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‘Old Maids’: Family and social relationships of never-married Scottish gentlewomen, c.1740–c.1840.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work is my own. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

## ABSTRACT

The thesis argues that never-married gentlewomen dissociated themselves from negative and ubiquitous stereotypes of the old maid by focussing on their gentility rather than their marital status. By demonstrably fulfilling the familial and social roles which belonged to their sex and rank, and by representing themselves in terms of approved genteel feminine virtues and conduct, they located themselves in networks of social reciprocity which extended from household and family into the wider social sphere. In doing so they confounded popular caricatures of mature unmarried women as selfish parasites whose failure to marry and procreate drained the resources of their natal families and undermined the nation's strength.

The thesis focuses on a number of case studies drawn from the extensive collections of family papers in the National Records of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland. Several of these never-married women were kin by birth or marriage, and their correspondence illustrates the reach of their relationship networks, their status, and influence. Their personal and, in some cases, published writing shows how they used ideals of gentility and associated language to support the familial and social positions they claimed. The thesis chapters examine the relationships they forged, and the resulting influence they were able to exercise, by considering them variously as members of households headed by male kin, as heads of their own households, and as familial patrons.

While never-married women are increasingly the subjects of research, the lives of never-married gentlewomen remain under-examined. Yet gentlewomen, habituated to writing as an essential social skill, have left a wide range of sources by which their management of social status and singlehood can be assessed. This thesis shows some of the perspectives opened up by study of these sources.

## Acknowledgements

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My partner, Bosco Hazard, has helped at every stage, from testing arguments while walking round a summer stubble field, to finalising the introduction on a recent crossing on the Irish ferry. He has sharpened my thinking, and the thesis. I am immensely grateful for his personal and intellectual support, unstintingly given.

This thesis is dedicated to my father, William Duncan, who first inspired my interest in history, and who has supported me in all my endeavours.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix; reproduced with permission.

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## Abbreviations

AH: *Architectural History*  
BM: *The Burlington Magazine*  
EAS: *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*  
ECL: *Eighteenth-Century Life*  
ECS: *Eighteenth-Century Studies*  
EHR: *The Economic History Review*  
FHS: *French Historical Studies*  
HJ: *The Historical Journal*  
IM: *Immigrants & Minorities*  
JAF: *Journal of American Folklore*  
JAH: *The Journal of American History*  
JBS: *The Journal of British Studies*  
JFH: *Journal of Family History*  
JHS: *Journal of the History of Sexuality*  
JSH: *Journal of Social History*  
JSHS: *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*  
JWH: *Journal of Women's History*  
NEQ: *The New England Quarterly*  
PP: *Past and Present*  
PS: *Population Studies*  
SECC: *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*  
SHM: *Social History of Medicine*  
SHR: *The Scottish Historical Review*  
TEC: *The Eighteenth Century*  
TSWL: *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*  
WAJ: *Woman's Art Journal*  
WHR: *Women's History Review*  
WS: *The Walpole Society*

## *Introduction*

This thesis grew out of research into representations of the self in eighteenth-century correspondence. Examining the epistolary courtship of an Edinburgh gentlewoman and her suitor, I was struck by the way she used the language of gentility to represent her choice positively in the face of familial opposition. Her father refused to countenance the marriage due to her suitor's lack of prospects and, rather than undutifully challenge this patriarchal judgement, she used positive cultural idioms to recast the parameters of the dispute and claim the moral high ground. In her letters, her love was founded on rational esteem, and she rejected low mercenary considerations and trusted in Providence to reward merit. The five-year courtship ended with her suitor's death in 1780, but Jane Innes never forgot her 'model of a compleat Gentleman' and never married. In 1810, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, she wrote a heartfelt memorial which underlined his gentility and his place in her kin network.<sup>1</sup>

But this narrative of love lost is not the whole story. Hundreds of surviving letters make it clear she did not spend the intervening decades moping over a portrait miniature. When she died in 1839 aged ninety-two, Miss Innes of Stow was an extremely wealthy woman. As the last heir to her family's fortune and the owner of several estates, she had had familial, civic, and political roles to play. Moreover, while she was exceptional in her wealth, she was far from exceptional in remaining unmarried. Among her closest relatives and friends were nearly a dozen never-married women and men. None of the women resembled the caricature spinsters of eighteenth-century popular culture. The stereotypical old maid of the period personified the supposed failings of her sex and served as a scapegoat for perceived wider failings in society. Contemporary social commentators portrayed her as a pathetic or resentful dependant, and a selfish consumer of, rather than a contributor to, familial and national wealth. In the stereotype, never-married women were relegated to the margins of family life, where historians were content to let them languish until fairly recently. All this raised questions which demanded attention. To

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<sup>1</sup> The two were maternal cousins.



what extent could people cast as family dependants shape their own lives? Where did actual never-married women stand in their kin and social networks? Could they use the normative language and ideals of gentility to claim status and a place in their family circle? The chapters which follow open up these questions and show that the reality of the old maid's lot often differed significantly from the representation.

The never-married women and men referred to in the Innes family correspondence were not written of in a way which suggests their number was unusual. The epistolary record of their social interactions highlights their presence in the midst of intersecting kin and social circles. The letters trace a network of relationships spanning many years, between sisters, brothers, cousins by birth and marriage, and friends whose intimacy sprang from loosely defined but acknowledged kinship. In correspondence they kept up the courtesies which maintained family connection, such as visiting, exchanging favours and above all writing to share news of relatives near and far. In short, their letters record genteel family lives which did not in any sense exclude the never married. Notwithstanding, this study excludes old bachelors, the never-married men, except where a contrast in circumstances and attitudes sheds light on the lives of never-married women. This is due only to constraints of space, as their roles in the family deserve equal attention and the evidence is, in many cases, more easily found.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the Innes correspondence served as a hub from which to identify never-married gentlewomen in other Scottish family networks.

Relocating the never-married gentlewoman in her family opens new perspectives on several areas of social history, and the thesis contributes to a body of work being built on both new and re-examined case studies.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the never-married women who appear in the following chapters belong to an emerging and 'more representative Scottish history' whose scholars seek to include those who

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<sup>2</sup> Froide notes that comparisons of male and female singlehood are needed. A.M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221.

<sup>3</sup> Most recently, D. Hussey and M. Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), which focuses on testamentary sources to examine domestic consumption by widows, spinsters, and bachelors in England and Wales in a 'chronological sweep' from c.1650–c.1850. See also, i.a., A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009); K. Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

formerly received little, if any, historiographical attention.<sup>4</sup> Barclay argues that ‘In the context of Scottish history, research on women’s and family history is sparse for the period 1650 to 1850’, although this lack has been, and is being, redressed by the work of, among others, Sanderson, Glover, Nenadic, and Kilday.<sup>5</sup> Leneman’s studies of Scots marriage, divorce, and states in between, show that household relationships and structures often failed to be contained by prescriptive norms of family life; the present study expands this theme by examining the lives of never-married Scottish gentlewomen in the contexts of household and family.<sup>6</sup> Historiographically as well as historically, it was long assumed that the economic and affective dynamics of family life were rooted in the conjugal unit, an assumption supported by demographic data taken from public records of marriage and legitimate births. Other relationships were effectively sidelined. Perry’s recent cross-disciplinary study on kinship reinforces this conjugally-centred view of family life. Reading eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary texts as expressive of social concerns, she sees a weakening of natal and extended ties and the privileging of the marriage relationship.<sup>7</sup> Yet actual marriages during this period are increasingly understood as dynamic partnerships in which both wives and husbands constructed and contested their relationships against the normative ideal of an affective union safely embraced within patriarchal authority structures.<sup>8</sup> If, as Barclay argues, there was a desire for an ‘intensifying of intimacy within the nuclear family’, it was ‘hard to apply in practice’, as natal and affinal kin

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<sup>4</sup> K. Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 12.

<sup>5</sup> K. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650–1850* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2011). E.C. Sanderson, *Women and Work in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Glover, op. cit.; S. Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury: The Highland Gentry in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), ‘The Impact of the Military Profession on Highland Gentry Families, c.1730–1830’, *SHR*, 85:1:219 (Apr. 2006), ‘Experience and Expectations in the Transformation of the Highland Gentlewoman, 1680 to 1820’, *SHR*, 80:2:210 (Oct. 2001); A-M. Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime in Enlightenment Scotland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> L. Leneman, ‘“A natural foundation in equity”: Marriage and Divorce in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *JSHS*, 20:2 (2000); ‘“No Unsuitable Match”: Defining Rank in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *JSH*, 33:3 (2000); ‘Wives and Mistresses in Eighteenth-Century Scotland’, *WHR*, 8:4 (1999); ‘“Disregarding the Matrimonial Vows”: Divorce in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *JSH* (winter 1996).

<sup>7</sup> R. Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 1; also K. Barclay, ‘Intimacy and the Life Cycle in the Marital Relationships of the Scottish Elite during the Long Eighteenth Century’, *WHR*, 20:2 (Apr. 2011); also Leneman, n.6 above.

continued to consider themselves part of the family.<sup>9</sup> Archival evidence points to the lifelong persistence and importance of active ties between parents and children, siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews. Historians have begun to acknowledge the value and meanings given to these relationships in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, scrutinising the expectations people had of them, and the language in which they expressed this. Chalus shows that politically active elite wives acted on behalf of their natal as well as their marital families, maintaining delicate balancing acts of allegiance.<sup>10</sup> Tadmor argues convincingly for a ‘language community’ which allowed people to manage such complex relationship networks, an idea central to the approach of this thesis.<sup>11</sup> Davidoff’s newly published study of sibling relationships in the long nineteenth century answers calls for more work in this field.<sup>12</sup> She demonstrates that unmarried and married siblings continued to play influential roles in each others’ lives across life-cycles and generations.<sup>13</sup> Prior to her wide-ranging overview, the dynamics of sibling relationships often took second place to biographical interest. The sibling thread runs strongly through this study. Never-married women often maintained this connection as their longest-lived close familial tie, even when the relationship itself was problematic. Particular consideration is given to the brother-sister relationship which, after the deaths of parents, often influenced a never-married woman’s domestic choices and circumstances. Manuscript sources show that a never-married sister managing a bachelor brother’s household was a common household formation.<sup>14</sup> Sisters too set up home together, in genteel examples of what Hufton calls spinster clustering.<sup>15</sup> If a gentlewoman had no siblings, she could look to her cousinage to find a socially acceptable domestic companion. Here the thesis builds on work by Rizzo, who draws attention to the bonds between women which supplemented, and in some cases supplanted or

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<sup>9</sup> Barclay, ‘Intimacy’, 196–7.

<sup>10</sup> E. Chalus, *Elite Women In English Political Life, c.1754–1790* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13, 15, 259, 270.

<sup>12</sup> L. Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings And Their Relations, 1780–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Froide, *Never Married*, 52. See also C.D. Hemphill, *Siblings: Brothers and Sisters in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Davidoff, *op. cit.*, 9, pt II.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–47; see also Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 85–7.

<sup>15</sup> O. Hufton, ‘Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century’, *JFH*, 9:4 (winter 1984), 361.

substituted for, the normative wife-husband relationship.<sup>16</sup> In doing so she highlights the trials of the many ‘humble companions’ who struggled to maintain social equality. Less immediately obvious, but no less deeply felt, were the conflicts of personal expectation and familial obligation likely to arise in a companionate relationship founded on a kin tie between single gentlewomen of similar status. Such close relationships have to some extent been scrutinised from the perspective of lesbian studies, one of the few research strands in which never-married women have made an appearance. However, although lesbian histories point to new readings of sources, they also tend to abstract never-married women from the familial frameworks in which most were overwhelmingly concerned to locate themselves. In contrast, this study focuses on never-married women’s efforts to normalise their self-representation.

Recently historians have been willing to look at a wider range of sources.<sup>17</sup> In 1984, Hufton rejected ‘fictional creation’ as historiographically untrustworthy, whereas Hill’s 2001 survey makes extensive use of contemporary as well as secondary literature.<sup>18</sup> But it remains true that relatively limited use has been made of the unpublished writing which never-married women themselves produced. Froide, in perhaps the most comprehensive study of single women to date, emphasises that ‘it is necessary to analyse their own words and actions’.<sup>19</sup> While Froide does this for women of middling and lower rank, the focus here on gentlewomen opens up fruitful and, in this context, untapped sources. Gentlewomen were educated to fulfil the roles of wives and mothers, but they were also encouraged to read and write with a degree of reflection. They took advantage of the contemporary explosion in print culture to read widely, in their own and other European languages. They expected—and were expected—to devote a significant proportion of their time to writing letters which articulated and upheld their social identity and status, and they expressed themselves

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<sup>16</sup> B. Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens/London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Kilday, *Women and Violent Crime* (court records); H. Doe, *Enterprising Women and Shipping in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), focussing on English ports mid/late century (shipping registers).

<sup>18</sup> Hufton, ‘Women Without Men’; B. Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Froide, *Never Married* (2005), 183.

in terms of shared cultural concepts.<sup>20</sup> The language of gentility gave shape to their social relations and reflected the contemporary importance attached to ideas of the self in relation to others. Here I diverge from Froide, who argues that never-married women ‘represented themselves as individuals rather than as wives, mothers, or even daughters’.<sup>21</sup> In contemporary texts, focus on oneself was commonly identified as selfishness, a cardinal social sin. In their personal writing, never-married women regularly represented themselves as dutiful daughters, drew attention to their mothering responsibilities towards younger relatives, and in some contexts even referred to themselves as wives. Reading these women’s lives it is evident that kinship, actual or performed, set the seal of social approval on relationships. Where Froide states that her study ‘reframes the history of women [...] by uncovering a significant proportion of women who did not perform the roles of wives and mothers’, this thesis argues that this is exactly what many never-married women did.<sup>22</sup> Among the examples in the following chapters are a governess who acted *in loco parentis* to her young charges after their mother’s death and sustained mutually affectionate relationships across three generations of her employer’s family, and a never-married woman who took charge of her brother’s household and demanded the respect accorded by custom to a wife. Never-married women were able to claim the status of socially normative relationships by adopting the appropriate responsibilities and by representing themselves in appropriate language.

