the market for mildly *risqué* light reading, not the market for spiritual edification'.⁷³

In his sermon, Sprint's excessive demands for the complete submission of wives to their husbands are based on an interpretation of a verse from Corinthians: 'But she that is Married, careth for the things of the World, how she may please her Husband'.⁷⁴ He tells us that 'careth,' in this case, means more than 'ordinary care', and that 'It is a Duty incumbent on all Married Women, to be extraordinary careful to content and please her Husband'. Sprint uses examples from scripture to prove that women have weaker capacities to learn, a subject that was hotly contested in the 1690s.⁷⁵ He also claims that women were made for the comfort of men;⁷⁶ that men were undone by Eve's transgression—a guilt which all women still supposedly share;⁷⁷ that women should be passively obedient, something he would not expect from men; that women should forget their own families; that women were disrespectful if they called their husbands by their Christian names;⁷⁸ that a woman's motto should be '*LOVE, HONOUR, and OBEY*';⁷⁹ and—his most infamous remark—that they should honour the '*Persian Ladies*' who wear an imprint of a foot on their coronets to show how they 'stoop to their Husbands Feet'.⁸⁰ For an intelligent, well-read woman like Chudleigh, who advocated spiritual and intellectual autonomy for women, his sermon must have been offensive. If Sprint's sermon was distasteful to

⁷²Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), 88.

⁷³Browne, 88.

⁷⁴Corinthians I 7:34.

⁷⁵Sprint, 4.

⁷⁶Ibid, 5.

⁷⁷Ibid, 6.

⁷⁸Ibid, 12-13.

⁷⁹Ibid, 14.

⁸⁰Ibid, 11.

Chudleigh, his prefatory 'Epistle' to his readers would have been even more so because he ends it with apocalyptic threats. As Eugenia points out, the conclusion to his 'Epistle' is 'bolder than all' because 'he is not contented to make [women] bear the Cross, and suffer Persecution in this Life', but Sprint attempts to threaten women with the persecution in the hereafter.⁸¹ He says,

*the Truths which I here publish will pursue them to Judgment, and there witness against them, not only as Traitors to their Husbands, whose Authority they usurp, but as Rebels to the Great Monarch of the World, whose Sacred Laws they Impiously violate.*⁸²

Proponents of domestic patriarchalism often drew analogies between the microcosm of the family and the macrocosm of the state in order to justify the hierarchy of arbitrary power within the family and the state. Sprint's melodramatic language is charged with double meaning: by recalling the more turbulent time of the seventeenth century, when Charles I was beheaded and his son James II lost his throne, Sprint insinuates that women's disobedience will have disastrous ramifications beyond the confines of the family. To a deeply religious woman like Chudleigh, who found great comfort in prayer, such threats would have insulted her faith in a God whom she believed would offer refuge to women besieged in their lifetimes. As a result, women's spiritual equality and intellectual autonomy—"Tis in our Minds that we wou'd Rule alone"—are concerns at the heart of *The Ladies Defence*.⁸³ As well as Chudleigh's religious focus, she was also concerned with the Horatian tenet that poetry should teach and delight. Whilst pleasing her readers with a clever dialogue, she also provides them with some sound advice. Melissa's satirical criticism of the inequalities between men and women is what most critics discuss in relation to *The Ladies Defence*, but her protofeminist views are also apparent in Melissa's final speech, which offers the readers a devotional, Neoplatonic ending. For Chudleigh, God's goodness becomes manifest for women in the afterlife leaving 'no Room for

⁸¹Eugenia, *The Female Advocate; or A Plea for the just Liberty of the Tender Sex, and particularly of Married Women. Being Reflections on a late Rude and Disingenuous Discourse by Mr. John Sprint, in a Sermon at a Wedding, May 11th; at Sherburn in Dorsetshire, 1699. By a Lady of Quality* (London: Andrew Bell, 1700), 8.

⁸²Sprint, 2.

⁸³TLDD, 34.

any thing but Joy'.⁸⁴

Eugenia, the pseudonymous author of *The Female Advocate*, and the first writer to react to Sprint in print, methodically counters his sermon in a witty but tiresome point by point *refutatio*. Completely different in style from Eugenia's line by line refutation of Sprint's scripture-based arguments, Chudleigh avoids a detailed rebuke of Sprint. Chudleigh instead criticizes the major points of Sprint's sermon especially those that deal with women's intellectual inferiority. She states in her 'The Preface To The Reader', 'Should I give a particular Answer to each Paragraph, I should not only tire the Readers Patience, but my own, for which Reason I intend only to take notice of some very remarkable things'.⁸⁵ In *First Feminists*, Moira Ferguson states that 'The respondents to Sprint are important to consider because they reveal two different approaches, one old, one up-and-coming: a rational versus a Scripture-based opposition'. She claims that Chudleigh used the 'reasoned debate of Astell's logical argumentation in an unusual combination with the dialogue form of the Duchess of Newcastle's orations; whereas Eugenia used a 'more traditional, scripturally-studded attack'.⁸⁶ Browne also comments on their differences: she states that 'much of Eugenia's criticism of Sprint consists of ridiculing points of detail', while Chudleigh's 'can be read as a stronger and more serious assertion of women's autonomy and rationality'.⁸⁷

In fact Chudleigh's defence of women is a hybrid of genres: she employs elements from formal rhetoric, particularly the tradition of *querelle des femmes*, satire and the Restoration stage.⁸⁸ Her use of a dialogue written in rhyming couplets is typical of Augustan satire, whilst her characters hearken back to many Restoration plays. In the preface to her *Essays* she acknowledges borrowing the character of Sir

⁸⁴TLD, 40.

⁸⁵Ibid, 13.

⁸⁶Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists. British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 16.

⁸⁷Browne, 89 and 92.

⁸⁸Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 17.

John Brute from John Vanbrugh's recent play, *The Provok'd Wife* (1697).⁸⁹ Whilst Chudleigh provides her readers with a witty female speaker who mocks the patriarchal stance of the male speakers, Melissa also appeals to the rules of 'Reason', by asserting the equality of male and female souls. The elements of Melissa's dialogue reveal the influence that Enlightenment beliefs had on Chudleigh. David Buchanan has argued that Chudleigh's verse dialogue marks a turning point for women's satire:

Under the influence of women writers, the satiric debate gradually shifted from conventional, rhetorical discussions of the nature of "women" to an increasingly rational, serious critique of the *institutions* (namely marriage and education) through which women were socially constructed.⁹⁰

Up until now, most twentieth-century feminist critics have focused on Astell's contribution as pivotal to this turning point in women's literary history. Whilst there is no doubt Chudleigh was inspired by Astell's efforts on behalf of women, her influence has been overemphasized. Chudleigh was an innovator in her own right, who contributed to the development of a new polemic genre in verse that combined philosophy and religion with satiric elements to defend women.

'The Love of Truth, the tender Regard I have for your Honour, joyn'd with a just Indignation to see you so unworthily us'd, makes me assume the Confidence of imploying my Pen in your Service' states Chudleigh in the first preface of the *Defence* titled 'To All Ingenious Ladies'.⁹¹ Later in a letter to Thomas, dated 19 October 1701, she also says that

I was troubl'd to see them made the Jest of [a] very vain Pretender to Wit, and expos'd by a Scurrilous Pamphlet, rather than a Sermon, to the Malicious Censures of invidious Detractors, of Men, who think they cannot be obedient Wives, without being Slaves, nor pay their Husbands that Respect they owe them, without sacrificing their Reason to their Humour.⁹²

In her preface Chudleigh sets the tone for her polemic when she turns to philosophy

⁸⁹Chudleigh, *Essays*, 249. See also Antony Coleman, 'The Provok'd Wife and The Ladies Defence', *N&Q*, 17 (1970), 88-91.

⁹⁰Information came from David Buchanan, 'Sharper Answers: Women's Contributions to the Late Seventeenth-Century Satiric Debate about Women', unpublished thesis chapter from the University of Alberta, Canada.

⁹¹*TLD*, 3.

⁹²BOD, MS. Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 62^r, *Whartoniana*, II, 107-8 and *HL*, 247.

rather than scripture to answer Sprint's claim that 'Women are of weaker Capacities to learn than Men'. Chudleigh says that 'we are generally less Knowing, and less Rational than the Men, I cannot but acknowledge; but I think 'tis oftener owing to the illness of our Education, than the weakness of our Capacities'.⁹³

Reason, embodied and eulogized by the character Melissa, is the weapon Chudleigh employs in her literary battle on behalf of women against Sprint's sermon. Her dialogue is divided between Melissa and three male characters: a parson, the aptronymically named Sir John Brute and Sir William Loveall all of whom recall stock characters from the Restoration stage. The Parson is pompous, Brute is the ill-natured one and Loveall represents the two-faced 'Pretender', an inference which surely has ironic political undertones. All three male characters represent Sprint's views dispersed throughout the *Defence*. In the dialogue Melissa represents 'right Reason' in diametrical opposition to the various male characters who embody tyrannical customs. To a certain extent, she also represents Chudleigh's voice, her name being close to Chudleigh's own *nom de plume*, Marissa. It seems that Melissa was so closely identified with Chudleigh, that in *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*, Thomas refers to Chudleigh as Melissa instead of Marissa several times.⁹⁴ Whilst the male characters espouse the unreasonable tenets of Custom and domestic patriarchalism, Melissa focuses on three main problems for women: their lack of proper education, the expectation of passive obedience and difficulties in the marriage market. All the major problems are interrelated, and, according to Melissa, the overall solution is for women to be as proactive as they can about their education and spirituality and—if need be—to forego happiness in this life in order to reap rewards in heaven. This particular point of view is considered by many twentieth-century, feminist critics to be inherently Astellian; however, in reality, it predates Astell, since many devout Christian male and female writers from the late seventeenth century held the same belief.

In relation to education, Melissa dismisses the Parson's assertions that women

⁹³Sprint, 4 and *TLD*, 12.

⁹⁴*PC*, 189, 191 and *HL*, 75-82.

are 'Born Fools, and by resembling Idiots Nurst'.⁹⁵ Recalling Astell's statement, 'So partial are Men as to expect Brick where they afford no Straw', from *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), Melissa states:⁹⁶

'Tis hard we should be by the Men despis'd,
Yet kept from knowing what wou'd make us priz'd:
Debarr'd from Knowledge, banish'd from the Schools,
And with the utmost Industry bred Fools.
Laugh'd out of Reason, jested out of Sense,
And nothing left but Native Innocence:
Then told we are incapable of Wit,
And only for the meanest Drudgeries fit.⁹⁷

Ironically, Melissa outlines the cycle in which women were caught: they were assumed to be less capable than men intellectually, but their potential was undeveloped because of inadequate education. Melissa argues that, given opportunity, women could make great improvements in themselves. The character Sir William, the 'pretender', then responds to Melissa with the ridiculous argument that if women were educated, foolish men would never find wives. He asserts, 'While You are ignorant, We are secure,/A little Pain will your Esteem procure'.⁹⁸ In rebuttal Melissa espouses an instrumentally feminist belief about the utility of well-educated women;⁹⁹ she states that a proper education would 'Make us good Friends, good Neighbours, and good Wives'.¹⁰⁰

In regard to Sprint's assertions that 'Subjection and Obedience to their Husbands is required from Wives, as absolutely and peremptorily as unto Christ himself', Melissa reacts strongly.¹⁰¹ In the preface to the reader, Chudleigh refers to passive obedience as 'ridiculous' and 'antiquated'.¹⁰² Melissa, too, agrees:

Why are not Husbands taught as well as we;
Must they from all Restraints, all Laws be free?
Passive Obedience you've to us transferr'd,
And we must drudge in Paths where you have err'd:
That antiquated Doctrine you disown;

⁹⁵TLD, 21.

⁹⁶ASPI, 10.

⁹⁷TLD, 30.

⁹⁸Ibid, 32.

⁹⁹Browne, 5.

¹⁰⁰TLD, 35.

¹⁰¹Sprint, 13.

¹⁰²TLD, 13-14.

'Tis now your Scorn, and fit for us alone.¹⁰³

The doctrine of passive obedience must have been particularly galling for women because, if accepted and practiced, it involved the colonization of their minds, the last place wherein they could assert a certain amount of freedom, and because men had cast off its yoke in the late seventeenth century along with an unpopular king.

In relation to problems with the marriage market, Chudleigh has advice for both men and women. In response to Sprint's claims that women were made for the comfort of men, Chudleigh instead advocates the development of friendship between spouses and recommends that they be chosen for their virtue and reason over beauty and wealth. In 'The Preface to the Reader', Chudleigh recommends that husbands look upon their wives 'as Friends, as Persons fit to be confided in, and trusted with their Designs, as such whose Interest is inseparably united with theirs'.¹⁰⁴ In the *Defence*, Melissa echoes Chudleigh's prefatory statements and bemoans the fate of women who are denied rational choice in regard to their spouses; she says, 'Unhappy they, who by their Duty led,/Are made the Partners of a hated Bed;/And by their Fathers Avarice or Pride,/To Empty Fops, or Nauseous Clowns are ty'd'.¹⁰⁵ However, like Astell, Chudleigh makes it clear that vows taken are permanent; women must postpone their gratification until the afterlife if their marriages turn out to be unhappy. She says that

I would perswade them to struggle with their Afflictions, and never leave contending, 'till they have gain'd an absolute Victory over every repining Thought...I wou'd advise 'em to pay 'em as much Respect, and to obey their Commands with as much readiness, as if they were the best and most indearing Husbands in the World.¹⁰⁶

For all that's been said about *The Ladies Defence* and its invective satire, the religious undercurrent is what Chudleigh leaves with the reader at the close of the poem with an invocation to God:

Thus will we live, regardless of your hate,
Till re-admitted to our former State;
Where, free from the Confinement of our Clay

¹⁰³*TLD*, 18.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid*, 19.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid*, 5.

In glorious Bodies we shall bask in Day,

* * * * *

And be as knowing, and as wise as you.
With generous Spirits of a Make Divine,
In whose blest Minds Celestial Virtues shine,
Whose Reason, like their Station, is sublime,
And who see clearly thro' the Mists of Time,
Those puzzling Glooms where busy Mortals stray,
And still grope on, but never find their way.
We shall, well-pleas'd, eternally converse,
And all the Sweets of Sacred Love possess:
Love, freed from all the gross Allays of Sense,
So pure, so strong, so constant, so intense,
That it shall all our Faculties imploy,
And leave no Room for any thing but Joy.¹⁰⁷

This type of devotional ending, whereby the speaker of the poem, in this case Melissa, looks to the afterlife for gratification and happiness is highly typical of Chudleigh's writings. The true source of Chudleigh's protofeminist beliefs, then, was intricately linked to her religious convictions.

Poems on Several Occasions (1703)

Although Chudleigh published her poetry, there is material evidence, previously discussed, that she had circulated it in manuscript prior to 1703. Why she ventured into print for the second time is unknown. In the preface of *Poems on Several Occasions*, however, she indicates a two-pronged motivation for printing her verses: to teach and delight her fellow women. The second part is evident when she opens her preface with the following statement:

The following Poems were written at several Times, and on several Subjects: If the Ladies, for whom they are chiefly design'd, and to whose Service they are intirely devoted, happen to meet with any thing in them that is entertaining, I have all I am at.¹⁰⁸

Chudleigh, however, quickly switches to her didactic mode, and the first part of the Horatian tenet becomes apparent when she says that 'The way to be truly easie, to be always serene, [is] to have our Passions under a due Government'.¹⁰⁹ The publication of her poems, then, seems to be part of her overall protofeminist inclination: to

¹⁰⁷TLD, 39-40.
¹⁰⁸POSO, 44.
¹⁰⁹Ibid, 45.

ameliorate the lives of her fellow women—especially gentlewomen whose 'Circumstances [did] not necessarily oblige them to lower Cares'—by encouraging them to develop their intellects and spiritual communion with God.¹¹⁰ ^{Readers} experience a spiritual quest ^{taken} by Marissa, who is the main speaker and Chudleigh's semi-autobiographical persona (similar to Jane Barker's poetic alter ego, Fidelia), Chudleigh encourages her readers to better themselves throughout the loosely strung narrative of her poems.¹¹¹ One should be wary of interpreting Chudleigh's poems only as autobiographical reflections; however, an autobiographical element does manifest itself, especially in the poems where Chudleigh laments the deaths of her friends and family. As a result of the positive and negative experiences chronicled by Marissa readers are given examples of how to cope with life's difficulties. Chudleigh tells her readers that they will witness her struggle with and overcome her passions:

they'll sometimes see me cheerful, pleas'd, sedate and quiet; at other times griev'd, complaining, struggling with my Passions, blaming my self, endeavouring to pay a Homage to my Reason, and resolving for the future, with a decent Calmness, and unshaken Constancy, and a resigning Temper, to support all the Troubles, all the uneasiness of Life, and then by unexpected Emergencies, unforeseen Disappointments, sudden and surprizing Turns of Fortune, discompos'd, and shock'd, till I have rallied by scatter'd Forces, got new Strength, and by making an unweary'd Resistance, gain'd the better of my Afflictions, and restor'd my Mind to its former Tranquillity.¹¹²

Through Marissa's spiritual struggles and victories, Chudleigh hopes to influence her women readers—to 'recommend' a way of life to them. 'I would have them no longer solicitous about Impertinences, anxious about Trifles, Slaves to their own Humors, and a Prey to every mean designing Flatterer', reveals Chudleigh. Her didactic intent is unmistakable even in the self-effacing prefatory apology: 'I beg their Pardon for presuming so freely to advise them, and I own it to be a Fault which nothing but the Zeal I have for them can excuse'.¹¹³

Thus the overall theme of her *Poems on Several Occasions* could be summed

¹¹⁰Chudleigh, *Essays*, 251.

¹¹¹Jane Barker, *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xvi.

¹¹²*POSO*, 44.

¹¹³*Ibid*, 45-6.

up by the statement: 'Tis impossible to be happy without making Reason the Standard of all our Thoughts'.¹¹⁴ Through the logic of rationalism and the practice of Christian devotion, women who applied Chudleigh's guidelines could achieve a type of spiritual autonomy whilst waiting for the ultimate freedom of the afterlife. In *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714*, Carol Barash claims that Chudleigh tries to write Reason as genderless but discovers that 'reason is already possessed by men and marked as male'.¹¹⁵ On the contrary, however, Reason is not always personified as male by Chudleigh; rather it is often female. For instance in the poem 'Solitude', Reason is distinctly personified as a female monarch who does battle with the Anarchy within the female speaker's mind: 'Reason her native Right may claim,/And strive to re-ascend the Throne,/But few, alas! her Pow'r will own'.¹¹⁶ Again in the poem 'The Resolve', Reason is a female monarch that rules 'within' the mind:

If Reason rules within, and keeps the Throne,
While the inferior Faculties obey,
And all her Laws without Reluctance own,
Accounting none more fit, more just than they.

The 'Resolve' in the poem is the female speaker's desire to let Reason rule in order to develop her mind to triumph 'over Vice and Fate'.¹¹⁷ Barash's claim, then, that Reason is already 'possessed' by men in Chudleigh's eyes does not hold upon a close reading of her poems. Rather Reason in these poems has very little to do with men and has everything to do with women's spiritual and intellectual potential. The internal struggle for the female speakers in the poems mentioned above is somewhat reminiscent of the persona created in both the preface and the epilogue of *The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World* (1656), by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73), mentioned briefly in chapter one. Cavendish creates a world in her own mind so that she can rule as '*Margaret the First*'.¹¹⁸ On one level, then, *The Blazing World*, like many of Chudleigh's poems, is a

¹¹⁴POSO, 44.

¹¹⁵Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714. Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 244n.

¹¹⁶POSO, 129.

¹¹⁷Ibid, 144.

¹¹⁸Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666), in *Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. The Description of a New World, Called*

practical exercise and an extended metaphor of the limitless possibilities of the female mind.¹¹⁹ Only for Chudleigh, the limitless possibilities ultimately manifest themselves in heaven.

Before a woman's ascension into heaven, however, Chudleigh espouses some of the benefits that Reason offers to the living. In 'The Offering', a short theodicy in which Chudleigh vindicates God's love through the splendor of nature, she argues that God's beauty can only be truly appreciated through Reason. By describing the beauty and the glory of the universe, the speaker begins the poem as if in prayer and proceeds to defend God's goodness ('Whose Kindness like himself is unconfin'd') and omnipotence ('He do's the Wants of all his Creatures know').¹²⁰

Accept, my God, the Praises which I bring,
The humble Tribute from a Creature due:
Permit me of thy Pow'r to sing,
That Pow'r which did stupendous Wonders do,
And whose Effects we still with awful Rev'ence view:
That mighty Pow'r which from thy boundless Store,
Out of thy self where all things lay,
This beauteous Universe did call,
This Great, this Glorious, this amazing All!¹²¹

The speaker then proceeds to catalogue the wonders of God's creation and explains that they can only be fully appreciated by the living if Reason rules their minds: 'All those Delights I in my Reason find'.¹²² The speaker also claims that to know God and the 'unexhausted Bounty' He gives is to thank Him: 'My Reason for him I'll employ,/And in his Favour place my Joy'.¹²³ Regardless of one's gender, however, Chudleigh makes it clear that anyone can benefit from letting Reason rule their minds. Reminiscent of John Pomfret's (1667-1702) 'The Choice' (1700), Chudleigh's *beatus vir* poem, 'The Happy Man', reiterates that anyone can die happily who, 'all his Passions absolutely sways,/And to his Reason cheerful Homage pays'.¹²⁴

the Blazing World and Other Writings, ed. by Kate Lilley (London: William Pickering, 1991), 124.

¹¹⁹For a discussion of Cavendish's discussion of subjecthood, see Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Genders*, 1 (1988), 24-39.

¹²⁰*POSO*, 141.

¹²¹*Ibid*, 140.

¹²²*Ibid*, 141.

¹²³*Ibid*, 141 and 143.

¹²⁴*Ibid*, 80.

Although Chudleigh's poems are diverse in tone and style, she is remembered most for her polemical anti-marriage poem, 'To the Ladies', which has often been interpreted autobiographically. It is worth quoting in full:

Wife and Servant are the same,
 But only differ in the Name:
 For when that fatal Knot is ty'd,
 Which nothing, nothing can divide:
 When she the word *obey* has said,
 And Man by Law supreme has made,
 Then all that's kind is laid aside,
 And nothing left but State and Pride:
 Fierce as a Eastern Prince he grows,
 And all his innate Rigor shows:
 Then but to look, to laugh, or speak,
 Will the Nuptial Contract break.
 Like Mutes she Signs alone must make,
 And never any Freedom take:
 But still be govern'd by a Nod,
 And fear her Husband as her God:
 Him still must serve, him still obey,
 And nothing act, and nothing say,
 But what her haughty Lord thinks fit,
 Who with the Pow'r, has all the Wit.
 Then shun, oh! shun that wretched State,
 And all the fawning Flatt'ners hate:
 Value your selves, and Men despise,
 You must be proud, if you'll be wise.¹²⁵

This particular poem seems to have made quite an impression on eighteenth-century women readers; as Ezell points out contemporary copies of it were inscribed on the flyleaf of the Shakespeare First Folio owned by Elizabeth Brockett and also in Elizabeth Dottin's manuscript volume of Bishop Henry King's poems.¹²⁶ Indeed, next to *The Ladies Defence*, it has been her most anthologized poem since the early eighteenth century, so much so, that it has become Chudleigh's signature poem. In miniature, it is a satirical, protofeminist comment on the more excessive elements of domestic patriarchalism like those found in Sprint's sermon. In the twentieth century, it has been interpreted as Chudleigh's personal mantra, especially the first two lines: 'Wife and Servant are the same,/But only differ in the Name'.¹²⁷ However, critics need to be wary of reading 'To the Ladies' only in a biographical framework.

¹²⁵*POSO*, 83-4.

¹²⁶Chudleigh, 'Introduction', xviii.

¹²⁷*POSO*, 83.

Evidence surrounding the state of Chudleigh's own marriage is contradictory and inconclusive; moreover, her ceaseless defence of women can be found throughout all her prose and poetry inasmuch as she consistently encourages women to improve themselves. Whilst many readers respond strongly to this poem, it has other contexts in which it can be read. Ezell agrees that poems like Chudleigh's can be misinterpreted:

Such antilove, antimarriage sentiments have their equivalents in male writings, notably the Cavalier and libertine lyrics. Certainly, if women's antimarriage verses are viewed only as autobiographical revelations it would be a disservice to the authors and their works. The significance of them is less as a window into the private lives of the authors than as a female literary convention, where women are not portrayed as doting wives, lovesick girls, or desperate spinsters.¹²⁸

Thus polemical and satirical convention rather than personal anguish may be at work in 'To the Ladies'. Moreover, despite its reactive nature, the speaker still encourages women to pursue their goals by saying, 'Value your selves, and Men despise,/You must be proud, if you'll be wise'. When the speaker tells women, they must be 'proud', she does not mean the vice deprecated in her *Essays*, but rather a type of self respect.¹²⁹ In the preface, Chudleigh outlines this type of pride when she says,

There is a noble Disdain, a becoming and allowable Pride; 'tis commendable to scorn to be below others in Things that are essentially Praise-worthy, and they may be permitted to put a true Value on themselves.¹³⁰

Thus Chudleigh's prefatorial comments are echoed by the speaker of 'To the Ladies', in an attempt to continue the theme of self-empowerment.

Similar in style and length to 'To the Ladies', 'The Wish' has gone largely unnoticed by modern literary critics. Metrically, both poems have the same rhythm of iambic tetrameter, but thematically 'The Wish' is oppositional to its counterpart 'To the Ladies'—it might be read as the idealization of marriage versus a critique of it. If fortune sends a woman a 'faithful Friend' who 'to his Passions is not a Slave' then she would not have to 'fear her Husband as her God' as the speaker describes in 'To the

¹²⁸Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife*, 108.

¹²⁹*OED*

¹³⁰*POSO*, 46.

Ladies'.¹³¹ As in the preface to *The Ladies Defence*, where Chudleigh recommends that both men and women look for friendship with sensible spouses, 'The Wish' is a further articulation of what to look for in an ideal husband. Chudleigh's friend, Elizabeth Thomas, wrote a similar poem that appears in *Pylades and Corinna*. She, too, outlines the ideal husband:

Should Providence present a Man of Parts,
Not learn'dly vain, yet skill'd in lib'ral Arts;
Whose Principles are solid, Pious too,
Just to himself, and to his Monarch True,
In Conversation grave, but not precise,
Unmov'd in Dangers, yet in Counsel wise;
His Carriage humble, mixt with decent Pride,
Instruct by Actions, and as calmly chide,
Who hates all Flatt'ry, and does Truth revere,
Deeds prove his Words, and ev'ry Act sincere;
One who the World's Temptations can withstand,
And all his Passions equally command;
If this uncommon Creature should agree,
To like an honest, dull, Sincerity,
(For Wit and Beauty ne'er belong'd to me)
I could contentedly accept the Bliss,
And with a Pleasure know no Will but His.¹³²

Again both poems are reminiscent of Pomfret's 'Choice'; and the similarities between Thomas' 'wish' and Chudleigh's 'The Wish', which begins with 'Would but indulgent Fortune send/To me a kind, and faithful Friend' and ends with 'I would not envy Queens their State,/Nor once desire a happier State' are unmistakable.¹³³ Thomas also wrote several anti-marriage poems, so the fact that she also experimented with a pro-marriage themes says more about the popularity of marriage as a subject in general than it does about the personal experiences of either writer, especially since Thomas never married. Whilst 'The Wish' and 'To the Ladies' fit in with Chudleigh's overall theme of female self-empowerment, there is a strong case to be made that both poems, can also be read as rhetorical exercises by Chudleigh, exploring both good and bad aspects of marriage.

In many of Chudleigh's devotional poems, one can detect the influence of

¹³¹*POSO*, 77 and 83.

¹³²*PC*, 31-2.

¹³³*POSO*, 77.

Neoplatonism possibly from her connections with the Cambridge Platonist, John Norris of Bemerton. As discussed in the introduction, the rather idealistic Neoplatonists believed that the constitution of the world was essentially spiritual. In her poems on friendship, Chudleigh reveals this influence. Marilyn Williamson believes Chudleigh's poems were highly autobiographical and that her friendships 'became a reassuring anchor in her struggle with a hostile male world'.¹³⁴ Whilst Chudleigh's friendship poems seem highly personal, much like her anti-marriage ones, they, too, are conventional in many ways, relying heavily on Neoplatonic and Christian tropes. The benefits of female friendship, the subject of chapter five, were lauded by other early women writers, including many of Chudleigh's contemporaries. In the poetry and prose of Astell and Thomas, within a Christian context, Platonic friendship is often extolled and defended as a pure form of love where two souls can achieve equality. In *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, Ruth Perry points out that

The Christian rationale, the moral justification for the importance of friendship, was mutual criticism. Best friends—which Astell invariably thought of as persons of the same sex—could help one another, gently read back one another's faults, and generally aid and abet the interminable self-improvement that Astell thought the will and duty of every Christian.¹³⁵

Chudleigh's stance on female friendship is similar, and it also falls into her overall protofeminist plan to encourage women to empower themselves spiritually and intellectually.