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Demography makes only a secondary contribution to this study. In 1984 Hufton asked, ‘what do the demographers tell us about the numbers of permanent spinsters and widows in the eighteenth century?’ and concluded, ‘not a great deal’.<sup>23</sup> Not much more detail is available today. The two strands of historical demography, population statistics and family reconstitution, are generally drawn from formal public records of a normalised progression of personal and community life: baptism, marriage, and

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. the case study which anchors Tadmor’s *Family and Friends*.

<sup>21</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 183, 216.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Froide concentrates on the period 1600–1750.

<sup>23</sup> Hufton, ‘Women Without Men’, 356.

burial. Limited information regarding the single can be extracted from this trajectory.<sup>24</sup> A never-married woman might be recorded as such only at her death, with few if any pointers to where and how she lived her life, whether alone, or with parents, siblings, or friends. Hobbs argues that current demographic methods can only be usefully applied to complex familial categories if balanced by an understanding of ‘the range of meanings that people put on their own and others’ [...] family arrangements’.<sup>25</sup> He reiterates that the oppositional categories of married/single are inadequate historiographically, and suggests historians gain a subtler and fuller picture of family and social dynamics if married/single is read as a relationship continuum.<sup>26</sup>

In demographic terms, it has never been easy to place never-married women on this continuum. Marital status did not appear on the national census until 1851, although concern over the ratio of women to men in the population, and the proportion who married, is evident in earlier census proposals. These concerns had political and economic roots. A perceived need to raise the British birthrate to maintain military and trading capabilities abroad co-existed uneasily with the fear that overpopulation at home might foment radicalism among the poor. In contemporary discourse, these issues were linked inextricably to births within socially legitimate, economically viable unions. The statistician John Rickman, in his 1796 call for a census, described marriage as ‘the sum total of human felicity and increasing population (fated eternally to accompany each other)’.<sup>27</sup> The economist

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<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 17–18, 22. Broad estimates suggest a fifth of the population remained unmarried: E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 255–65. The sources can also be problematic for the normative family; in England, parish registers are poor records ‘even of the Anglican population’. D.V. Glass, *Numbering the People: The eighteenth-century population controversy and the development of census and vital statistics in Britain* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973), 95.

<sup>25</sup> A. Hobbs, ‘It Doesn’t Add Up: myths and measurement problems of births to single women in Blackpool, 1931–1971’, *WHR*, 17:3 (Jul. 2008), 450. Hobbs cites Blaikie, Garrett, and Davies’s study of nineteenth-century Scottish illegitimacy as an example of ‘using record linkage and biography for a more multidimensional approach’, *ibid.*, 438. See also H. Barker and E. Chalus (eds), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (London/New York: Longman, 1997), 16.

<sup>26</sup> Hobbs, *op. cit.*, 436, 446. See, e.g., K. Holden’s work for the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries.

<sup>27</sup> K. Levitan, ‘Redundancy, the “Surplus Woman” Problem, and the British Census, 1851–1861’, *WHR*, 17:3 (Jul. 2008), 363. Rickman’s article was published in 1800; the decennial census began in 1801: Glass, *Numbering the People*, 107.

John Ramsay McCulloch approved efforts to establish marital status for the Glasgow census of 1821, and mentioned military service in the first paragraph of his 1829 essay on census taking, closely followed by the need to obtain ‘authentic information [...] with respect to the proportion which the sexes bear to each other’.<sup>28</sup> However, echoing the controversial views of his fellow economist and demographer the Revd Thomas Malthus, he also suggested that a decline in marriage—due to people waiting until they could provide for their children—was ‘both a cause and a consequence of the increased healthiness that obtains all over Europe’.<sup>29</sup> The influence which the conflation of political, economic, and moral arguments had on contemporary attitudes to never-married women underpins chapter one, which looks at the old maid in popular culture.

The difficulties of tracking never-married gentlewomen’s lives through public records are partly due to the way genteel families functioned. It was the duty of the male head of a family to represent his kin in a public context; his relatives were expected to give unstinting support. All worked for the common good. This principle, at once economic and moral, means that surviving archives (public and personal) often foreground men as family representatives. To read this as suppression of individual aspirations and achievements would be anachronistic. By advancing their representative in the public arena, women and junior male family members supported their own status in their immediate social circles. However, even birth and death dates can be difficult to establish for those who played out their roles backstage. A good example is the architectural Adam dynasty, which produced a generation of never-married siblings who collectively advanced the energetic Robert Adam as their public representative. The sisters who managed the family’s London household led retired and, until recently, relatively unscrutinised lives.<sup>30</sup> Much of the surviving evidence was recorded and preserved incidentally in correspondence to,

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<sup>28</sup> J.R. McCulloch, ‘Proposals for an Improved Census of the Population’, *The Edinburgh Review*, vol. XLIX, no. XCVII (Mar. 1829), 1–2. McCulloch, recognising the difficulties of relying on baptismal and burial records, observed that life annuitants were among the few ‘whose career may be accurately traced, and the precise epoch of their death distinctly ascertained’, although he admitted data on this small group ‘in decidedly comfortable circumstances’ was of limited demographic use (*ibid.*, 12, 13). Nonetheless his comment remains relevant, given that unmarried women often drew their income from investment in annuities.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Glover examines their education as gentlewomen in *Elite Women and Polite Society*.

and about, their famous brother.<sup>31</sup> This indicates the difficulties even with well known families; in the case of families for whom documentation is scanty there might be only a hint of a generation of never-married siblings, as in the legal record of an Edinburgh gentleman whose heirs were his two brothers and four sisters, all living at the same address.<sup>32</sup> This is not to suggest that never-married women are absent from the public record: they wrote wills, they entered into legal contracts, and they might be named as taxpayers, property holders with voting rights, civic benefactors, or signatories of patriotic loyalty oaths.<sup>33</sup> But they are not always easily recognised, given that Mrs was a courtesy title commonly accorded to older women.<sup>34</sup> Positively identifying a woman as never-married often requires reading between the lines, and corroboration from scattered personal sources.

An expanding body of case studies may help to consolidate the demographic estimates of gentlewomen who remained unmarried in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Research to date has focussed mostly on aristocrats or working women.<sup>35</sup> Emphasis on working women's 'predicament' and 'means of survival' led Hufton to conclude that 'Falling real wages produced more spinsters', and may have influenced her statement that 'one demographic constant is the failure of spinsters to live as long as married women', an assertion not borne out by the comparatively wealthy (and childless) single gentlewomen studied here.<sup>36</sup> The argument that spinsterhood was driven by economic factors is valid, but 'historically, the most important component of wealth was not wages but inheritance', a point relevant to poorer as well as wealthy women.<sup>37</sup> Vickery suggests that up to thirty per cent of

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<sup>31</sup> To some extent the same is true of Robert Adam's younger brothers. Cf. Edinburgh gentlewoman Janet Schaw, whose published journal is supplemented by nearly 100 pages of appendices, yet whose own birth and death dates remain approximate. As McMillan notes drily, 'had she married (or killed someone, or published even one poem) the detail of her life would have become more available'. D. McMillan, 'Some Early Travellers', in D. Gifford and D. McMillan (eds), *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 120.

<sup>32</sup> Testament record for John Aeneas Taylor, 28 Mar. 1838, via [www.scottap.com](http://www.scottap.com)

<sup>33</sup> Froide, giving a broad range of examples, describes the civic record of never-married women's activities as 'effaced but significant'. *Never Married*, 117–53 passim.

<sup>34</sup> Conversely, in Scotland, married women were often referred to by their natal rather than their marital surnames in formal or legal documents.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. P. Sharpe, 'Literally spinsters: a new interpretation of local economy and demography in Colyton in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *EHR*, 44:1 (Feb. 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Hufton, 'Women Without Men', 355, 358; O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, vol. I, 1500–1800* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 254.

<sup>37</sup> A. Erickson, in Froide, *Never Married*, 118; see also, e.g., M.R. Miller, "'My Part Alone': The World of Rebecca Dickinson, 1787–1802', *NEQ*, 71:3 (Sept. 1998).



aristocratic women never married; thirty years ago Otto proposed a similar figure for the Scottish aristocracy; both referenced the 1964 work of Hollingsworth.<sup>38</sup> Wall's proposed percentages of unmarried women were extrapolated from a limited 1981 survey of the population listings of three towns.<sup>39</sup> First quoted by Hufton in her 'tentative essay' on spinsters and widows, they are still cited in default of more wide-ranging studies.<sup>40</sup>

Wall's survey of unmarried women also highlights a difficulty in reading data drawn from civic records. Without evidence from other sources to give a rounded interpretation, apparently straightforward classifications such as servants or lodgers can be misleading. As Tadmor shows, both might belong to the kin family as well as the household family.<sup>41</sup> This caveat in pinning down relationships and even identities applies to family papers as well as the public record. Methodologically, it is necessary to do more than look for women behind male figureheads; some women even bore the names of male relatives or benefactors, a feature of family memorialisation and patronage obligation noted in chapter six. The difficulties multiply when trying to pin down never-married women. It is frustrating to find a woman titled as Mrs whose circumstances suggest but fail to confirm single status; it is disconcerting to find a supposed spinster referred to as a wife. This form of address points to another statistically hidden group of single women, those who formed households with brothers, with a brother and his wife, or with a sister and her husband. These common but often ignored household structures are fully examined in chapter three, as is the significance of wife as a term of address in the context of a non-marital relationship. It is worth reiterating that these single women's lives might be recorded only in personal papers, notwithstanding their contribution to the

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<sup>38</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 208n.3; P.C. Otto, 'Daughters of the British Aristocracy: Their Marriages in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries with Particular Reference to the Scottish Peerage', PhD diss., Stanford University (1974); T.H. Hollingsworth, 'The Demography of the British Peerage', *PS*, 18:2 (1964 supp.). An overview of aristocratic family structures is provided by L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) and D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990), while Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) informs many subsequent studies of family dynamics during the eighteenth century.

<sup>39</sup> Under age 45, 4.5–5.9 per cent of single women headed households; aged 45 and over, 36.4–40 per cent. In Froide, *Never Married*, 23n.29.

<sup>40</sup> Hufton, 'Women Without Men', 358; J.M. Bennett and A.M. Froide (eds), *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 262n.14; Froide, *Never Married*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 30, 38.

economic health of their household, wider family, and community.<sup>42</sup> Due to the difficulties of locating never-married women in public records, these sources have not been considered as primary evidence. Aptly, several case studies were uncovered through examinations of personal records of kin relationships and networks.<sup>43</sup> Within the parameters of gentility the selection has been as broad as possible, although there has been no attempt to extrapolate statistics from the details of individual lives for the methodological category, the never married. Nonetheless readers will hopefully gain a clear (if quantitatively uncorroborated) perspective on the never-married woman as a familiar figure in the social landscape.

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To understand properly the social relationships of gentlewomen, it has been necessary to give weight to both printed and manuscript sources. Printed and written texts defined the gentlewoman's world, from the books which entertained her, instructed her, chastised and exhorted her, to the pocket books which recorded her domestic management and the letters which maintained her relationships with family and friends. Such a variety of sources inevitably presents contradictory perspectives on the roles and status of never-married women. In these contradictions lies evidence of how individual women built their social identity. Taken together, the sources support the argument that positive self-representation was fundamental to successful social interaction.

The thesis begins with an examination of the old maid in popular print culture. Chapter one makes use of chapbook satires, broadside ballads, plays, poems, periodicals, conduct books, and novels popular and obscure, to scrutinise the old maid across social and educational divides. Enjoyment of print culture was open to those of limited or no literacy through communal reading, and it was not uncommon in larger households for servants to be provided with a small library of moral works. Gentlewomen discussed the latest novels in their letters, and took their turn to read

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<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Wulf, *Not All Wives*.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., the governess Agnes Porter referred in passing to a family in which 4 of 5 daughters were single, and another in which 5 out of 7 remained unmarried. J. Martin (ed.), *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen: The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter* (London/Rio Grande: The Hambleton Press, 1998), 336, 340.

aloud in the family circle. Reading aloud came second only to cards as a regular evening entertainment in genteel families, and was thought more proper for ladies, who could listen to improving texts while busy with improving female tasks like needlework. Was the old maid a figure commonly encountered by these readers and listeners? How was she portrayed, and how did they respond? The range of print sources used—from the greasy broadsheet passed hand to hand to the neatly bound conduct book in a gentlewoman's private library—makes it possible to identify common phrases and idioms and to assess them in different social registers. Visual caricatures are noted in passing, as they bear a strong family resemblance to textual caricatures and were equally widespread, but visual culture is too large a field to be considered here, and few never-married gentlewomen were wealthy or socially prominent enough to commission a self-portrait which could be seen as an oblique response to visual caricature. The linguistic focus of the thesis as a whole has been driven by opportunities to examine never-married women's self-generated textual representations against those which appeared in print. The research parameters of self-representation within gentlewomen's networks of kin and connection have largely excluded consideration of representations of old maids in published texts by never-married women authors, although examples are cited in chapters one and two.

The following chapters draw on manuscript sources, archival and published. Little more than a decade ago, Bennett and Froide claimed that single women had 'left precious few diaries, letters, or other personal memorabilia for historians to study today'; in 2007 Larsen contended that the history of single women emerged only when historians 'developed frameworks that allow the study of people whose historical records are scarce'.<sup>44</sup> Froide in her groundbreaking study showed that single women could be found behind the archival scenes, if not centre stage, but emphasised that the historiography was still 'sorely in need' of original studies.<sup>45</sup> The potential case studies found in reviewing a relatively small number of family collections for this thesis suggest the existence of further relevant material in the archives of prominent and obscure families alike. While it has not been possible to identify more than one type of source for every case study, a broad range has been

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<sup>44</sup> Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 3; R. Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: elite single women's experiences in Yorkshire, 1730–1860', *WHR*, 16:3 (Jul. 2007), 389.

<sup>45</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 6, 7.

used across the chapters, including bonds, wills, household accounts, and journals. They point to female property-holding, moneylending, and philanthropy, areas which Froide identifies as lacking research.<sup>46</sup> Never-married gentlewomen are seen in formal and informal relationships from their own and others' perspectives. Correspondence looms large. The prevalence of the epistolary form in print reflects the centrality of correspondence in social interaction. Periodicals like the perennial and much imitated *Spectator* used real and fictitious letters to draw readers into a national debate on what constituted polite society. Letter-writing enabled women to involve themselves in the lives of relatives and friends unhampered by distance or visiting costs. It also opened up a discursive space in which they could engage with and comment on public affairs, something which has been aptly compared to men's use of the coffee-house.<sup>47</sup> As a signifier of gentility, the 'converse of the pen' was scarcely less important than conversation in the salon.<sup>48</sup> Gentlewomen took care to cultivate this essential social skill, and were by and large practised and articulate letter-writers. They rarely wrote entirely unselfconsciously; as Samuel Johnson observed, the letter-writer must always be calculating to some degree the figure he wishes to make.<sup>49</sup> The hierarchical relationships which underpinned genteel society were commonly maintained by correspondence, and letters were often freighted with social expectation. Hence correspondence is of major importance in assessing where never-married women located themselves in their networks, how they did so, and how much influence they wielded. Archival collections of family correspondence are central not only to historiographical identification of never-married women, but also to clarification of their relationships. Vickery's expectation of finding 'at least one or two lone older females' in every archival correspondence network appears to be an underestimate.<sup>50</sup> Published correspondence supports the argument that it was the norm rather than the exception for several women in each generation of a family to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>47</sup> J. How, *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's 'Clarissa'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 14, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Richardson (1746), in M. Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 112.

<sup>49</sup> M.R. Zirker Jr, 'Richardson's Correspondence: The Personal Letter as Private Experience', in H. Anderson, P.B. Daghlain, and I. Ehrenpreis (eds), *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (Lawrence/London: The University Press of Kansas, 1968), 78.

<sup>50</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 209.

remain unmarried: Le Faye's biographical index to Jane Austen's letters reveals that the author and her spinster sister had six never-married nieces and three never-married grand-nieces, and at least a dozen never-married women among their visiting and corresponding acquaintance.<sup>51</sup> In the context of Scottish correspondence, 'one or two' is certainly below the mark. A notable aspect of Scottish gentry families was their high degree of interconnectedness through marriage, and the extensive deposits of family correspondence in the National Records of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland make it possible to trace never-married women, their relationships and influence more easily than would have been feasible had these collections been scattered around the country. In the case of published letters, McMillan rightly points out that interest in old family papers is not a recent phenomenon, but early non-academic published collections have perhaps been read more as antiquarian curiosities than as reliable articulations of social relationships.<sup>52</sup> In chapter two, which makes use of such sources, not only the relationships between the letter-writer and her correspondents are relevant, but also the relationship between the letter-writer and her editor. The common practices of copying letters and preserving and arranging correspondence had narrative dimensions which were both autobiographical and biographical. Descendants who gathered letters and pruned them for publication situated the writer as part of the public narrative of the family, as did later generations who made archival donations. This confirmation of posthumous status is an important counterpoint to the stereotypical old maid who, once dead, was soon forgotten, having made no contribution to her family or wider society. Early published correspondence is read here with an eye to these family narratives.

Household records and jot books do more than establish material contexts for never-married women's lives.<sup>53</sup> Domestic accounts may also reveal household dynamics and hierarchies, and the gendered assumptions about status which underlay

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<sup>51</sup> D. Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 490–572 passim.

<sup>52</sup> McMillan, 'Some Early Travellers', in Gifford and McMillan, *Scottish Women's Writing*, 89n.16. See also Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> While many never-married gentlewomen felt their incomes were narrow, details of domestic expenditure make it clear they rarely met with the poverty which kept such close company with the mass of their socially inferior countrywomen.

them. This reading of domestic records has sometimes been seen as problematic. Vickery asserts that accounts ‘lack the emotional expansiveness of diaries and letters, and can give limited insight into attitudes’.<sup>54</sup> Notwithstanding, much of her work looks to these sources to draw out ways in which household or family members reconciled (successfully or otherwise) the prescriptive norms and pragmatic realities of their relationships.<sup>55</sup> Hartigan-O’Connor validates this approach in her case study ‘Abigail’s Accounts: Economy and Affection in the Early Republic’, observing that ‘strikingly and explicitly, market transactions constructed social relationships and affective ties shaped economic relationships [...] the financial substance of domestic life [was] marked by the mixture, rather than the separation, of economy and emotion’.<sup>56</sup> Household accounts commonly noted, for example, ongoing financial patronage to relatives. This set out for contemporaries and posterity a record of familial status, benevolence, and obligation. In chapter six, meticulously kept accounts and household jot books are presumed to be constructed texts capable of being read in different ways. These long-running records of management reveal both the steady economic rise of an early nineteenth-century Edinburgh household and the downward spiral of the relationship between the never-married brother and sister who kept house together. The accounts (weapons in a struggle for domestic dominance) are peppered with calculations set down to demonstrate that the writer’s wealthy brother, although head of the household and a liberal host, rarely disbursed money for food and heating. The notebooks also record the writer’s tactical withholding of board money as a means to force recognition of her independent financial status. The sister and brother, children of a prosperous banker, fought their emotional battles in the credit and debit columns of their mutual accounts. Other case studies show that spinsters used financial patronage to boost their status among kin. In a period when ‘economic interdependence, not independence, was the rule’, legal documents such as bonds, annuities and wills were commonly read as expressions of

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<sup>54</sup> A. Vickery, ‘His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England’, *PP*, 1 (2006 supp.), 19; see also Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 109.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Vickery, ‘His and Hers’, 17–19, and 26: ‘The account book is [...] still replete with concentrated emotion’.

<sup>56</sup> E. Hartigan-O’Connor, ‘Abigail’s Accounts: Economy and Affection in the Early Republic’, *JWH*, 17:3 (2005), 35, 37.

the concerned parties' familial and social standing and prospects, and thus invested with emotional meaning.<sup>57</sup>

While this study makes no claim to be comprehensive, the case studies can be taken as a representative cross-section of never-married Scots gentlewomen. They range from independently wealthy women who took their social status as given, to women whose economic and social standing was inseparably tied to the prestige of close male kin, down to those whose reliance on personally earned income marked them as being on the bottom rungs of gentility. Some came from Whiggish families, others were ardent Tories; one had a brother killed commanding Jacobite troops at Culloden. The geographical range of these never-married Scotswomen and their networks was also broad. They lived in town and country and had connections from Sutherland to Ayrshire; one spent most of her life in rural Wales while several were ensconced in London. All identified themselves to some degree as Scotswomen, even if they also associated themselves with British identities. Several were connected through the marriages of relatives; other ties of cousinship, friendship, and patronage emerged unexpectedly as archival research progressed.

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In selecting and reading the sources, three frameworks came into play which, to a degree, interacted. Historically, as unmarried women approached the age of thirty they were assigned a homogeneous cultural identity—the old maid—on the assumption that they would not marry. This contemporary framework differs from the methodological framework which allows historiographical parameters to be set by retrospectively classifying women as never married.<sup>58</sup> Both frameworks suggest the existence of a social group which is easily defined. However, chapter one shows that the popular stereotyping which reduced the causes of non-marriage to female character failings glossed over the multiplicity of economic and social factors

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<sup>57</sup> Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> Only death excludes the possibility of marriage: a problem with demographic definitions of 'never-married' as 'over 45' or 'over 50' is the implication that, past this age, no further evidence is needed—in principle little different from contemporary commentators who drew the line at 30. See A.M. Froide, 'Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England', in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 241; Hufton, *Prospect*, 251.

underlying spinsterhood. The methodological framework is convenient, but should not reinforce this historical reductionism by failing to give due weight to the diversity of ways in which women who did not marry defined and represented themselves. As a counter to stereotypes of old maids, gentility was the most positive framework in which a never-married woman could shape her social identity. Neither historical commentators nor modern scholars have found it easy to define gentility.<sup>59</sup> It rested less on specific levels of income than on arguable concepts such as politeness and good lineage, and was manifested in behaviour, dress, conversation, and claims to social connection. It was thus possible for women in widely differing circumstances to locate themselves within this framework—provided their income was not too narrow, nor their connections too low. By consistently upholding her rank as a gentlewoman, a never-married woman could gain social agency. While the name of old maid belittled her and set her apart, the name of gentlewoman validated her social character and relationships.

Because these contemporary social categories were formulated and given expression in both printed and manuscript sources, the thesis methodology has been shaped by considerations of language. The extent to which educated women used language to construct and manage their self-representations is illustrated across the chapters. The approach to sources has been influenced by the work of, among others, Cressy, Brewer, and Davis.<sup>60</sup> Readings owe a great deal to studies by Vickery and Tadmor, both of whom emphasise the importance of being alert to the full range of meanings which could be invested in words and phrases in common currency.<sup>61</sup> Tadmor's extended examination of the concepts of family and friends exemplifies the contributions made by case studies to broader historiographies. The thesis follows Tadmor's approach by looking at the use of genteel idioms in a variety of contexts, and in considering how mundane words and expressions could be employed to uphold or subvert the social status quo.

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<sup>59</sup> See, i.a., A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven/London: Yale Nota Bene, 2003), 13–14.

<sup>60</sup> D. Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England', *PP*, 113 (Nov. 1986); J. Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2005); N.Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

<sup>61</sup> See especially the case studies which illustrate *Gentleman's Daughter* and *Family and Friends*.



In a language-based approach to sources, terminology is of particular importance. Unmarried and single are used here in a sense consistent with the perspectives of the historical actors, while never-married is a historiographically definitive statement of status.<sup>62</sup> I have preferred the straightforward never-married woman—and, where relevant, wife or widow—to Froide’s pairings of ‘never-married’/‘ever-married’ and ‘lifelong singlewomen’/‘life-cycle singlewomen’.<sup>63</sup> With simplicity in mind, I have tried to avoid ambiguous terminology.<sup>64</sup>

The focus remains throughout on the language used by the women studied. It is a fundamental contention of this thesis that never-married gentlewomen saw and represented themselves as gentlewomen first. Their rank was a positive identity which allowed them to evade negative social categorisation by marital status. Froide refers to the ‘very disparate roles of widows and wives on the one hand, and singlewomen on the other’, on the grounds that ‘the conjugal household was the basis of social, economic, and political thought and structure’.<sup>65</sup> The sources studied here do not support this statement. The problem lies in the acceptance of a cultural ideal as the norm; in this instance, that the household as a socially foundational unit was also a conjugal unit. Letters, accounts, and household books show never-married women commonly adopting roles and responsibilities defined historically, and accepted historiographically, as belonging to wives. Arguably these were first and foremost the duties of gentlewomen. Ideally, the responsibilities of household management and domestic/familial patronage for which gentlewomen were educated were fulfilled by a wife but, as chapters two and three show, they might be fulfilled by a daughter, a sister, or niece.

The idea of family embraces many definitions, and both Froide and Tadmor emphasise the permeability of household and kin groupings in the eighteenth and

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<sup>62</sup> Spinster—which appears in contemporary legal documents without pejorative connotations—is occasionally used as a synonym for never-married.

<sup>63</sup> Froide, ‘Marital Status’, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 237–59 passim; Froide, *Never Married*, 7, 9.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Life-cycle singlewomen’ can define widows as well as women yet to marry. Potentially confusingly, while Froide uses ‘ever-married’ for women who were once married, other scholars use ‘ever-single’ to mean women who never married, e.g., L. Chambers, ‘Married to Each Other; Married to the Cause. Singlehood and Sibship in Antebellum Massachusetts’; T. Franzen, ‘Singular Leadership: Anna Howard Shaw, single women and the US woman suffrage movement’. *WHR*, 17:3 (Jul. 2008), 341–57, 419–34.