Probably the best known early women writer to praise female friendship, however, was Katherine Philips (1632-64), also known as 'the Matchless Orinda'. Chudleigh's idea of the union of souls seems to owe more to Philips and her rapturous poems to Lucasia than to the pragmatic Astell. In 'To My excellent Lucasia, on our friendship. 17th. July 1651', Philips says

I did not live untill this time
Crown'd my felicity,
When I could say without a crime,
I am not Thine, but Thee.
This Carkasse breath'd, and walk'd, and slept,

¹³⁴Williamson, 92.

¹³⁵Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 139.

So that the world believ'd
 There was a soule the motions kept;
 But they were all deceiv'd.
 For as a watch by art is wound
 To motion, such was mine:
 But never had Orinda found
 A Soule till she found thine;
 Which now inspires, cures and supply's,
 And guides my darken'd brest:
 For thou art all that I can prize,
 My Joy, my Life, my rest.
 Nor Bridegroomes nor crown'd conqu'rour's mirth
 To mine compar'd can be:
 They have but pieces of this Earth,
 I've all the world in thee.
 Then let our flame still light and shine,
 (and no bold feare controule)
 As inocent as our design,
 Immortall as our Soule.¹³⁶

Philips wrote many poems to Lucasia but the one above reveals her perspective on the idea of unified souls, that one finds so frequently in the friendship poems of Chudleigh. In 'To *Clorissa*', for instance, Marissa, like Orinda, addresses her friend by saying 'In all Concerns we'll have an equal Share' and that 'We'll live in one another's Breast'. In keeping with the rest of her poetry, the immortality of their union is stressed in the last two lines: 'We'll meet again in the blest Realms of Light,/And in each other there eternally delight'.¹³⁷ Nowhere, however, are Chudleigh's thoughts on Platonic friendship more evident than in her poem, 'Friendship'. She says, 'Friendship is a Bliss Divine,/And does with radiant Lustre shine', and that friends are those whose 'Hearts are one, whose Souls combine,/And neither know or Mine, or Thine;/Who've but one Joy, one Grief, one Love', who'll ultimately become 'one pure celestial Mind'.¹³⁸ Here the speaker articulates the supposed pleasures of the commingling of equal souls.

In 'The Choice, A Dialogue between *Emilia* and *Marissa*', one finds a parable about women's friendship—about how women can support each other intellectually and spiritually and achieve their goal of happiness in heaven. In the first stanza of 'The Choice', Marissa begins by hailing the merits of virtue: 'Virtue sure's th' only

¹³⁶Katherine Phillips, *The Collected Works of Katherine Philips, The Matchless Orinda*, 3 vols, ed. by Patrick Thomas (Stump Cross: Stump Cross Books, 1990), I, 121-22.

¹³⁷*POSO*, 69.

¹³⁸*Ibid*, 79.

Treasure,/Th' only solid lasting Pleasure' and closes by worrying about the potentially ill effects of Malice on her Virtue.¹³⁹ Emilia then encourages Marissa in her metaphoric battle against Malice by saying, 'Malice may you perhaps assail,/But never, never can prevail'. Virtue, like Reason, in many of Chudleigh's other poems is the guiding light that 'shall still point out the Way'.¹⁴⁰ When Marissa is faced with death, she views it as a release and a reward for her efforts against vice: 'Fortune's Gifts I ne'er could prize/And now her Trifles I despise'.¹⁴¹ Marissa then ensures Emilia that their friendship, which was good on Earth, will only get better:

Together we'll lay down our Clay,
Together throw the Load away;
And bright as Fire, and light as Air,
To the superior World repair;
To glorious Seats, and Realms Divine,
Where love do's in Perfection shine:
Love undisguis'd, without alloy
Noble, pure, and full of Joy,
Sincere, and strong, and still the same,
One steady, bright, immortal Flame:
There, there our Friendship we'll improve,
Together tast the Sweets of Love;
Still in each other's Bliss rejoice
And prove one Soul, one Thought, one Voice.¹⁴²

As in so many of Chudleigh's poems, the women characters must avert the desire for instant gratification by avoiding the traditional Christian Vices—in 'The Choice' Malice, Zeal, Envy and Pity—in order to experience divine knowledge, happiness and a union of souls in heaven.

Aside from her melodramatic and rapturous Friendship poems, Chudleigh, like many of her male and female contemporaries, practiced the panegyric. Eugenia, Mary Astell, Dr. Samuel Garth, her mother, Mary Lee, and John Dryden are among the many who receive adulation from Chudleigh in verse. In *The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760*, Myra Reynolds claims that Chudleigh's 'literary dicta are of little value, for they do hardly more than echo the judgments of the day'.¹⁴³ However, her

¹³⁹*POSO*, 152.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid*, 153.

¹⁴¹*Ibid*, 154.

¹⁴²*Ibid*, 154-5.

¹⁴³Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England 1650-1760* (Boston and New York: Houghton

panegyrics on contemporary authors are particularly interesting because they can give the modern critic insight into what Chudleigh was reading, and, even more to the point, what she thought was worthwhile for other women to read. Her poem 'The Resolution' is probably the best example of a panegyric/reading list. In it the speaker reiterates the overall *raison d'être* of her poems, that what should teach should also please: 'Books are the best Companions I can find,/At once they please, at once instruct the Mind'.¹⁴⁴ 'The Resolution', although it is apparent elsewhere, reveals how strongly Chudleigh was influenced by seventeenth-century thinkers, since, amongst many of the poets and dramatists she praises, she recommends authors such as Edward Stillingfleet, bishop of Worcester (1635-99), who preached a certain level of religious tolerance; John Tillotson, archbishop of Canterbury (1630-94), a latitudinarian; and John Norris of Bemerton (1657-1715), the Cambridge Platonist. Unlike Astell, who disagreed with some of the pivotal tenets of Enlightenment thinking, like religious toleration and individual rights, Chudleigh seems to have been more tolerant, especially of dissenters. In the preface to *The Song of the Three Children Paraphras'd*, for instance, she mentions those who 'have false Notions of Religion'. Instead of castigating them as Astell would, she asks them to stop spreading their version of the 'Word'. Ultimately, however, Chudleigh believed that men and women, regardless of their creed, could please God by

Living well, not the being of this or that Denomination, of this or that Sect or Party, that will make them eternally happy; but the being exactly conformable to those Divine Rules which are prescribed in the Holy Scriptures, those unerring Precepts, of which that sacred Volume is full.¹⁴⁵

Here Chudleigh clearly proves herself to be more liberal and 'enlightened' in regard to religious tolerance than Astell, who thought any amount of toleration would lead to the destruction of the Church of England.

Conclusions: Essays upon Several Subjects in Prose and Verse (1710)

'Lady Chudleigh has afforded me a very agreeable, and rational Entertainment.

Mifflin Company, 1920), 147.

¹⁴⁴*POSO*, 88.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid*, 175.

You asked [^]for my opinion of her Essays and this is it. they neither abound with false Wit nor affected Expressions, the common blemishes of this sort of writing', wrote George Russel to George Ballard on 16 October 1749.¹⁴⁶ Russel went on to say in the same letter that Chudleigh's *Essays*

appear to be not the Excursions of a lively imagination, which can often expatiate on the Passions and actions of Men, without the least Experience of either; So much as the deliberate results of a long exercise in the world improv'd with Reading, regulated by judgment soften'd by good breeding, and heighten'd with sprightly thoughts and elevated Piety. her stile often runs itself into a kind of Poetical measure, I dare say the authoress never observ'd it—Her Soul was harmonious, no wonder her Expressions are the same.¹⁴⁷

Published in 1710, although started as early as 1703, Chudleigh's prose essays combined with verse represent the culmination of her religious, philosophical and polemical writings. They continue and further develop many of the protofeminist themes found in *The Ladies Defence* and *Poems on Several Occasions*. The essays range in topics from knowledge and friendship to life and death, but the overall theme is the still amelioration of women's lives. In fact, one finds Chudleigh repeatedly challenging and coaxing her women readers to look deep within themselves to find their intellectual potential. Her stated intentions are to convince women to improve their 'Faculties':

'Tis only to the *Ladies* I presume to present them [her *Essays*];. . .to them they may prove beneficial; they'll in 'em be perswaded to cultivate their Minds, to brighten and refine their Reason, and to render all their Passions subservient to its Dictates; they'll there be instructed by great Examples, read of several Men, and some Ladies, that have struggled with Pain, Poverty, Infamy, Death, and whatsoever else has been accounted dreadful among the Sufferings incident to Humanity, without being overcome, without losing their Resolution, or lessening their Patience.

She adds for emphasis, 'My whole Design is to recommend Virtue, to perswade my Sex to improve their Understandings'.¹⁴⁸ Like other didactic essays addressed specifically to women, such as *The Ladies Calling*, Chudleigh's *Essays* offer women a type of Christian manual on how to conduct their lives. Unlike *The Ladies Calling*,

¹⁴⁶BOD, MSS Ballard 37, fol. 133^r.

¹⁴⁷Ibid, fols., 133^{r-v}.

¹⁴⁸Chudleigh, *Essays*, 247.

which assumes women's mental inferiority to men, however, Chudleigh credits her women readers with more intellectual responsibility and assures them in her essay 'Of Grief' that 'Thoughts cannot be immur'd, they enjoy an entire Liberty'.¹⁴⁹ Although one can find Chudleigh urging her reader on throughout the entire volume of essays, it is Chudleigh's leading essay 'Of Knowledge', with the sub-title 'To the Ladies', that epitomizes her protofeminist inclinations. In it she challenges her women readers to

not permit the Men any longer to monopolize the Perfections of the Mind, to ingross the Goods of the Understanding: I would not have them suffer themselves to be willingly dispossess'd of their Reason, and shut out of the Commonwealth of Learning.¹⁵⁰

She offers her readers a long catalogue of illustrious women in verse as examples of their potential if they 'endeavour to improve those Faculties [their] kind Creator' has given them.¹⁵¹ This continued coaxing and encouragement of women which openly disputes assumptions about women's intellectual and spiritual inferiority is part of Chudleigh's protofeminist legacy.

'Where Reason governs there will be no disorderly Passions, no Storms to ruffle the Mind, nor Clouds to overcast it; all will be calm and bright, all harmonious and regular; the Soul will be full of Satisfaction', wrote Chudleigh in her essay 'Of Friendship'.¹⁵² Like Astell and other early eighteenth-century protofeminists, Chudleigh employed rational, philosophical arguments to defend the intellectual and spiritual potential of women. In her own right, however, Chudleigh deserves to be reconsidered as a protofeminist who made a singular contribution to the polemic genre in defence of women that became popular at the turn of the eighteenth century. *The Ladies Defence*, a development of the *querelle des femmes* tradition was a hybrid of satire and serious social criticism, offered her readers accessible verse that attempted to instruct and entertain them simultaneously. In the loosely strung narrative of the semi-autobiographical speaker, Marissa, Chudleigh's *Poems* offered

¹⁴⁹Chudleigh, *Essays*, 293.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid*, 251.

¹⁵¹*Ibid*, 254.

¹⁵²*Ibid*, 347.

similar entertainment to her women readers, whilst always reminding them that true happiness could only be found by relying on Reason and a strong faith in God. The *Essays*, which contained rather stern recommendations about pride, humility, anger, fear, etc., still sought to coax her readers into her line of thinking by offering entertaining verse to break the monotony of prose. More tolerant and less political than Astell, Chudleigh was a much more accessible writer, whose texts, which were reflections of years of careful study and practice, sought to teach and delight women.

Chapter Four:

'Compelled to claim an author's right'¹

The Celebrated and Calumniated Elizabeth Thomas

Elizabeth Thomas demonstrates several things about the way the Great Poet mythologizing process works. . . Patriarchal culture, which has shaped the Great Poet myth and handed it to Pope to personalize as Poet as Defender of the Citadel, has also shaped a countermyth about women. Poverty, illness, doomed love, writing, and masculinity make a mighty Poet in His Misery Dead. Poverty, illness, doomed love, writing, and femaleness make a Scribbling Woman, in other words, a whore.²

'The Letter you were pleased to direct for me, to be left at the Coffee-house last Summer, was a great Honour; and your Verses were, I thought, too good to be a Woman's; some of my Friends to whom I read them were of the same Opinion', wrote John Dryden to Elizabeth Thomas on 12 November 1699.³ A well-respected verse and letter writer, Thomas shared a brief correspondence with Dryden in the last year of his life. Even after Dryden's death Thomas continued to correspond with his son Charles (1666-1704), and his cousin Elizabeth (Pickering) Creed (1644?-1728), a philanthropist who resided in Oundle, Northamptonshire.⁴ Widely circulating her poems in manuscript, Thomas ^{had a} writing career ^{which} was fundamentally social, since she wrote and exchanged poetry with many literary personalities from the turn of the eighteenth century. Thomas was also a disciple of Enlightenment thinking, who had a sound knowledge of history, natural philosophy, classical literature (mostly from translations) and current issues, to which her letters, lyrics, satires, panegyrics, pastorals and religious meditations bear witness. Like ^{that of} other fairly well-known protofeminists, such as Mary Astell and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, much of her poetry dealt with women's issues. Although she never argued for complete equality between

¹*The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, Now First Collected: with Notes and Illustrations; an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, Grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of His Letters, the greater part of which has never before been published*, 3 vols, ed. by Edmond Malone (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), I, 354.

²Isobel Grundy, 'Against the Dead Poets Society, Non-Augustan, Non-Romantic, Non-Male Poets', *Halcyon*, 15, (1993), 191.

³*The Letters of John Dryden*, ed. by Charles E. Ward (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942), 125.

⁴PC, 259-61, HL, 232 and the poem, 'To the Pious Memory of Mrs. JEMIMA CREED; Inscribed to Mrs. ELIZABETH CREED of Oundle, Northamptonshire' in MP, 41-6.

men and women, Thomas believed in women's inherent right to education and to be treated with respect before and after marriage. Thomas herself never married; however, she was engaged for sixteen years to the Gloucestershire gentleman, Richard Gwinnett (1675-1717). Their correspondence was published in *Pylades and Corinna* (1731) and *The Honourable Lovers* (1732). It reveals much about country life in Gloucestershire, with its hunting parties and assizes, as well as the excitement of the literary scene in London.

Although Thomas was fairly well-known and admired for her wit and poetic ability at the turn of the eighteenth century, her reputation has not fared very well in literary history. Aside from her connection with Dryden, she is usually remembered for the role she played in the 1726 sale of some of Alexander Pope's early letters to the notorious bookseller, Edmund Curll. Pope subsequently satirized her in *The Dunciad. An Heroic Poem* (1728), and Pope scholars were quick to assume that she obtained the letters by illicit means. As a result, Thomas' role as an *author* in literary history has been almost completely eclipsed by her role as an *anecdote* in Pope scholarship. This marginal position has been compounded by her obscurity—Thomas' poems and letters have not been published since the early eighteenth century except in a small selection of specialized anthologies that do little to recontextualize her life or writings. Her status, or lack thereof, as an unmarried, impecunious woman no doubt has done little to help her standing. This chapter examines the eighteenth-century material evidence of Thomas' reputation and the subsequent calumny to which it has been subjected in order to reevaluate her contributions to early eighteenth-century literature, particularly protofeminism.

Elizabeth Thomas wrote her life story and prefixed it to *Pylades and Corinna*. For historical reasons—the scholar, Edmond Malone, discredited certain details—this autobiography has usually been dismissed as unreliable. Whilst some of the early details of her life story have been difficult to corroborate, much of her memoir has revealed itself to be accurate. One should also keep in mind that Thomas wrote her

life story whilst imprisoned in Fleet Prison for debt; she may have embellished certain details to gain more sympathy from potential supporters or to increase its commercial appeal.

Born on 31 August 1675, Thomas was the only surviving child of Emmanuel Thomas (died 1677) of the Inner Temple and Elizabeth (1650?-1719), daughter of William Osborne of Sittingbourne, Kent. She was baptized at St. Bride Fleet Street on 1 September 1675.⁵ Her parents were married 25 April 1668 at the Old Church, St. Pancras, London.⁶ Both parents came from respectable, professional families, but Thomas had to contend with financial hardship after her father died in May 1677. In her 'Life', Thomas, no doubt to boost her claims for being a gentlewoman, reports that her father ^{was supposedly} a 'vastly Rich' man who kept a 'Chariot, a House in Town, another in *Essex*, and Chambers in the *Temple*'.⁷ Apparently, he was given a lavish funeral in keeping with his status:

The Pall was borne by Six Right Honourables; the Corps deposited under the Communion-Table in the *Temple-Church*, and one Hundred and Thirty Rings, of 20s. each, given away.⁸

Records survive that do confirm parts of Thomas' story. Although he left no will, the administration record for Emmanuel Thomas indicates that he had chambers in the Temple. Moreover, the archives of the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple confirm that he was an 'attourny' who was '*buried in the round*' of the Temple Church on 10 May 1677.⁹ After the funeral was over, however, Thomas' mother received a shock to discover their diminished circumstances. Apparently, her father had been lax about obtaining prompt payment from clients; after a fire occurred and his records were lost, there was little hope of obtaining all that was owed to him. To conserve money, Thomas and her mother retired to the country. Even though Thomas frequently bemoans the financial struggles she endured throughout her life, she is careful to provide a family lineage that emphasizes her status as a gentlewoman, as

⁵PC, 24 and GH, MS 6540/2.

⁶London Metropolitan Archives, Saint Pancras, Euston Road Parish Register, P90 PAN1/1 + 3.

⁷PC, iv-v (All Roman numerals refer to the second series unless otherwise stated).

⁸Ibid, v.

⁹PRO, PCC, PROB 6/52, fol. 64 and *A Calendar of the Inner Temple Records*, 5 vols, ed. by Frederick Andrew Inderwick (London: H. Sotheran & Co. et al, 1896-1936), III, 451.

when she claims that her great-grandfather, Richard Shute, a Turkey merchant and City member, was a favourite of Charles I.¹⁰

Thomas was schooled at home in writing, reading, Latin and arithmetic and claims to have seen a tutor whilst in the country. Apparently, she was a prolific reader from an early age—'before she was five Years old, she had Read the whole Bible three times over'.¹¹ Thomas frequently mentions her personal library with great pride; she claims that she

frequently [received] handsome pecuniary Gifts from her Sponsors, and other Relations; and allowed the liberty to dispose of them as she thought fitting, it went all for Books, but she never bought any, till after having Read, and as she thought found them worthy; by which Means, before she was twenty, she had purchased a small, tho' valuable Collection of the best Authors and Editions, estimated by a Bookseller at an Hundred Pounds.¹²

Aside from the details of repeated financial crises suffered by her mother, little is known about Thomas' early life. She recounts memories of frequent illness and much time spent in 'writing Familiar Letters in Prose and Verse, to her little Cousins', a social, literary pattern that she continued in later life. In a description of her appearance, Thomas is careful to construct an image of herself as an intellectual and spiritual woman, who is not overly concerned with materialism:

As for her Stature, it was, in Youth, a tall middling; but in her later Years, thro' the depression of her Spirits, on the turn of Fortune, and a long habitude of Reading, and Writing, she had contracted a droop of her Head; which, as it abated something of her height, did very much of her Presence. She was neither Fat, nor Lean, her Hair Auborne, her Eyes a dark-full Hazel, her Visage Oval, her Complex ion and Teeth tolerable, her Shape neither excellent nor deformed, All together she was well enough; and had she studied the Adornment of her Body, as much as she did that of her Mind, she would have made a more agreeable Appearance; but that was not her Aim, having always affected Solitude, and a private Life. The *Body* she would say, was only a *Case* for the *Soul*, like the Wooden-work of a Clock, which, if kept but whole, and clean-dusted, was sufficient.¹³

¹⁰*PC*, xxi. A Turkey merchant would have been involved in international trade, specifically with what is now the Middle East.

¹¹*Ibid*, viii.

¹²*Ibid*, x. For other references to her library and manuscript folio of poems see *HL* 152 and 89 (second pagination).

¹³*Ibid*, x-xi.



3. Elizabeth Thomas, by G. King, from *Pylades and Corinna*.
By permission of the Provost and the Fellows of Worcester College, Oxford.

Thomas does seem to have been committed to her intellectual endeavours and, like Mary Astell, sought out associations with other intellectual men and women to assist her continuing development. Had Thomas been spared the indignity of penury, scholars might not have been so quick to dismiss her as a literary trollop.

Thomas seems to have attracted the attention of several intellectual men and women, including the Gloucester gentleman, Richard Gwinnett, whose pen name was Pylades. Gwinnett was the eldest son of George Gwinnett (d. 1723), the lord of the manor in Shurdington, Gloucestershire. Apparently his father was an intimate friend of Thomas' maternal uncle, Richard Osborne. Gwinnett studied law under Francis Gastrell at Christ Church, Oxford and was admitted to the Middle Temple on 22 June 1697; however, he was unable to practice law in London due to ill health.¹⁴ Thomas initially attempted to dissuade Gwinnett from an entanglement with her because of her 'unhappy Circumstances'. Gwinnett, however, persisted in his suit, but their engagement was protracted because he was unable to provide an adequate income in order for them to have a good standard of living after marriage. Gwinnett also feared his father's disapproval of Thomas because she had no dowry—he was expected to marry well to alleviate the encumbered estate that he would inherit one day. In Letter IX, dated 26 October 1700, Gwinnett writes to Thomas,

I with the same Freedom give you an account of my *external* Circumstances, as I have of the most *internal* Thoughts of my Heart. Estate I have none at present, but what my Father allows me, and when I shall have any at my own Command is very uncertain, my Father and Mother being as likely to live, I think, as my self. I am the eldest of Two *Sons* and Three *Daughters*, who being all to be provided for out of about 300l. *per Annum*, how much will come to my Share, more than my Mother's Jointure, which I suppose is about half of it, must be determined by future Contingencies. This is my Condition, CORINNA, and I would not call my Fortune too narrow, if I could enjoy that Constancy of Health in *London* which some Men do; for then I would not doubt but by my honest Care and Industry, I might procure an honourable Subsistence, as for heaping up a great Estate right or wrong, that I shall never aim at.¹⁵

Denied a union by material circumstances, they continued their engagement through correspondence and annual visits. Both of them refused potentially lucrative matches

¹⁴See *DNB* and *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple*, 3 vols (London: Butterworth & Co., 1949), I, 242.

¹⁵*PC*, 27-8.

during the sixteen year interim because of their devotion to one another. Toward the end of his life, Gwinnett partially supported Thomas and her bedridden mother with gifts of money because she had rejected other suitors in favour of him. In Letter XXX, from Gwinnett to Thomas, he gently calms her financial worries:

I have often told you, *that you should never want Necessaries, at least as long as I am able to support you: And at present I have Ten Pounds (which I can well spare) ready to return you, as soon as you can send me the comfortable News that you are able to receive it.*¹⁶

By 1716, Gwinnett's father 'gave him Possession of the whole Estate, and leave to please himself', at which time, Thomas reports that 'he immediately came up, claimed my Promise, and was very pressing for Marriage'.¹⁷ However, Thomas' mother had become very ill; her doctor, Samuel Garth, gave her less than six months to live. As a result, Thomas put Gwinnett off, so she could nurse her mother. She claimed that

I told him I could not leave her in that weak Condition to die among Strangers, and as I had not thought sixteen Years long in waiting for him, he could not in Justice refuse me six Months to pay my last Duty to a dying Parent...I knew Mr. GWINNETT could not live in Town, I was sensible it was my Duty, when a Wife, to live where he pleased: I knew my Mother was too weak to be removed; or if she had not, she had so entirely disoblged him by some little peevish Humours (occasioned by her Distemper) that I durst not leave it to his Courtesy tho' I must do this Justice to his Generosity, and Memory, that he was willing to pay for Board and Attendance in *London*.¹⁸

Ironically, Thomas' mother outlived Gwinnett. After suffering a consumptive relapse, he died on 16 April 1717 before he and Thomas could marry.¹⁹ Because of Thomas' long devotion to him, Gwinnett had altered his will on 29 March 1717 and bequeathed £600 to her. Hers was the first legacy he listed:

I give and bequeath unto M^{rs}. Elizabeth Thomas Junior in Wyans Court in great Russell Street within the Libertys of Westminster the sum of six hundred pounds to be paid her in manner following that is to say one hundred pounds one Year after my decease and of residue thereof within ~~the~~ three Years after my decease this kindness she hath deserved of me in what she hath formerly written in her own will.²⁰

¹⁶*HL*, 184-5. For other references to the monetary support that Gwinnett gave to Thomas see the same, 154-8.

¹⁷*PC*, lxxiii.

¹⁸*Ibid*, lxxiii-lxiv.

¹⁹Gwinnett was interred in the family tomb in the churchyard of Holy Trinity, Badgeworth, Gloucestershire. See Ralph Bigland, *Historical, Monumental and Genealogical Collections, Relative to the County of Gloucester*, 2 vols (London: John Nichols, 1791/92), I, 118.

²⁰GRO, MS D189/II/1/F1 and PRO, PCC, PROB 11/561/231. Gwinnett's will was also reprinted in *HL*, 87-8 (second pagination).

However, when Thomas attempted to claim her inheritance, Richard's brother, George junior 'stifled the *Will*'.²¹ Hence, in 1718, she embarked on a long and costly lawsuit that involved the courts in Chancery, the Guildhall and the House of Lords.²² She reports:

At last, to shew my Respect to the Dead, I consented to an Accommodation, viz. to receive 200*l.* down, and 200*l.* more at the Year's end; the *first* Payment I received, and paid away in three Days among her [Thomas' mother] Creditors, and mine, without keeping a single Shilling to my own Use; but when the other became due, he bid me Defiance, stood Suit on his own Bond, and held me out four Terms (which by a *Bye-Law*, in the *City*, they call a *Subject's Right*.) This brought me from Chancery to Common-Law, and a Set of all new Lawyers, where having cast him at *Guild-Hall*, and recovered Costs, they took out a *Writ of Error*, and carried it to the Bar of the *House of Lords*, where it dangled another Year, and then they paid in the 248*l.* without standing a Hearing: The Gentlemen of the long Robe had made me sign an Instrument, that they should receive the Money, and pay themselves; and truly [], when they had done that. . . there was no more came into my Pocket out of the aforesaid Sum, than 13*l.* 16*s.*²³

Thus out of the £600 pound settlement Gwinnett bequeathed her, she only received £213 and 6*s* for her litigious efforts.

When Thomas' mother died on 28 January 1718/19, Elizabeth had taken on her debt of £333, in expectation of receiving Gwinnett's legacy. However, the money she received from Gwinnett's estate was not enough to satisfy her mother's creditors. In the end, she was destitute and had to sell her belongings to live, including her treasured library. She reports selling the 'last of all my Books, which I had been collecting my whole Life (with what Gifts I had from kind Godmothers and Relations) to the Value of above 150*l.* with the utmost Regret, I pledged them for about 50*l.* and lost them'.²⁴ Thomas notes with bitter irony in a letter she wrote to William Talbot, Bishop of Durham, on 31 October 1728, that had she left her mother in the care of others in 1716 and 'married him [Gwinnett] then, I had been secured from the Insults of Poverty'.²⁵

²¹Even though Richard Gwinnett appointed his father as his sole executor, his brother proved the will; administration was granted 'by y^e archbishop of Canterbury to George Gwinnett y^e deseaseds Brother 24 Dec^r 1717' (GRO, MS D189/II/1/F1).

²²PRO, Chancery Proceedings, C11, 2372/34, 2372/49; Chancery, Decrees and Orders, C33/332-2, fol. 323^v; C33/334-1, fols. 185, 244, 250; C33/336-52, 255, 256; C33/338-340.

²³PC, lxxv-lxxvi.

²⁴Ibid, lxx.

²⁵Ibid, lxxiv.

After her disastrous lawsuit, Thomas' financial situation worsened. She says the loss of potential income from the suit 'at once broke all my Measures, and compelled me to abscond from all my Creditors, and starve in a Corner till last Winter; when, betrayed by a false Friend, I was hurried to a Jail'.²⁶ A warrant was issued for her arrest in December 1727, and she was apprehended at Southwark in Surrey and subsequently committed to Fleet Prison on 11 January 1727.²⁷

During her time in prison, the Bishop of Durham, mentioned above, after hearing of her appalling situation, paid four guineas a year toward her chamber rent and encouraged other prominent people to be charitable towards her as well. Testimonials of her worthiness were written up and signed by prominent men such as William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury, Benjamin Hoadly, (at the time) Bishop of Salisbury and Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London. In the summer sessions of the Peace at Guildhall, London, a warrant was issued for Thomas' release on 23 July 1729 under an Act of Insolvency granted by the King.²⁸ However, she was not released until the middle of 1730, presumably because she could not pay all of her prison fees. Malone found a letter written by Thomas during the interim period between her clearing and release 'in a presentation copy of her volume of Poems, purchased a few years ago by my friend Mr. Bindley'.²⁹ She seems to have been negotiating her freedom in exchange for a volume of her poetry. Malone noted that the letter, dated 16 April 1730, had 'no superscription, but was probably addressed to Sir Joseph

²⁶PC, lxxvi.

²⁷PRO, PRIS 1/3, fol. 415, #94. Michael Webb, an Assistant Librarian at the Bodleian, kindly helped me translate Thomas' prison record from the Latin.

²⁸Curll gives 3 June 1729 as the release date in PC (lxxx).

²⁹*A Catalogue of the Curious and Extensive Library of the late James Bindley, Esq. F.S.A., Removed from his residence in Somerset-Place. Part the Third. Containing an Extraordinary Assemblage of Rare and Curious Books in Every Department of Literature; but particularly in Early English Literature. Which will be Sold by Auction, by Mr. Evans, at his house, No. 26, Pall-Mall, on Tuesday, Feb. 16, and Ten following Days, Sunday excepted* (London: W. Bulmer, 1819), 51. Lot 1293 is 'Mrs. Thomas's Poems, presentation copy, with Bp. Hoadley's autograph, 1722'. In the margins, it says the book sold for 5 shillings and 6 pence to the bookseller Robert Triphook. The book next appears in the catalogue to the sale of Richard Heber's library in 1834 as, lot 6707: 'Thomas (Mrs.) Miscellany Poems on Several Subjects, Large paper, presentation copy to Mrs. Hoadley the wife of Bishop Hoadley, red morocco, richly gilt, - 1722'. Apparently, it sold for 12s on the 24th day of the sale, Heber having previously purchased it for 7s. 6d. See *Bibliotheca Heberiana. Catalogue of the Library of the late Richard Heber, Esq., Part the First, Removed from his house in York-Street, Westminster, which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. Sotheby and Son, at their house, Wellington-Street, Strand, On Thursday, April 10, and Twenty-five following days, Sundays excepted* (London, 1834), 348. I lost track of the book after this sale and have not been able to locate it in any published library holdings.

Jekyll, Master of the Rolls; *Your Honour* being the appropriate address to the person filling that high office'.³⁰

She begs leave to lay her unhappy case before your Honour's charitable consideration, having bin deprived of a competent fortune by an unjust executor, who carried her through Civil and Common Law, Chancery, and the House of Lords; till length of time consumed the profits of the suit, and she was landed in a prison; where, for several years, she has suffered more than thought can conceive, or words express. And tho' she received liberty by the gracious Act in July session, has languished here ever since under extream sickness and want, being so destitute of all necessaries, that she is not able to go through the streets, much less can she hope to get into any business, for the support of life, without a few modest fig-leaves to cover her; which having no means to raise, nor friend or relation living, she is compelled to claim an author's right,—of presenting her book; a method she little thought to have used, and is ashamed to own now: but who, oh! who, can blame a drowning wretch, for laying hold of any branch?³¹

Still in Fleet Prison on 5 June 1730, Thomas wrote to the Edward Harley, the second Earl of Oxford (1689-1741) to thank him for past charity and ask for more:

My Lord, with the utmost regret I have deferred this duty till now, having been wedged down in this detestable place by an incurable and painful malady, poverty, and tatters. Ever since my clearing in July, I have had much difficulty to support a wretched being, and entirely despaired of getting out of this place, but Providence sent comfort when I least expected, Lady Frances Clifton clothed me, my Lord Delaware sent four guineas towards paying my prison debts, which were contracted since Michaelmas 1720 (during that long and hard winter, when I lay ill and must have perished had I not found a little Christian credit in the house), and to work out the rest I wrote the enclosed trifle, depending on two guineas for the copy, which is the market price for a sixpenny pamphlet, but through the deadness of trade could get no money; only an equivalent in books, which I humbly hope such friends as are inclined to buy will be so good as to purchase of me now, rather than of the shops when published.

The Duchess of Somerset (who has been long a great support to me) had the bounty last week to give me a stock of stationary ware, and to buy of me after, with a gracious promise of future custom at her return. My Lady Delaware has given me leave to hope for a recommendation among her acquaintance, when I am out of this place; so that I now begin to hope I shall live by my honest industry; it being worse than death to me to receive favours and live idle.³²

Although Thomas was eventually released from the Fleet, she never escaped the prison of poverty. After her emancipation, Thomas took lodgings in Fleet Street, but she died shortly afterwards at the age of 56 on 3 February 1731. She was 'decently

³⁰Malone, I, 353-54.

³¹Ibid, I, 354-55.

³²Report on the Manuscripts of his Grace The Duke of Portland, K. G. preserved at Welbeck Abbey', *Historical Manuscripts Commission* (London: Mackie & Co. Ltd., 1901), VI, 29.

Interred' on 5 February in the churchyard of St. Bride Fleet Street³³, the burial reportedly having been paid for by Margaret West, Lady Dowager De La Warr (d. 1738).³⁴

Thomas seems to have first published when she was 25, when her anonymous poem '*To the Memory of the truly Honoured JOHN DRYDEN, Esq*' appeared in the commemorative compilation, *Luctus Britannici* (1700).³⁵ Between 1700 and 1722, she circulated her poetry in manuscript amongst friends and family, but is not known to have published anything further in print. As previously mentioned, her poems were first printed in 1722 under the title, *Miscellany Poems On Several Subjects* and then reissued in 1726 with the title, *Poems on Several Occasions*.³⁶ In addition to the Pope-Cromwell letters, Thomas seems to have sold various manuscripts to the notorious bookseller, Edmund Curll, in 1726 because, from that date on, her writings and correspondence can be found scattered throughout many of Curll's publications in a piecemeal fashion. They were finally consolidated in *Pylades and Corinna* (1731) and *The Honourable Lovers* (1732).

Curll repeatedly recycled Thomas' material. *Whartoniana: or, Miscellanies, in Verse and Prose, By the Wharton Family* came out in two volumes in 1727 (reprinted in 1731 as *The Poetical Works of Philip, Late Duke of Wharton*). In the second volume, Curll printed some of Thomas' correspondence with Richard Gwinnett, John Norris of Bemerton, Lady Hester Pakington and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, all of which reappeared in *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*. In January 1727, Curll published *Atterburyana*, which contained letters passed between Thomas and Gwinnett, and Thomas and Captain Richard Hemington, along with Gwinnett's poem, 'The Wish'. The poem and some of the letters were also

³³GH, MS 6540/4.

³⁴PC, vi (first series), Peter Cunningham, *A Handbook for London, Past and Present*, 2 vols (London: John Murry, 1849), I, 117 and Malone, I, 355.

³⁵*Luctus Britannici: or the Tears of the British Muses; for the Death of John Dryden, Esq, Late Poet Laureat to Their Majesties, K. Charles and K. James the Second. Written by the most Eminent Hands in the two Famous Universities, and by several Others* (London: Henry Playford and Abel Roper, 1700), 13-15. This poem, slightly altered, reappeared in *MP*.

³⁶Both of these were printed for Thomas Combes, at the *Bible and Dove* in *Paternoster-Row*.

reprinted in *Pylades and Corinna*. The satire attributed to Thomas called, *Codrus, or the Dunciad Dissected*, was first published in 1728, and her dubious account of Dryden's funeral appeared in the 1730 publication of the *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Amours of William Congreve Esq. The Metamorphosis of the Town* was published anonymously in 1730 and reprinted 1731 and 1732.³⁷ And as previously mentioned in July 1731 and February 1732, *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers* appeared; Curll published the second edition of both volumes in 1736.³⁸

After Thomas died, Curll continued to publish her texts. In 1735 he included some letters that had passed between her and Thomas Uvedale, plus one letter to her from Chudleigh, in an edition of Pope's letters.³⁹ In 1743 the fourth and final edition of *Metamorphosis* was printed for J. Wilford, with Thomas' name on the title page for the first time. The inscription read, 'By the late celebrated Mrs. *ELIZABETH THOMAS*, Who has so often obliged the Town, under the Name of *CORINNA*'. Since 1743, Thomas' life story and writings have appeared in only a few biographical dictionaries such as Robert Shiel's *Lives of the Poets* (1753)⁴⁰, the *Biographium Fæmineum* (1766), Mary Hays' *Female Biography* (1803), Matilda Betham's *Biographical Dictionary* (1804), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (1990), *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720* (1990), *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (1993) and anthologies such as Alexander Dyce's *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825), Frederic Rowton's *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (1848), Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989) and *The Columbia Anthology of British Poetry* (1995).⁴¹

³⁷*The Metamorphosis of the Town: or, a View of the Present Fashions. A Tale: After the Manner of Fontaine* (London: J. Wilford, 1730). This poem was attributed to Thomas, by Curll, in an advertisement at the end of the first volume (first edition) of *PC*.

³⁸In *The Gentleman's Magazine*, under 'Books publish'd', advertisements appeared for *PC* (July 1731), 313 and for *HL* (February 1732), 635. They were each priced at 5s.

³⁹Alexander Pope, *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence*. (London: Edmund Curll, 1735), III, 1-24 (second pagination).

⁴⁰This text is attributed to Theophilus Cibber on the title-page.

⁴¹An account of her life story also appeared in the *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* (4 July 1846), 8-11.

Thomas' Misrepresentation in Literary History:

During a more fortunate time in her life, Thomas had met Alexander Pope through her acquaintance Henry Cromwell.⁴² At her request, Cromwell had given her some letters which had passed between himself and Pope in the years from 1708 to 1711. She then realized in her impoverished state several years later that she might profit from the sale of these letters, since Pope's literary reputation had, by that time, greatly increased. Hence in 1726, she sold them for ten guineas to the notorious bookseller, Edmund Curll, who knew their potential value and promptly published them in *Miscellanea in Two Volumes*.⁴³

At the time Curll published *Miscellanea*, he and Pope were already bitter enemies. Publishing the letters proved to be a material and personal triumph for Curll because they not only sold well, but their publication also perturbed Pope. Not one to be outdone, Pope took his revenge in his 1728 satire, *The Dunciad. An Heroic Poem*. In Book II, while describing a race between Curll and his rival bookseller, Bernard Lintott, Pope satirizes both Curll and Thomas:

Full in the middle way there stood a lake,
Which *C—l's Corinna* chanc'd that morn to make,
(Such was her wont, at early dawn to drop
Her evening cates before his neighbour's shop,)
Here fortun'd *C—l* to slide; loud shout the band,
And *L—t, L—t*, rings thro' all the *Strand*.
Obscene with filth the Miscreant lies bewray'd,
Fal'n in the plash his wickedness had lay'd;⁴⁴

Pope's description of Curll, as a 'Miscreant', 'Obscene' with Corinna's faeces ('filth') is disgusting, but, by 1729, when *The Dunciad* first appeared on the literary scene, Curll was already notorious for being an unscrupulous bookseller and would have been accustomed to this sort of 'mud-slinging'. In contrast, before Pope immortalized

⁴²For information on Henry Cromwell, see Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope, A Life* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985).

⁴³*Miscellanea. in Two Volumes. Never before Published. Viz. I. Familiar Letters written to Henry Cromwell Esq; by Mr. Pope. II. Occasional Poems by Mr. Pope, Mr. Cromwell, Dean Swift, &c. III. Letters from Mr. Dryden, to a Lady, in the Year 1699*, 2 vols (London: Edmund Curll, 1727). Ralph Straus lists the first publication date as 14 July 1726, in *The Unspeakable Curll. Being Some Account of Edmund Curll, Bookseller; To which is added a Full List of his Books* (London: The Whitefriars Press, Ltd., 1927), 278. *Miscellanea* also contained some of Thomas' letters and a tract written by Gwinnett called, *An ESSAY on the MISCHIEF of Giving FORTUNES with WOMEN in MARRIAGE*.

⁴⁴Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad. An Heroic Poem. In Three Books* (London: A Dodd, 1728), ii, 53-60. See also *The Dunciad*, ed. by James Sutherland (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965), 105-6.

Thomas as 'C—l's *Corinna*', she had an honourable reputation. Catherine Ingrassia argues that the 'public urination signifies the lack of propriety and conformity demonstrated by Thomas's sale of Pope's personal letters; the private should not be publicly exposed'.⁴⁵ Curll, of course, could not let the chance to profit from Pope's *Dunciad* pass him by, so in May of 1728, he published *A Compleat Key to the Dunciad*. This key revealed the identity of most of the people whom Pope had satirized in *The Dunciad*. It also confirmed that 'Curl's *Corinna*', was 'Mrs. Thomas, to whom Mr. Cromwell gave Mr. POPE'S Familiar LETTERS, which Mr. Curll printed in 2 Volumes'.⁴⁶

The literary skirmish between Curll and Pope, however, did not end with Curll's *Key to the Dunciad*. Pope published a new version of his satirical poem in 1729 called, *The Dunciad With Notes Variorum*. In reply to Curll's identification of Thomas in the *Key*, Pope composed his own footnote to accompany the 'Curl's *Corinna*' line:

This name it seems was taken by one Mrs. T—, who procured some private Letters of Mr. Pope's, while almost a boy, to Mr. Cromwell, and sold them without the consent of either of those gentlemen to Curl, who printed them in 12^o 1727. He has discover'd her to be the publisher in his *Key*, p. 11. *But our Poet had no thought of reflecting on her in this passage; on the contrary, he has been inform'd she is a decent woman and in misfortunes.* We only take this opportunity of mentioning the manner in which those Letters got abroad, which the author was asham'd of as very trivial things, full not only of levities, but of wrong judgments of men and books, and only excusable from the youth and inexperience of the writer [my italics].⁴⁷

Although this note seems considerate—even sympathetic—toward Thomas, in editions of the *Dunciad* after 1735, Pope omitted the sympathetic comment (seen above in italics). In *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden*, Edmond Malone, speculates that Pope removed the understanding statement after he discovered that Thomas had authored the libelous satire, *Codrus, or the Dunciad Dissected* in 1728, one of the many satires on Pope published by Curll after the debut

⁴⁵Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 59.

⁴⁶*A Compleat Key to the Dunciad. With a Character of Mr. Pope's Profane Writings*, 3rd edn. (London: Edmund Curll, 1728), 11.

⁴⁷Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum with the Prolegomena of Scriblerus* (London: A. Dod, 1729), ii, 66n and Sutherland, 106.

of *The Dunciad*. Although Curll originally published *Codrus*, under the name of Mr. Philips, he later claimed in two different publications that it was actually Thomas who had written it. Malone suggests that Pope discovered her authorship from an advertisement printed on the last page of *Pylades and Corinna*.⁴⁸ Under the title, 'An Account of the Writings of PYLADES and CORINNA', the following advertisement appears:

CODRUS: OR, THE DUNCIAD DISSECTED. To which is added, Farmer POPE and his SON. A TALE. Written by CORINNA (but published under the name of PHILIPS) 8vo. 1729. Price 6 d.

Yet, in 1729 prior to the 1731 publication of *Pylades and Corinna*, Curll revealed Thomas to be the author of *Codrus* in another rejoinder to *The Dunciad Variorum*, called *The Curliad*. A note in *The Curliad* reveals that 'The *Dunciad* Dissected, &c. Was wrote by one, whom the *Remarker* [Pope] compassionately stiles, a decent Woman, and in Misfortunes'.⁴⁹ Regardless of whether Pope was aware of Curll's announcements in 1729 or 1731, the omission of the line in question has made Thomas appear in a slightly less favourable light to readers of *The Dunciad* post 1735.

If there is any doubt about Pope's intentions toward Thomas, one only need look at the note that accompanies the *Dunciad* line: 'Obscene with filth the Miscreant lies bewray'd' (Book II, line 71), which follows the '*Curl's Corinna*' line. Unlike the relatively innocuous note already mentioned above, Pope did not restrain his animosity toward Thomas in the note accompanying the description of Curll immersed in her faeces. Before making numerous scatological allusions, Pope offers readers a mock apology for his vulgarity: 'Tho' this incident may seem too low and base for the dignity of an Epic Poem, the learned very well know it to be but a copy of *Homer and Virgil*'. Then he ends the note with an acrimonious jab at Curll and Thomas, by claiming that 'men are sometimes obliged to swear, when they happen to have to do with Porters and Oyster-wenches'.⁵⁰ As a result of Pope's portrayal of

⁴⁸Malone, I, 352 and *Codrus: or the Dunciad Dissected. Being the Finishing-Stroke. To which is added, Farmer Pope and his Son. A Tale.* (London: Edmund Curll, 1728).

⁴⁹*The Curliad. A Hypercritic upon the Dunciad Variorum. With A farther Key to the New Characters* (London: Edmund Curll, 1729), 31. See also Joseph V. Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks on Alexander Pope 1711-1744* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969), 153-6.

⁵⁰Pope, *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), ii, 71n and Sutherland, 106-7.

Thomas both in the main text and subsequent notes, in Book II of the *Dunciad*, her standing has suffered greatly in literary history.

Thomas' appearance in Book II, however, may not have been the only one, since there is another section in the *Dunciad* where Pope may have satirized her. In Book III of the 1728 edition, Pope lampoons two women writers:

In lofty madness meditating song,
With tresses staring from poetic dreams,
And never wash'd, but in *Castalia's* streams.
H— and *T—*, glories of their race!⁵¹

In his 1728 *Key*, Curll originally attributes the letters '*H—* and *T—*' to the authors '[Eliza] Heywood and [Catherine] Trotter'.⁵² However, James Sutherland, editor of the Twickenham edition of *The Dunciad*, believes that the '*T—*' is most likely a reference to Thomas, because Catherine Trotter 'was a respectable woman' who had never offended Pope.⁵³ Sutherland's scholarly notes seem impartial, but his commentary is typical of a Pope scholar, inasmuch as he assumes the worst about Thomas. He insinuates that she was *not* respectable and is, therefore, *more* deserving of Pope's insult. Ultimately, Sutherland's disparaging remarks perpetuate the unfounded defamation of Thomas' character. Scholars may never know who the original '*T—*' was, and the likelihood of it being Thomas is not as significant as the negative assumptions Sutherland and other Pope scholars make about her. Whatever the case, by altering the line slightly in the 1729 *Variorum* edition, Pope clarified the identification issue. No one need speculate to whom he refers in line 145 of book three: 'Haywood, Centlivre, Glories of their race!'.⁵⁴ Because of Thomas' role in the literary transaction with Curll and her subsequent appearance(s) in *The Dunciad*, Pope scholars have misrepresented her character for over two hundred and fifty years. They were quick to assume that she procured Pope's letters from Cromwell in an illicit and compromising manner, by assuming she was Cromwell's mistress, although there has never been any proof to substantiate this notion.

⁵¹Pope, *Dunciad* (1728), iii, 150-54 and Sutherland, 162.

⁵²*A Compleat Key*, 17.

⁵³Sutherland, 162n.

⁵⁴Pope, *Dunciad Variorum* (1729), iii, 145 and Sutherland, 162. The authors are Eliza Haywood and Susanna Centlivre.

Before becoming embroiled in the Pope-Cromwell scandal, Thomas' prior claim to fame was receiving her pen name, Corinna, from Dryden, with whom she shared a brief correspondence in 1699.⁵⁵ As a result, Dryden scholars have scrutinized her character as well. Not only have they accepted the rumour that she was Cromwell's mistress, but, in relation to her association with Dryden, they have accused her of fortune-hunting. For example, in *The Works of John Dryden*, Sir Walter Scott says that Corinna 'contrived' to make an acquaintance with Dryden, the 'good-natured poet'.⁵⁶ The fact that the old *Dictionary of National Biography* repeats Scott's defamation by saying she 'was a great celebrity hunter' who managed 'to inveigle Dryden into a correspondence' has not helped her reputation in literary history.⁵⁷ Thus the unified stance of Pope and Dryden scholars—that Thomas was a woman completely lacking in morals and scruples—has been difficult to debunk.

Scholars interested in Thomas owe a great debt to both T. R. Steiner and Roger Lonsdale. Steiner was one of the first twentieth-century scholars to address misconceptions about Thomas by uncovering the calumny to which her reputation had been subjected. He holds Pope's biographers and editors responsible for the misrepresentation:

As part of the lore of the *Dunciad*, nearly every editor and biographer of Pope has asserted that Elizabeth Thomas, vendor of the Pope-Cromwell correspondence to Edmund Curll, was Cromwell's mistress, and probably trollop-general to fashionable London. Principal contemporary authorities like *DNB* and the Twickenham Pope maintain the story. Yet, outside of material directly connected with Pope, one cannot find a scrap of reliable eighteenth-century evidence to support this received view.⁵⁸

Lonsdale was also one of the first champions of Thomas. He included a short biography and a selection of her poetry in his anthology of eighteenth-century women

⁵⁵In a letter dated 12 November 1699, that Thomas affixes to her 'Life' in *Pylades and Corinna*, Dryden says, 'Since you do me the Favour to desire a Name from me, take that of CORINNA if you please; I mean not the Lady with whom OVID was in Love, but the famous *Theban* Poetess who overcame PINDAR as Historians tell us'.

⁵⁶*The Works of John Dryden*, 18 vols, ed. by Sir Walter Scott (London: William Miller, 1808), XVIII, 165.

⁵⁷Old *DNB*. Incidentally, I rewrote Thomas' entry for the New *DNB* in the summer of 1999; it is due out in 2004.

⁵⁸T. R. Steiner, 'The Misrepresentation of Elizabeth Thomas, "Curlls' Corinna"', *N&Q*, 30 (1983), 506.

poets. His inclusion of her is worth noting because he represents her 'as no one's Corinna but simply as "Elizabeth Thomas"'.⁵⁹ Despite these late twentieth-century reconsiderations of Thomas' story, the Popeian misrepresentations of her life still dominate scholarly opinion. For instance, in Margaret J. M. Ezell's latest book, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, she says of Thomas, 'It was, of course, through the poet Elizabeth Thomas, the lover of Henry Cromwell. . . that Pope's letters eventually ended up in Edmund Curll's hands'.⁶⁰

The legacy of Popeian calumny of Thomas' character began in 1745 when William Ayre, Pope's first biographer, set the example for other scholars in his *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Alexander Pope*, by calling Thomas a 'Lady of Wit and Pleasure'.⁶¹ Subsequent Pope scholars have repeated Ayre's hearsay so many times that it has been accepted as truth. For the most part, however, the falsehoods have been complacently, not malevolently, recapitulated by scholars against Thomas. For instance W. H. Dilworth insinuates that 'Messieurs Pope and Cromwell, as well as many other gentlemen of parts and eminence were intimately acquainted' with her. Owen Ruffhead refers to her as Cromwell's 'favourite', and Malone says that she appeared to be 'intimately acquainted' with Cromwell. Robert Carruthers calls her an 'intimate' of Pope, while Whitwell Elwin and W. J. Courthope claim that 'she was Cromwell's mistress'. Ralph Straus refers to Thomas as 'Cromwell's erstwhile mistress' and George Sherburn calls her Cromwell's 'former lover'. In one of the most damning testimonies, Scott calls her a 'hack authoress' and then says that 'her person, as well as her writings, seems to have been dedicated to the service of the public', a quotation which the old *DNB* repeats.⁶² With Scott's slander being reiterated in the

⁵⁹Anne McWhir, 'Elizabeth Thomas and the Two Corinnas: Giving the Woman Writer a Bad Name', *ELH*, 62 (1995), 116 and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 32-44.

⁶⁰Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 73.

⁶¹William Ayre, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Alexander Pope, Esq; Faithfully Collected from Authentic Authors, Original Manuscripts, and the Testimonies of many Persons of Credit and Honour: Adorned with the Heads of divers Illustrious Persons, treated of in these Memoirs, curiously engrav'd by the best Hands*, 2 vols (London, 1745), I, 288.

⁶²W. H. Dilworth, *The Life of Alexander Pope, Esq. 1759* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1974), 84; Owen Ruffhead, *The Life of Alexander Pope, Esq. Compiled from Original Manuscripts; with a Critical Essay on his Writings and Genius* (London: C. Bathurst et al, 1769), 465; Malone, I, 352; *The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope*, 4 vols, ed. by Robert Carruthers (London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co.,

DNB, it is not surprising that these anecdotes have carried the stamp of academic authority for so long.

The Thomas-Curll epistolary transaction and the subsequent Curll-Pope conflict in the literary marketplace during the late 1720s and early 30s have been briefly outlined. However, the repercussions that occurred after 1735 need to be examined in order to understand why Thomas' fate as one of the literary trollops of Popeiana was sealed. Ayre, Pope's first biographer, came to several false conclusions about Thomas by misinterpreting events and letters, which later scholars have passively reprinted. In 1735 Pope's readers were reminded of the Thomas-Curll scandal when Pope published his own correspondence.⁶³ In a prefatory apology to his readers, Pope mentions Thomas' earlier indiscretion with his letters in order to justify the new—and supposedly authoritative—edition of his early correspondence:

*It is to one of that Sex we are beholden for the whole Correspondence with H. C. Esq; which Letters being lent her by that Gentleman, she took the liberty to print; as appears by the following, which we shall give at length, both as it is something Curious, and as it may serve for an Apology for ourselves.*⁶⁴

After this apology, three letters were printed, one from Thomas to Cromwell and two from Cromwell to Pope, all of them dating back to the summer of 1727. These letters also appeared in another 1735 publication called, *A Narrative of the Method by which the Private Letters of Mr. Pope have been procur'd and publish'd by Edmund Curll, Bookseller*.⁶⁵ Both the new edition of Pope's letters and *A Narrative* served to discredit both Curll and Thomas and to illustrate how Pope had been victimized by the unauthorized publication of his correspondence. Steiner reminds scholars that Cromwell and Thomas were dead by 1735, so that the 'Sole authority for the

1853), III, 201; *The Works of Alexander Pope*, 10 vols, ed. by Whitwell Elwin and William John Courthope (London: John Murry, 1871-86), IV, 327; Straus, 278; *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols, ed. by George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, 437; and Scott, XVIII, 164.
⁶³Alexander Pope, *Letters of Mr. Pope, and Several Eminent Person, From the Year 1705, to 1711*, 2 vols (London, 1735).

⁶⁴*Ibid*, I, A^{r-v}.

⁶⁵*A Narrative of the Method by which the Private Letters of Mr. Pope have been procur'd and publish'd by Edmund Curll, Bookseller* (London: T. Cooper, 1735). Sherburn, III, 458n, says that *A Narrative* was 'inspired if not written by Pope'. Likewise, Elwin and Courthope, VI, 419n, say that 'this narrative proceeded from Pope'. They also claim that Curll published an edition of *A Narrative* later that same year in the second volume of *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence*.

genuineness and content of the three letters is Pope, never a scrupulous editor, here with motive to disparage Mrs. Thomas'.⁶⁶ These particular letters, however, do not contain anything too damaging in terms of Thomas' reputation, a circumstance which may indicate their authenticity.

From a historical perspective, Thomas' letter to Cromwell is significant because it is one of a few that survive from the late 1720s. Most of her letters which were published in *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers* date from the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Her letter to Cromwell, dated 27 June 1727, outlines her financial predicament and substantiates what she tells us about that time of her life in her memoir:

After so long a Silence, as the many and great Oppressions I have sigh'd under has occasioned, one is at a Loss how to begin a Letter to so kind a Friend as your self. But as it was always my Resolution, if I must sink, to do it as decently (that is as silently) as I could: So when I found my self plung'd into unforeseen, and unavoidable Ruin, I retreated from the World, and in a Manner buried my self in a dismal Place, where I knew none, nor none knew me. In this dull unthinking Way, I have protracted a lingering Death (for Life it cannot be called) ever since you saw me, sequestered from Company, deprived of my Books, and nothing left to converse with but the Letters of my dead, or absent Friends, amongst which latter I always placed yours and Mr. Pope's in the first Rank.⁶⁷

After explaining her distress over financial matters, Thomas continued her letter to Cromwell in a sheepish tone. She was obviously concerned about how he reacted to having his letters published without his permission. She partially blames Curll for the indiscretion by saying that 'he [Curll] conveyed them to the Press, I must not say altogether with my Consent, nor wholly without it. I thought them too good to be lost in Oblivion'. Her ultimate justification for selling the letters to Curll becomes clear when she says,

besides, to end all Dispute, you had been pleased to make me a free Gift of them to do what I pleased with them: And every one knows that a Person to whom a Letter is address'd, has the same Right to dispose of it, as he has of Goods purchased with his Money. I doubt not but your Generosity and Honour will do me the Right of owning by a Line that I came honestly by them.

⁶⁶T. R. Steiner, 'The Misrepresentation', 507. In *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, George Sherburn notes that 'The dates of these letters to and from Cromwell are perplexing: one would expect them all to date in July or August of 1726', II, 437.

⁶⁷*A Narrative*, 2-3, Ayre, I, 289 and Sherburn, II, 437.

Thomas closes her letter with, 'I flatter my self in a few Months I shall be again visible to the World, and whenever thro' good Providence that Turn shall happen, I shall joyfully acquaint you with it'.⁶⁸ However, she never appeared in society again.