<sup>65</sup> Froide, ‘Marital Status’, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 237.

nineteenth centuries.<sup>66</sup> The conceptual inclusivity of relationship terms during this period underpins the arguments of chapters five and seven, and is the linguistic focus of chapter three. Throughout, immediate or close family refers to never-married women's siblings, parents, first cousins, nephews and nieces. This reflects eighteenth-century understandings of familial relationships, and sidesteps the term nuclear family, problematic because it anachronistically defines anyone other than parents and offspring as additions to, rather than integral components of, the household family. Other terms expressive of important contemporary social relationships and concepts, such as friend, connection, interest, gentility, public and private, are used in the senses understood by the historical actors. Friendship was an active relationship which required nurturing: Tadmor succinctly defines friends as people who were 'expected to be effective' in promoting one's welfare.<sup>67</sup> It was inclusive and permeable, spanning 'kinship ties, sentimental relationships, economic ties, occupational connections, intellectual and spiritual attachments, sociable networks, and political alliances'.<sup>68</sup> The language of friendship was dynamic, enabling people to set expectations and negotiate disappointments.<sup>69</sup> The language of gentility, like that of friendship, expressed an ideal of social cohesion, and many never-married gentlewomen used it fluently to counteract and forestall any attempts to demote or exclude them from family or social circles. Interest—personal influence used for one's own or others' benefit—was a valued expression of both gentility and friendship, and central to the exercise of patronage. Female patronage has been slow to gain historiographical recognition and attention. As with other aspects of women's history, the spotlight has been cast first on elite women: Chalus's work elucidates their roles in politics (long assumed to be an almost exclusively masculine preserve), while Strobel and Worsley give instances of aristocratic female patronage of the fine arts and architecture.<sup>70</sup> The influence wielded by women of lesser rank is less easily identified and tracked, but a never-married woman who used her influence (however

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<sup>66</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 75, 85; Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 123, 131–3, 140.

<sup>67</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 130.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>70</sup> E. Chalus, *Elite Women*; H.A. Strobel, 'Royal "Matronage" of Women Artists in the Late-18<sup>th</sup> Century', *WAJ*, 26:2 (autumn 2005–winter 2006); L. Worsley, 'Female Architectural Patronage in the Eighteenth Century and the Case of Henrietta Cavendish Holles Harley', *AH*, 48 (2005).

slight) to help her friends was sure to enhance her status, and contemporary language use makes it clear that patronage was understood to function at many levels, in both public and private contexts. Never-married women's use of personal influence is examined in chapters five and six.

Debate on the definition of public, private, and separate spheres (and whether this framework is useful) is no longer central to social history, but the arguments, regularly revisited in the later twentieth century by both British and American scholars, demand brief notice here in the context of assessing never-married women's areas of familial and social activity. Kerber—observing that American debate emerged from feminist responses to historiographical structures based on earlier politico-historical divisions of the sexes—wryly acknowledges suffragist Lucy Stone's insistence in 1855 that 'Too much has already been said and written about woman's sphere'.<sup>71</sup> She agrees with the anthropologist Rosaldo that the model of opposed spheres is deficient because it presents 'dichotomies which teach that women must be understood not in terms of relationship [...] but of difference and apartness'.<sup>72</sup> Kerber concludes that to continue using the language of separate spheres is 'to impose a static model on dynamic relationships'.<sup>73</sup> This assessment of the limitations of sociological structures is particularly apt in the context of a study of never-married women and their places in another commonly assumed dichotomy, married and non-married. British input has been assessed by several scholars of women's and gender history, including Vickery, who gives it particular attention.<sup>74</sup> She argues that the more historians rely on women's personal documents, the more positively they evaluate woman's sphere, but that nonetheless the framework of spheres cannot contain women's lives. She suggests that Davidoff and Hall's seminal work on middling families reconstructs a 'richness and singularity' which 'refuses

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<sup>71</sup> I.a. Samuel Quincy (1756), Alexis de Tocqueville (1835), Friedrich Engels (1884). L.K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *JAH*, 75:1 (Jun. 1988).

<sup>72</sup> M.Z. Rosaldo, *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *HJ*, 36:2 (1993). See also Barker and Chalus, who summarise the debate similarly. *Gender*, 19–21.

the general structure they seek to impose'.<sup>75</sup> Vickery argues for subtler readings of the everyday language of ordinary women, language which expressed neither the prescriptive idealism of home as a feminine sanctuary, nor radical women's rhetoric of home as a female prison.<sup>76</sup> The terms public and private as generally used in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not imply strictly gendered divisions of activity; nor did they invariably locate political/business activities outside the home. They signalled social rather than spatial demarcations, as both Vickery and Klein emphasise.<sup>77</sup> Private versus public in social interactions meant polite discrimination as opposed to vulgar inclusivity.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the longevity of debate on the home as women's sphere, their status in it has hardly gone unchallenged, historically or historiographically. As a final small but important terminological distinction, the word housekeeper has been rejected here in favour of household or domestic manager when referring to gentlewomen in this role. Methodologically there has often been a failure to distinguish between the housekeeper as an upper servant, and the mistress of the house. Tadmor notes that a single man's household family comprised two parts: himself as the head, and his dependants, who were 'mostly servants'. The family included 'a set role for a female housekeeper', who could be a wife, a sister, 'or any other woman who is invested with the office of housekeeping'.<sup>79</sup> This is close to the argument of chapter three, but fails to make the distinction a gentlewoman would have insisted on, between a male head of family as the employer of a female higher servant, and a male head of family living with a kinswoman who filled the genteel managerial role essential to polite householding. Never-married gentlewomen sometimes struggled to maintain this distinction of status; to avoid misreadings it is important that the historian do so. Vickery, for example, asserts that 'many, if not most, families exploited their unmarried womenfolk, as unpaid housekeepers'. This

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<sup>75</sup> Vickery, 'Golden Age', 394; L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). K. Gleadle re-evaluates the influence of *Family Fortunes*, including the 2002 revision, in 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*: reflections on the twentieth anniversary of the publication [...]', *WHR*, 16:5 (Nov. 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Vickery, 'Golden Age', 392, 400–1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; L.E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *ECS*, 29:1 (1996).

<sup>78</sup> Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 202, 223.

<sup>79</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 23.

reading of sources may reflect not so much numbers of women under the familial thumb, as the function of personal writing in working out difficult relationships, a point she acknowledges elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> The genteel home was expected to run smoothly and discreetly, its operation known and seen in entirety only by the mistress; perhaps inevitably, female managerial skills were not always appreciated, and in correspondence many gentlewomen commented (scathingly or apprehensively) on the wife as domestic slave. Like Vickery, Froide refers anachronistically to ‘free housekeeping’ as the sister’s contribution to a sibling household.<sup>81</sup> Again, this misses the all-important distinction of status (wages were paid to servants), not to mention the financial contributions many never-married women made to the households in which they lived. It also misses nuances of reciprocity, as some never-married women who acted as household managers successfully used the role of genteel hostess to enhance their social visibility and status.

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By explicitly locating themselves in their families, never-married gentlewomen did not necessarily intend to confine themselves there. Nor is it the intention of this thesis to do so. Rather, it proposes that—like single gentlemen and the genteel married of both sexes—they used their families as foundations on which to build wider social relationships. Spinsterhood was no bar to a place at the top of female public society. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Lady Isabella Finch served at court as a lady of the bedchamber, a position of influence which saw her develop roles as an advisor to royalty and a patronage facilitator for a government minister.<sup>82</sup> In the previous generation, Lady Elizabeth Hastings was publicly and positively represented in *The Tatler*, in tribute to her pious patronage.<sup>83</sup> In the early nineteenth

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<sup>80</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 188, 202; *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 75.

<sup>81</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 60. Hufton, describing housekeeping as the fate of unmarried clergy daughters, fails to clarify that this would normally be for male kin—an important point as regards social status. *Prospect*, 253.

<sup>82</sup> E.H. Chalus, ‘Finch, Lady (Cecilia) Isabella (1700–1771)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn Jan. 2008) via [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com), hereafter (ODNB 2004 online; online edn –).

<sup>83</sup> A. Guerrini, ‘Hastings, Lady Elizabeth (1682–1739)’ (ODNB 2004 online).

century Lady Anne Hamilton also gained a royal post, although as lady-in-waiting to Caroline, princess of Wales, her court career was neither straightforward nor long-lived.<sup>84</sup> Gentlewomen rarely achieved, or sought, such aristocratically prominent heights, and few had the wealth to perpetuate their name in the manner of the industrialist and property developer Sarah Clayton, who laid out streets and a square in Liverpool.<sup>85</sup> Most gentlewomen simply hoped that in their own circles they would be recognised during their lives and remembered after their deaths. The papers of never-married women, their kin and friends, are testaments to how they achieved this and what it meant to them—and a collective refutation of popular representations of the old maid with which the thesis begins in chapter one.

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<sup>84</sup> K.D. Reynolds, 'Hamilton, Lady Anne (1766–1846)' (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>85</sup> J. Langton, 'Clayton, Sarah (1712–1779)' (ODNB 2004 online).



## Chapter 1

### 'Old Maids and Batchelors Bluff': the never married in popular culture

Sour. Peevish. Ill-natured. Withered. These are some of the epithets—and not the worst—which were commonly applied to mature unmarried women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The old maid was a legitimate object of scorn, the natural sport of those who were wisely ensconced in marriage. Or so most journals, broadsides, prints, plays, poems and novels of the period would have it.

Gentlewomen can be considered unlikely readers of the coarser broadsheets, but this is not necessarily true of the servants, shopkeepers and others with whom they had daily dealings. The respect which a gentlewoman claimed in these everyday relationships was potentially undermined, if she was unmarried, by socially acceptable contempt for the old maid. The fictional complaint of one may stand for the experience of many: 'As I was walking 'tother Day in the Strand, two Gentlemen passing by me, one says to the other, That is an Old Maid, poor Wretch! These words were not spoken from any real Sentiment of Compassion, but in a sneering contemptuous Manner'.<sup>1</sup> Even children were expected to mock the old maid clinging on to gentility, dismal evidence of lowly status in a society built on deference.<sup>2</sup> Although the most vicious language was confined to a handful of texts, negative phrasing and imagery permeated society. The caricature old maid could be met with in any number of social settings—at the theatre or in a picture gallery, in the politer surroundings of a subscription library, even at home, between the pages of a novel lying in the parlour.<sup>3</sup> The most respected authors did not scruple to make use of the comic relief offered by the instantly recognisable figure of the old maid.<sup>4</sup> Less well-off readers, who could buy novels cheaply in parts, would have been aware that the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 7, Sept. 1737, 563, via [www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/](http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ilej/), hereafter (bodley).

<sup>2</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* (London: Martin Secker, 1923), 94.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Arthur Murphy's comedy, *The Old Maid* (London: 1761), regularly performed and reprinted to 1826; William Hogarth's engraved painting *The Four Times of the Day: Morning* (1736), claimed by Henry Fielding as the original of Miss Bridget Allworthy in *Tom Jones*. K. Wilson estimates women made up 30% of library patrons: 'Citizenship, Empire and Modernity in the English Provinces, c.1720–1790', *ECS*, 29:1 (1996), 79.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Walter Scott, *The Antiquary* (1816).



language of their betters mirrored their own.<sup>5</sup> When the unmarried woman looked around her, she was liable to see her state negatively reflected from all sides. This chapter sets the context for the arguments made in the body of the thesis. It focuses on the old maid as portrayed by a spectrum of contemporary writers, from novelists of national stature, to countless anonymous contributors to journals. The chapter also looks briefly at the representation of unmarried older men to gauge how far criticism was gendered, and with what purpose. By examining the language and imagery of popular culture it sets out the context in which an unmarried mature gentlewoman had to construct her personal narrative of singlehood.

The chapter will also show that the denigration of unmarried women can be read as part of an ongoing ‘state of society’ discourse which, at this time of burgeoning print culture, was expressed through stock characters and a shared cultural vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> The old maid, along with the sham-genteel half-pay officer, the over-educated miss, the nabob and the Frenchified fop, embodied vague but persistent fears about the direction society was taking; a London newspaper, for example, observed prostitutes, ‘antiquated maidens [and] simpering misses’ crammed promiscuously into the spectators’ gallery at a notorious adultery trial.<sup>7</sup> Often, the same critical language was used to describe different stereotypes, and the impact of their behaviour was described in the same terms. The old maid, however, emerged as a particularly suitable scapegoat for the times, and in the process she was endowed with traits which had belonged to earlier negative female types. Satire has been identified as ‘one of the most pungent forms of eighteenth-century communication’ and ‘repetition drummed home the point’ in text and image.<sup>8</sup> Ridicule was entertaining, as the crowds who gathered outside print shops to view the latest productions testified, but it also reinforced social norms by pillorying those outside them. And while few actual single gentlewomen were personally lampooned or caricatured, the ubiquity of the old maid as a stereotype marked the high level of social stigma attached to prolonged spinsterhood. Moreover, the hysterical note

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<sup>5</sup> E.H. Jacobs, ‘Buying into Classes: The Practice of Book Selection in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *ECS*, 33:1 (1999), 57.

<sup>6</sup> C.f. Tadmor, *Family and Friends*.

<sup>7</sup> H. Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley’s Whim* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008), 110.

<sup>8</sup> P.J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700–1850* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 43, 45.

which crept into many texts underlines the widespread fear that marriage, although normative, was no longer the norm. There was a perception that more people were remaining unmarried, especially women. To some extent this was founded on fact. Nenadic shows that marriage prospects decreased for Highland gentrywomen during this period, with resulting pressures on both them and their families.<sup>9</sup> Froide argues that hostility rose with single women's increasing visibility in, and contribution to, civic society.<sup>10</sup> The question raised again and again was, what would become of the established order if marriage failed? The old maid in popular culture must be considered as part of this wider discourse.