If Cromwell responded to Thomas' letter, it has not survived. In Pope's 1735 publications, however, Cromwell's silence or lost response is an implicit negation of Thomas' claim that she 'came honestly' by the letters. Readers of Pope's letters and of *A Narrative* are left to assume the worst about Thomas, especially when they read Cromwell's first letter to Pope, dated 6 July 1727. Obviously feeling embarrassed at his indiscretion of giving Thomas Pope's letters, Cromwell says,

Mr. D[enni]s about that time charg'd me with giving them to a Mistress, which I positively denied; not in the least, at that time, thinking of it: But some time after finding in the News-Papers Letters from Lady *Pakington*, Lady *Chudleigh*, and Mr. *Norris*, to the same *Sapho*, or *E. T.* I began to fear that I was guilty.⁶⁹

Pope biographers have picked up on the fact that Cromwell refers to Thomas as a 'mistress'. They have used this particular passage against her as evidence of her sexual misconduct, but Steiner points out that 'There is considerable irony in the reliance of Popeans on John Dennis as authority for anything; moreover, this evidence of Mrs. Thomas's whoredom fails under scrutiny'. Steiner also reminds scholars that in the early eighteenth century the word 'mistress' could have been used to mean 'a lady favoured and gallanted' and not necessarily a fallen woman.⁷⁰ Cromwell continues to make excuses to Pope for his indiscretion and goes on to say, 'I have not seen this *Sapho*, alias *E. T.* these seven Years;—her writing, *That I gave her them to do what she would with them*, was straining the Point too far'.⁷¹ In another letter to Pope, dated 1 August 1727, Cromwell, still preoccupied with the scandal, writes:

The great Value she expresses for all you write, and her Passion for having them, I believe was what prevailed upon me to let her keep them. By the Interval of twelve Years at least, from her Possession to the Time of printing them, 'tis manifest that I had not the least Ground to apprehend such a Design: But as People in great Straits, bring forth their Hoards of old Gold, and most valuable Jewels, so *Sapho* had recourse to her hid Treasure of Letters, and plaid off, not only yours to

⁶⁸*A Narrative*, 3-4, Ayre, I, 289-90 and Sherburn, II, 437-38.

⁶⁹*A Narrative*, 5, Ayre, I, 295-6 and Sherburn, II, 439-41.

⁷⁰Steiner, 'The Misrepresentation', 507.

⁷¹*A Narrative*, 5, Ayre, I, 296 and Sherburn, II, 440.

me, but all those to her self (as the Ladies last Stake) into the Press.⁷²

Cromwell seems to pardon Thomas in part because of her poverty; however, Pope scholars have not been so magnanimous.

In Pope's 1745 *Memoirs*, Ayre set the tone in Popeiana with his numerous disparaging remarks against Thomas. He reproduced large sections of *A Narrative* in Pope's *Memoirs*, and made use of the letters in the most unsympathetic way possible. He makes the following comments about Thomas after quoting from sections of the letters mentioned above:

Had these Letters been from Mr. *Pope* wrote directly to Mrs. *Thomas*, we can't help thinking but she had an undoubted Right to destroy, keep, or sell them; but when it appears they were only lent her for Perusal by a Friend, it makes the Affair appear very much in her Disfavour; yet, if we come to consider of the great Intimacy and Freedom among them, (as such for the Lady's Sake we shall prove) and her pressing Necessities, we think she deserves some Mercy; but above all in being the Instrument of the Publication of Mr. *Pope's* Letters and those of his Friends, without which we must unavoidably have wanted many Lights concerning his Life, which we now have; so that we believe she is so far from being hated for it, that she is by some thought worthy Reward, at least if they hate the Traytress on that Account, I find most People love the Treason.⁷³

Ayre concludes that,
Ironically, in combination with her 'pressing Necessities', it was Cromwell's and Thomas' alleged relationship—their 'great Intimacy and Freedom'—which gave Thomas leave to sell the Pope-Cromwell correspondence. Ayre insinuates that it was one of the many liberties exchanged between Cromwell and Thomas. His slight concession toward her is, in reality, a surreptitious insult. Unfortunately, Ayre's attitude, regardless of its inaccuracy, has been accepted as the truth in Popeiana.

Ayre's analysis of Thomas' supposed misconduct does not stop with an examination of the three letters which appear in Pope's letters and in *A Narrative*. He claims to have examined a wide range of relevant documents including manuscript material. Despite this fact, he erroneously interprets other letters written by Pope. In some of his letters, Pope amorously refers to a 'Mrs. T—'. Assuming the 'T—' stood for Thomas, Ayre says, 'It appears that Mr. *Pope* wrote a Letter to a certain Lady, not

⁷²*A Narrative*, 7-8, Ayre, I, 297 and Sherburn, II, 440-41.

⁷³Ayre, I, 290-91.

difficult to guess'. He then reprints the letters by inserting Thomas wherever 'Mrs. T—' appeared. Ayre prints a line from one of the letters in the following manner: 'Mrs. *Thomas* has honestly assur'd me [Pope], that but for some Whims which she can't entirely conquer, she would go and see the World with me in Man's Cloaths'.⁷⁴ Scholars today know that Pope did not actually write 'Mrs. Thomas' in the line above because the 'Mrs. T' in question appeared in letters to Martha Blount, sister of Teresa Blount.⁷⁵ Not only does Ayre err in his assumption about who the mysterious 'Mrs. T—' is, but he follows up his misleading example (quoted above) with more negative, editorial comments. He says, 'Mrs. *Thomas* fond of such Company, and being, as certainly she was, beautiful, witty, generous, and young, she pass'd whole Days, and often more than Days, with either Mr. *Cromwell* or Mr. *Pope*, or both'. This quotation, incidentally, appears in the 'Biographical Appendix' of the Twickenham edition of the *Dunciad* under Thomas' name.⁷⁶ Hence Ayre's testimony has become part of the cycle of calumny against Thomas' reputation.

Although most scholars now agree that the 'Mrs. T—' mentioned above is a reference to Teresa Blount, there is less agreement over who Sappho is: Pope and Cromwell discuss a Sappho, or rather, several Sapphos in their correspondence.⁷⁷ Determining who each Sappho is has puzzled many scholars over the years. Ayre, in his *Memoirs*, believed that when Pope wrote to Cromwell on 21 December 1711, he was referring to Thomas as his mistress: 'You fancy now that *Sapho's* Eyes are a Couple of these Tapers, but 'tis no such matter Sir; these are Eyes that have more Persuasion in one Glance than all *Sapho's* Oratory and Gesture together'.⁷⁸ Steiner points out that Thomas is unlikely to have been anyone's mistress in 1711 because she was so ill after swallowing a chicken bone around this time, but few scholars have ever bothered to follow up on her story. Moreover, just because Cromwell referred to

⁷⁴Ayre, I, 291.

⁷⁵Sherburn, *Correspondence*, I, 261 and Valerie Rumbold, *Women's Place in Pope's World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 163n.

⁷⁶Ayre, I, 292 and Sutherland, 456.

⁷⁷For connections between Sappho and Thomas see T. R. Steiner, 'Young Pope in the Correspondence of Henry Cromwell and Elizabeth Thomas ('Curll's Corinna')', *N&Q*, 30 (1983), 495-97.

⁷⁸Ayre, I, 294 and Sherburn, I, 137.

Thomas as 'this *Sappho*' in his letter to Pope, dated 6 July 1727, does not mean he used the reference exclusively for Thomas. Cromwell's application of the demonstrative pronoun 'this' before Sappho, in the example above, indicates that he was using the term generically, especially since he was a sociable man-about-town who probably had many female acquaintances.⁷⁹

Distinguishing the Sapphos throughout the Pope-Cromwell letters is not a straightforward task, especially since the term 'Sappho' seems to have been a generic name for any literary woman in the early eighteenth century.⁸⁰ 'Every woman who dabbled in literature was occasionally called Sappho in those gallant and witty times'.⁸¹ The fact that Thomas herself uses it in relation to another woman illustrates how common a term it was. In a letter to Thomas Uvedale, dated 20 April 1703, she says of a Mrs. Martland, 'how can you call that Place [Winchester] dull, where our *English Sappho* resides? SAPHO was the Name Mr. CROMWELL chose for her, and not undeservedly, her excellent Verses requiring a nobler Epithet, if the Records of Time had afforded it'.⁸² Without more evidence, then, speculating which Sapphos refer to Thomas, if any, is a fruitless endeavour.

For all of the speculation over Thomas' relationship with Cromwell, it is surprising that not many scholars have ever bothered to read *Pylades and Corinna* to see what Thomas actually says about Cromwell. Steiner says that 'the *Pylades and Corinna* letters should be known to Popeans' because of the alternative perspective they provide about Pope's early days in London.⁸³ They should also 'be known to Popeans' because they shed light on Thomas' life and the nature of her relationship with Cromwell. Her acquaintance with Cromwell could have begun as early as 1703 and lasted as late as 1720. During that time, they socialized, corresponded and exchanged poetry—just as Thomas did with many other men and women. At the end

⁷⁹See number 47 (28 July 1709) in *The Tatler*, 3 vols, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 335, for Cromwell's description as 'Sir *Taffety Trippet*, a Fortune-hunter, whose Follies are too gross to give Diversion; and whose Vanity is too stupid to let him be sensible that he is a public Offence'.

⁸⁰Joanna Lipking, 'Fair Originals: Women Poets in Male Commendatory Poems', *ECL*, 12 (1988), 67.

⁸¹W. M. T., 'Dryden, Pope, and Curll's "*Corinna*"', *N&Q*, 12 (1855), 279.

⁸²Pope, *Literary Correspondence*, 10 (second pagination).

⁸³Steiner, 'Young Pope', 497.

of the first volume of *Pylades and Corinna*, several short letters that passed between them are reproduced under the title of 'Billets'.⁸⁴ Aside from shedding some light on the association between Thomas and Pope, these short letters are light-hearted and friendly, but full of shallow clichés.⁸⁵

In Thomas' correspondence with her fiancé, Richard Gwinnett, Cromwell is discussed on several occasions. Unlike her superficial exchanges with Cromwell, Thomas reveals her genuine opinion of him to Gwinnett. Thomas seems to have found Cromwell somewhat annoying. In Letter IV, from Corinna to Pylades, Thomas devotes an entire letter to ridiculing Cromwell's character. Gwinnett it seems saw Cromwell as a potential rival for Thomas' affections, and she chastises her fiancé for his unfounded jealousy: 'If I did not know you took an exquisite Pleasure in tormenting me, I should be ashamed of your mean Suspicions. My Stars! what an Object of Desire have you chosen for me! how amiable! how agreeable a Creature!'.⁸⁶ Thomas, of course, is being facetious because Cromwell actually repels her: 'But O! when he pulls out his Tooth-Pick, and borrows my Pocket-Glass to discharge the Glew from the Corners of those lovely Oglers, I burn, I rave, I can no longer contain my self within the Bounds of silent Decency'. Thomas continues to tease Gwinnett by saying,

Well! see what our Jealousy has produced! insensible and ignorant as I was of his uncommon Talents when I began the Character, I now, upon a Research, find that you had Reason for what you wrote. You have enlarged the Prospect. You have opened my Eyes.⁸⁷

In closing the letter, Thomas refers to Cromwell's characterization in *The Tatler*. She says, 'And I cannot chuse but be pleased with the Conquest of a Person whose *Fame* our incomparable TATLER has rendered immortal by the *Three* distinguishing Titles of 'Squire EASY the *amorous* BARD; Sir TIMOTHY the *Critick*; and Sir TAFFETY

⁸⁴PC, 280-87. See also BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fols. 49^r, 50^{r-v}, 51^r, 52^v and 53^{r-v}.

⁸⁵Ibid, 284. Pope gives the impression that he was unacquainted with Thomas; however, they had met on at least one occasion. The subheading of one of her 'Billets' to Henry Cromwell reads, 'On his bringing Mr. POPE to visit me, and desiring me to return a (very dirty) Translation of *his Own*, from VOITURE'.

⁸⁶Ibid, 191-92.

⁸⁷Ibid, 193.

TRIPPET the *Fortune-Hunter*'.⁸⁸ It is evident from her letters that Thomas did not have an affair with Cromwell because he repulsed her. A woman who prided herself on maintaining a honourable engagement for sixteen years would have been unlikely to compromise her reputation for an affair with someone like Cromwell.

A further factor which has affected Thomas' reputation as an author is the opinion of the renowned scholar, Edmond Malone. In his edition *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden* (1800), he discredits both Thomas' account of Dryden's funeral published in *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Amours of William Congreve Esq* (1730) and sections of her biography, 'The Life of Corinna'.⁸⁹ Even though Malone acknowledges her distress when writing it—'at the time of writing it she was in the Fleet Prison, in great poverty and distress; and that she was induced probably by some small sum of money to furnish Curll with this fictitious narrative'—his criticism of her 'tale-spinning' only adds to the damage done by Pope scholars.⁹⁰ In regard to her 'Life', Malone specifically criticizes the sections in which she discusses her father's funeral, the alleged request made by Philadelphia (Carey) Wentworth, the Countess Dowager of Wentworth (d. 1696) to raise Thomas after her father's death and Dr. Glysson's friendship with and Dr. Quibis' swindling of her mother. Extant public records, however, prove that much of what Thomas tells us about her life story is accurate.

Malone's opinion of her as an untrustworthy historian manifests itself in areas of literary history other than Dryden scholarship. His discrediting of her, combined with her ruined reputation, has influenced the way in which many scholars have classified *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*. Despite having a few sections where Thomas may embellish the truth about herself, *Pylades and Corinna* is clearly non-fiction; several scholars, however, have categorized it as fiction or at least quasi-fiction. For instance, in *A List of English Tales and Prose*

⁸⁸PC, 193-4.

⁸⁹Malone, I, 348-51.

⁹⁰Ibid, I, 348.

Romances Printed Before 1740, Arundell Esdaile considers *Pylades and Corinna* to be fictional, so, too, does William McBurney in *A Check List of English Prose Fiction 1700-1739* and *English Prose Fiction 1700-1800 in the University of Illinois Library*. In *The Epistolary Novel Its Origin, Development, Decline and Residuary Influence*, Godfrey Frank Singer discusses *Pylades and Corinna* in the chapter, 'The Fictional Outposts and The Pre-Richardsonian Letter Story', as if it were a proto-epistolary novel. Robert Day in his book, *Told in Letters, Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson*, lists *Pylades and Corinna* in 'A Chronological List of English Letter Fiction 1660-1740'. He describes it as being 'A fictionalized biography of the two, with letters *said* to be their correspondence over a period of years' (my italics).⁹¹ It seems that literary scholars have been hesitant or unwilling to grant *Pylades and Corinna* authority as non-fiction, even though many of the letters printed therein were used as material evidence in Thomas' lawsuit against the Gwinnetts. On the one hand, it could be argued that publications, especially by an unknown, discredited woman writer, entitled, *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*, might easily get mistaken for epistolary fiction, especially since women's correspondence, fictional or otherwise, was extremely popular in the 1730s. A cursory examination of other contemporary titles of epistolary fiction reveals that the title, *Pylades and Corinna*, does *sound* like the title of an epistolary novel.⁹² On the other hand, the classification of *Pylades and Corinna* as fiction is more likely an implicit dismissal of Thomas as a credible author. The charges of her unreliability are linked to her poverty, Malone's negative criticism and her alleged sexual misconduct, the latter of which has been falsely perpetuated in the anecdotes of Pope and Dryden scholarship and adopted as

⁹¹Arundell Esdaile, *A List of English Tales and Prose Romances Printed Before 1740*, (London: Blades, East & Blades, 1912), 293; William Harlin McBurney, *A Check Lists of English Prose Fiction 1700-1739* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 87 and *English Prose Fiction 1700-1800 in the University of Illinois Library* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 69; Godfrey Frank Singer, *The Epistolary Novel. Its Origin, Development, Decline, and Residuary Influence* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), 51-52; and Robert Adams Day, *Told in Letters, Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 255.

⁹²See for instance: *The Amours of Philaris and Olinda: or the Intrigues of Windsor. A Genuine History* (1730); *Memoirs Of a certain Lady of Quality Under the Name of Arpasia. Containing A Series of real, yet extraordinary Adventures* (1731); and *Love a la Mode: or, the Amours of Florella and Phillis. Being The Memoirs of two celebrated Ladies under those Names: In which the whole Circle of modern Gallantry is display'd* (1732).

truth in literary history.

Another factor which affects Thomas' credibility as an author is that several of her texts were published by Edmund Curll. Issues of authorial intention are complicated by the fact that Curll is not known for being a scrupulous editor. Not many booksellers can compete with Curll's notoriety in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁹³ In regard to *Pylades and Corinna*, for instance, one immediately notices the presence of another voice in the dedication, supposedly written by Philalethes. Ralph Straus says that Philalethes 'was anybody, including Curll, who happened to be on the spot at the appropriate moment'.⁹⁴ Moreover, in the preface someone—most likely Curll—reports that Thomas wrote her life story in defence of her reputation, which had been compromised by Pope in the *Dunciad*:

*Mr. POPE having been pleased to Libel CORINNA in the DUNCIAD, she had fully resolved upon publishing her own LIFE, and often, in Letters to her Friends, and by Word of Mouth, wished that she might only live to finish it; in order to which, she applied no less than twelve Hours, the very Day before she died.*⁹⁵

Curll's role as editor does not end with his introductory comments: his presence can be felt throughout both *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*. He adds footnotes and annotates letters by giving real names where only pseudonyms appear. Straus also points out that Curll had an ulterior motive for adding footnotes to Thomas' text, since 'Almost every note refers to a book which has been published by Curll. He lost no chances' to make a profit.⁹⁶ For instance, in the first edition of the first volume of *Pylades and Corinna*, Curll adds a note to a letter in which Thomas mentions Captain Richard Hemington and John Norris of Bemerton. Curll's footnote directs readers to *Atterburyana* and *Whartoniana*, the publications in which Curll originally printed Thomas' correspondence with Norris.

The dedication, preface and footnotes are not the only places where Curll intrudes; he frequently breaks into the text to interpret the events Thomas and

⁹³Straus, 3-7.

⁹⁴Ibid, 78.

⁹⁵PC, x (first series).

⁹⁶Straus, 292.

Gwinnett recount in their letters. For example, toward the end of *The Honourable Lovers*, after Gwinnett's last letter, dated 10 December 1716, Curll breaks into an emotional part of the narrative by saying, 'N. B. At the Bottom of this Letter, *Corinna* made this Remark viz. Thus stood my Affairs, at the Time of his Death; for I never saw him after this Letter'.⁹⁷ Curll's commentaries here and elsewhere in her text often sound credible, but whether or not Thomas actually made such a comment is unknown.

Because of Curll's repeated interjections, Anne McWhir complains that Thomas 'fails to speak on her own account' and that he uses Thomas to present *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers* as a strike against Pope. McWhir further complains that Curll's 'love-tragedy, complete with medical reports and episcopal references, constructs a version of Corinna that obscures—and co-opts—Thomas herself'—that 'it is difficult to find either the woman or the writer in a text elaborately constructed by her publisher'.⁹⁸ McWhir, however, fails to take account of the evidence. First, the two texts lack an elaborate construction. Aside from typical prefatory information, Thomas' autobiography, and the Thomas-Gwinnett letters placed in rough chronological order, Curll seems to have added other letters, poems and miscellaneous pieces to the end of each volume without much thought. Second, whilst Curll added notes for emphasis it seems unlikely he tampered with the actual content of Thomas' autobiography and letters. As previously discussed, with a few exceptions, the details Thomas provides in her 'Life' have been corroborated by extant public records. Moreover, collation of the printed letters with their counterparts in manuscript reveals that Curll made honest transcriptions—the only differences are accidental. Third, the sheer volume of letters in *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers* (over 46 in the former and 69 in the latter, combined with other miscellaneous texts) make it unlikely that Curll, mainly interested in pumping out publications for profit, would have taken the pains to 'obscure' and 'co-opt' Thomas' voice as a woman and writer. Fourth, a close reading of *Pylades and Corinna* and

⁹⁷HL, 267.

⁹⁸McWhir, 110.

The Honourable Lovers, especially in conjunction with *Miscellany Poems*—which was published by Thomas Combes—reveals a strong and consistent authorial voice. Changing the attitudes of scholars about Thomas, however, seems like a Sisyphean task under the weight of Popeian misrepresentation, Malone's discrediting revelations and the shadow of Curll's infamy. The task of assessing her character accurately is complicated 'by the irreconcilable claims of Pope and his editors (she was unchaste and, specifically, Henry Cromwell's mistress) and her own circle (she was an impoverished gentlewoman, good to her mother and careful of her reputation)'.⁹⁹ The task becomes more complicated by the balance of authority given to Pope and Dryden scholarship over her 'own circle'. Thomas has been an easy target because of her gender, class and marital status. The aggregate effect of these factors has obscured Thomas' life story and authorial voice for far too long.

A Social Author:

Without the distraction found in the negative anecdotes of Pope and Dryden scholarship, Elizabeth Thomas' role as an amateur author especially in the first decade of the eighteenth century will be explored for the first time. Although this period is often remembered for its expanding market in printed books, it was also a busy time for manuscript circulation. In *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, Margaret J. M. Ezell documents how these two modes of authorship—printed and non-printed—thrived simultaneously. She also points out that literary history has favoured the authority of printed books over scribal writing, which has often been dismissed or completely ignored by scholars. Hence the significance of manuscript circulation from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries needs to be reassessed because of its prevalence in the production of writings by both men and women:

the manuscript text operates as a medium of social exchange, often between the sexes, neither private nor public in the conventional sense of the terms, and a site at which women could and did comment on public issues concerning social and political matters.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Rumbold, 163.

¹⁰⁰Ezell, *Social Authorship*, 40.

Thomas would have provided a classic case study for Ezell's book because she was an avid consumer of many texts being produced by the growing book trade¹⁰¹ as well as manuscripts that traveled through literary networks. These networks, in which Thomas was a reader and a contributor, were made up of men and women, from London and other parts of England and Ireland. Participating in the print and non-print literary scenes was extremely important to Thomas' intellectual and social life—in fact her career as an author was essentially *social*. Kathryn R. King notes that, for women, writing and sharing poetry in the early eighteenth century was 'a social as well as intellectual act, an opportunity to exercise the mind, talents, and personality in acts of textual sociability'.¹⁰² Ironically, the published texts that survive by Thomas do so only because she was forced to sell almost everything she owned in the 1720s, including her manuscripts and letters. Had she married Richard Gwinnett, twentieth-century readers might never have had access to her poems and letters because she does not seem to have been inclined to publish them.¹⁰³

Although very few original documents are known to have survived, Thomas' printed texts reveal her active participation in manuscript circulation. In her 'Life' and letters, readers hear about her childhood common place books, her presentation copy of verses that circulated to different parts of the country and her frequent epistolary exchanges with men and women.¹⁰⁴ Her networks involved family members, friends and well-known London literati. Aside from the occasional visit to the country, Thomas seems to have spent most of her adult life in London. Her literary social patterns typically involved personal visits with her correspondents, such as Mary,

¹⁰¹A footnote claims that Thomas' family was friends with a bookseller, called Daniel Browne (*PC*, 180).

¹⁰²Kathryn R. King, 'Jane Barker, *Poetical Recreations*, and the Sociable Text', *ELH*, 61 (1994), 563.

¹⁰³I am constantly on the look out for her manuscript of poems, which seems to have circulated quite widely in and outside of London. Perhaps a copy is nestled safely in a private library just waiting for rediscovery. Thomas reports that a bookseller offered her £30 for a '*Manuscript Folio of my Poems*' (*HL*, 152 and 89 second pagination).

¹⁰⁴Thomas' manuscripts are specifically referred to in a poem to Lady Hester Pakington, '*To the Lady Pakington at the Bath; with these Poems in Manuscript*', and in a letter written from Pakington to Thomas, dated 30 May 1701, in which she says, 'I was glad of an excuse not, to restore [them] when I was in London' (BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 60^r and Whartoniana, II, 106).

Lady Chudleigh, Richard Gwinnett and her cousin, Anne Osborne, when they came to the city and epistolary exchanges when they were residing at their country homes.

Thomas' longest literary correspondence lasted between Gwinnett and herself during their sixteen year engagement. These letters—Gwinnett's usually from Shurdington in Gloucestershire and Thomas' from London—include their own as well as other people's verse, discussions on books and debates about political matters. In fact it seems that Gwinnett was initially drawn to Thomas because of her literary reputation. In the first letter of *Pylades and Corinna*, dated 29 June 1700, Gwinnett wrote,

Perhaps, Madam, you may be surprized at a Stranger's talking thus to you, since you did not think fit to let the World know to whom it was indebted for that incomparable Poem on the Death of the truly honoured *John Dryden* Esq; But such Excellence, and such Accomplishments as you are Mistress of, cannot lie hid.¹⁰⁵

With his letter Gwinnett also sent a poem he had written on Dryden's death and thus began the pattern of their sixteen year relationship—love via letters, poetry and one or two annual visits. As their relationship developed, their letters became slightly less concerned with compliments and the panegyric code, and they would share family and political gossip as well as their intellectual opinions. Letter XXII, dated 7 July 1706, is typical of many of their letters in which they discuss current publications. Gwinnett writes in the postscript,

P.S. When you have read Mr. LOCKE'S *Posthumous Works*, pray give me your Judgment of his *Examination of MALEBRANCH'S Notion of seeing ALL THINGS in GOD*, which is the Foundation of Mr. NORRIS'S *Ideal World*. His *Essay on Miracles* is very well worth your reading, because it clears that Subject from many Difficulties with which other Writers had perplexed it. . . But why do I recommend Books to you, who live in the midst of them, and have sufficient Judgement to chuse the best.¹⁰⁶

Like other contemporary protofeminists, Thomas was interested in philosophy and theology. Thomas and Gwinnett did not only discuss printed books, they also shared poems written by themselves and others. After visiting Sir Charles Duncombe's country seat in Wiltshire, Gwinnett sent Thomas some verses called, 'Bereford, A

¹⁰⁵*PC*, 2. The poem to which Gwinnett is referring is Thomas' elegy on Dryden's death, called 'To the Memory of the truly Honoured JOHN DRYDEN, Esq', which appeared in *Luctus Britannici* (1700).

¹⁰⁶*Ibid*, 121.

Poem', following Letter XXIV, dated 3 January 1707/8, in which he writes,

*P.S. If my Epistle could be made suitable to this Place, it would be the most elegant that ever my dear CORINNA received from me: For truly, of all the noble Seats that I have seen in any of my Rambles, I do not know one that for external Beauty, Situation, and all other Conveniences, is to be compared with this House of Sir Charles Duncombe's. I wish I could make BEREฟอร์ด immortal; and I will try to give a particular Description of it shortly in Rhime.*¹⁰⁷

Their relationship might have developed into the ideal companionate marriage if Gwinnett had survived. Regardless, their letters and poems offer intriguing insight into how authorship and readership were an intricate part of social life at the turn of the eighteenth century for men and women alike.

Thomas took her intellectual development seriously and actively sought out ways in which to expand her mind with many professional and amateur authors. Her courage in sending poetry to men like John Dryden at a coffee house and John Norris at Bemerton for advice on her poetry and studies is a proactive example of her efforts. Dryden, after having read her poems in manuscript, offered her encouragement. His son, Charles Dryden, also had an epistolary exchange with her. In a letter quoted in the previous chapter, dated Easter Eve, circa 1700, Charles wrote to Thomas specifically looking for critical feedback on a poem he had written. He writes,

own sense &

I beg you to peruse the following verses according to your ^ discretion, which farr surpasses mine in all respects. . . . Be pleasd to tell me what you find amiss, or correct it your selfe, and excuse this trouble.¹⁰⁸

John Norris' encouraging responses, which will be discussed in the following chapter, must have also been motivating for Thomas. He tells her in a letter, dated 25 April 1699, that she has a 'pregnant Genius for Poetry', but that he believes that her talents could be 'better bestowed upon more Serious and usefull Studies'.¹⁰⁹ And in a letter dated 12 July, 1699, he discusses philosophy and religion with Thomas:

e
we are Rational Cr^eatures whose greatest Happiness consists in the perfect Contemplation of Truth & Love of good, I think it concerns us

¹⁰⁷PC, 141-2.

¹⁰⁸BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fols. 56^{r-v} and *Miscellanea*, I, 154-5.

¹⁰⁹BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 57^r, *Whartoniana*, II, 95 and *HL*, 199-200.

most to apply our thoughts to those things that tend to y^e improvement of our Reason, and to the Regulation of our Manners. The former as our best Learning, and the latter ^{as} our best Wisdom.¹¹⁰

In this same letter he includes a reading list that would have made rigorous reading for a learned young man, let alone a woman who had had little access to formal education. Ultimately, Norris' friendly and open urging must have boosted Thomas' confidence in herself in addition to assisting her intellectual endeavours. Thomas also exchanged letters and poems with Thomas Uvedale (born about 1644) of Winton, whose brother, Robert Uvedale (1642-1722), was a fairly well-known horticulturist. Uvedale, it seems, had met Thomas whilst in London and when he returned to his country home complained of ennui. In a letter, dated 16 April 1703, he writes,

If any Thing could render the Solitude of a Country Retirement agreeable to my Temper, certainly it would be the Opportunity of receiving your obliging Letters, which next to your ingenious Conversation, give me the greatest Satisfaction in the World; but since my Affairs will not at present permit me to enjoy that Happiness, I must be the Continuance of an *Epistolary Correspondence*. . . to return our Favour of those excellent Verses on MUSIDORA, I present you with two Copies of my own home-spun Poetry, by which you'll see what it is you're to trust to, if you trade with me in Verse.¹¹¹

Aside from a few letters, a poem Thomas sent to him was eventually printed in *Miscellany Poems* under the title, 'An ANSWER to some Verses written by Mr. UVEDALE'.¹¹² The evidence that remains of their dialogue is also illustrative of how letter writing and verse circulation was a central part of the social lives of men and women in the early eighteenth century.