### Formed for Society

The nature of social relationships, their proper purposes, and the right ways of conducting them, were enduring concerns. Few people could hope to make their way through life without turning to their connections to promote their interest, or to support them in difficult times. The language of kinship and friendship not only acknowledged these relationships but also signalled expectations of reciprocity.<sup>11</sup> Equally few people, however, seem to have trusted fully in these ties.<sup>12</sup> Heirs might fail to provide for widows and unmarried siblings (witnessed by family and legal papers, and the frequency of this theme in novels), and those on the higher rungs of the social ladder often displayed lamentable disregard for *noblesse oblige*.<sup>13</sup> Lack of confidence in social relationships can be read in the attention given to their management in periodicals, including the much-reprinted *Tatler* and *Spectator*, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Scots Magazine*, and a host of provincial imitators. From novels to pamphlets, social relationships were presented as not only a practical but also a moral good. In 1793, a clergyman defied the threat of radicalism with a pamphlet assertion of the *Advantages, which Accrue to this Country from the Intimate Connexion which subsists between the Several Ranks and Orders in*

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<sup>9</sup> Nenadic, 'Impact of the Military Profession', 93–4.

<sup>10</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 153–5.

<sup>11</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 140, 240.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*, 179.

<sup>13</sup> For the selfish heir theme see, e.g., J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811); Mrs Ross, *The Balance Of Comfort, Or, The Old Maid and Married Woman* (1817). In 1773, a prominent politician said he would 'rather be hanged [...] than make applications' for friends: R.S. Walker (ed.), *James Beattie's London Diary 1773* (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1946), 36.

*Society*.<sup>14</sup> As the title, timing, and indeed the author's profession make clear, social cohesion was commonly expressed in terms of an idealised status quo based on hierarchical, patriarchal, and Protestant structures of authority. Acknowledgement of interdependence within the framework of rank was thought to mark a civilised society; at the individual level, it was a sign of gentility. The novelist Eliza Haywood illustrated this by having a character inherit not only his father's money, but also his network of friends; the young Mr Goodman shows his fitness to take up the patriarchal mantle by accepting its responsibilities as well as its benefits.<sup>15</sup> Linguistically at least, gentility was closely tied to obligation and duty.

The opposite of genteel social connection was selfish individuality. Anyone who rejected ties of connection and ignored the just claims and expectations of others laid themselves open to the charge of selfishness. This was a serious criticism, because it was understood to be not just a personal flaw but a defect in the social character. 'Nothing is more fatal to the social virtues', pronounced an anonymous author who sarcastically dedicated a two-volume classification of bachelors to the duke of Devonshire, 'Prince of Bachelors'.<sup>16</sup> Jane Austen underlined the enormity of the fault, and the damage it could do, in the Dashwood sisters' discussion of the faithless Willoughby, whose behaviour in *Sense and Sensibility* threatens the unity of several families: 'Marianne's lips quivered, and she repeated the word "Selfish?" in a tone that implied "Do you really think him selfish?" "The whole of his behaviour," replied Elinor, "from the beginning to the end of the affair, has been grounded on selfishness."' <sup>17</sup> The marriages which conclude Austen's novels are not so much romantic endings as reassertions of the social status quo. By right conduct both women and men gain the haven of secure family life. Marriage also opens the door to mature integration into society beyond one's birth family. Marianne Dashwood finds that 'wife' encompasses the roles of 'the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village'.<sup>18</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, an important connection is made between rational happiness and the usefulness—that is, the social utility—of married life. The same

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<sup>14</sup> Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, 210.

<sup>15</sup> *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), in Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 248.

<sup>16</sup> *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions*, vol. I (London: John Macrone, 1835) (National Library of Scotland NF 605 22), hereafter (NLS).

<sup>17</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, n.d.), 379.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

can be read in the novels of Austen's contemporary, Susan Ferrier, whose characters look forward to 'a happy and a useful life' after learning 'the true uses and advantages of power and prosperity'.<sup>19</sup> Neither the idea nor its expression were new: in a pamphlet of c.1730, a repentant bachelor acknowledges that as a husband he would be 'of more extensive Usefulness, and a better Member of Society than I could possibly be in a single Life [...] a good Subject, a useful Friend'.<sup>20</sup>

In this conceptualisation of society as an enlargement of personal relationships, marriage was the foundational connection. It created new, extended, and active alliances in each generation in a process which constantly revitalised social networks. In the early eighteenth century, *The Tatler* characterised the 'great change of a single life into marriage' as 'the most important, as it is the source of all relations, and from whence all other friendship and commerce do principally arise'.<sup>21</sup> The opportunity to make 'Alliances to Families of Merit and Distinction' was held up as one of matrimony's greatest benefits; a century later it was still called 'the best of our social institutions'.<sup>22</sup> The point was linguistically as well as morally consistent. A married man was 'a better Member of Society' than a single man, the title of husband was 'respectable, social, and dignified', and to become a husband and father was 'the great end of social life'.<sup>23</sup> Social, and society, were nowhere clearly defined; like gentility, to which they were closely allied, the words signalled approved patterns of behaviour. This is not to suggest they were always used with similar intent. As Tadmor emphasises (and the following chapters demonstrate), formulaic language in common currency was available to challenge as well as to uphold the views of dominant groups or individuals.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> S. Ferrier, *The Inheritance* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1929), 894; also *Marriage* [same ed.], 616.

<sup>20</sup> *The Bachelor's Recantation. Or, His Estimate of the Expences of a Married Life Re-considered* (?1731), 5, 7 (Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Document Number CW3315278923), hereafter (ECCO GDN).

<sup>21</sup> *The Tatler*, no. 184, 13 Jun. 1710, 363, via The Spectator Project, [www.meta.montclair.edu/spectator/](http://www.meta.montclair.edu/spectator/), hereafter (montclair). The phrasing is echoed in *The Folly, Sin, and Danger of Marrying Widows, and Old Women in General* (1746), 6 (ECCO GDN CW3317491052).

<sup>22</sup> *Recantation*, 7; *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Recantation*, 5; E.F.J. Carrington, *Confessions of an Old Bachelor* (London: Henry Colburn, 1827), 211 (NLS NF.605.e.12); *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 101, 141, 175; see also L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), 339–42.

In conduct literature at least, the increasing weight given to personal choice in marriage remained within a familial framework.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary texts reveal uncertainty about the moral repositioning of the self relative to this most important of decisions, but marriage continued to be represented as a union between families, at least for couples whose rank suggested they had assets as well as love to invest in the relationship.<sup>26</sup> Where this was the case it remained a matter of family as well as personal interest, and consequently it was depicted in both published and private texts as individual choice guided by a sense of familial responsibility.<sup>27</sup> Rational esteem, not passion, laid the proper groundwork, due consideration was to be given to future prospects, and the advice and approval of friends was indispensable.<sup>28</sup> (The other side of the coin was the clandestine marriage, at once highly fashionable and morally deplored for its implied spontaneity and lack of public scrutiny.<sup>29</sup>) A gentlewoman's choice took into consideration her existing ties and obligations, and the good she might do her connections by her match. A genteel suitor demonstrated his rank by not only approving her care but also, like Haywood's Mr Goodman, being willing to take up such obligations as his own. In Austen's *Emma* (1816), Mr Knightley shows great complaisance—genteel thought for others—when he proposes waiving his rights as head of his own household to live in the home of his new wife's fussy father.<sup>30</sup> In Mrs Ross's *The Balance Of Comfort, Or, The Old Maid and Married Woman* (1817), the heroine Althea Vernon's suitor has no wish to be 'blindly selected from all the world, at the expence of every natural tie', and gives proof of his worth by offering to take into the marital home Althea's sister who, abandoned by her husband, has collapsed into mental breakdown and drug addiction. The knowledge that her marriage will enable her to help her sister, nephews and

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<sup>25</sup> Women's tactical reconciliation of personal and family wishes is examined in Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 49–52.

<sup>26</sup> I.a., *An Address To The Right Worshipful The Batchelors Of Great-Britain* (ECCO GDN CW3304682627); *Folly, Sin, Danger; Confessions*. Hufton observes that parental control generally diminished further down the social scale. *Prospect*, 100.

<sup>27</sup> For examples in private writing see Hufton, *ibid.*, 104; Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 192.

<sup>28</sup> This last requirement was such a commonplace that, in fiction and in fact, women who felt they had made a mistake tried to back out of imminent marriage by claiming they did not have friends' blessing. See, e.g., Haywood, *History*, in Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 256n.118; R. Mitchison and L. Leneman, *Sexuality and Social Control, Scotland 1660–1780* (Oxford/New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 90.

<sup>29</sup> For the important legal and cultural differences between Scottish and English irregular marriage, see Leneman, "A natural foundation in equity".

<sup>30</sup> Austen, *Emma*, 504–5.

nieces persuades Althea to give up her stated preference for a single life.<sup>31</sup> In the novels of Ross, Austen, Ferrier and others, true marriage is conceived as a greater capacity for social good: ‘the world has too many claims on such women as Miss Vernon, to suffer her to waste her usefulness in “single blessedness”’.<sup>32</sup>

The messages about the direct moral/social impact of marriage which readers took from these texts did not gloss over the fact that a good marriage was also assumed to be on a good financial footing. Women were advised to make sure of an ‘elegant sufficiency’ lest they learn the hard way that love in a cottage was insufficient to maintain gentility, while men looked to marriage to provide a personal injection of capital via a dowry—‘friends and a portion to raise your promotion’, in the blunter language of the broadsheet.<sup>33</sup> However, even the financial negotiations preceding marriage could be translated into terms of social good by placing them in the context of a general circulation of wealth, necessary for the health of the body politic.<sup>34</sup> Marriage itself was represented as a patriotic stimulus to the wider economy, leading naturally to ‘a greater consumption of Manufactures, and something more added to the King’s Revenues’ by way of the extensive excise tax on domestic goods.<sup>35</sup> Less calculable but equally important was the economic confidence inspired by the ordered familial establishment. At a time when professional and commercial transactions depended heavily on credit, to set up home ‘in a publick reputable Place [...] where a discreet Wife is left in my Absence to manage its Affairs’ was to make a valuable statement of prosperity and stability.<sup>36</sup> Practically and symbolically, the marital establishment was the basis of genteel public life.<sup>37</sup>

A marriage which benefited kin and community was, by extension, of benefit to the nation. Married couples were encouraged to view their households as

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<sup>31</sup> Mrs Ross, *The Balance Of Comfort, Or, The Old Maid and Married Woman*, 3 vols (London: A.K. Newman and Co., 1817), III, 125, 127.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 116; *Jovial Batchelor* (J. Pitts, ?1802) (NLS L.C. fol. 69 (183)).

<sup>34</sup> *Recantation*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 5; on the importance of the excise to the economy, see J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, money and the English state, 1688–1783* (London/Boston/Sydney/Wellington: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 68, 91–100 passim.

<sup>36</sup> *Recantation*, 4. On the importance of credit, see Brewer, *op. cit.*, 186, 187; Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, 231; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, xxxv, 200, 208.

<sup>37</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 18, 275.

microcosms of a well ordered, prosperous monarchic nation-state. Naturally this reinforced patriarchal expressions of family life. The head of a legitimate family could look forward to ruling his domestic realm as the ‘Lord of a little Commonwealth’.<sup>38</sup> Reluctant suitors were reminded of the satisfaction of ‘being plac’d at the Head of a little Society, every Member whereof is under my Direction, subject to my Authority, and owe me Obedience’.<sup>39</sup> Eager suitors endorsed these patriarchal formulae in private writing: an Edinburgh doctor who emigrated to America to find a rich wife hoped to be acknowledged as a ‘petty prince in his own family’.<sup>40</sup> These metaphors encouraged men to see themselves acting on a wider public stage than women. Both sexes could look forward to an expansion of their public roles after marriage, but while the ideal wife directed her energies to doing good in a village, a married man could congratulate himself on being a ‘Useful and Considerable member of the common wealth’.<sup>41</sup>

Married women’s horizons were limited practically and conceptually by the prioritisation of motherhood.<sup>42</sup> Legitimate parenthood was the clearest and perhaps the most effective distinction made between married and unmarried. The titles of wife and mother were often linked, and heavy with responsibility. (In Ross’s *The Balance of Comfort*, the altruistic heroine is destined to ‘become the happiest [and] the best, of wives and mothers’.<sup>43</sup>) Increasing focus on the physicality of motherhood—as in ongoing debate on the virtues of maternal breast-feeding—emphasised the gulf between the wife/mother and the mature single woman. This conflation of marriage and motherhood did not exclude husbands and fathers but, as in other contexts, the man’s role was writ with a patriarchal flourish. ‘Small Deputy Governors presiding over the several little Parcels and Divisions of their Fellow Subjects’ were reminded that their children were ‘the Additions which [they] made

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<sup>38</sup> *Recantation*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> In E.G. Breslaw, ‘Marriage, Money, and Sex: Dr. Hamilton Finds a Wife’, *JSH*, 36:3 (spring 2003), 658. Wulf notes the transatlantic persistence of these metaphors, *Not All Wives*, 117. Wives used them to question the ideal of domestic deference; complaints against petty tyrants are legion. The philosopher David Hume (himself never-married) cautioned readers of his essay on love and marriage that tyrants invariably produce rebels.

<sup>41</sup> *The Ladies Advocate* (1741), in Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> For actual maternal experiences, see Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, chp. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, II, 101.

to [their] Species, to [their] Country, and to [their] Religion'.<sup>44</sup> The widespread identification of familial with national interests was formulaic but emphatic.<sup>45</sup> Children ensured the continuity of both family and nation: an increasing population, loyal to the Protestant British state, was a bulwark against rebellion within and without. A fruitful marital union, and a properly conducted marital household, were powerful metaphors for national prosperity.