It is not surprising that Thomas gravitated to literary women, such as Mary Astell and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, since Thomas admired both *A Serious Proposal To the Ladies* (1694) and *The Ladies Defence* (1701). Astell generated much discussion at the turn of the eighteenth century which is reflected in Thomas' own correspondence. Both she and Gwinnett discuss Astell's *A Serious Proposal* in their

¹¹⁰BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 65^r, *Whartoniana*, II, 97 and *HL*, 202.

¹¹¹Pope, *Literary Correspondence* (1735), III, 1-3 (second pagination).

¹¹²*MP*, 151-2.

letters. In fact, Thomas may have felt an affinity for Astell because she, too, was a gentlewoman who did not possess the means to live as one. Not only did Thomas read and admire her polemical texts, but she attempted to establish an acquaintance with Astell, as she had done with so many other intellectual men and women. Astell was known to Thomas personally, even though their relationship may not have been the most cordial. Thomas mentions encountering Astell whilst visiting Chudleigh:

I was under no small Confusion when I found the Gallantry was turned to Earnest; but, Mr. Sydal, and Mrs. Astell coming seasonably to my Relief, put an End to the Discourse. You may, perhaps, expect something from Mrs. Astell, but, I will assure you, she would not know Me. However, I was even with Her at my Departure, and returned her as slighting a Notice...Upon cooler Thoughts, I am ashamed of the publick Incivility, which I should not have been guilty of, at another Time, in respect to my Lady [Chudleigh]; but I was so provoked with Mrs. Astell's haughty Carriage, that I knew not how to behave my self. O, how hard it is, for one of our frail Sex, to resist the Vanity of publick Applause. I have several Times put my Lady upon Pumping her for a Reason of this Alteration, and she protests to me, that Mrs. Astell never gave her any; but her Ladyship's own Thoughts were, that she was so much sollicitated by Women of the greatest Quality and Fortune, that she had not Time enough to repay all their Kindnesses with her Conversation. This may be true, for aught I know, and She who has no certain Subsistence, may be allowed to improve a Friendship with those that have; but methinks she might forbid the Addresses of her insignificant Admirer with a little more Decency, in Gratitude to her true Friend Mr. Norris, who gave the Acquaintance, but what she pleases.¹¹³

Thomas wanting 'a Reason of this Alteration' indicates that, at a previous time, they might have been on friendlier terms. The reason for Astell's slight comes in the form of a footnote, presumably written by Curll, accompanying Letter IX, dated 26 October 1700, which states:

N.B. The Reader may be pleased here to observe that CORINNA and this GENTLEWOMAN, differed greatly in their POLITICAL PRINCIPLES. Mrs. NORRIS [John Norris' wife], in a Letter to CORINNA, thus delivers her self.—'As far as I can perceive, your greatest crime with Mrs. ASTELL, is, you are too much a WILLIAMITE; I know where she has slighted some of her best Friends upon that Account'.¹¹⁴

Ruth Perry has thoroughly documented Astell's zealous High Tory leanings so her snubbing Thomas for being 'too much a WILLIAMITE' is certainly plausible.

¹¹³HL, 80-81.

¹¹⁴PC, 29.

Madam,

(1) Lady Chudleigh to Constance

62

The weak Defence I have made for my Sex, is so far from deserving the Thanks you are pleas'd to give me both in your obliging Letter, and your admirable Verses, that it hardly merits the least Regard, as having nothing in it that can render it acceptable, besides the Kindness and ~~zeal~~ ^{zeal} with which it was written. I was trouble'd to see them made the Jest of very vain Prebender to wit, and expos'd by a scurrilous Pamphlet, rather than a sermon, to the malicious Censures of invidious Detractors, of Men, who think they cannot be obedient wives, without being Slaves, nor pay their Husbands that Respect they owe them, without sacrificing their Reason to their Humour. I heartily wish they had had a better Champion; so good a Cause deserving to have been manag'd by a more accurate Pen than mine: But I hope I will not be long before some ingenious Lady will undertake the Quarrel, and do us Justice. Give me leave to say, Madam, that, since you write so incomparably well both in Prose and Verse, none can manage it to greater Advantage than your self; it being a Province to which your extraordinary Accomplishments give you an undisputed Right. Mr. Pearce was not so just to me as he ought to have been, for without my knowing any thing of it, he Epitomiz'd the Preface, and by shortning it spoil'd the Connection, and quite alter'd the Sense: Further was our Poem Printed with so much care as it should have been, all those I have seen having several Errors in 'em. I am proud of the honour you do me in desiring my acquaintance, tis a favour I cannot enough acknowledge, and which I could not expect from a Person to whom I had not the happiness to be known. That Correspondence you have so generously begun, I hope you will be so kind as to continue, which will be the greatest obligation you can possibly lay on

Ashton the
19th of October
1701.

Your most humble
Servant
Mary Chudleigh

* A Poem
written by her
Ladyship.

* Whether
it is printed
or not
I cannot
say.

* See, An Essay
upon the
Mistress of
the
Giving
Fortunes to
Widows in
Marriage.
Carefully prin-
ted, for
at Court in

4. Letter from Mary, Lady Chudleigh to Elizabeth Thomas, 19 October 1701.
MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 62r. By permission of the Bodleian Library.

Unlike her acquaintance with Astell, Thomas' friendship with Chudleigh seems to have been amicable and is well documented by the evidence found in *Pylades and Corinna*, her poetry and their extant letters.¹¹⁵ Moreover, it seems that Chudleigh may have assisted Captain Hemington in an unsuccessful suit for Thomas' hand in marriage.¹¹⁶ Chudleigh's and Thomas' correspondence began some time before October 1701, when Thomas wrote to Chudleigh under the pretext of thanking her for *The Ladies Defence* (1701), which Chudleigh had published in reaction to a misogynist sermon written by John Sprint, *The Bride-Womans Counsellor* (1699). In her letter, dated 19 October 1701, Chudleigh cordially thanks Thomas for her introductory letter and poem and states that Thomas, too, could have defended women from a man like John Sprint: 'Give me leave to say, Madam, that, since you write so incomparably well both in Prose and Verse, none can manage it to greater Advantage than your self'.¹¹⁷ It seems likely that Thomas sent her a manuscript copy of the panegyric called, '*To the Lady CHUDLEIGH, The Anonymous Author of the Lady's Defence*', which later appeared in *Miscellany Poems*.¹¹⁸ In its complimentary description of Chudleigh's *Defence*, this poem is reminiscent of the panegyric Thomas probably sent to Mary Astell, entitled '*To Almystrea*', which is already discussed in chapter three:

Marissa Hail! hail *Eloquence* divine!¹¹⁹
 What solid *Judgement* sparkles in each Line!
 What *strenuous* Proofs in ev'ry Period shine!
 With such Success the happy *Goal* you reach,
 No *Wisdom's self* could better Lessons teach;
 Could more impartially the Case decide,
 And solve the Doubts that rose on either Side.¹²⁰

Despite the fact that Thomas may have written this poem in part to gain the favour of an acquaintance, her appreciation of Chudleigh's poem seems just as sincere as her admiration for other writers who inspired her, such as Dryden and Norris. There is

¹¹⁵Incidentally, I found Elizabeth Thomas' autograph in the BOD's copy of Chudleigh's *Essays* (1710), call number: Vet.A4.e.498.

¹¹⁶*HL*, 75-82.

¹¹⁷BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 62.

¹¹⁸*MP*, 145-50.

¹¹⁹*Marissa* is Chudleigh's *nom de plume*.

¹²⁰*MP*, 148.

little doubt that Thomas had great respect for Chudleigh's ideological standpoint; she considered Chudleigh a '*fair Defender*' whose polemical words acted on behalf of all women:

This gen'rous Nymph in *Action* spoke her Mind,
She *came*, she *saw*, and *gain'd* what she design'd:
By dint of *Reason*, she your Foes *subdues*,
See how they trembling fly, and *she alone* pursues.¹²¹

Moreover the hyperbolic affiliation of Chudleigh with Caesar—as a heroine who 'came, saw and gain'd what she design'd' over Sprint in their battle of words—emphasizes how consequential *The Defence* was to Thomas, who would have been acutely aware of the battle women encountered in their quest for respect.¹²² Originally, Thomas' motives for writing the panegyric may have been to gain patronage; however, their friendship grew to one that was mutually beneficial and supportive—a topic that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Astell and Chudleigh were not the only women writers who influenced Thomas. She read widely and appreciated other published and unpublished authors: She and Gwinnett discuss Katherine Philips' stance on Platonic friendship. And in Letter III, Thomas reports to Gwinnett having been 'shewn a POEM ', called 'The GROVE at *Long-Leate*' which turned out to be by Elizabeth Singer (later Rowe), who was the non-conformist poet, who later became famous for writing *Friendship in Death in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (1728).¹²³ This letter is interesting because Thomas seems to be jealous of Singer and erroneously reports her marriage to a Mr. Copley.¹²⁴ Apparently, Gwinnett had once attempted to pursue Singer romantically, just as he did Thomas, only his suit was unsuccessful with the former. In a footnote to the letter above, Curll directs the readers to 'A Copy of Verses, before her [Singer's] Poems, written by *Pylades*, 1697'. The poem to which Curll refers is called, 'To the AUTHOR of these POEMS, Known only by *Report*, and by Her *WORKS*', and it appeared in *Poems on Several Occasions, Written by*

¹²¹MP, 148.

¹²²See Grundy, 191, for her interpretation of this section of verse.

¹²³PC, 189-90.

¹²⁴She actually married Thomas Rowe (1687-1715) in 1710.

Philomela in 1696, not 1697. The last line of this poem in the 1696 edition reads, 'You'll ne'er grow vain with —'s humble praise'. When Curll reprinted Rowe's poems in 1737, he printed the same poem but filled in the blank before 'humble praise' with Gwinnett's name. Not surprisingly, Curll also included a footnote directing the reader to purchase *Pylades and Corinna* if they wanted to discover more about him. One interesting addition to the 1737 edition was a letter written by Rowe from Frome, dated 30 August 1736. In it she wrote,

I am infinitely obliged to you for your Concern for my Character. Assure Mr. CURLL, that, in Printing my POEMS, no Body will dispute his Right, or give him any Opposition. I only desire him to own, that it's his Partiality to my Writings, not my Vanity, which has occasioned the Re-publishing of them. Assure him likewise, that the late Mr. *Gwinnett* has but one POEM in the Book, and that I never had any Correspondence with that Gentleman.¹²⁵

Gwinnett, it seems, had a penchant for literary women.

References to other friends and correspondents appear in Thomas' prose and poetry, such as Sulpitia (Anne West, Lady Dowager De La War), to whom she may have been a companion; Musidora (Mrs. Diana Bridgman), who was a musician and philanthropist; Sarah Hoadly (d. 1743), wife of Bishop Hoadly, who was a well-known portrait painter; Hester ^{lady} Pakington, who was the wife of the Tory politician, Sir John Pakington; and others such as Mirabella and Bassina who have still yet to be identified. They comprised members of many networks of writers and artists with whom Thomas socialized. It has been suggested that Thomas' aim in writing poems to the women mentioned above was probably an attempt to gain patronage—a subject that will be considered in the following chapter. However, Thomas' inclination to seek out other like-minded male and female authors, both amateur and professional, was not only a ploy to gain patrons. Reading, writing and circulating manuscripts was an integral part of her social and intellectual existence.

Thomas' Polemical Poetry:

Thomas was a versatile writer of prose and verse who could comment on Sir

¹²⁵Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *Philomela: or, Poems by Mrs. Elizabeth Singer, [Now Rowe,] Of Frome in Somersetshire* (London: Edmund Curll, 1737), ixx^v.

Isaac Newton's theory of Optics in one letter and write a satiric ditty in another.

Throughout all of her prose and poetry, however, runs a vein of protofeminism. Like many of her contemporaries, she was part of a group of women writers who, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, read, wrote, circulated and published polemical prose and poetry in defence of women. As previously mentioned, these women usually espoused the amelioration of women's lives, especially in regard to their treatment in marriage and educational opportunities.

'Many were inspired by the general philosophical shift toward a rational and empirical analysis of life that rejected tradition and encouraged self-confidence and independent thought'.¹²⁶

Polemical writing with a protofeminist slant from the turn of the eighteenth century is often assumed to have been generated in relation to or as a result of Mary Astell's predominance. Thomas was certainly intrigued by Astell and knew her writings, but her own writing career would have existed and thrived without Astell's influence. It seems far more likely that other seventeenth-century thinkers, such as Descartes and Locke, had an even bigger effect on Thomas. Like many other contemporary women writers, Thomas was intrigued by the Cartesian-equality-amongst-souls tenet as well as the contractarian arguments against custom- and scripture-based power structures. When male writers, such as Locke, fell short in their arguments in relation to women—especially when speaking of Custom—Thomas, like Astell and Chudleigh, was quick to criticize them. This point has already been discussed in chapter one in relation to Thomas' poem, '*On Sir J----- S----- saying in a sarcastick Manner, My Books would make me Mad. An ODE*'. Unlike Astell, who is best remembered for her prose tracts, as Isobel Grundy states, Thomas' most notable contribution to protofeminism is her 'hard-hitting topical satire and polemic' in verse.¹²⁷ To complement Grundy's point, it should also be noted that much of Thomas' satiric poetry is distinguishable from Chudleigh's satires which

¹²⁶Moir Ferguson, *First Feminists British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 15.

¹²⁷Grundy, 195.

often have rapturous, Neoplatonic endings. Although all three women discussed similar themes in their writings, their styles differed greatly.

One memorable protofeminist satire written by Thomas is 'A New LITANY, *Occasion'd by an Invitation to a Wedding*', in which she invents a satiric litany with serious undertones. In her supplication to God, with the response '*Libera nos*' after each couplet—the *nos* being women in general, the speaker makes three simple requests:

From Marrying in haste, and Repenting at leisure;
Not liking the Person, yet liking his Treasure:
Libera nos

From a Mind so disturb'd that each Look does reveal it;
From Abhorring One's Choice, and not Sense to conceal it:
Libera nos

From a Husband to govern, and buy him his Wit;
From a sullen, ill-natur'd and whimsical Citty.
*Libera nos*¹²⁸

This poem is simultaneously a sombre and parodic litany reflected in the two pronged title. On the one hand, her supplication to God in her '*New Litany*' for women not to become victims of bad marriages is serious. On the other, in response to being invited to a wedding, the speaker ironically inverts the litanous genre by substituting a polemical, secular prayer for a traditional one. Such clever inversions are typical of Thomas' satiric style.

Nowhere are Thomas' satiric talents more apparent than in the poetry inscribed to her cousin, Anne Osborne.¹²⁹ Surviving letters and poems to her cousin indicate the two were very close. Thomas often refers to Anne as her sister before she married and moved 'to rural Shades'.¹³⁰ Aside from revealing an interesting aspect of Thomas' extended family life, her letters and poetry to Clemena reveal them to have often discussed issues concerning women. The two polemical poems that remain addressed to her, '*The true Effigies of a Certain Squire: Inscribed to CLEMENA*' and '*Epistle to*

¹²⁸MP, 98.

¹²⁹Anne Osborne's pseudonym is Clemena.

¹³⁰MP, 236.

CLEMENA. *Occasioned by an Argument she had maintain'd against the AUTHOR*, deal with the two most significant issues for turn-of-the-century women protofeminists: education and marriage.¹³¹

'*The true Effigies of a Certain Squire*' satirizes an ignorant country squire, who epitomizes what would have been the eighteenth-century equivalent of a male chauvinist. The structure of the poem—four short stanzas representing the speaker and two dealing with the squire's satiric appearance and utterances, painted by the muse—highlights how the squire's inane physical appearance is indicative of his foolishness in general. The ridiculous fop was by no means an original character in the early eighteenth century; readers would have been familiar with him from contemporary poetry and plays. In Thomas' characterization of him, however, she may have been attempting an ironic gender reversal. Women were often satirized for and equated with the sum of their aesthetic appearances, and this ridiculous squire receives the same treatment from Thomas.

The speaker begins the poem with an apostrophe to her muse petitioning it to assist her 'Revenge' on 'the most despised of men'—the squire—who is a proponent of many customs that keep women subordinate to men.¹³² The speaker states in the first stanza, '*Revenge thy self, with Satyr arm thy Quill*'. Then in detail that rivals Jonathan Swift in 'The Lady's Dressing Room', the muse paints/describes the squire's outlandish appearance:

First, *Paint* a large, two handed, surly Clown,
In Silver Wastcoat, Stockings sliding down.
Shooes, (let me see) a Foot and Half in Length,
And stoutly arm'd with Sparables for Strength.
Ascend! and let a Silver String appear,
Which seems to cry, a Golden Watch is here:
O'er all a D'oily Stuff, to which belongs
One Pocket charg'd with *Citron* Peel and Songs:
'Tother contains, more necessary far
A Snuff Box, Comb, a Glass, and Handkercher.¹³³

After the lengthy description of the squire, the speaker cuts off the muse with disgust:

¹³¹MP, 79-85 and 174-79.

¹³²Judith Drake also satirizes the character of a country squire in *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696).

¹³³MP, 80.

Enough, O Muse! thou hast describ'd him right,
 'Th *Emetick's* strong, I sicken at the Sight:
 A Fop is nauseating, howe'er he's drest,
 But this too fulsome is to be exprest.
 Such hideous *Medley* would thy Work debase,
 Where *Rake* and *Clown*, where *Ape* and *Knave*, appear with open
 Face.¹³⁴

Thomas' use of painterly tropes, specifically the image of the muse as a painter—who draws the 'true Effigies' of the squire—seems to be reminiscent of techniques used in topographical poetry, since she gives her readers such a detailed prospect of the 'landscape' of the squire's physical appearance. However, unlike topographical poems, such as Sir John Denham's, *Cooper's Hill* (1642), Thomas' prospect is not viewed from a literal high vantage point but rather from the moral high ground where Reason battles Custom.

After the speaker has interrupted the muse to register her distaste of the squire, she then asks her muse to continue the painting to reveal how the squire's aesthetic appearance reveals his intellectual shortcomings:

Yet stay, proceed and paint his awkward Bow,
 And if thou hast forgot, I'll tell thee how;
 * * *
 His Honours thus perform'd, a Speech begin
 May shew th'obliging *Principles* within:
 The Mem'ry to his Sense I now confine,
 His be the *Substance*, but th' *Expression* thine.

The muse then recounts some words of the squire:

Madam, cries he, L-rd how my Soul is mov'd!
 To see such silly Toys by you approv'd:
 A Closet stuff'd with Books, pray what's your Crime,
 To superannuate before your Time;
 And make your self look old, and ugly in your Prime?
 Our modern Pedants contradict the Schools,
 For learned Ladies are but learned Fools.
 With ev'ry Blockhead's Whim ye load your Brains,
 And for a Shadow, take a World of Pains.
 What is't to you what Numbers *Cæsar* slew?
 Or who at *Marathon* beat the De'el knows who?
 Defend me *Fortune!* from the Wife I hate,
 And let not bookish Woman be my Fate.¹³⁵

Thus the muse makes the explicit connection between the squire's external and internal fatuity. The characterization of his narrow-mindedness becomes even more

¹³⁴*MP*, 81.

¹³⁵*Ibid*, 82-3.

ridiculous because of the pride the squire takes in his pursuit of ignorance. He claims he would like to entail folly on his descendants:

And truly speak it to my *Joy* and *Praise*,
I never Read six Books in all my Days.
Nor should my Son; for could my Wish prevail,
Blest Ignorance I'd on my Race entail.¹³⁶

The connection Thomas cleverly makes between the material, legal custom of property entailment and intellectual entailment reminds her readers yet again just how arbitrary Custom's power is.

Thomas calls upon her muse in the beginning and throughout the poem to 'assist' her pen, but she ends it by directly addressing her cousin, Anne:

How is't my Friend? can you your Spleen contain,
At this ignoble Wretch, this less than Man?
Trust me, I'm weary, can repeat no more,
And own this Folly worse than when 'twas acted o'er.¹³⁷

Although we get a hint of it in the title, the poem's *raison d'être* is revealed again in the final stanza: this satire was written for Anne's (Clemena's) benefit. It provides a telling example of how Thomas uses her close relationships as media through which to express her polemical views.

The poem, '*Epistle to CLEMENA. Occasioned by an Argument she had maintain'd against the AUTHOR*', which tells the tragedy of Nefario and Aminta, reveals an ongoing debate between Thomas and Osborne, since her cousin's response to a letter, conversation or poem is implied in the opening lines. Thomas begins with conciliatory overtures to her cousin who, it seems, had told Thomas that her attitude toward men was too harsh and misanthropic:

Tho' you my Resolution still accuse,
And for *Misanthropy* condemn the Muse;
Still finding Fault with what I most commend,
And lose good Humour in the Name of *Friend*:
Yet if these pettish Heats you lay aside,
And by calm *Reason* let the *Cause* be try'd.
I make no Question, but it would appear,
You had no Cause to *boast*, nor I to *fear*.¹³⁸

As in many of her poems, the voice of Reason in '*Epistle to CLEMENA*' outlines the

¹³⁶*MP*, 84.

¹³⁷*Ibid*, 84-5.

¹³⁸*Ibid*, 174.

inequalities in marriage, as it battles the all pervasive Custom. In the second stanza, this theme continues:

For when two bind themselves in Marriage Bands,
Fidelity in each, the *Church* commands;
 Equal's the Contract, equal are the Vows,
 Yet Custom, different Licences allows:
 The *Man* may range from his unhappy *Wife*,
 But *Woman's* made a Property for *Life*.¹³⁹

With the tyranny of Custom outlined, the speaker continues to narrate the tale of Nefario and Aminta, an allegorical mini-tragedy or a verse parable based on the experience of an oppressed, virtuous woman, who unwittingly chooses a bad husband. The speaker justifies her mistrust of men based on the experience of Aminta, who resigned 'her self into *Nefario's* Arms'.¹⁴⁰ Like Astell and Chudleigh and many other women writers who criticized Custom, Thomas personifies its blatant cruelty, which allows men a tyrannical sovereignty in marriage.

Grundy claims that Thomas' poems often 'reach below the surface' to reveal the potential sufferings of women 'inventively'.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, the narrator proceeds to describe the brutality of Aminta's living situation. It is hinted that physical abuse will become part of Nefario's repertoire when the narrator says that he 'scarcely can refrain to give th' impending Blow'.¹⁴² Despite the fact that Aminta entered the marriage chastely, the speaker states that she is 'ruin'd by him' and that her life is '*an Evil worse than Death*'.¹⁴³ In an ironic reversal, Thomas aptly uses the language usually employed to describe a fallen or seduced woman to describe Aminta. As Grundy claims, Thomas' 'critique exposes the biases inscribed in popular usage, and reeducates her readers' ears'.¹⁴⁴

In another polemical poem, '*The forsaken Wife*', in the style of a Heroidian love complaint, Thomas employs the same image of the chaste wife who has been ruined by a 'cruel' husband:

¹³⁹*MP*, 174.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid*, 175.

¹⁴¹Grundy, 190.

¹⁴²*MP*, 178.

¹⁴³*Ibid*, 179.

¹⁴⁴Grundy, 190.

Cruel Man! I am not *Blind*,
 Your *Infidelity* I find;
 Your want of *Love*, my *Ruin* shews
 My broken *Heart*, your broken *Vows*:
 Yet maugre all your rigid *Hate*,
 I will be TRUE in spite of *Fate*;
 And one *Preheminence* I'll claim,
 To be for ever *still the same*.¹⁴⁵

In *Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), Astell claims that virtuous women could find solace in an unhappy marriage if they were better educated to understand their Christian faith and knew how to bide their time until death because 'the Mind is free, nothing but Reason can oblige it, 'tis out of the reach of the most absolute Tyrant'. Thomas criticizes such optimism in these last two poems by suggesting that freedom of the mind does not always deflect cruelty of the heart, and that Astell's and Chudleigh's stance—that happiness can wait until the afterlife—does not always soften suffering in real life. Both Astell and Chudleigh believed that women would have their reward in heaven and that they should set their sights on the afterlife for relief, whereas Thomas does not seem to endorse this belief wholeheartedly in these poems. Both an '*Epistle to CLEMENA*' and '*The forsaken Wife*' end in a despondent tone. In the former tragedy-in-miniature, after Thomas reveals the endless cycle of death in life Aminta will undergo, she directly addresses her cousin again:

Ah *Friend!* in these deprav'd, unhappy Times,
 When *Vice* walks barefac'd, *Virtues* pass for Crimes:
 Many *Nefario*'s must we think to find,
 Tho' not so bad as this, yet *Villains* in their Kind.
 Hard is that Venture where our *All* we lose;
 But harder yet an honest Man to choose.¹⁴⁶

In the latter love complaint, Thomas ends by saying,

Shew me a *Man* that dare be TRUE,
 That dares to *suffer* what I do;
 That can for *ever Sigh* unheard,
 And ever *Love* without Regard.
 I then will own your *Prior* claim,
 To LOVE, to HONOUR, and to FAME:
 But 'till that time, my *Dear* adieu,
 I yet SUPERIOR am to you.¹⁴⁷

Unlike her contemporaries, Astell and Chudleigh, Thomas does not end with a

¹⁴⁵MP, 295.

¹⁴⁶Ibid, 179.

¹⁴⁷Ibid, 295.

Neoplatonic, Christian trope that promises to grant happiness to long-suffering women in the afterlife. Although one might want to read these poems biographically, it is equally likely that Thomas was experimenting, using her talent for satire to comment on the highly topical issue of power relations in marriage.

The '*Epistle to CLEMENA*' in *Miscellany Poems* which ends with the line, 'But harder yet an honest man to choose' (as quoted above) is directed to Thomas' cousin. In *Pylades and Corinna*, however, in Letter IX, dated 26 October 1700, Pylades refers to a similar poem Thomas sent to him, only the characters are named Nefario and Armida (which is most likely a typographical printing error or a minor revision by Thomas). Curll prints three stanzas of this poem after the letter which appear to be part of another version of the same poem.¹⁴⁸ After line one hundred and three (the last line of the poem in *Miscellany Poems* and the eighteenth line of the fragment), Thomas bemoans the difficulty of choosing an 'honest Man', and includes these lines—reminiscent of John Pomfret's 'The Choice' (1700)—which are not included in *Miscellany Poems*:

But since you think I villify my Birth,
And Satyrize the *perfect'st State* on Earth.
Without the least Reserve my Thoughts I'll shew,
And still disclose my naked Heart to you.

Should Providence present a Man of Parts,
Not learn'dly vain, yet skill'd in lib'ral Arts;
Whose Principles are solid, Pious too,
Just to himself, and to his Monarch True,
In Conversation grave, but not precise,
Unmov'd in Dangers, yet in Counsel wise;
His Carriage humble, mixt with decent Pride,
Instruct by Actions, and as calmly chide,
Who hates all Flatt'ry, and does Truth revere,
Deeds prove his Words, and ev'ry Act sincere;
One who the World's Temptations can withstand,
And all his Passions equally command;
If this uncommon Creature should agree,
To like an honest, dull, Sincerity,
(For Wit and Beauty ne'er belong'd to me)
I could contentedly accept the Bliss,

¹⁴⁸Curll's footnote says,

N.B. Among CORINNA's Papers I found the following Characters, of NEFARIO and ARMIDA, referred to in this Letter. The former, is that of a certain debauched Country Baronet; who being brought Home, brimfull of Liquor, is thus represented upon an Interview with his Lady, and remarkable for her Virtue as polite Accomplishments (*PC*, 30).

And with a Pleasure know no Will but His.¹⁴⁹

The lines the two poems share are the same, aside from a few incidental alterations; it seems, then, that Thomas wrote a version of the poem for both her cousin and her potential fiancé. It provides yet another example of Thomas' activity in manuscript circulation. Like Katherine Philips before her, Thomas circulated her verse in hand-written copies and constantly 'revised what she had earlier written'.¹⁵⁰ The version of this poem sent to Clemena is undated, but the version written to Gwinnett was most likely sent to him shortly before 26 October 1700, which was only a few months after they had made their acquaintance and he had declared his intentions toward her. Thus Thomas adapted her polemical poem by adding a slightly happier ending for her suitor's benefit. It is evident that Gwinnett was familiar with the details of the poem when he wrote back to Thomas:

I am not able to describe, nor can you imagine, my dear CORINNA, how sensibly I am touched with the VERSES you *wrote* in your *Sleep*. They have raised a *Passion* in me to a high Degree, for which I have no Name, viz. a Complication of *Joy* and *Grief*, *Hope* and *Fear*; and tho' I did not rise in the *Night* to answer them, yet the next Morning before I was up this offered itself,

No more, CORINNA, me dissuade
From what I can't resist;
For never better Choice was made,
Nor would I be more blest.
Then let me, charming Maid, my Flame pursue,
And Life and Love together bid *Adieu*.

Tho' I am no Observer of Dreams or Omens, yet there is something in yours has strangely affected me, and I cannot tell for what Reason. But I scorn to despair, especially since you have given me such Comfort in the Conclusion of your NEFARIO, and ARMIDA.¹⁵¹

It would not be too farfetched to read the extra lines of this latter version of the poem as a biographical representation of Thomas' own hopes and fears about marriage—Gwinnett seems to have done so. The fact that she sent this poem to both her cousin and her fiancé, however, reveals just as much about her scribal publication practices and the popularity of satires on marriage as it does about her personal life.