The normative value attached to these formulations is underlined by their use in royal iconography. In the later eighteenth century, the public image of King George III and Queen Charlotte was steadily domesticated as a counterweight to the irregular lives of the king's siblings and, later, the prince of Wales.<sup>46</sup> Portraits of the king were matched by companion portraits of his consort. Sometimes the trappings of royalty were backgrounded to show the couple in parkland surrounded by their offspring, a standard format for depicting landed families. The Hanoverian king was presented on the one hand as a British gentleman and proud paterfamilias, and on the other as the father of his people—the embodiment of a constitutional monarch. Popular prints made these visual representations available to the widest possible audience, and cheap woodcuts which mixed and matched the detail were immediately recognisable variations on the theme.<sup>47</sup>

One pair of royal portraits, by Benjamin West, is instructive on how thoroughly the never-married were conceptually excluded from society. Colley, whose work highlights the importance of visual representation in eighteenth-century popular culture, notes that an emphasis on maternity supports the queen's status.<sup>48</sup> The royal wife and mother stands with serene dignity in the foreground, while in the background her thirteen children are grouped in the grounds of Windsor, home of English monarchs since medieval days. One of the young princes wears the uniform of a naval midshipman. The image deliberately creates a connection between the

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<sup>44</sup> *The Spectator*, no. 500, Fri. 3 Oct. 1712, 262 (montclair); see also *Recantation*, 7; *Confessions*, 366.

<sup>45</sup> C. Flint, 'The Family Piece: Oliver Goldsmith and the Politics of the Everyday in Eighteenth-Century Domestic Portraiture', *ECS*, 29:2 (1995–6), 148.

<sup>46</sup> C.C. Orr, 'Aristocratic Feminism, the Learned Governess, and the Republic of Letters', in S. Knott and B. Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 315; Colley, *Britons*, 268.

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., J. Murphy after T. Stothard, *The Royal Family* (London: J. Jeffryes, 1794) and *The Royal Family of Great Britain* (London: J. Evans, 1793), via [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

<sup>48</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 268–70.



queen's responsibilities and those of the lowest of her female subjects. The motto of London's Lying-in Charity for Married Women at their own Habitations, a fashionable cause patronised by the prince of Wales in the 1780s, makes the point: 'Increase of Children a Nation's Strength'.<sup>49</sup> Queen Charlotte's contribution to the nation is the complement to her husband's; portrayed halfway through the war with the American colonies, the king is shown gazing confidently ahead, against a martial background of officers, men, campaign tents and ships of the Royal Navy; in one of these, perhaps, his son serves. The royal portraits and the charity motto draw together themes of populousness, economic expansion, long-established hierarchical authority and social stability. Both the imagery and the brevity of the motto presume familiarity with the connections made. In 1742 the philosopher and economist David Hume argued that abundance of people as well as commodities and riches was evidence of benevolent rule: 'if every thing else be equal, it seems natural to expect, that, wherever there are most happiness and virtue, and the wisest institutions, there will also be most people'.<sup>50</sup> It was an appealing and durable idea of national health and wealth which, resting on the willingness of each person to fulfil her or his role in a clearly structured hierarchy, could be approved by both the rationally and the religiously minded. As an Irish pamphlet writer observed in 1790, 'Formed for society, solitary seclusion is never the object of our voluntary choice, while unbiased reason is permitted to regulate our conduct [...] we require the mutual aid of each other'.<sup>51</sup> Across the Atlantic, a Massachusetts spinster mused on her single state and recalled that 'in the beginning tha was made male and feemale [...] wee are made for Sociaty'.<sup>52</sup> Thirty years later, in 1824, a didactic poem rhymed succinctly and morally, 'We are each a link of one great chain, / And help each other to sustain'. Spoken by a fictional old bachelor who admits, 'I no kin or kindred own, / And in the world do stand alone,' the sentiment serves to highlight the dissociation of the never-married.<sup>53</sup> At the poem's end, the bachelor reminds a young newly-married man,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>50</sup> 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', in S.S. Lanser, 'Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid', in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 310.

<sup>51</sup> *Considerations On Establishing A College For Old Maids In Ireland* (Dublin: 1790), 7, 8 (ECCO GDN CW3324629988).

<sup>52</sup> Miller, "'My Part Alone'", 342, 361.

<sup>53</sup> *The Rich Old Bachelor: a Domestic Tale. In the style of Dr. Syntax, by a Lady* (Canterbury: Ward, 1824), 70, 217 (NLS I.40/2.a).

‘now you’re husband, master, friend, / Many on you will now depend’.<sup>54</sup> Marriage was consistently and explicitly conceptualised as something divinely and naturally ordained for ‘the harmonious Order of Civil Society’.<sup>55</sup>

### *Danger to a Nation*

These insistent formulations reveal vulnerable spots in the social psyche. Acute uncertainty resulting from the prolonged periods of war in which Britain was engaged for most of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries underlaid the conservatism which prevailed politically and culturally after the French revolution slid into violent unpredictability. France was seen as a recurring threat to Britain’s external and internal security during the conflicts which succeeded with scant interruption from the Act of Union to the battle of Waterloo.<sup>56</sup> Abroad, the two countries clashed as they exercised mercantile and colonial muscle from North America and the West Indies to Africa and Asia.<sup>57</sup> At home, Catholic France was the puppet-master pulling the strings of rebellion. The Stuart claimants who threatened constitutional stability throughout the first half of the eighteenth century were backed by the threat of French invasion. Later, under Napoleon, the threat took physical shape as the emperor’s Army of England gathered.<sup>58</sup> Apprehension was not confined to southern England; people remembered that Edinburgh’s seaway, the Firth of Forth, had previously been attempted by French ships, and new alarms were experienced on the Welsh coast.<sup>59</sup>

France had ‘encouraged her own subjects, and alarmed Europe, by her vaunted 27 millions’ of people, warned the statistician John Rickman, who made a clear link between marriage and a healthy population level.<sup>60</sup> It is now known that the population of Britain and Ireland increased dramatically towards the end of the eighteenth century, but popular perception at the time was otherwise.<sup>61</sup> Pamphlet

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>55</sup> *Recantation*, 7; see also *Folly, Sin, Danger* and *An Old Bachelor’s Reflections on Matrimony* (NLS L.C. 2398. (29)).

<sup>56</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 1, 18, 284–6.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 284–6.

<sup>59</sup> In 1708 and 1797.

<sup>60</sup> In Glass, *Numbering the People*, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 158; Lanser, ‘Singular Politics’, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 311.

writers had been wringing their hands for more than half a century over the ‘Danger of Celibacy to a Nation’, in regular echo of *The Spectator*’s pronouncement that ‘Celibacy is the great Evil of our Nation’.<sup>62</sup> ‘No wonder the British Name is less terrible than formerly’ lamented one, contemplating the ‘melancholy Consideration that Eight Hundred Thousand Females should lie uncultivated’. To make wives and mothers of them would ‘restore the British Glory, and the Balance of Europe to our hands’.<sup>63</sup> Both the army and navy swallowed up increasing numbers of men and boys: the armed forces totalled about 170,000 in the Seven Years’ War, the navy expanded ninefold between 1789–99, and by Waterloo the army numbered closer to a quarter of a million.<sup>64</sup> Rickman took a leading role in drafting and implementing the first national census of 1801 which, if it did not allay fears that Britain had insufficient men to withstand French aggression, at least countered the longstanding idea that widespread celibacy was ‘dispeopling the Kingdom to nothing’.<sup>65</sup> It has been calculated that more than half of Britain’s rising population was now under twenty-five.<sup>66</sup> By this date, however, the hydra of social malaise had raised another head—revolution at home.

While an increase in the number of loyal defenders of king and country was welcome, the return of hundreds of thousands of demobilised men to Britain after each cessation of hostilities was not. Most of these men were young, unmarried, and poor; all were used to violence.<sup>67</sup> When they failed to find work they quickly turned to crime, and rising indictments were seen as evidence of disregard for property rights and hence rightful authority.<sup>68</sup> Public opinion among the middling and genteel became increasingly conservative as revolutionary France opened a prospect of

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<sup>62</sup> Celibacy meant non-marriage, not sexual continence. *Female Grievances Debated In Six Dialogues* (London: 1727), 1, 164 (ECCO GDN CW3317486049); *Spectator*, no. 528, 5 Nov. 1712, 352 (montclair).

<sup>63</sup> *Recantation*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> At the end of the Seven Years’ War, only 295 boys of 4,787 recruited by the Marine Society could be accounted for; tropical diseases claimed regiments in weeks. Colley, *Britons*, 92, 98, 286–7. Effective strength was commonly well below numbers on the ‘paper establishment’, which doubtless increased demands for a clearer picture of capability. A.J. Guy, *Oeconomy and Discipline: Officership and administration in the British army 1714–63* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 10.

<sup>65</sup> D. Eastwood, ‘Rickman, John (1771–1840)’ (ODNB 2004 online); *Female Grievances*, 165.

<sup>66</sup> Colley (drawing on E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Schofield, T.C. Smout), *Britons*, 303.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>68</sup> J. Rule, *Albion’s People: English Society, 1714–1815* (London/New York: Longman, 1992), 232.

complete social breakdown little more than twenty miles away across the Channel.<sup>69</sup> There, hallowed structures of authority had been torn down by the masses. Britain's sense of vulnerability can be felt in the shock and revulsion expressed over the public execution of Marie Antoinette, queen, wife, and mother. The circumstances of the French queen's downfall prompted the resurrection of her image in roles which she had failed to inhabit convincingly during her lifetime. Commentators did not need to labour symbolic comparisons with Queen Charlotte. The resonance of her solitary trial and execution, bereft of her husband and king, cautioned many British reformists to temper their calls for political liberty.<sup>70</sup> Two years later, when a patriotic society rallied British citizens to unity, it drew on the same symbolism to drive home the point that French ideas and arms threatened all ranks. Its propaganda print opposed the 'Curses of War'—a farmer's wife and children left desolate and unprotected by the murder of their household head—to the blessings of British peace, defined as 'Prosperity & Domestick Happiness' and represented by a neat wife and children welcoming the husbandman home to a well plenished table.<sup>71</sup> Once again the pathetic figure of the unprotected wife and mother was used to guide appropriate sympathetic response. Another print of 1797 depicted the princess of Wales with her year-old daughter and an attendant; save for the prince of Wales's feathers in her hair, the simple vignette could have been a picture of any young gentlewoman with her child and friend.<sup>72</sup> It is unclear whether it was published at this time of crisis to suggest the prince's return to the bosom of the national family, but if the import of the image is uncertain, its force is not. Whether she illustrated stability or the natural order under threat, the wife and mother was one of the most affecting and compelling symbols available to contemporary discourse.

### Stale Virgins

When social wellbeing was expressed through the topos of marriage, those who remained unmarried were inevitably cast as the scapegoats for social ills. Unmarried mature women, however, were a more obvious target for criticism than single adult

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> This aspect of the backlash is noted by, i.a., Colley, *Britons*, 253; Hufton, *Prospect*, 491.

<sup>71</sup> In Colley, *op. cit.*, 305.

<sup>72</sup> In Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 111.

men. Adult women not subject to marital authority, including widows, had long been considered a threat to social order; women who had never had a husband at all were regarded with particular suspicion, irrespective of whether their condition was voluntary. They were portrayed as not only unattached, but unnatural—evidence of profound uncertainty about their place in the scheme of things. The longstanding identification of unmarried women and witches persisted through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Few writers exhibited the sustained misogyny of the anonymous *A Satyr Upon Old Maids*, an early text (1712/13) in which agricultural failure was laid squarely at the doors of the ‘blind Cottages’ where bitter single women lived. In this poem, neighbours were urged, ‘E’en burn the next old Maid, no matter which, / For if she’s not, she’ll quickly be a Witch: / But if from Witchcraft, you’d be always free, / Scratch all the Antiquated Maids you see, / Scratch till the Blood spins out, for that (tis told) / Will soon oblige those Hags to quit their Hold’.<sup>73</sup> However, the author’s advice is a reminder that the hate figures on which people vented fear and anger in times of insecurity were long-lived. 1727 saw the last British execution of a witch, in Scotland; the offence of witchcraft was not abolished until 1736.<sup>74</sup> Colley notes that the violence meted out to reputed witches was similarly dealt to Catholics in the later eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The shift is observable in cultural idioms as well as actual assaults. In 1750, Hogarth published *The March to Finchley*, an engraving which has been interpreted as Britain (a guardsman) choosing between the future (a young, fair, heavily pregnant woman) and the Stuart past (an old, barren, and aggressive Catholic woman).<sup>76</sup> The withered woman who threatened the social order remained a symbolic constant, even as enlightened thinkers dismissed witchcraft as vulgar superstition. By 1771, the suggestion that a scorned maiden aunt would have been ‘burnt for a witch’ had she lived ‘some years ago’ could appear in a novel as heavy-handed provincial humour, like the dream of

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<sup>73</sup> *A Satyr Upon Old Maids* (London: 1712/13), 8 (ECCO GDN CW3313803395).

<sup>74</sup> L. Henderson, ‘Witch-hunting and witch belief in the Gàidhealtachd’, in J. Goodare, L. Martin, J. Miller (eds) *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). The Scottish and English witchcraft acts were repealed in 1736 and replaced by a single act (dated 1735) against pretended witchcraft. J. Goodare, L. Martin, J. Miller, L. Yeoman, ‘The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft’, via [www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches/](http://www.shc.ed.ac.uk/witches/)

<sup>75</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Colley (i.a.), *ibid.*, 45.

her being carried off in the night by the devil on a broomstick.<sup>77</sup> By the time Walter Scott wrote *The Antiquary* in 1815, the titular character Jonathan Oldbuck's exclamation to his unmarried sister—'Aroint thee, witch!'—served only to mark his old-fashioned eccentricity.<sup>78</sup> But a woman born around 1740, as several of the women studied in this thesis were, might well have heard faint echoes of physical violence in the verbal slapstick of these later texts.

The ubiquitous epithets of old maid and stale virgin were hardly less negative. In 1757 the pamphleteer 'Miss Casandra' suggested that old maid was the worst possible characterisation of a woman.<sup>79</sup> This strong statement underlines the fact that it was 'prudent Management' of women's sexuality to appropriate social ends which was at stake, not chastity as an abstract virtue.<sup>80</sup> Old maids, it was said, would 'lead apes in hell', a widely used, obliquely sexual but clearly derogatory idiom which may have originated in early Protestant propaganda against celibacy.<sup>81</sup> Slurs of old maid and stale virgin, repeated *ad nauseam* in popular texts, reinforced the powerful charge of unnaturalness and implicitly justified the deeply rooted cultural rejection of mature unmarried women. Other commonly used qualifiers were antiquated, fusty, withered, and dry.<sup>82</sup> Notwithstanding this emphasis on sterility, the useless bodies of old maids were also condemned as carrion.<sup>83</sup> The two representational extremes of withered and putrefying flesh expressed a prevailing belief that regular (that is, married) sexual relations were necessary to adult women's health. Medical practitioners relied heavily on Astruc's six-volume, multiple-edition *Traité des maladies des femmes* (1761–5), which argued that female-specific ill

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<sup>77</sup> A.E. Skinn, *The Old Maid; Or, History Of Miss Ravensworth*, 3 vols (London/York: 1771), I, 198 (ECCO GDN CW3309659157); III, 6 (ECCO GDN CW3311907568).

<sup>78</sup> W. Scott, *The Antiquary*, chp. 6, via [www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk](http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk) Scott's antiquarian interest in witchcraft is expressed in *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830).

<sup>79</sup> *An Address To The Gentlemen Under the Denomination of Old Bachelors by Miss Casandra* (London: 1757), 7 (ECCO GDN CW3324609259).

<sup>80</sup> *Recantation*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> G.B. Needham, 'New Light on Maids "Leading Apes in Hell"', *JAF*, 75:296 (Apr.–Jun. 1962); see also K. Kittredge, "'Tabby Cats Lead Apes in Hell": Spinsters in Eighteenth Century Life and Fiction', PhD diss., SUNY, Binghamton (1992).

<sup>82</sup> [T. Ruffe], *An Old Maid's Fortune* (London: 1727), 2 (ECCO GDN CW3310024458); *A Practical Essay on Old Maids* (1760), 35 (ECCO GDN CW3309134393); Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*, I–III passim; Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 35; *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 21; A. Balfour, *The Old Maid and Widow, or the Widow the Best Wife* (Brechin: 1835) (NLS L.C. 2792. (5)).

<sup>83</sup> *Satyr*, 4, 7; T. Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (London: Bumbus, 1823), I, 68; *Recantation*, 9.

health emanated from the uterus, and unmarried women were increasingly diagnosed with ‘greensickness’, ‘melancholy’ and ‘hysteria’.<sup>84</sup> One pamphleteer claimed that women’s wilful refusal to marry inevitably led not just to madness but to the blasphemy of suicide: ‘Inwardly craving, / But outwardly raving, / What hopes of Repose, but in your strong / Garters; / Death, who’s not sparing / To feed upon Carrion, / Is the only Gallant that will then give you / Quarters’.<sup>85</sup> The stereotype old maid was often described in terms of disease and pollution, likely to morally infect those around her.<sup>86</sup> In Ann Skinn’s novel, *The Old Maid; Or, History Of Miss Ravensworth*, a nephew implies that his spinster aunt’s suicide, blasphemy or not, would give more relief than shame to her connections; in her place, he would ‘in conscience pack myself out of the world, that I might be no disease to wholesome mortals’.<sup>87</sup> In the context of this text at least, the principle of moral infection is proved when she is discovered in bed with the butler, in an overturn of all familial/household decency and order. Such women, ill concealing their lechery under prudishness, were mocked as ‘Stale Maids and stinking Fish’ for trying to hide their true nature from others.<sup>88</sup> The odour of ‘stale maidenhood’ was so pervasive that a writer who proposed communal living for single gentlewomen, similarly to Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, feared ‘the Term, Old Maid, will probably [...] turn the serious reader away in disgust’.<sup>89</sup> In this vocabulary, the old maid emerges as the representative woman from a ‘venerable tradition of misogynist verse’ and prose which focuses on ‘the corruption and decay of the female body, on painting and dressing, on excrement and disease’.<sup>90</sup> In the early eighteenth century, these negative idioms were applied to both wives and spinsters, across genres and in different contexts. Linguistic formulations in *A Satyr Upon Old Maids* appear in Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees* and in Jonathan Swift’s tracts and poems. In Mandeville and Swift, the corrupt female body is a metaphor for the economic

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<sup>84</sup> Hufton, *Prospect*, 41; Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> *Recantation*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> See Lanser, and Kittredge, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 20, 304.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>88</sup> *Address To The Right Worshipful*, 21; see also *The Batchelor: Or Speculations of Jeoffry Wagstaffe, Esq* (Dublin: 1769), I, 17 (ECCO GDN CW3316201551); *The Entertaining Fortune Book* (London: ?1755), 20 (ECCO GDN CW3310181544); *Confessions*, 233.

<sup>89</sup> Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, I, 61; *Considerations*, 3.

<sup>90</sup> L. Brown, ‘Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift’, *ECS*, 23:4 (summer 1990), 426.

condition; in Swift's Irish tracts, economic and misogynistic formulations come 'directly into synchrony'.<sup>91</sup> Vain and foolish wives who spend money merely to 'adorn a nauseous unwholesome living Carcase' seem 'sent into the World for the Destruction of Families, Societies, and Kingdoms'.<sup>92</sup> Swift's *The Lady's Dressing Room* strongly echoes the *Satyr* in its depiction of a woman tainting the air around her as she undresses.<sup>93</sup> By the later eighteenth century, when fear of a falling population had increased the sense of national malaise, suggestions that unmarried women's selfish behaviour could lead to the destruction of families, societies, and kingdoms had the persuasiveness of long-established idiom.

Mockery of unmarried women as physically masculinised further defined them as a threat to God's order and the social (that is, men's) order. The mannish old maid was a stock physical type throughout the period, depicted linguistically and visually as tall and thin to an unwomanly degree, with a prominent nose, 'raw-boned [...] flat-chested', 'nothing approaching a bosom being visible'.<sup>94</sup> Effectively, she was unsexed. *The Antiquary's* maiden sister Miss Griselda Oldbuck bore 'such a ludicrous resemblance to the physiognomy of Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck, that Lovel [...] might have supposed that the figure before him was his old friend masquerading in female attire'.<sup>95</sup> The idea that a woman's non-normative sexuality was immediately detectable by a masculinised appearance is also evident in criticism of women whose supposedly oversexed natures were revealed by their adoption of masculinised dress. It has been argued that the fashionably militarised riding attire which was widely satirised in the later eighteenth century was actually worn by very few women.<sup>96</sup> But like the withered and the rotten (or the prudish and the lascivious) old maid, the unsexed and the oversexed woman co-existed in popular discourse as embodiments of the same anxiety: female sexuality not secured within marital bounds and not

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 432; *Satyr*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> J. Galt, *The Last of the Lairds* (Edinburgh/London: Scottish Academic Press, 1976), 81; Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*, II, 85 (ECCO GDN CW3311907211); Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, I, 68; Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 33, III, 56. Froide notes Mrs Jewkes in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Mrs Western in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones (Never Married)*, 178). Visually, see Hogarth's *Morning* and, e.g., E.F. Lambert, *An Old Maid's Skull Phrenologised* (c.1830), via [jmmas.oxfordjournals.org](http://jmmas.oxfordjournals.org)

<sup>95</sup> Scott, *Antiquary*, chp. 6, via [www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk](http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk)

<sup>96</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 241–2; Rubenhold, *Lady Worsley*, illust. 86–7.



directed to maternity was evidence of society's wider failure to maintain properly ordered relationships.

The symbolic importance of married motherhood is arguable not only from the age at which the single woman was identified as an old maid, but also by the apparent irreversibility of the categorisation. In Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood is gently mocked for assuming she will sink into spinsterhood after a failed romance at nineteen; a more worldly heroine hopes for another ten years before having to 'dwindle into a wife at thirty'.<sup>97</sup> The stereotypical old maid, in her mid-forties and ending her fertile period, could not look for social reprieve through marriage. The old bride—a woman who married too late to bear children—was scarcely distinguishable from the old maid in popular discourse and representation. The language which condemned them both points to the equation of physical and economic sterility. In the union of an old maid and her lover (presumed to be younger and poorer) there was no expansion of family or wealth into a new generation. The couple's marriage flaunted the selfish gratification of lascivious and mercenary impulses. The old bride was condemned for signing her financial assets away from her kin in order to buy sexual services. Her husband was assumed to be in need of a quick cash fix, as the 'Nuptial Drudgery' was otherwise 'too nauseous a Pill to be swallow'd'.<sup>98</sup> His shame was complete if, in a further failure to fulfil marital gender roles, he conceded household authority to his richer wife. 'Heaven, provoked at so monstrous a Breach in the Order of Nature', would punish the 'Criminals'.<sup>99</sup> Marriage, which was supposed to enhance a couple's familial and public standing, here became an emblem of their ignominy. In such an 'unnatural Conjunction', the idea that a man might be 'in Love with [his wife's] Person and natural Accomplishments' was 'such an Absurdity' that the critic did 'not think it worth while to take any further Notice'.<sup>100</sup>

One point to be drawn from these formulations is that, like chastity, the value of marriage was degraded outwith a very specific set of parameters. If one of its chief 'Abuses and Corruptions' was entering a union in which procreation was unlikely,

<sup>97</sup> Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*, III, 16.

<sup>98</sup> [Ruffe], *Old Maid's Fortune*, 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Folly, Sin, Danger*, 9, 10. The author warns young men against elderly wives, whether old maids or widows.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 10, 11.

another was the deliberate avoidance of parenthood. In *The Balance of Comfort*, a young wife who chooses a mercenary marriage welcomes miscarriage as the removal of an ‘incumbrance’. She is a variant on the female embodiment of selfish sterility, and the warning message—marriage is a duty which has a proper end—does not differ from that communicated by the caricature old maid or old bride.<sup>101</sup> However, in the case of a young woman there remained hope that, influenced by the advice and example of friends, she would be recalled to the connected duties of marriage and maternity. An unmarried woman beyond her menopause was a woman beyond recall.

When public life was broadly understood as an extension of private life, it followed that the nation’s posterity should be born within unions which supported hierarchies of authority and rank. Bennett and Froide suggest writers on the sterility and social inutility of unmarried women ‘conveniently’ ignored the complicating factor of ‘bastard-bearing singlewomen’, but the absence in print culture of a deterrant stereotype unwed mother suggests rather that negative representations of singlehood were directed to a significant degree towards the genteel.<sup>102</sup> The wilfully single mature woman, the deliberately childless wife and the unwed mother were all illustrative of behaviour destructive to family and public life. The latter, however, was typically presumed to be a servant. She was not beyond reform through a marriage suitable to her station and compromised reputation, but her reclamation was the remit of parish and religious authorities, not writers on social conduct. She was not a figure through whom they could speak to a genteel readership.<sup>103</sup> (Bastard-bearing single gentlewomen no doubt existed, but lack of an explicit discourse suggests they were well enough concealed not to be considered a threat to society at large.<sup>104</sup>) Bennett and Froide’s reading also fails to acknowledge the extent to which physical sterility served as a metaphor for economic sterility. It was selfish of gentlewomen to be so picky that they would not marry and thereby add to the circulation of wealth and a population loyal to structures of authority built on

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 3; Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 128.

<sup>102</sup> Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 20. Barclay notes ‘the prescriptive literature of the late eighteenth century presented a model of behaviour that had little relevance to the lower classes, as it was unachievable without an engagement with commercial society’. *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 56.

<sup>103</sup> Records suggest local church authorities in Scotland had limited influence on the gentry. Mitchison and Leneman, *Sexuality and Social Control*, 71, 75.

<sup>104</sup> See also Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 84.

property-holding and rank. It was also selfish of poor women to breed brats to be a burden on the parish or their natal families, but when social commentators tackled the undesirability of bringing bastard children into the world, they addressed themselves where they hoped to have an effect, that is, to single gentlemen.<sup>105</sup> Whatever his vices, a gentleman was presumed to have residual susceptibility to society's good opinion, and to be potentially reclaimable to the private and public duty of legitimate marriage and fatherhood.

Although social commentators did not antagonise genteel readers by equating their behaviour with that of the lower ranks, one of the most effective strategies used against unmarried gentlewomen was the repeated lesson that the old maid was very much on the edges of genteel family life. The stereotype old maid had no true home, because she had no meaningful household/familial role to fulfil. She was an encumbrance whose financial dependency on her nearest male relatives was assumed. The title of Miss highlighted her failure to make the transition into social maturity and her correspondingly lowly household status, which was at odds with the respect she was due by virtue of rank and age. Her ill-defined position and consequent efforts to assert herself destabilised the dynamics of the household. In Arthur Murphy's popular mid-century play *The Old Maid*, a brother exasperated by the bickering of his wife and sister knows where to lay the blame: 'an old maid in the house is the devil'.<sup>106</sup> The fictional old maid's status was not much improved if she lived with an unmarried brother. In reality, as the following chapters demonstrate, many never-married gentlewomen successfully fulfilled the responsibilities of household management for male relatives both married and single. But in public texts at least, the domestic worth of unmarried women could scarcely be acknowledged against the normative marital household, and the fictional old maid as household manager was, in most cases, a dismissive or comic portrait. Tobias Smollett's Tabitha Bramble, who complains of being a 'household drudge' in her brother's house, in fact 'lives free of all expense' and profits from selling his estate produce.<sup>107</sup> The most damning evidence of her impropriety, however, is a letter to

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<sup>105</sup> There was no parochial obligation in Scotland to support illegitimate children. Mitchison and Leneman, *Sexuality and Social Control*, 58.