¹⁴⁹PC, 31-2.

¹⁵⁰Elizabeth Hageman and Andrea Sununu, 'New Manuscript Texts of Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda', *English Manuscripts Studies, 1100-1700*, 4 (1993), 214.

¹⁵¹PC, 26.

Thomas connected with many male and female writers because of mutual interests in philosophy, literature and religion and protofeminism. In particular, Thomas' belief regarding women's inherent right to education and respect in marriage found her many allies amongst contemporary writers and artists. When speaking of Thomas and two other eighteenth-century women poets, Grundy states that

their work embraces [the] resituating of ancient literary inheritance, hard-hitting topical satire and polemic, and treatments of language, desire and power. Their existence and their dialogue with other poets shows them to have played an important part in a varied but coherent women's tradition.¹⁵²

With Thomas as the main case study, the next chapter explores this 'dialogue' in detail to discover the connection between women's literary friendships and the production of protofeminist writing in poetry and prose.

¹⁵²Grundy, 195.

Chapter Five:

'To be both *Patroness* and *Friend*'¹

Platonnes, Patronage, Friendship and Protofeminism at the turn of the eighteenth century

SINCE you such kind *Commands* are pleas'd to send,
And bless me with the charming Name of *Friend*:
How can I longer with your Will dispute?
No, *Madam!* know, your Pow'r is *absolute*.
So kindly you, for all my *Fears* provide,
What Faults the *Critick* sees, the candid *Friend* will hide.²

The above quotation from Elizabeth Thomas' poem, '*To the Lady PAKINGTON at the Bath; with these POEMS in Manuscript*', reveals a link between two highly literate women from the turn of the eighteenth century. Hester, ^{Lady} Pakington, the daughter and heiress of Sir Herbert Perrott of Haroldston, Pembrokeshire, was the second wife of the high Tory politician, Sir John Pakington (1671-1727).³ Lady Pakington is the patron and Thomas, the protégée. In this short poem, most likely attached to a manuscript of verses sent to Lady Pakington, Thomas offers the adulation that one might expect in praise of her social superior and patron. Thomas, it is well-known, suffered from financial problems and was forced to seek out patronage from numerous men and women who ranged in social class from country gentlefolk to high-ranking peers. What is striking about this poem is that Thomas blurs the distinction between friendship and patronage.

On the one hand, Lady Pakington's condescension to Thomas in allowing her to be considered a '*Friend*' can be construed as just another form of patronage. Being admitted to the 'conversation' of someone from a superior social class was significant at a time when social status was a type of currency. Through her connection to Lady Pakington, Thomas might have experienced 'a rise in status, which in turn carried

¹MP, 276.

²Ibid, 153.

³Joseph Foster, *London Marriage Licences 1521-1869*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1887), 1009, Edward Lowry Barnwell, *Perrot Notes; or Some Account of the Various Branches of the Perrot Family* (London: J. Russell Smith et. al, 1867), 129 and Old DNB.

economic value at a time when income and access to economic resources were closely correlated with rank'.⁴ Moreover, patrons were often sought out to give protection and approval for authors' texts—to act as friends, not critics—a role Thomas specifically requests of Lady Pakington in the final line of the quotation above.

On the other hand, Lady Pakington may have disregarded their social inequalities to strike up a sincere friendship with Thomas because of their mutual interest in literature, particularly occasional poetry. Aside from Thomas lending her manuscript of poems to Lady Pakington, they also shared a correspondence. In the only surviving letter that Lady Pakington wrote to Thomas, dated 30 May 1701, an ongoing association between the two women becomes apparent, but its length and significance are impossible to ascertain. A short narrative of their acquaintance can be strung together if one reads the textual and material evidence concurrently. This evidence includes the two poems written to Lady Pakington by Thomas, both of which appear in *Miscellany Poems*⁵, and Lady Pakington's letter to Thomas. In her letter, which reveals Lady Pakington to be quite literate, she apologizes to Thomas for a lapse in their correspondence: 'I must always acknowledge kind Corinna to be the best natur'd & most generous Person in ^{the} World since she can still have obliging thoughts ffor one XXXXX who so little deserves them'. She compliments Thomas' 'Verses', which she still has in her possession, and says that 'I was glad of an excuse not, to restore [them] when I was in London'. Lady Pakington closes the letter by expressing concern for Thomas' health and assuring Thomas of her friendship.⁶ As in many contemporary letters, the language is highly conventional and the praise of Thomas' manuscript poems could be nothing more than politeness at work. Thus the letter could be from a patron to her protégée, from one friend to another or an alliance in which friendship and patronage were both an integral part of the relationship.

⁴Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

⁵These two poems include the one quoted from above and 'SONG. To Lady PAKINGTON', *MP*, 133-4. This poem is also called 'The DREAM'. (See *HL*, 244).

⁶BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 60^r, *Whartoniana: or, Miscellanies, in Verse and Prose. By the Wharton Family, and Several other Persons of Distinction. Never before published*, 2 vols (London: Edmund Curll, 1727), II, 105-7 and *HL*, 245-7.

Initially this interchange between Thomas and Pakington seemed to be a straightforward instance of a patronage between women. Upon closer inspection, however, a friendship based on their love of learning and literature seems plausible, despite the discrepancy in social class. In her study of the Verney family, Susan E. Whyman noticed that a certain amount of class leveling existed at the turn of the century, especially in London. She claims that

London's huge size and diversity led to intimate local networks that transcended economic and status categories. In contrast to their country counterparts, Londoners were less confined by rank and developed personal contacts in more uninhibited, intermixed ways.⁷

The potentially exogamous friendship may have also had something to do with what Irene Brown refers to as the philosophy of 'rational domesticity'—whereby men and women of different classes *chose* friends because of their common ideological beliefs regarding religion, philosophy, education and friendship. Brown claims that

As early as the second half of the seventeenth century an alliance was forged between male and female rationalists, which united their shared view of religion, reason, and friendship with a critique of family life—with rational domesticity.⁸

Brown also states that this rational domesticity is characterized 'by a distinctive sociability, [in which] women functioned as mediators within and between social groups and fueled the elaborate mechanism of the patronage system'.⁹ Brown's theory is compelling and may shed some light on the relationships between learned men and women, of different social classes—like the one shared between Damaris, ^{lady} (Cudworth) Masham and John Locke—from the turn of the eighteenth century.

Another related explanation is that protofeminism had developed to the point where women were identifying with each other as a subordinated political group (especially when it came to education, marriage and religion) regardless of class. Making any definite conclusions about the relationship between Lady Pakington and Thomas, however, is impossible without further evidence. Although the Pakington/Thomas

⁷Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England. The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70.

⁸Irene Q. Brown, 'Domesticity, Feminism, and Friendship: Female Aristocratic Culture and Marriage in England, 1660-1760', *Journal of Family History*, 7 (1982), 416.

⁹*Ibid*, 415.

connection may be unclear, there are other alliances between women that are more revealing.

Women writers from the turn of the eighteenth century, like the Bluestockings from the mid and late eighteenth century, had supportive literary networks in which intellectual men and women of diverse social classes came together because of their common interest in literature, education, religion and the amelioration of women's lives. Unlike the Bluestockings, who have received much attention from literary critics in the past two decades, learned women from the turn of the century, aside from Mary Astell, have largely been overlooked. This chapter considers the material evidence that exists in order to examine the relationship between women's friendships and patronage and the impact it had on protofeminist activity at the turn of the eighteenth century.

The Age of Patronage

Socially, politically and culturally, patronage in its many forms played an integral part in the production of literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for both men and women. Most literary scholars and historians concerned with patronage in the long eighteenth century stress that patronage became democratized as it passed from the hands of a few to the many. They believe that authors who formerly relied on courtly and aristocratic patronage had to turn to politics, booksellers and the rising middle class for such things as subscription as the century wore on.¹⁰ There is no doubt that patronage evolved over the century; however, as Dustin Griffin argues, 'previous studies of patronage have focused too narrowly on the growth of a literary marketplace which apparently made patronage outmoded'.¹¹ He claims that

it is important not to overestimate the cultural shift from aristocratic to middle-class sponsorship. Many of the arts in eighteenth-century England still depended heavily on the patronage of the aristocracy and

¹⁰Michael Foss, *The Age of Patronage. The Arts in Society 1660-1750* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), 17.

¹¹Griffin, 5.

the gentry.¹²

The evidence that survives about women writers and patronage confirms Griffin's argument: wealthy women played significant roles as patrons throughout the eighteenth century.

Women were an integral part of the system as both authors and patrons, but as with everything in the eighteenth century, the options for women writers were more limited than for their male counterparts. Of the several forms of patronage available at the turn of the eighteenth century, women writers were not able to take up official positions in government or the church and they might have hesitated to accept the 'protection' of a male peer, since this type of patronage could be construed as being sexually untoward, depending on the reputation of the peer. A woman could have benefited from gifts of money, but this was not the only way patronage could be expressed: encouragement, conversation, introductions, companionship, advice, scribal circulation and extended visits could all result in some sort of material gain for a woman writer whether it be money or recognition. Like Aphra Behn, a woman writer could have relied on the aristocracy to patronize her plays to maximize their large third-night takings; like Delarivier Manley, she could have written for a political party; like Elizabeth Singer Rowe, she could have received protection from a peer such as Lord Weymouth and his family; like Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, she could have received encouragement and publication exposure through an established male author just as Finch did from Jonathan Swift; like Elizabeth Thomas, she could have written dedications, panegyrics and have been a humble companion; and finally as the century progressed she could have done exceptionally well through subscriptions, like Ann Yearsley.¹³

Much has been made of the role that patronage played in party politics at the turn of eighteenth century, but little has been made of its significance in relation to gender politics. An interesting phenomenon emerges when one closely examines

¹² Griffin, 9.

¹³ Paul J. Korshin, 'Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage', *ECS*, 7 (1973/4), 453-73, Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen. Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), 102-8 and Griffin, 189-205.

patron/protégée relationships between women at the turn of the eighteenth century, especially if the women were somehow involved in the production and circulation of protofeminist literature. Protofeminist patrons and protégées were often involved in friendships that crossed the boundaries of rigid class distinctions. Which came first, the friendship or the patron/protégée alliance, is often difficult to determine but the reason that many women patrons developed friendships with their protégées seems inextricably linked to their mutual interests in women as a political group. Although not always entirely devoid of party politics, gender politics was often the bond between women friends of unequal social classes. Patronage could be a happy side effect for the less fortunate women writers involved.

From the letters and texts that survive from polemical women writers of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, one can find many examples of women writers attempting to gain recognition and patronage both in book dedications and with complimentary verses. Polemical women writers were not strangers to the panegyric or the dedication. After receiving some financial assistance from William Sancroft, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mary Astell dedicated a manuscript volume of poems to him in 1689; Sarah Fyge Egerton dedicated *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703) to the great universal patron, Charles Montagu, first Earl of Halifax, and one can find many panegyrics and elegies included in her compilation of poems. Mary, Lady Chudleigh dedicated her *Essays on Several Subjects* (1710) to Sophia, Electress of Hanover, the mother of the future George I; one can also find numerous panegyrics in her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703). Elizabeth Thomas, who struggled most of her life to maintain her status as a gentlewoman, used her poems and letters to appeal to a broad spectrum of people from different classes and political allegiances. Aside from writing poems to Lady Pakington, whose husband, Sir John, was a well-known Tory, Thomas, like her contemporary and possible acquaintance Egerton¹⁴, also appealed to the great Whig patron, Charles Montagu. Other poems that Thomas may

¹⁴Jeslyn Medoff, 'New Light on Sarah Fyge (Field, Egerton)', *Tulsa Studies*, 1 (1982), 170.

have written for patronage include '*Paraphrase from the French, Inscribed to the LADY HODGSON*', '*To the most Honourable the Marchioness of — — on Her leaving the Town*', '*A SOLILOQUY. On observing an Hour-Glass in a sleepless Night*, Dec. 22. 1715. *Inscribed to the Right Honourable the Lady MARY IRWIN*' and '*To the late Duke of NORFOLK. An ODE*'.

A particularly good example of Thomas' attempt to gain patronage exists in the form of a letter, dated 10 March 1702/3, that she wrote to a peer, bound in a volume of the John Ellis (1643?-1738) papers. At the time, Ellis was the Under-secretary of State to Sir Charles Hedges (died 1714). According to the manuscript index of the British Library, the letter is addressed to James Butler, the second Duke of Ormond (1665-1745).¹⁵ Materially, it bears all the marks of a letter written for patronage: it is in a neat italic hand; there is generous spacing throughout the letter, particularly between the superscription, 'My Lord' and the start of the letter; it is only written on one side of the sheet; and Thomas added some fancy swirls to her first initial when she signed the letter. Textually, the letter is the epitome of politeness and deference:

S^r James Butler told me that He had presented my most Humble Duty to Your Grace, with my Humble Request on y^e behalf of my Countrey-Man: & Friend M^r Charles Herles who is Very Ambitious of Serving yo^r Excellency in whatever Capacity Your Grace shall think fitting. He is an Honest Man my Lord, & of an Ancient Family in Cornwall: and if Your Excellency is pleased to bestow A Commission on Him He will Raise His Men &c. S^r James told me y^t yo^r Grace had not forgot me: Indeed my Lord, I am Very much asham'd of the Cause of Your Remembrance for I am Non Sensible that the Fitz-Geralds are but odd People, & can't make out what they said tho' they gave it me in Writing. Which failure I hope Your Grace will not Impute to me. I could now my Lord wish ~~XXXX~~ I were a Man, that I might find some Oppertunity of Laying my Life at yo^r feet, & in some Measure Testifie y^e Sincerity & Zeal I have ever had for yo^r Grace. But as I am, if yo^r Grace is pleasd to Hon^r me with an Employ in yo^r Excellencies Service, it is the height of my Ambition.¹⁶

This letter is significant as a representation of patronage on many levels. The most obvious is the request made by Thomas and her subsequent offer to return the favour

¹⁵The James Butler referred to at the start of the letter was probably the son of Pierce Butler, third Viscount Galmoy (1652-1740) and cousin of the Duke, who happened to have the same name.

¹⁶BL, MSS Additional 28890, fol. 127^r.

My Lord

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Sr James Butler told me, that he had presented my most Humble
Duty to Your Grace, with my Humble Request on y^r behalf of my Country-man
& Friend M^r Charles Herles, who is Very Ambitious of serving y^os Excellency
in whatever Capacity Your Grace shall think fitting. He is an Honest Man -
my Lord, & of an Ancient Family in Cornwall: and if Your Excellency is pleas'd
to bestow a Commission on him he will Raise His Men &c. Sr James told me y^t
y^os Grace had not forgot me: Indeed my Lord, I am Very much ashamed of the Cause
of Your Remembrance: for I am now sensible, that the Fitz-heralds are but odd
People, & can't make out what they said: tho' they gave it me in Writing. Which
failure I hope Your Grace will not Impute to me. I could now my Lord wish
~~that~~ I were a Man, that I might find some Opportunity of Laying my Life
at y^os feet, & in some Measure Testifie y^r Sincerity & Zeal I have ever had
for y^os Grace. But as I am, if y^os Grace is pleas'd to Honor me with an Employ
in y^os Excellencies Service, it is the height of my Ambition. However, I pray
God to Bless Your Grace with Long Life, & happiness, which shall be y^r constant
Prayers of

My Lord

y^os Grace's

most Hum^{ly} Devoted

& most faithfull serv^t

March 10th 1702/3

I am my own Porter my Lord,
& should be very Proud of
Receiving my Answer from y^r Grace.

E. Thomas

5. Letter from Elizabeth Thomas to James Butler, Duke of Ormond, 10 March 1702/3.

MS Additional, 28890, fol. 127^r. By permission of the British Library.

'in some Measure' to the Duke; however, the letter also reveals Thomas doing a favour (or returning one) for a country connection. Thomas' father originally came from Cornwall. Perhaps she was acting on behalf of a family member from the country in the hope of reciprocal future financial support. Or perhaps Thomas was acting as a patron herself. Although Thomas lacked material wealth, she was rich in social connections with powerful people in London. It seems she might have used her position in town to benefit others as well as herself.

Thomas did not just target peers, one can find just as many poems dedicated to members of the gentry and middle classes as well as contemporary authors and musicians. In the 'Life of Corinna', Thomas tells us of the many presents she received from relatives: 'what Gifts I had from kind Godmothers and Relations'.¹⁷ One wonders if she was seeking favour with her middle-class uncle, Richard Osborne, when she wrote, 'JILL. *A Pindarick ODE. Inscrib'd by Command to Her Honoured Unkle RICHARD OSBORNE, Esq*'. Dedications, panegyrics and elegies such as the examples above can be found in most texts by men and women writers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact book dedications and panegyrics were so conventional that authors could not expect all of their endeavours to be acknowledged. By the turn of the eighteenth century, authors could only expect relatively modest gifts of money—no more than ten to thirty pounds for the average dedication of a book—if they received anything at all.¹⁸

As previously mentioned, money and gifts were not the only sources of patronage that could be useful to a woman writer. In a time when there was still a stigma attached to learned women many women writers sought to have their authorial attempts recognized through the approval or the encouragement of their male peers. Fathers, brothers, and non-related male authors could offer a type of patronage that one might term coaching today. Isobel Grundy has identified this type of patronage in relation to Samuel Johnson and women writers of the mid-eighteenth century.

¹⁷HL, lxxiv.

¹⁸Korshin, 467.

Grundy states that Johnson often offered advice and moral support to struggling women writers instead of gifts of money:

Johnson was early drawn into a loose-knit group of remarkable and productive, though not fully professional, writing women, who were busy teaching each other to know their strength. That kind of teaching, which we today might call assertiveness training, was very much part of what Johnson in his turn specialized in offering younger writers, and particularly women.¹⁹

How many upper-class brothers sent to Oxford or Cambridge assisted their sisters (such as Edward and Jane Barker and William and Elizabeth Elstob) will never be known. The same could be said for the literary friendships that developed in the social writing culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries like those Jane Barker maintained with the Cambridge men she wrote to after her brother died, whom she mentions in her semi-autobiographical text, *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723).²⁰ According to the female speaker of *A Patch-Work*, the students, aside from encouraging her literary endeavours,

relieved my *Solitude*, and, in some Degree, dissipated that Melancholy wherewith I was oppress'd: And in their Absence (as I said before) visited me with Letters, and little Presents of the newest Pieces of Diversion that came to their Hands.²¹

Well-known male authors such as John Locke, John Norris of Bemerton and John Dryden often wrote to and received letters and poems from aspiring women writers. Locke had a particularly close relationship with Damaris^{lady} Masham, but the Lovelace collection in the Bodleian contains a large selection of letters to and from other women as well.²² The same is true of Dryden and Norris, who corresponded with and encouraged numerous women writers during their lives. Perry notes the important outlet that correspondence offered many women:

Letters permitted women to select teachers and mentors for themselves, and to establish a kind of intellectual apprenticeship that they had no other means of arranging. This was the obvious way for intellectual women to extend their range of contacts. Letters permitted

¹⁹Isobel Grundy, 'Samuel Johnson as Patron of Women,' In *The Age of Johnson, A Scholarly Annual*, 1, ed. by Paul J. Korshin (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1987), 60.

²⁰*The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker*, ed. by Carol Shiner Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 92-95.

²¹Ibid, 95.

²²Sheryl O'Donnell, 'Mr. Locke and the Ladies: The Indelible Words on the Tabula Rasa', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 8 (1979), 154-5.

scores of women who had no literary ambition whatsoever to engage with the leading thinkers of the day. Women chose a favorite author or an accessible clergyman to write to, as a finishing touch to their education, a sort of Grand Tour of the mind. So common were these epistolary relationships between intellectual women and philosophers or divines that they may be said to constitute a minor genre in late seventeenth-century English letters.²³

It would be naive to argue that women writers seeking recognition from established male authors were not also after increased social standing as well as some sort of material gain; however, it would be equally naive of literary historians to overlook the significance that authorial camaraderie and encouragement could have for women writers who might not have had easy access to a wide literary circle, publishing opportunities or a formal education.

With no father or brothers to assist or encourage her, Elizabeth Thomas had to rely on her own initiative to get moral support and other kinds of patronage. Aside from relying heavily on her extended relations and family friends, she also cultivated correspondences with several contemporary authors, including John Norris of Bemerton and John Dryden. Literary historians have accused her of being a fortune hunter: the old *DNB* states that she 'contrived to extract some didactic letters from Henry [sic] Norris of Bemerton, which she published in a cheap duodecimo to relieve her necessities while in the Fleet'.²⁴ In *The Works of John Dryden*, Sir Walter Scott says that Thomas 'contrived' to make an acquaintance with Dryden, the 'good-natured poet'.²⁵ Originally, it seems evident that Thomas had no intention of publishing the letters that Norris and Dryden wrote to her at the turn of the century—poverty and fear of imprisonment in the 1720s forced her to act desperately. Her alleged crime of receiving money for the publication of their letters almost thirty years after their actual correspondence seems to pale when one considers her dire financial situation at the time. Moreover her material gain could only have been minimal since she could not afford her freedom until 1730 even though it was granted by an Act of Insolvency in 1729.

²³Ruth Perry, 'Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women', *ECS* 18 (1984/5), 482.

²⁴His name was John Norris.

²⁵*The Works of John Dryden* 18 vols, ed. by Sir Walter Scott (London: William Miller, 1808), XVIII, 165.

When Thomas wrote to Norris and Dryden, then, publishing their letters was probably the furthest thing from her mind. Following the example of Mary Astell, who had also shared an exchange with Norris, published as *Letters Concerning the Love of God* (1695), Thomas was looking for authorial recognition and direction for her intellectual endeavours. Thomas claims in her 'Life' that 'she enjoyed a constant *Correspondence* with [Norris] during the last *Sixteen Years* of his Life: Tho' they never once *saw* each other' (he died in 1711).²⁶ In their letters Norris encouraged her reading and writing and offered guidance on how to continue her education, for which she was very grateful. Thomas sent Norris a poem, possibly a version of '*To Her very good Friend, The Reverend Mr. JOHN NORRIS of Bemerton. An ODE*', as the footnote in *Whartonia* and *The Honourable Lovers* claims. In this poem, Thomas expresses her admiration for Norris' works:

Wond'rous good Man! how pious is your Care!
 How sweetly you th'Almighty's Love declare!
 And for those Joys, our earthly Minds prepare.
 Your bright Ideas make appear,
 'Tis God alone we ought to know;
 That no true Happiness is here,
 But what from him does flow.
 Ah still, your charitable Ends pursue!
 Divine; Philosopher; and Poet too;
 What can't such Union do?²⁷

Norris wrote back on 25 April 1699 praising her efforts:

Madam you have here my Particular Thanks for your very extraordinary and obliging Present, which entertain'd me with great pleasure and wonder.

He went on to tell her,

You have, I perceive, a very pregnant genius for Poetry, and, I doubt not, for greater things, and if you will be advised by one who has had some Conversation with the Muses, you should not employ very much of your time in their Company, which in you would be better bestowed upon more Serious and usefull Studies.²⁸

Norris was only too happy to oblige Thomas' request for tuition and intellectual guidance. In a subsequent letter dated 12 June 1699, he wrote to say,

I should very gladly Comply with your ~~humble~~ request in giving you

²⁶PC, xii-xiii.

²⁷MP, 11.

²⁸BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 57^r, *Whartonia*, II, 95 and *HL*, 200.

such poor Assistance as I am able towards the direction of y^r Studies.

Sincerely concerned for her salvation, Norris stresses that his advice on reading material would serve

only the promotion of Christian Life and Practice, or such as tend more immedia[te]ly to the Illumination of y^r Mind, and the improvement of your Reason and understanding in the way of Science and Speculation.²⁹

Other letters outline reading lists and study projects for Thomas. It is worth noting that Norris did not limit his advice to traditional reading for women such as popular conduct books, but rather advised her to read philosophy and theology, including Malebranche, Descartes, Locke and Burnet, to name a few. He also encouraged her to learn French, not for any fashionable reason but so that she could read texts in their original language. In a letter dated 12 July 1699, Norris wrote to Thomas,

there will be a Necessity of a Language or two Latin is more difficult, and ffrenche will now answer all, which therefore I would have you learn out of Hand. Tis the most commanding & therefore most usefull Language at present, and Malebranche alone will abundantly reward all the Pains you shall take in it, which need not be great neither, if omitting y^e tedious way of learning y^e grammar, you only read over twice or thrice the Particles, then the Verbs, and then proceed to go over the Dialogues, and after that any plain Book with a Translation, by which way you may be Mistres of ffrench so far as to read a Book by the help of a Dictionary, in a Month's time. I speak upon Experience, and would have you try. And so I pray God to bles and prosper your Studies, and to make you Wise here, and Happy hereafter.³⁰

Norris reveals himself to be sincerely interested in her development. Thus these letters provide a good example of how men could offer intellectual patronage to amateur women writers who did not have access to a formal education.

Unlike the fortune-hunting character described in the old *DNB*, Thomas probably wrote to Dryden because she greatly admired him, and he was known to have encouraged other women writers. Their correspondence was very brief and occurred in the last year of his life in November and December 1699. She sent him a couple of poems looking more for recognition, encouragement and advice, rather than money. He was kind enough to reply—comparing her to Sappho—and suggested that

²⁹BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 59^v, *Whartoniana*, II, 96 and *HL*, 200-201.

³⁰BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fols. 65^v-66^r, *Whartoniana*, II, 100 and *HL*, 204-5.

she use Corinna as her pen name. Like Norris, Dryden offered Thomas some practical advice and positive reassurance, only, unlike Norris, Dryden *did* think that poetry was an appropriate art form for her to pursue:

The great desire which I observe in you, to write well; & those good parts which God Almighty & Nature have bestowd on you, make me not to doubt that by Application to study, & the reading of the best Authours, you may be Absolute Mistress of poetry.³¹

Dryden recommended Theocritus over Virgil for the study of pastorals and, despite being very busy and not in good health, he took the time to constructively criticize two poems that Thomas had sent to him, namely, 'A *Pastoral ELEGY. To the Memory of Her dear Friend the Honourable Mrs. CECILIEE BEW*' and 'The triple League to Mrs. SUSAN DOVE', both of which appear in *Miscellany Poems*. He said of her poems, 'If you have any considerable faults, they consist chiefly in the choice of words, & the placing them so as to make the Verse run smoothly'.³² The authority of an endorsement by a well-known writer such as Dryden must have meant a great deal to Thomas in a time when many intelligent women were still actively discouraged from reading and writing too much. Thomas seems to have really appreciated his efforts to encourage her because she published an elegy on his death in the commemorative compilation *Luctus Britannici* (1700) and wrote numerous other poems in his honour. For instance, in 'The DREAM. *An Epistle to Mr. DRYDEN*', Thomas credits him with providing her muse with inspiration:

The Death of Friends, first gave my Muse a Birth,
But you, Sir, rais'd her grov'ling from the Earth:
You taught her Numbers; and you gave her Feet;
And you set Rules, to bound Poetick Heat:
If there is ought in me deserves that Name,
The Spark was light at mighty *Dryden's* Flame:
But ne'er yet blest with my great Master's Sight.
I fear you'll think it Impudence to write.
Forgive me *Sir*, I long'd to let you know
How much your Pupil to your Works does owe.³³

After Dryden passed away, Thomas continued to correspond with his son, Charles Dryden and his cousin, Elizabeth (Pickering) Creed from Oundle, Northamptonshire.

³¹BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 54^r and *The Letters of John Dryden*, ed. by Charles E. Ward (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942), 127.

³²BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 54^r and *The Letters of John Dryden*, 127-8.

³³MP, 22.

In particular, in *To the Memory of JOHN DRYDEN Esq; An ODE. Inscrib'd to Mr. CHARLES DRYDEN*, Thomas acknowledges Dryden's inspiration and efforts to assist her:

Forgive, Oh *Muse*! I find 'tis he,
'Tis *Dryden* does thy Notes inspire:
He who first instructed thee,
And tun'd thy inharmonious Lyre.³⁴

Although both Norris and Dryden take on a father/teacher role, their positive, in Norris' case, continuous, responses to Thomas show them to have been active and willing participants in social, literary exchanges. They fulfilled a role in Thomas' life that was similar to the one that Johnson would fill for women in the Bluestocking circle later in the century. Of Norris, specifically, Perry states that his taste for the intellectual companionship of women 'might be compared to the later novelist Samuel Richardson or to the antiquarian George Ballard'.³⁵

Although polemical women writers dedicated prose and poetry to a wide range of potential men and women patrons, they often chose to dedicate their most protofeminist works to wealthy and powerful women. From the turn of the eighteenth century onward, many women writers viewed Princess and then Queen Anne as a powerful ally, patron and protectress and so they wrote many panegyrics and dedications to her. In her dedication to Queen Anne in *Poems on Several Occasion* (1703), Mary, Lady Chudleigh suggests that a powerful woman patron was the best choice for a woman writer in an age when learned, writing women were often ridiculed:

But to whom should a Woman unknown to the World, and who has not Merit enough to defend her from the Censure of Criticks, fly for Protection, but to Your *Majesty*? The Greatest, the Best, and the most Illustrious Person of Your Sex and Age.³⁶

Although convention and hyperbole are at work in Chudleigh's address and in others like it, dedications to Anne seemed to have had a legitimizing effect on polemical writing by women. Carol Barash has argued that Anne, both as princess and queen,

³⁴*MP*, 92.

³⁵Perry, 'Radical Doubt', 487.

³⁶*POSO*, 43.

had a large influence on communities of women writers at the turn of the eighteenth century. She says that

There was a significant rise in the number of English women writing for publication, as well as in the number of works that think about women as a political group, in the period between the death of Mary in 1694 and the death of William in 1702.³⁷

Joan Kelly agrees. She states that 'Queens and possible queens continued to stir feminists up by their mere being'.³⁸ Polemical texts in defence of women such as *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex* (1696), by Judith Drake, and Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II* (1697) were dedicated to Anne. Barash's theory about Anne's frequent appearance in dedications and panegyrics by polemical women writers seems plausible, especially given the fact that a cluster of protofeminist texts was published just before and during the early years of her reign. Barash, however, slightly overstates the importance of Anne as a motivational figure behind polemical writing by women. It could equally be argued that Anne's frequent appearances in poems and dedications are coincidental—she happened to be heir to the throne and then queen when there was an increase in polemical activity by women. A brief survey of other protofeminist texts reveals that other wealthy women were often chosen as protectresses: Bathsua Pell Makin dedicated her *Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* in 1673 to Lady Mary before she was married to William of Orange and the pseudonymous writer, Eugenia, dedicated *The Female Advocate* (1700) to a Lady W— —ly.

When she finally published her poems and letters in the 1720s and 1730s, Thomas dedicated them to powerful women of that era. *Miscellany Poems* was dedicated to Caroline of Anspach (1693-1737), then Princess of Wales, who was very interested in occasional poetry.³⁹ *Pylades and Corinna* and *The Honourable Lovers*

³⁷Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714. Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 231-2.

³⁸Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789', *Signs*, 8 (1982), 25.

³⁹In a letter, dated 16 April 1730, most likely written to Joseph Jekyll, Master of the Rolls of Fleet Prison, Thomas says, 'That the most unfortunate of her sex presumes to lay her little offering at your feet; which, having been accepted by Majesty, [her volume of Poems in 1727 was dedicated to Caroline, Princess of Wales, at this time become Queen,] she flatters her selfe, may afford your Honour, at a leisure hour, some entertainment also' (*The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, Now First Collected: with Notes and Illustrations; an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, Grounded on Original and Authentick Documents; and a Collection of His Letters, the*

were dedicated to the Duchess of Somerset and the Lord and Lady De La Warr, respectively. The dedications share many themes and are just as conventional as dedications by men; the only major difference is that the women writers usually mention their gender when seeking protection, which could have had just as much to do with convention as it did with women identifying with each other as a political group. For example, Thomas' address to Princess Caroline is strikingly similar to the one Chudleigh made to Queen Anne nineteen years earlier: 'for to whom should a solitary unfriended MUSE fly for Protection, but to the living Shrine of all HUMANE VIRTUES'.⁴⁰

Not all women writers chose wealthy women to be their patrons: Egerton's *Poems on Several Occasions* was dedicated to Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax, as was the female compilation in memory of Dryden, *The Nine Muses* (1700). Barash cites this collaborative effort, that brought together women of differing religions and classes, as a good example of 'women's strong sense of poetic community in the years immediately preceding Anne's coronation'.⁴¹ Anne's ascension to the throne was timely, but also coincidental to the increased production of polemical prose and poetry. Since the Restoration, women had been developing a growing sense of their oppression. This general realization had more to do with the dissemination of rationalism, Natural Philosophy and politics than it did with the arrival of a woman Monarch. Although there can be no doubt that budding feminists at the turn of the eighteenth century identified with Anne, protofeminist writing by women may have reached an apex anyway. Protofeminist polemic can be seen in the feminist texts from the same period that were not dedicated to Anne or one woman in particular. Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), Chudleigh's *The Ladies Defence* and Barker's *The Lining of the Patch Work Screen* (1726) were dedicated to all women — 'To the Ladies' — which might say more about women identifying with other women as a political group than it does for Queen Anne's influence over the production of

greater part of which has never before been published, 3 vols, ed. by Edmond Malone (London: H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), I, 354). The 1722 edition of *MP* was also dedicated to the princess.

⁴⁰*MP*, A3f.

⁴¹Barash, 246n.

such texts. Still it is important not to overstate the case: the proliferation of polemical writing by women and the frequency with which they were dedicated to powerful women was most likely due to a combination of convention and gender politics at work. Networking women writers were encouraging each other in their polemical productions and this collusion also made a significant impact on the growing genre.

The Age of Friendship

If the long eighteenth century can be called the Age of Patronage, then one could also call it the Age of Friendship. Friendship as a subject is discussed repeatedly during the Restoration and eighteenth century. Indeed in a world in which life could be so tenuous, friendship was frequently extolled and defended as a pure form of Christian love in which two souls could achieve equality and immortality. Although there was a long-standing belief that only men were capable of perfect Platonic friendships with each other, many writers disagreed. Women writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could be passionate about their friendships and frequently wrote about them in prose and poetry.

The most notable champion of female friendship from the seventeenth century was the Royalist poet, Katherine Philips. When she was isolated in the country with her husband, surrounded by people with religious and political beliefs that conflicted with her own, she formed the Society of Friendship, made up of like-minded men and women who communicated under pseudonyms drawn from Greek pastoral poetry. Under the persona Orinda, Philips wrote numerous poems and letters about love and friendship. She had no doubt that women were equally capable of experiencing Platonic love and friendship as their male counterparts.⁴² Not all male authors disagreed with Philips: Jeremy Taylor dedicated his *Discourse on the Nature, Offices and Measures of Friendship, with Rules Conducting it* (1657) to her, and Sir Charles Cotterel, Master of Ceremonies at the court of Charles II, shared a correspondence

⁴²Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity. English Women's Writing 1649-88* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 134-5.

with her on the subject, which was later published as *Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus* in 1705. Philips' stance on women and friendship and her proactive participation in the Society of Friendship provided a model for many turn-of-the-eighteenth-century men and women writers. In Letter VI of *Pylades and Corinna*, dated 3 September 1700, for example, Richard Gwinnett wrote to his fiancée, Elizabeth Thomas:

I am the more displeased with him, [William W. Ayloffe] because he is against *Friendship* between *different Sexes*. Mrs. PHILIPS, who had more Sense and Judgment, was of a contrary Opinion, and I am clearly of her Persuasion.⁴³

In a following letter Gwinnett compared Thomas to Philips by saying, 'Her refined and rational Thoughts of Friendship (not unlike Yours) which is a Subject she very much delights in, show a Soul above the common Level of Mankind, and mightily raise my Desire of practising what she so nobly describes'.⁴⁴ Thus many years after her death, Philips' ideological stance on love and friendship was still often regarded as a model worthy of emulation. As a result, *Letters from Orinda to Poliarchus* was reprinted several times and many aspiring social authors adopted Philips' example as a prototype for their own literary circles.

Another exemplar of women's friendship and potential from the seventeenth century can be found in the 1670s and 80s in the court of Mary of Modena, the second wife of James II. Her court provided a prototype of the potential creative power of female friendship. Barash claims that 'as Duchess of York she created a place where women's education and women's imagination were taken seriously' in a 'pastoral world of women's friendship, and a symbolic matrix in which women were central'.⁴⁵ It should not surprise literary historians that three of Mary's attendants became fairly well-known figures in history: Anne Killigrew, Anne Kingsmill (later Finch, Countess of Winchilsea) and Sarah Jennings (later Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough).

⁴³PC, 20. Gwinnett was referring to William W. Ayloffe's stance on friendship in his book, *The Government of the Passions, According to the Rules of Reason and Religion* (London: J. Knapton, 1700).

⁴⁴HL, 38.

⁴⁵Barash, 150.

The previous examples shed some light on the models of female friendship that would have influenced women writers from the turn of the eighteenth century. The Bluestockings, however, from the mid and late eighteenth century also provide a relevant example. Just as it was for Astell, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Thomas and their literary circles, 'learning, virtue, and friendship *were* inextricably linked' for the Bluestockings.⁴⁶ With the Bluestockings, one also finds the distinction between friendship and patronage blurred. For instance, after Elizabeth Montagu became a wealthy widow, she established legacies for less fortunate women writers who were a part of her literary social circle, including her sister, Sarah Scott, Elizabeth Carter and Anna Williams. Numerous male authors, such as Samuel Johnson and Samuel Richardson, were also an integral part of the support network in encouraging and promoting struggling women writers.⁴⁷

By the time of the Bluestockings, however, the polemical prose and poetry written in defence of women and published in the Restoration and early eighteenth century was a thing of the past. As Betty Rizzo notes, 'the question of women's equality to men was also rarely directly broached'.⁴⁸ The Bluestockings still discussed women's potential rationality and their right to an appropriate education, but the openly fervent protofeminism seen earlier in the century had all but disappeared. Moira Ferguson also comments on the demise of feminist texts following what she refers to as the 'Astell cluster' and the subsequent 'hesitantly and cautiously tendered' feminist ideas from the 'new, somewhat understated feminist period' in the later eighteenth century.⁴⁹ Without arguing for direct links, there is enough evidence to argue that there were literary networks of men and women writers that played a similar literary, social and cultural role to that of the Bluestockings at the turn of the

⁴⁶Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle. Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 11.

⁴⁷See Grundy, 'Samuel Johnson as Patron of Women', 59-77 and Gae Holladay and O. M. Brack, Jr., 'Johnson as Patron', In *Greene Centennial Studies, Essays Presented to Donald Greene in the Centennial Year of the University of Southern California*, ed. by Paul J. Korshin and Robert R. Allen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 172-99.

⁴⁸Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows. Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 6.

⁴⁹Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists. British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 19-20.

century. Earlier networks have not been noticed because most critics dismiss polemical women writers from the earlier period as merely being part of 'the Astell cluster'. However, there were other women writers, aside from Astell, who benefited from the friendship of wealthy women patrons and they, too, believed in women's right to spiritual and intellectual autonomy.

Platonnes, Patronage and Friendship

At the turn of the eighteenth century women from a wide variety of backgrounds were often drawn together because of their mutual interests in women's role in society, specifically in relation to religion, education and marriage. As a result patron/protégée relationships often developed into friendships, despite discrepancies in social class. Such class leveling, in London in particular, has been partially explained by the city's growing size and diversity as well as the trend in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries whereby men and women chose friends based on their common intellectual and spiritual interests rather than their social standing.⁵⁰ A further explanation lies in the fact that protofeminist consciousness had developed by the end of the seventeenth century to the point whereby women from different classes had begun to identify with each other as a downtrodden political group held back by Custom. The rest of this chapter considers the material evidence still extant that suggests that women's friendships, combined with patronage, had a significant impact on protofeminist activity, specifically the production and development of polemical prose and poetry in defence of women, at the turn of the eighteenth century. It should be noted, however, the leveling between the social classes had its limits. The women at the lower end of the social scale were still 'respectable', 'above contempt' and came from families that would probably be middle-class today. Neither Astell or Thomas were well-off, but they both claimed to be gentlewomen.⁵¹ Moreover, class could never be entirely forgotten. The letters of

⁵⁰Whyman, 70 and Brown, 415-7.

⁵¹I have not come across any patron/protégée relationships that blossomed into friendships that

Astell and Thomas to their socially superior friends contain constant reminders of the gulf that divided them.

Astell's Chelsea circle is a good place to start when discussing literary networks from the turn of the eighteenth century because a significant amount of material evidence survives, and Ruth Perry has documented Astell's life and texts in great detail. Astell, a poor but respectable Northerner, came to London in order to make her way in the world. Her family would not have been able to provide a dowry that would have allowed her to marry within her social class. Through her wit, intellectual prowess and a little help from high Tory and possibly even some Jacobite patrons, she eventually gained financial independence. Patronage for Astell was vital, and she chose her patrons carefully—powerful men and women whose political and religious beliefs were in line with her own. When her relations would no longer assist her, Astell turned to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, a churchman of high principles who would not endorse James II's Declaration of Indulgence or swear allegiance to the House of Orange. He patronized her in the late 1680s with gifts of money and introductions. Rich Wilkin, her bookseller and political ally, helped to start her career as a published author and John Norris of Bemerton corresponded with her and subsequently persuaded her to publish their letters, which brought her much literary prestige.

The most significant patrons/friends in her life, however, were the wealthy, learned women who supported her, such as Lady Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Ann Coventry, Lady Catherine Jones and Elizabeth Hutchenson. Perry recognizes the significance that friendship, particularly with like-minded women, had for Astell. She astutely points out that

It would be a serious distortion, for instance, not to detail Mary Astell's private friendships in telling the story of her life. Self-consciously identifying herself by gender before any other social categorization, she wrote four of her books expressly for a female audience. Her sense of self was very much bound up in relationships with other women; she both needed and relied upon the community of friends

involved working-class women from the turn of the eighteenth century.

who supported her.⁵²

The same could be said of Elizabeth Thomas and her private friendships. The significance of Astell's links to other women through friendship and patronage in relation to her work as an activist on behalf of women cannot be overstated.

Independently, Astell could publish her polemical texts defending the intellectual and spiritual rights of women, but she would never have succeeded in realizing her practical goals without assistance—one case in point is that her proposal for a Protestant nunnery at the turn of the century failed without the backing of a wealthy patron. The Chelsea school, which Astell later helped to establish in 1709, was part of the charity school movement that developed rapidly in the early eighteenth century, but its establishment was also an integral part of Astell's plan to affect positive change in relation to women's education. The establishment and successful running of the school was protofeminism in action—her practical legacy to women's education after years of theoretical and polemical writing. Not surprisingly, the school was also a project strongly supported by three of her closest patrons and friends, Lady Elizabeth Hastings, Lady Catherine Jones and Lady Ann Coventry. Pious, wealthy and learned, according to Perry, 'Each of these women maintained a web of connections with many women—including the relatives of their personal servants—and each manifested an impulse to support, encourage, and educate other women in a variety of ways'.⁵³ Despite having impressive pedigrees and vast amounts of wealth, they chose to lead quiet lives and assist the less fortunate.

Astell and her patrons shared a mutual admiration because of their common philosophical and religious beliefs. Although class differences could never be entirely forgotten, Astell developed sincere friendships with her like-minded patrons that turned out to be life-long. Perry claims that Astell's ability to affect change through the support of patrons/friends was unusual and that contemporary women writers were not so lucky:

⁵²Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7.

⁵³Ibid, 244.

One could actually do something in concert with such a powerful friend. The literary women in whose company Astell had inevitably found herself when she first came to London had no such power in the world but were as ineffectual as she. Elizabeth Elstob could not collect enough advance subscriptions to publish her own Anglo-Saxon translations; the poet Elizabeth Thomas was reduced for subsistence to dealing in scandalous materials, and satirized for it by Pope in *The Dunciad* as 'Corinna'. Without influence or money these women could hardly help themselves, let alone help Astell realize her dream of independence.⁵⁴

It is true that both Elstob and Thomas struggled financially, especially later in their lives. What Perry fails to realize, however, is that in Thomas' case, she did flourish intellectually and achieve a measure of stability, especially at the turn of the eighteenth century with her own set of wealthy women patrons/friends. It was only in the 1720s, after all her close patrons/friends were dead that she was 'reduced to subsistence'.

Through the texts and letters of Elizabeth Thomas, literary historians can glimpse an aspect of early eighteenth-century life in which like-minded women of various social classes came together and were motivated to act or write on behalf of other women. Thomas, a gentlewoman by birth, lacked financial security in her life from the time her father died when she was two years old. Like her contemporary and acquaintance Mary Astell, she relied heavily on patronage from friends and family. In the flurry of protofeminist activity at the turn of the eighteenth century, Thomas thrived intellectually under the protection of her friends and patrons. Although very few letters survive, one can piece together several of the literary networks in which Thomas participated. In several of her poems, Thomas mentions three major women patrons/friends, namely, Anne (Wild) West, Lady Dowager De La Warr, the wife of Charles West, the fifth Baron De La Warr⁵⁵; Diana (Vernatti) Bridgeman, the wife of William Bridgeman of Combs, Suffolk, M.P., clerk to the Privy Council of James II and secretary to the Admiralty; and Lady, Mary Chudleigh, the wife of Sir George Chudleigh, Baronet. All three women were dead by 1710. From poems and letters

⁵⁴Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, 265.

⁵⁵*Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* (London: Burke's Peerage [Genealogical Books] Ltd., 1980), 754-6.

left by Thomas, one learns that De La Warr, whose pseudonym was Sulpitia, was known for her learning and piety and Bridgeman, known as Musidora, for her musical talent and generosity to the poor. It seems quite likely that Thomas was some sort of humble companion to Lady De La Warr, who died in May 1703. Later that same year, Thomas was introduced to Diana Bridgeman and her daughter, Katherine, through Chudleigh. That Thomas and her patrons/friends actively participated in varied social and literary networks is apparent from letters that Thomas sent to her fiancé between 1700 and 1717. Moreover, their use of pseudonyms is reminiscent of Philips' Society of Friendship from earlier in the seventeenth century.

Of the selection of poems Thomas wrote to De La Warr and Bridgeman, many seem like straightforward attempts to gain favour and patronage. For instance, in '*On Mrs. DIANA BRIDGEMAN's Playing on the Lute*', Thomas commends her patron's musical talent with the enthusiasm expected of a protégée. She says,

When *Musidora* strikes the Lyre,
Such Heav'nly Charms descend,
As more than humane Joys inspire,
And all our Cares unbend

* * *

Cease! cease those speaking Strings to guide,
Our Souls are wound so high,
Unless you lay the Lyre aside,
We shall with Rapture die.⁵⁶

Thomas describes Chudleigh's literary texts with similar ardor. In '*To the Lady CHUDLEIGH, The Anonymous Author of the Lady's Defence*', Thomas praises Chudleigh's intellectual prowess in her literary battle against John Sprint, the author of *The Bride-Womans Counsellor*, discussed in chapter four:

Marissa Hail! hail *Eloquence* divine!
What solid *Judgment* sparkles in each Line!
What *strenuous* Proofs in ev'ry Period shine!
With such Success the happy *Goal* you reach,
Not *Wisdom's self* could better lessons teach;
Could more impartially the Case decide,
And solve the Doubts that rose on either Side.
Fly! brutal Wretches fly! no more proclaim
Your want of *Candour*, and your Love of *Shame*:
No more the Foibles of the Sex explore
But own the Force of *Virtue's* sovereign Pow'r:
Let bright *Marissa*! now your Rage disarm,

⁵⁶MP, 16-17.

Whose Eyes are Darts, whose ev'ry Word's a *Charm*.⁵⁷

Poems addressed to De La Warr before she died also have the same complimentary tone. In '*The DISCONSOLATE*', Thomas describes what their friendship meant to her:

In vain! I *Company* pursue,
And to *Sulpitia* Visits make,
Since ev'ry tender Word of hers,
Doth *Friendships* dear *Idea*'s wake.⁵⁸

A first-time reader of Thomas' poems might not notice much difference between her odes and panegyrics to other men and women, compared to the ~~the~~ examples above, especially since Thomas is always careful to ensure a respectful tone toward her social superiors. As in the poem she wrote to Lady Hester Pakington, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, there is a palpable difference between Thomas' poems written for general patronage to people such as Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax, and the ones she wrote to De La Warr, Bridgeman and Chudleigh. This difference can be found in the way Thomas frequently focuses on the friendships they shared.

Examinations of her letters, combined with close readings of several of her poems, reveal a much more intimate connection than one might expect between a protégée and her patrons. Interpreting some of Thomas' texts in an autobiographical light, especially the elegies she wrote to her three main patrons, is particularly useful when attempting to unravel her connections with them. De La Warr was the first to die in May 1703. Although not her best poetic effort, in her poem, '*On the Death of the Right Honourable ANNE, Lady Dowager DE LA WARR*', Thomas apotheosizes an enlightened woman for her great mind, wit, condescension, virtue and conduct:

Come here, ye *fair One*'s, hither come;
Leave worldly Thoughts behind;
Oh! learn to Dress you at this Tomb,
By great *Sulpitia*'s Mind.
Her *Virtues* will your Charms improve,
Her *Conduct* yours will steer:
Her *Condescension*, gain you Love;
Her *Truth*, disperse your Fear:
Her *Patience*, will your Griefs allay,
Her *Temper*, rage disarm:
Her *Piety*, might Vengeance stay,
And salvage Atheists charm.

⁵⁷MP, 148-9.

⁵⁸Ibid, 256.

But all her Worth 'twould endless be to tell,
Each *Virtue* she possest; and did in each excel.⁵⁹

In many ways, Lady De La Warr shares the admirable traits possessed by Astell's great women patrons, particularly Lady Ann Coventry. Although very little material evidence from De La Warr's life survives, one can find her signature, along with her daughter's (Cecilia) and son's (Charles) in an *Album Amicorum 1624-1677* owned by the scholar Johannes Fridericus Wagner of Nuremborg.⁶⁰ She signed her name as Ann LaWarr on 13 July 1677 with the following inscription: '*volo solidum perenne, your real frend*'.⁶¹ What is striking about this autograph book is the number of learned men who signed it from Leydon, London and Cambridge, including Sir Francis Drake and Sir Robert Harley, to name a few. De La Warr and her daughter were the only women to sign it. Although this book literally provides scholars a scrap of material evidence, it suggests that De La Warr, at the very least, may have socialized with scientists. With the popularity of Natural Philosophy and the Royal Society, she was not the only woman to take an interest in science. Thus, as with Astell, Thomas' choice of a learned, older woman companion was not random. She wanted to cultivate relationships with people who could help her achieve her intellectual and spiritual goals as well as assisting her material needs. It seems that De La Warr with her wealth, high birth, intellect and '*Patience, Piety and Virtue*' could do just that.

Since Thomas seemed to rely heavily on De La Warr for spiritual and material support, it is not surprising that Thomas expresses much grief over the loss of her friend and patron:

Oh! how can I this fatal Loss survive?
This endless Separation bear,
From her, whose Friendship when alive
Was most my Comfort here?
In her lov'd Bosom, all my Cares were eas'd;
My Joys were doubled; and my *Griefs* appeas'd:
Ev'n all my Soul so freely was reveal'd,
I'de scarce a Thought, that was from her conceal'd.
O rigid Fate!

⁵⁹MP, 62.

⁶⁰BL, MS Additional 15852, fols. 33^v, 34^v, 35^r. The BL manuscript index lists De La Warr's signature as dating to 1637 but upon close inspection the year is actually 1677.

⁶¹Literally this Latin phrase translates as, 'I want solidity or substance forever'. Perhaps it was some sort of inside joke or pun on a science experiment that De La Warr witnessed or heard about.

Why was she born so soon? or I so late?
 Why was I destin'd to possess
 But one short, *septenary* Happiness?
 Had she staid longer, I had still improv'd;
 For by her Conduct, all my Actions mov'd:
 Ah wretched Maid! now great *Sulpitia's* gone,
 No Friend has thou, no Guide to rest upon.
 Yet curb thy Sighs! thy boundless Grief conceal;
 Since none can ease the Torments thou dost feel:
 In secret, for thy private Loss complain;
 Nor cease thy Tears, while *Life* and *Sense* remain.⁶²

Although the exact details of their relationship are unknown at the moment, there seems little doubt that De La Warr acted in the capacity of a patron to Thomas. An autobiographical reading of the line, 'But one short, *septenary* Happiness', suggests that Thomas was De La Warr's acquaintance/companion for seven years. De La Warr had been a wealthy widow since 1687, the year her husband, Charles West, the fifth Baron De La Warr, died and had reached a great age for her time—taking on Thomas as a companion would probably have suited them both very well.⁶³ Thomas, a young gentlewoman who could not afford to marry according to her rank or live independently, most likely met De La Warr when she was twenty-one. Thomas had very few opportunities at the turn of the eighteenth century but becoming a companion was one of them.⁶⁴

Aside from losing a friend who 'when alive' was Thomas' great 'Comfort', Thomas also lost financial security. By 1703, neither Thomas nor her fiancé, Richard Gwinnett, could afford to marry. Unless De La Warr provided for Thomas, she would have been forced back into the same precarious position she experienced before she entered her Ladyship's service. For this reason, Thomas' elegiac composition may not just have been written for purely cathartic reasons. She may have hoped that the De La Warr heirs might remember her and continue to patronize her. It seems from the high praise in the poem, '*To the Right Honourable the Lady D—, on Her first Visit*', possibly written to the next Lady De La Warr that Thomas was hoping for the

⁶²MP, 60-61.

⁶³Burke's *Peerage* states that Anne, daughter of John Wild of Droitwich, co. Worcester was married to Charles West, Baron De La Warr on 25 September 1642. If she was about eighteen when she married than she could have been in her eighties when she died (755).

⁶⁴Rizzo, 33-4.

patron/protégée relationship to carry on with the next generation of the family.

Thomas apotheosizes the Lady D— —:

When some Illustrious Person's blaz'd by Fame,
Charm'd by it's *Eccho* we revere the Name:
But when th' admired Idol we behold,
How different it appears from what was told!
With *Shame*, we past *Credulity* deplore;
And call those Praises back we gave before.

But, Madam, this is otherwise in you,
And *Fame* was much too short of what is *true*:
With pleasing Wonder, I survey'd you round,
And blest *Neander* whom such Virtues crown'd:
My self I then devoted as your Slave,
And am your Victim, to destroy or save;
As you decree, resolve to fall or rise;
Low at your Feet, the *humble Trophy* Lies.⁶⁵

The line 'Charm'd by it's *Eccho* we revere the Name' led me to suspect that this poem was addressed to Anne West's daughter-in-law, Margaret (Freeman) West, the next Lady De La Warr (*d.* 1738), wife of John, the sixth Baron of De La Warr. It seems that the subsequent generations of the family did assist her: in a letter to Earl of Oxford, written 5 June 1730 (quoted in the previous chapter), Thomas reports that John, the seventh Baron and first Earl of De La Warr, paid some of her prison debts, and it was his mother, Margaret West, who paid for her burial in 1731. The charitable assistance given by the family is also acknowledged in the dedication of *The Honourable Lovers*:

Votive to that Right Honourable Pair,
The Noble Lord and Lady *Delaware*,⁶⁶
Whose Acts of Charity were often shown,
To poor CORINNA under Fortune's Frown.⁶⁷

Isobel Grundy has also suggested that Margaret West's daughter-in-law, Charlotte (McCarthy) West, Lady De La Warr (*d.* 1735), who married John, the seventh Baron and first Earl of De La Warr, may have given Thomas some small-scale help in the 1720s by selling donated stationery ware.⁶⁸ The close relationship that existed

⁶⁵MP, 78.

⁶⁶This line probably refers to Charlotte and John (the seventh Baron and first Earl of De La Warr) West.

⁶⁷HL, A3^r.

⁶⁸Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 194 and 272n.

between Thomas and Anne West, Lady Dowager De La Warr, however, was not carried over to the next generation. The relief Thomas received from her heirs seems to have been based more on charity rather than friendship.

After the death of Anne West, Thomas quickly found solace and support from another learned, older, wealthy woman, named Diana Bridgeman, who was born Diana Vernatti in Italy in about 1653. She married William Bridgeman (circa 1649-1699), son of Richard Bridgeman and Katherine Watson of Combs, Suffolk, some time in 1674.⁶⁹ William came from an illustrious family; his father, Richard Bridgeman, was the third son of the Right Reverend John Bridgeman (1577-1652), bishop of Chester and brother to Sir Orlando Bridgeman (1606-74), who eventually became the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal (1667-74). Diana and William Bridgeman had at least four children baptized whilst living in the parish of St. Martin's-in-the-Field, Westminster: Katherine (b. 1677), Elizabeth (b. 1678), Orlando (b. 1680) and William (b. 1695).⁷⁰ William Bridgeman received an MA from Cambridge in 1675, *per Literas Regias*.⁷¹ As previously mentioned, from circa 1667 to 1694 he served as secretary to a series of Secretaries of State⁷² and then from 1694 to 1698 he served as secretary to the Admiralty.⁷³ For remuneration under the Secretaries of State, he would have relied on fees but for his post in the Admiralty he would have received a fixed income of £800 per annum.⁷⁴ Either way, these two posts would have made him a very wealthy man. A published record survives of a law suit he undertook and lost in the King's Bench, in which he solicited for his appointment of chief clerk for enrolling the pleas to be passed on to his heirs.⁷⁵ Evidently, he

⁶⁹IGI.

⁷⁰WA, St Martin's-in-the-field Parish Register, vol 6 (Baptisms: 1 May 1672-31 July 1681) and vol 7 (Baptisms: 1 August 1681-30 April 1692).

⁷¹*Alumni Cantabrigienses, Part I From the Earliest Times to 1751*, 4 vols, ed. by John Venn and J. A. Venn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 216 and *Graduati Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge: J. Deighton et. al, 1823), 63.

⁷²*Officials of the Secretaries of State 1660-1782*, ed. by J. C. Sainty (London: The Athlone Press, 1973), 27-8, 67. Bridgeman served under a succession of Secretaries of State including, the Earl (then Lord) of Arlington, Joseph Williamson, Robert, second Earl of Sunderland, Charles, second Earl of Middleton, Henry, first Viscount of Sydney and Sir John Trenchard.

⁷³*Admiralty Officials 1660-1870*, ed. by J. C. Sainty (London: The Athlone Press, 1975), 36, 112.

⁷⁴*Office-Holders in Modern Britain II*, 26 and *Office-Holders in Modern Britain IV*, 35.

⁷⁵See BOD, MS Carte 78, fols. 669-72. The details of the case were published under the title of *A brief State of the Case and Tryal had in the King's Bench, in the Assize brought for the Office of Chief Clerk for inrolling of Pleas in the said Court; between Willliam Bridgeman, Esq; Plaintiff; and Rowland*

wanted the lucrative post to stay within his family.

A large collection of manuscripts—mainly political tracts, treaties and commissions—once in William Bridgeman's possession, are now housed in the Rawlinson collection in the Bodleian Library.⁷⁶ Many of these documents came into the possession of his daughter, Katherine Bridgeman (1677-1742), on 15 September 1737, after her nephew, William Bridgeman of the Middle Temple, son and heir to her younger brother, Orlando, by his first wife, died unmarried on 17 August of the same year at Paris.⁷⁷ Although the addendum to her brother's will explaining the circumstances is faded and almost impossible to read, it seems evident that her father's papers passed to her at this time.⁷⁸ After her death, her library was sold at auction in 1743. Marginalia in the Bodleian catalogue copy reveals that Richard Rawlinson purchased many of the manuscripts at this sale.⁷⁹

The wealth and social standing of the family is confirmed in other material documents as well: they owned property in London and Suffolk. An indenture of assignment written up on 3 June 1718 for a property on Pall Mall and St. James, Picadilly remains listing William Bridgeman, Esq. as one of the owners in the seventeenth century. A schedule on the deed lists a series of owners: William appears on this list for the dates of 18 December 1693 and 16 August 1694. He died and was buried on 12 April 1699, but his heirs still appear on the schedule for many years to follow.⁸⁰ On the 1 April 1702 listing, Diana Bridgeman is named as his

Hold, Esq; and Edward Coleman, Gent. Defendants (London: Isaac Cleave, 1694).

⁷⁶BOD, MSS Rawlinson, A 79, 80, 134-6, 139a-b, 143-4, 147, 217-8, 231, 255-7, 260-61, 266, 292-3, 328, 477; B 428; C 172; and D 380, 383. There are several papers housed in the BL: see MS Lansdowne, 1152, vols A and B, MSS Stowe, 202-205, MS Additional 40777. The *National Record of Archives* lists a few other holdings elsewhere in the UK and the US.

⁷⁷*The Record of Old Westminsters*, 2 vols, ed. by G. F. Russell Barker and Alan H. Sterning (London: Chiswick Press, 1928), I, 121, *Register of Admissions to the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple*, 3 vols, ed. by Sir Henry F. MacGeach and H. A. C. Sturgess (London: Butterworth & Co., 1959), I, 289 and *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, I, 216.

⁷⁸PRO, PCC, PROB 11/644/111, fol. 106.

⁷⁹*A Catalogue of the Entire Library of Mrs. Katherine Bridgeman, (Of Cavendish Square) Deceased: Consisting of A Choice Collection of Books in most Branches of Polite Literature, Several Curious Manuscripts, Particularly Letters of the Duke of Monmouth's own Writing to King James II* (London, 1743), Bodleian Library call number: Mus. Bibl. III 8° 55. Bridgeman's library contained the poetry and prose of many women writers, such as Katherine Philips, Anne Killigrew and Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchelsea, but did not contain any of Thomas' texts.

⁸⁰WA, St Martin's-in-the-field Parish Register, vol. 8 (Burials: 1 May 1692-29 February 1700) and PRO, PCC, PROB 6/75, fol. 55. Bridgeman does not seem to have left a will.

'Widow Relick and Administratrix'; this section also lists Orlando Bridgeman of the Inner Temple as the son and heir as well as Elizabeth (Bridgeman) Jessup, widow of Constant Jessup, Doctor of Divinity. The family is named one more time in the schedule listing for 28 February 1708. Orlando Bridgeman, then residing in Ipswich, and Elizabeth (Bridgeman) Jessup are listed as the administrators for the property. Presumably they sold their interest in it after that.⁸¹

Because of her affluence and status Diana Bridgeman would have been in a good position to help a struggling author like Thomas. She took over as Thomas' major patron after they met some time in 1703, most likely the summer after De La Warr's death. During a trip to London, Chudleigh arranged the introduction of Thomas to Diana Bridgeman and her daughter, Katherine. In a letter dated 15 October 1703, Chudleigh wrote to Thomas,

I am very glad you have had the Advantage of good Conversation. You are happy in Mrs. *Bridgman's* and her Daughter's desirable Company, when you see them, give them my humble Service and my Thanks for the obliging Concern they are pleased to express for me, which I shall ever look on as a Favour that can never be enough acknowledged.⁸²

They probably socialized over the next four years after which Bridgeman died of an apoplexy and was buried 11 December 1707.⁸³ In a letter Chudleigh wrote to Thomas, dated 31 May 1706, Chudleigh expresses her concern over Bridgeman's failing health: 'I thank you for carrying my Letter to Mrs. *Bridgeman*, I am much concerned to hear of her frequent Illnesses, I believe the Air will be the best Remedy she can use'.⁸⁴ After the death of Diana Bridgeman in 1707, Thomas also wrote an emotional elegy in which she explicitly outlines their relationship in terms of patronage and friendship. In '*To the Pious Memory of Mrs. DIANA BRIDGEMAN. An ODE*', Thomas names her clearly as fulfilling a dual role:

'Tis *Musidora* claims thy Voice,

⁸¹WA, Deeds, Accession 72/97.

⁸²*Whartoniana*, II, 115 and *HL*, 254.

⁸³WA, St Martin's-in-the-field Parish Register, vol. 9 (Burials: 1 March 1700-30 April 1710).

⁸⁴*PC*, 267 In the same letter, Chudleigh mentions an eclipse, '*a great Circle round the Sun*, which frightened the People of *Exeter*'; Rev. S. J. Johnson lists an eclipse occurring on 12 May 1706 in *Eclipses, Past and Future, with General Hints for observing the Heavens* (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1874), 63.

Dear Object of thy Tears;
 'Ere while the **Patron** of thy Joys,
 And Partner of thy cares:
 To *Musidora*, who could condescend
 To be, as well as to be call'd a **Friend**.⁸⁵ [my bolding]

Here one can glimpse a relationship between two women, unequal in society, who developed a friendship above and beyond the patron/protégée relationship. The fact that Thomas made friends with another artistic and learned woman was probably not an accident. Throughout most of her life, Thomas attempted to cultivate her mind and spirituality through carefully chosen friendships. Bridgeman, it seems, was more than just another literary patron. Like the Bluestockings later in the century, she also made it her practice to assist struggling women—her charity was protofeminism in action. In the same elegy, Thomas comments on Bridgeman's acts of kindness, specifically for the benefit of poor women:

But resting not on *Theory* alone,
 Her Principles, were in the *Practice* shown:
 The *Sick* she visited, the *Poor* reliev'd,
 And *Aged Widows* by her *Bounty* liv'd:
 Yet did so secretly her Alms dispence,
 They fell unseen, like Gifts of Providence.⁸⁶

Although we know very little else about her, Diana Bridgeman seems to have shared certain traits with some of Astell's great patrons who spread their wealth among the less fortunate as well.

Thomas was also acquainted with Bridgeman's daughters, Elizabeth Jessop and Katherine, who married her cousin, Orlando Bridgeman of the Inner Temple, son of the second Baronet Sir John Bridgeman of Castle Bromich, Warwick.⁸⁷ Thomas wrote one poem in her honour: '*A Pindarick ODE In imitation of SPENCER's Divine Love, inscribed to Mrs. KATHERINE BRIDGEMAN*'.⁸⁸ In a letter written to Gwinnett, dated 16 February 1715-16, when Thomas was feeling ill, she makes the following report:

⁸⁵MP, 29.

⁸⁶Ibid, 36.

⁸⁷Katherine's husband was M.P. for Wigan 1698-1700, 1700-1701 and 1702-5. See *Burke's Peerage*, 335 and *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714*, 4 vols, ed. by Joseph Foster (Oxford: Parker & Co., 1891), I, 180.

⁸⁸MP, 68-76.

Mrs. *Bridgeman's* Sister, Mrs. [Elizabeth] *Jessop*, and *Harry Cromwell*, have done me the Favour of their Visits, but I have not seen one of them all. I have no longer any Relish for Conversation, nor any Reason to expose the dismal Habit I am fallen into. I rejoice in the Health of You and Yours, and shall most unfeignedly take Pleasure in your happy Settlement, as being your obliged Friend.⁸⁹

Beyond this date, it is not known if Thomas' acquaintance with Diana Bridgeman's daughters continued.

Thomas' last great friend and patron was Mary, Lady Chudleigh, who died in 1710. We do not know if Chudleigh ever gave Thomas gifts of money, but she certainly offered her other types of patronage, such as correspondence, conversation, introductions and ultimately friendship. In return, Thomas read her prose and poetry and sent her news and gossip from London; she also undertook London-based errands for Chudleigh when she was in Devon. As mentioned in the previous chapter, their correspondence began some time before October 1701, when Thomas wrote to Chudleigh under the pretext of thanking her for publishing *The Ladies Defence* (1701). In a letter dated 8 December 1701, Chudleigh wrote, 'the Correspondence you have so obligingly begun, shall (if you please to continue it) prove as lasting as our Lives, and I shall think my self very happy in the Conversation and Friendship of so ingenious a Person'.⁹⁰ From remarks Thomas makes in *Pylades and Corinna*, Thomas and Chudleigh appear to have visited each other regularly in the first few years of the eighteenth century, when Chudleigh came to London, and Thomas to Devon and Bath. Of her three great patrons, more material evidence survives revealing the details of her friendship with Chudleigh than with the other two.

Friendship was something that Chudleigh held dear which is evident in her own poems, especially 'Friendship', in which she states that 'Friendship is a Bliss Divine'.⁹¹ Thomas evidently appreciated Chudleigh's poem, 'Friendship'; she commented on it in a panegyric to Chudleigh entitled, '*To the Lady CHUDLEIGH, On Printing Her Excellent POEMS*'. Aside from complimenting Chudleigh's 'Wit, and

⁸⁹*HL*, 263.

⁹⁰BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 61^r, *Whartoniana*, II, 109 and *HL*, 249.

⁹¹*POSO*, 79.

Learning', Thomas also says: 'With what illustrious Charms you *Friendship* dress'.⁹² One cannot help but think that Chudleigh might have condescended to Thomas initially, but their mutual admiration becomes apparent through their continued correspondence. Chudleigh was pleased with Thomas' poem in her honour and, in a letter dated 8 December 1701, she writes back to Thomas, '~~Your Verses will be a very great Ornament to my Poem; and since you are pleas'd to permit it, shall Adorn the second Edition~~'.⁹³ This sentence was not published along with the rest of the letter because it was deleted in the original manuscript. The reason for its omission is uncertain, but the fact that Chudleigh was considering such a compliment to Thomas is a mark of her esteem.

Unfortunately for literary historians, only a handful of letters between Chudleigh and Thomas survive, all of which date between 1701-1706. This small selection, however, reveals how consequential supportive friendships were to polemical writers such as Thomas and Chudleigh. It is evident that they did not develop their protofeminist ideas in a vacuum, but rather sought out like-minded women to nurture their intellectual needs. Although I stress the support that Thomas received from Chudleigh, their relationship was by no means one-sided. In the nine years they knew each other Chudleigh exchanged material with Thomas before publishing *Poems on Several Occasions* (1703) and *Essays on Several Subjects* (1710), both of which contain protofeminist poems and prose. In a letter dated 8 October 1703, Chudleigh informed Thomas that she had been working on some prose

⁹²MP, 150.

⁹³BOD, MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 61^r.

Madam,

57

(2)

61

The continuance of your Kindness to a Stranger, to one who has nothing to recommend her to your Esteem, nothing that can justly entitle her to those Epaniums you are pleas'd to give her, raises my Wonder, and I look on it as the Result of an Uncommon Generosity, of a more than ordinary Goodness of Temper: You take Delight in obliging, and bestow your Favours with such an indearing sweetness, such an engaging Civility, that 'tis impossible to receive 'em without being sensibly touch'd by them; they make a deep impression on the Mind, and with an agreeable Violence constrain the Persons on whom they are confer'd, to become your Debtors, among which Number, I must own my self to be one: Yes, Madam, you have laid so many Obligations on me, that you have put it out of my Power to make you a Requitall: I have nothing to offer you in return but Thanks and a hearty and sincere Acknowledgement, which I desire you to accept, as being the only Retribution I am yet capable of making you. The Correspondence you have so obligingly begun, shall (if you please to continue it) prove as lasting as our Lives, and I shall think my self very happy in the Conversation and Friendship of so ingenious a Person. ~~Your Verses will be a very great Ornament to my Poem; and since you are pleas'd to permit it, shall adorn the second Edition.~~ I was trouble'd to hear of the Melancholy Occasion of your Silence; the Kindness with which you treat me, makes me interest my self in all your Concerns: I heartily wish yours and your Grand-Mother's Health: 'tis pity a Person who knows so well how to employ her Eyes, should have any illness in 'em; but since you write me, that the weakness was casual, I hope by this time you are wholly freed from it; if you are, I shall beg the Favour to hear from you as often as your Convenience will permit you to give your Self the trouble for I am with much Sincerity

Ashton the
8th of December.
1701.

Your most humble Servant
Mary Chudleigh

6. Letter from Mary, Lady Chudleigh to Elizabeth Thomas, 8 December 1701.

MS Rawlinson, Letters 90, fol. 61'. By permission of the Bodleian Library.

tracts:

Morality has been my chief Study since I saw you; the ESSAYS I've writ are on *Knowledge, Friendship, Life, Death, Humility, Grief* and on *several other Subjects*; you shall see them if I come to *London* this Winter, but that I believe I shall not.⁹⁴

In the example above, Chudleigh merely mentions her intent to show some work-in-progress to Thomas; however, there are several examples where they actually did exchange texts. As mentioned previously, in a postscript to one of Thomas' letters to Gwinnett called 'A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MELISSA (Lady Chudleigh), MUSIDORA (Mrs. Bridgeman) CORINNA, the STOIC, (Captain Hemington) &c.', Thomas recounts one such exchange.⁹⁵ She reports that 'This Paper was dropt, by my LADY [Chudleigh], into my Lap' for her perusal, which was called, 'WOMAN *the Crown of the CREATION*'. Listed in the text were short entries written under the subtitles, 'Of *their* CONVERSATION, MODESTY, LEARNING, PRUDENCE, and BEAUTY'⁹⁶; perhaps these were the rudiments of Chudleigh's essays that she had wanted Thomas to read, or some other manuscript in circulation. In another letter to Thomas, Chudleigh enclosed a poem entitled, 'ZENOBIA', in which she compares the excellence of a certain friend with her historical namesake:

Zenobia, Empress of the *East*,
Aspiring *Rome*, with Wonder saw
ZENOBIA, Pattern of the *West*,
Shall keep th' admiring World in awe.

Unsway'd by Custom's rigid Forms,
A more superior Course she steers,
To what she likes, herself transforms,
And grateful in each Change appears.⁹⁷

In a corresponding poem with the same title, Thomas also espouses the merit of the friend:

ALL like your self, you still appear, I see,
Not tainted *alamode* with *Coquetry*:
No! you have kept unsullied, tho' the Times
Even make our *Innocence*, and *Virtue Crimes*.⁹⁸

⁹⁴*Whartoniana*, II, 113 and *HL*, 253.

⁹⁵*HL*, 75-82.

⁹⁶*HL*, 81-2.

⁹⁷Alexander Pope, *Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence*, 3 vols (London: Edmund Curll, 1735), III, 25 (second pagination).

⁹⁸*MP*, 220.

Although we do not know when these poems were written, the fact that Thomas and Chudleigh were sharing protofeminist poetry is a notable example of how their friendship encouraged the production of such writing. Another example of a similar exchange can be found by comparing their two *Almystrea* poems dedicated to Mary Astell, which are discussed in chapter two. The protofeminist inclinations of Thomas and Chudleigh drew them together and developed into a friendship, which in turn promoted further polemical and didactic writings. They continually shared their writings and ideas in the early eighteenth century before Chudleigh became ill and, as a result, they probably boosted each other's confidence and ultimately assisted each other in their quest for intellectual autonomy.

Unfortunately for Thomas, Chudleigh died in 1710. The loss of such a good friend must have been a terrible blow for Thomas, especially since her two other great patrons/friends had already passed away. She expresses her loss in the elegy, '*On the Death of the Lady CHUDLEIGH. An ODE*', in which she wishes her '*Illustrious Friend farewell*'. In this poem, Thomas also bemoans the loss of her two other friends previously deceased. In stanza III, Thomas thinks back to a time when she was fortunate to have friends who comforted and guided her and patrons her supported her:

Ill fated *Wretch!* oh whither wilt thou fly!
 To shun impending Destiny?
 Where wilt thou *centre next?* on what new *Friend* rely?
 Once did I think, O *foolish and prophane!*
 A solid Good on Earth to find;
 And *Friendship!* sacred *Friendship* was my Aim!
 Joy of my *Heart*, and *Blessing* of my *Mind*.
 Beyond Desert I soon was blest,
 And great *Sulpitia* warm'd my *Breast*:
 Her sweet *Address*, the *Muse* inspir'd,
 Her *pious Life* by all admir'd,
 My *Heart* with constant *Emulation* fir'd.
 Bright *Musidora!* Soul of *Harmony*,
 What grateful *Songs* are due to thee,
 Who gen'rously didst condescend
 To be both *Patroness* and *Friend?*
 Divine *Marissa!* last in *Time*, not *Place*,
 But first in ev'ry God-like *Grace*.
 With kind *Affection* did me bless,
 Ah *Gracious Heav'n!* what Happiness
 Did I in *Three* such *Friends* possess!
 Proud of my *Joys*, I grew secure,

Nor fear'd a Turn of *Fate*;
 For oh! what could I not endure,
 When by *Experience* I was sure,
 My *Friends* would ease the Weight?
 Such *Love*, such *Tenderness*, in each was shewn,
 As ev'ry *Joy*, or *Grief* of mine, pertain'd to them alone.⁹⁹

Thomas seems to sense that 1710 was the end of an era for her. Eighteenth-century taste for hyperbole aside, there is no doubt Thomas would have felt the loss of her great triad of patrons/friends, since she describes herself as an 'Ill fated *Wretch*' with nowhere to turn for help. And although Bridgeman is the only woman specifically marked out in this poem for both her patronage and friendship, it seems quite likely that Thomas received both from De La Warr and Chudleigh as well. Thomas, who is remembered most in literary history for the unfortunate details of her life, ironically foretells her impending financial doom when she says, 'oh whither wilt thou fly! To shun impending Destiny?'. Following the death of Chudleigh she was never 'blest' with another friend or patron like De La Warr or Bridgeman. After the death of her fiancé and the contestation of his will, Thomas' life took a downward spiral financially. From the early 1720s, all her efforts seemed focused on obtaining money to stave off her creditors. Without the moral and monetary support of her friends/patrons, Thomas' literary and social life suffered.

By the third decade of the eighteenth century, Thomas was no longer the idealistic young writer she had been and polemical prose and poetry in defence of women as a genre had lost its earlier popularity. She was now a poor, single, struggling woman with few friends and family on whom she could rely. She was forced to publish her poems and letters in an attempt to satisfy her creditors. Most likely out of desperation, Thomas sent copies of her 1722 *Miscellany Poems* to Chudleigh's son, Thomas Chudleigh, and Mrs. Sarah Hoadly, a well-known painter and wife of Bishop Hoadly. The Bodleian copy of the 1722 edition contains some marginalia that states the book was, 'a present from Mrs: Thomas ye author aprill ye 4th: 1722', and on the title page the name 'Tho: Chudleigh' is inscribed.¹⁰⁰ Thomas

⁹⁹MP, 273-80.

¹⁰⁰The signature matches Thomas Chudleigh's, the son of Mary, Lady Chudleigh, which can be found on a letter, dated 2 January 1710, sent to Sophia, Electress of Hanover in the BL, MS Stowe 224.

also sent a special presentation copy to Sarah Hoadly,¹⁰¹ who was part of her social circle at one point as well, especially since Thomas claims in her life story to have known the bishop and his wife for twenty-five years.¹⁰² She says:

I have had the Honour of being well known to Bishop HOADLY, and his good Lady, above 25 Years; but Time wears out all things, and one must not, cannot hope, that the many and great Favours I have received from them, should be continued for Life.¹⁰³

Unlike Astell, however, whose patron/friend relationships lasted until she died, Thomas fell into relative obscurity, first hiding from her creditors and then lingering in Fleet Prison. Although some prominent bishops and peers took pity on her condition and ultimately secured her freedom from the Fleet briefly before she died (and then paid for her burial), Thomas' literary endeavours from this period pale compared to her earlier ones. Her publications in the last decade of her life—at least the ones most interesting from a protofeminist point of view—were almost all written in the polemical activity at the turn of the eighteenth century. With no friends to inspire her or support her, combined with ill health, her demise seemed inevitable.

Certain women patrons and their protégées from the turn of the eighteenth century moved beyond the boundaries of their initial relationships to develop friendships in which they sincerely cared for each other's spiritual, intellectual and physical well-being. The evidence that survives offers us a glimpse of a world in which friendships arose between women from different classes. Their camaraderie served as inspiration to act, whether through charity work, patronizing women writers or writing in defence of women. The production of polemical prose and poetry can, therefore, be linked to groups of like-minded women—*Platonnes*, patrons, protégées and friends—who, like the Bluestockings, demonstrated that 'learning, virtue, and

¹⁰¹Edmond Malone mentions this particular copy in, *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden*, as being part of a library owned by his friend John Bindley. It continued to appear for sale in a couple of nineteenth-century book catalogues. In 1818 it was sold with the rest of the Bindley collection and in 1834 it is described as a '*Large paper, presentation copy to Mrs. Hoadley the wife of Bishop Hoadley, red morocco, richly gilt*' that sold for 12s.

¹⁰²Thomas also wrote a poem dedicated to Sarah Hoadly, entitled, '*To the most ingenious Mrs. SARAH HOADLEY, excellent in Painting, &c.*' (MP, 12-14).

¹⁰³PC, lxxvii.

friendship *were* inextricably linked'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Myers, 11.

Conclusion:

'To write, or read, or think, or to enquire'¹

The Legacy of Early Eighteenth-Century Protofeminism

*What has a Woman to do with Learning? This I have known urged by some Men, with an Envy unbecoming that greatness of Soul, which is said to dignify their Sex. For if Women may be said to have Souls, and that their Souls are their better part, and that what is Best deserves our greatest Care for its Improvement; furthermore, if good Learning be one of the Soul's greatest Improvements; we must retort the Question. Where is the Fault in Womens seeking after Learning?*²

There is still a lot of scholarly work that needs to be done on early women writers. Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century playwrights, such as Aphra Behn, novelists, such as Eliza Haywood and a few poets, such as Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, have received a fair amount of scholarly attention in recent years. By comparison, however, in-depth studies on protofeminist (non-fictional) prose and poetry by women from the same period are lacking. Hence this thesis attempted to redress this critical lacuna. It examined the rise of polemical prose and poetry written by women in the late seventeenth century, which reached a climax between 1694 and 1710 in the texts of women such as Mary Astell, Judith Drake, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Elizabeth Thomas and Sarah (Fyge Field) Egerton.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, London, in particular, was the scene of a flurry of activity involving the reading, writing, circulating and publishing of protofeminist texts that defended women's rights to intellectual and spiritual autonomy. Amongst others, one reason for this influx was the influential blend of Cartesian rationalism with Cambridge Platonism that enabled women to consider themselves as the rational and spiritual equals of men. Another overlooked but important influence on the protofeminist movement was the seventeenth-century political debates between contractarians and patriarchalists. Women who were fed up

¹Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, 'The Introduction', *The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchelsea 1661-1720*, ed. by Myra Reynolds (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1903), 5.

²Elizabeth Elstob, *An English-Saxon Homily, on the birth-day of St. Gregory. Anciently used in the English-Saxon Church. Giving an Account of the Conversion of the English from Paganism to Christianity. Translated into Modern English, with Notes, &c.* (London: W. Bowyer, 1709), ii.

with male writers clamoring about their freedom within the civil state, whilst ignoring women's, asserted their right to education, independent religious consciousness and better treatment in marriage. Ironically, they often used the same language that contractarians did in order to underline the double standards that existed between men and women, especially when denouncing the tyranny of Custom.

Many scholars would have us believe that protofeminist writing peaked mainly because of Mary Astell's memorable contributions. There is little doubt that Astell was a significant protofeminist in English literary history. Her acerbic wit and rigorous prose style certainly inspired the imagination of contemporary women readers and writers as well as twentieth-century scholars. There are, however, wider contexts in which to interpret early eighteenth-century protofeminism. Not all prose and poetry written in defence of women after 1694—the year *A Serious Proposal* was published—was written directly in response to Astell, though they have often been categorized and dismissed as such by today's feminist critics. This thesis, therefore, reevaluated the contexts in which Astell and her contemporaries have usually been read in order to improve and expand the critical awareness of a fascinating early phase of feminism. Drake, Chudleigh and Thomas prove themselves to be much more than mere Astellian echoes or disciples. Chudleigh and Thomas, in particular, whilst admiring Astell's work, made unique contributions to the polemical prose and poetry of the period.

This thesis then went on to explore how crucial supportive patronage relationships and friendships were for women writers. As a result of the social fluidity in London at the turn of the eighteenth century, there were many opportunities for aspiring amateur writers to commingle and correspond with their social superiors. For instance, Thomas' literary networks included men and women from various classes: well-known authors such as John Dryden, John Norris of Bemerton, Alexander Pope, Mary Astell and Dr. Samuel Garth; titled and wealthy men and women such as Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Anne West, Lady De La Warr, Hester, Lady Pakington and Diana Bridgeman and her daughters; and notable religious and military

figures such as Bishop Hoadly and his wife Sarah, a well-known portrait painter, and Captain Richard Hemington and his wife. The support that Thomas received from her patrons and friends not only assisted her precarious financial position but also helped promote the writing and circulation of her polemical prose and poetry.

After protofeminist literature peaked in the early eighteenth century, the reputations of writers such as Astell and Chudleigh quickly faded. Still, their life stories and writings did make brief appearances in biographical dictionaries and anthologies such as George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), and some of their main tenets concerning women's rights to better education and treatment in marriage did find their way into eighteenth-century novels. For the most part, however, acerbic and radical polemical prose and poetry fell out of literary fashion and did not resurface until later in the century. This rise and fall of protofeminism is symbolized in the life experiences of Elizabeth Elstob (1683-1756), who is quoted in the above epigraph. Her story is a fitting anecdote on which to close this thesis.

Elstob, who was a friend of Astell's, was one of the last surviving women who wrote during the polemical period between 1694 and 1710. She was an Anglo-Saxon scholar who published *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birth-day of St. Gregory* (1709) and *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, first given in English, with an apology for the study of northern antiquities* (1715). Like other early protofeminists, she flourished in the activity of the first decade of the eighteenth century; however, like Thomas, she, too, suffered from financial difficulties when both her brother and her patron, George Hickes (the Saxon scholar), died in 1715.

Elstob resurfaced when Ballard sought her out for information about Astell for his *Memoirs*. The year was 1736 and she was living in Evesham, Gloucestershire, eking out a living as a school mistress. Once alerted to her desperate situation, both Sarah Chapone—mother-in-law to Hester—and the Bluestocking Mary (Granville Pendarves) Delany secured Elstob an annuity from Queen Caroline that

unfortunately ended when the Queen died in 1737. After her first endeavour to assist Elstob faltered, Delany helped her to obtain the position of governess in the household of the Duchess Dowager of Portland, in return for room and board as well as £30 a year. She remained in the service of the Duchess for eighteen years until her death in 1756.

At least when Elstob died at the age of 73, she would not have been completely destitute as Thomas had been. By the time Elstob passed away, however, her days as a rigorous productive scholar, who defended women's intellectual rights, were long gone. She did receive financial support from prominent women of the mid eighteenth century, but the protofeminist camaraderie Elstob experienced earlier in the century, when Astell helped her to obtain subscriptions for her second publication, was replaced by charity.³ Although she provides a material link between the turn-of-the-century women writers and the Bluestockings, Elstob's life also symbolizes, to some extent, the demise of the earlier protofeminist movement.

The demands of women writing polemical prose and poetry between 1694 and 1710 may seem modest from a twentieth-century perspective. Their goal was to achieve a type of metaphysical and spiritual equality with men by focusing their efforts on acquiring better education and treatment in marriage for women. Complete equality with men would only become an issue with future generations of feminist writers. It would take the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century to ignite a similar fiery passion in women to take up their pens in defence of their sex with the same vehemence as Astell, Chudleigh and Thomas had done at the turn of the eighteenth century.

³Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell, An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 111.

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