<sup>106</sup> Murphy, *Old Maid*, 10; see also Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*.

<sup>107</sup> Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, I, 49, 70.

her housekeeper in which she complains about her brother and countermands his wishes as head of the household.<sup>108</sup> An old maid's relationship with servants (her own and other people's) was often the lens through which her want of true gentility was revealed. In the rare case that her home was her own, her servants would go their own way, for she could claim no household authority in her own person. In Ferrier's *The Inheritance* (1824), the archetypal spinster Miss Pratt returns from a journey to find her house 'hard and fast locked up' by her maid, who has left the key at a neighbouring shop and gone visiting without notice.<sup>109</sup> Miss Pratt promptly emphasises her own disregard for appropriate behaviour by likewise going visiting without notice. Seizing the opportunity to save money, she arrives unannounced at her friends' house, shamelessly reveals her lack of domestic authority by complaining of her cold and untended home, and extracts an invitation to stay.<sup>110</sup> This picture of female indecorum was meant to warn as well as amuse. Financially independent single women were potentially a greater threat to normative family life than those who were dependent. In fiction at least, a solitary life commonly signalled rejection of natural ties of affection, or (failing affection) of duty, gratitude, and obligation.<sup>111</sup> Choosing to live alone undermined the foundational social principles of mutual reliance and assistance, and in setting up for herself—an establishment for the benefit of one person instead of the next generation—the old maid was selfishly using capital which could be put to better family use. Moreover, a woman who could make the economic choice to live alone had no reason to put herself under the rule of a domestic 'petty prince'. Ferrier tactfully offered a positive version of single female householding which was carefully calculated to uphold social norms. Miss Pratt descends on the home of the Miss Blacks, Christian gentlewomen whose lives are passed in active piety and benevolence. God is head of their household; they pose no challenge to patriarchal social structures.

As *The Inheritance* shows, positive representations of the old maid as householder had to be shaded carefully to avoid giving the impression that this might be a desirable option for women. It was safer to paint the spinster householder as a

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>109</sup> Ferrier, *Inheritance*, 363.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>111</sup> Illustrated in Miss Pratt's fictional counterpart, the old bachelor Uncle Adam.

lonely social cipher. Living alone (servants did not count in this equation), or with strangers in lodgings, could be read as evidence of being without connections or support in the world. The well-wisher who recommended the establishment of an Irish Protestant ‘college’ for single women of moderate fortune represented the old maid’s situation as ‘deplorable [...] Stripped, perhaps, by death of her relations, and abandoned by the friends of her youth, she pines in solitude [...] the solitary tenant of an humble habitation’.<sup>112</sup> She is ‘Denied the pleasures of society’, not just enlivening company but the social interaction which defines and confirms her as a gentlewoman. Worse, ‘when death advances to her relief’—as in other texts, this is the only relief she can hope for—‘his sting is sharpened by the reflection, that her eyes will not be closed, nor her limbs decently laid, by the hand of friendship or consanguinity’. In *The Balance of Comfort*, the heroine is reminded that there are many single women who, ‘poor, friendless, and unconnected, pass through life, vainly wishing for the endearing ties of kindred, and the attentions of affectionate connexions’.<sup>113</sup> Popular representations of singlehood as a solitary life ending in a solitary death reflected and influenced the concerns of unmarried women.

The old maid, suppressing the painful knowledge of her familial uselessness, was inevitably envious, spiteful, rancorous, ill-tempered, and peevish. The adjective which characterised her across the genres, however, was sour.<sup>114</sup> It recalled the unsparing physical mockery of her person and highlighted the reading of appearance as character. An old maid was never simply ill-natured; she was ‘ugly, ill-natured’, ‘very cross and ugly’.<sup>115</sup> The burden of negative adjectives may be read as more than the weight of popular disapproval. Miles notes ‘the proportioning of adjectival to other materials as it vividly increases first in poetry and then in prose from early eighteenth to early nineteenth century’.<sup>116</sup> This was not ornamentation but awareness of the ‘power of adjectives to stand for assumed statements’. Characterisation lay in qualities rather than actions, giving a sense of ‘steady, static, pervasive universal

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<sup>112</sup> *Considerations*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 107.

<sup>114</sup> E.g., *Wagstaffe*, 49; Murphy, *Old Maid*, passim; Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, III, 27.

<sup>115</sup> Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*, II, 119; *Wagstaffe*, 17. The ‘unmarried woman, contented with her situation’ was rarely portrayed, but when she was, she was invariably ‘pleasing in person’ as well as manners. See, e.g., Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 25, 119.

<sup>116</sup> J. Miles, ‘A Change in the Language of Literature’, *ECS*, 2:1 (autumn 1968), 35.

generalities which did not need to be asserted, as by verbs'.<sup>117</sup> In this reading, the old maid's sour temper could scarcely be sweetened even by improved circumstances; it was, effectively, her nature. The much-quoted claim in Austen's *Emma*, that a rich single woman is always respectable, illustrates the truism that wealth overcomes a multitude of social handicaps, especially in face-to-face sociability.<sup>118</sup> But the old maid in the abstract, and single women at a distance, were widely characterised as ill-natured. The Birmingham bookseller William Hutton (whose novelist daughter Catherine never married) referred to an unmarried male relative as 'an uncle who was a Grocer, and a bachelor'; female relatives similarly situated were 'three crabbed aunts, all single, who resided together as Grocers'.<sup>119</sup> These characterisations were so taken for granted that they could be used as shorthand for undesirable social personalities or situations with little regard for context. Before marriage brought her wealth, Elizabeth Robinson (Montagu) speculated that she and her sister Sarah might live together 'when we are poor old maidens'.<sup>120</sup> Notwithstanding this instance of imaginative sympathy (and the fact that several of her bluestocking acquaintance were spinsters), when discussing the sensitive subject of genteel female dependency many years later, she deployed the clichéd old maid without any apparent sense of incongruity. Even the difficult position of a governess, she insisted, would be preferable to living as the companion of 'some old maiden whose peevishness has driven from her all who are able to subsist without her'.<sup>121</sup>

In aggregate, the language which defined the stereotype old maid was that of vulgarity. Her lack of moderation marked her as the obverse of the ideal gentlewoman, who was known by her neat dress, complaisant manners, strategic sociability, and discreet fulfilment of household/familial duties. If the old maid wore excessively old-fashioned clothes, she was trying to impress the authority of age; if her clothes were modish she was foolishly clinging on to youth.<sup>122</sup> In the *Gentleman's Magazine* the latter fault was caricatured as 'Miss Youthwoud [who] dresses in the Height of Gaiety, and, indeed, rather frantic than genteel; she has all

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 38, 43.

<sup>118</sup> Austen, *Emma*, 94.

<sup>119</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 22.

<sup>120</sup> In Froide, *Never Married*, 193.

<sup>121</sup> In Rizzo, *Companions*, 129.

<sup>122</sup> See, e.g., Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, III, 56; I, 117, 119.

the hoity-toity of a Girl of fifteen, and yet Miss Sally Youthwoud is upwards of fifty-three'. This was 'a proper Subject for Satire', and the reader was invited to consider Hogarth's *Morning*, 'where an antient Miss is in the depth of Winter going to Church in a single Lappet Head, and ridiculously shews all the contemptible Grimace of affected Youth'.<sup>123</sup> Affected youth was just as evident half a century later in George Woodward's etching *A Nottingham Card Party*, showing four elderly and fashionably (over)dressed women.<sup>124</sup> It was common for the old maid's social activity as well as her dress to be depicted as 'rather frantic than genteel'.<sup>125</sup> The framework of her life was askew, and activities which were laudable in a gentlewoman became in her a matter for censure. Where a gentlewoman's sociability demonstrated reciprocal and regulated politeness, the old maid's visiting was excessive and unannounced, a disruption to familial order.<sup>126</sup> Ferrier's Miss Pratt, perpetually revolving around her circle of acquaintance, is a woman without a domestic anchor. In the same vein, the transmission of family news was condemned in the old maid as gossip and slander. As charges of gossiping and excessive visiting were intermittently levelled at all gentlewomen, the association of undesirable female behaviour with a particularly undesirable female type reinforced the deterrent effect. Shevelow argues that conduct writers achieved deeper engagement with their readers by communicating principles of behaviour through dramatic situations and characters, rather than by 'a system of rules'.<sup>127</sup> The old maid fulfilled this function admirably, embodying unacceptable behaviour directly and indirectly. The examples cited situate her not just in the contemporary discourse on marriage but in the broader discourse on gentility. Nevertheless, although the old maid was held up as an offender against both marriage and gentility, it was recognised that she had a counterpart in the old bachelor.

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<sup>123</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 8, Jul. 1738, 357 (bodley).

<sup>124</sup> In Woodward's *Eccentric Excursions* (1796), which claimed that Nottingham was famous for old maids (Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 229).

<sup>125</sup> In *Confessions*, 233, a 50-year-old spinster who attends every local ball dances 'with a vehemence scarcely less boisterous than the flounderings of a grampus'.

<sup>126</sup> For genteel female sociability, see Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, chp. 4.

<sup>127</sup> K. Shevelow, 'Fathers and Daughters: Women as Readers of the "Tatler"', in E.A. Flynn and P.P. Schweickart (eds), *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 117.

### Gentlemen Rakes

While Lanser ‘found no evidence that eighteenth-century English discourse mounts a critique of single men’, the persistence of specific formulations into the early nineteenth century makes it clear that such a critique existed in linguistic parallel to the discourse on female singlehood, in print culture and in private writing.<sup>128</sup> Characterisations of old maids and old bachelors were remarkably similar, and the figure of the old bachelor can be seen as a companion portrait. The nature of the charges against him support his identification as a gentleman: one author minutely assessed the ranks in which he might be found, and concluded the type was most numerous in ‘the independent group’.<sup>129</sup> His faults point to contemporary concerns about the performance of genteel masculinity.

Criticism of old bachelors, although severe, was not as vicious as that directed at old maids. There was no hate figure equivalent to the witch. Nor did writers on male singlehood express disgust at the male body. Sexual references were more mocking than spiteful, one writer suggesting mischievously that stubborn bachelors be ‘circumcis’d upon Conviction [...] as most incorrigible useless Members of a well-governed State’.<sup>130</sup> The old bachelor was not an immediately recognisable physical type, although his dress failed to show the sober refinement expected of a gentleman, tending instead to the ungentle extremes of ‘slovenly’ or ‘finical’.<sup>131</sup> These extremes were reflected in his domestic surroundings. In Ferrier’s *The Inheritance*, the wealthy old bachelor Uncle Adam lives in a ‘small, vulgar, staring red house’, reluctantly admitting visitors to his only public room which has ‘the comfortless aspect of a bad inn’s worst parlour’.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, ‘nickyty-nackyty men’ were to be found among the tea-cups, ‘devoured by ennui and domestic fiddle-faddle’.<sup>133</sup> Feminised and hence unsexed, they were counterparts to the masculinised old maid. The old bachelor who was overly ‘fond of [...] a certain cut of coat, a particular sort of stocking’ was kissing cousin to another contemporary caricature,

<sup>128</sup> Lanser, ‘Singular Politics’, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 303, 306; see examples in Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 8, 77; N. Eustace, ‘“The Cornerstone of a Copious Work”: Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship’, *JSH*, 34:3 (spring 2001), 520–1.

<sup>129</sup> *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, chp. 2.

<sup>130</sup> *Address to the Right Worshipful*, 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 64.

<sup>132</sup> Ferrier, *Inheritance*, 148.

<sup>133</sup> *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 44, 75.



the effeminate fop.<sup>134</sup> Rauser notes that, like women dressed military fashion, fops and ‘macaroni men’ had a presumed negative influence disproportionate to their actual social presence. The macaroni ‘seemed to occupy a confusing middle space between male and female, while his sexual appetite was alternately painted as weak and voracious’.<sup>135</sup> Such men, ‘incapable of fulfilling public duties’, had in various incarnations been targets of popular criticism since the early *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers.<sup>136</sup> The fop, the macaroni, and the old bachelor can be added to the range of male and female stereotypes which, conceptualised and defined in identical or closely similar terms, represented failures of genteel gender roles. The old bachelor was fusty, peevish, envious, disagreeable.<sup>137</sup> Like the old maid, he was doomed to be ‘alone in the Day, and alone in the Night; alone in going abroad, and alone in returning home [with] busy, corroding Cares to be your Companions’.<sup>138</sup> Both old maid and old bachelor, resenting their social impotence, were in the blasphemous habit of ‘constant and malignant railing at all that passes [...] whether of the ordinances of man or Heaven’.<sup>139</sup> Formulaic language connected both to male physical impotence. An early eighteenth-century treatise dismissed the impotent man as ‘a useless Member to the Common-wealth in which he lives’, while a 1735 essay urging procreation for the national good called him a ‘sour, ill-natured Fellow’.<sup>140</sup>

Despite the similarities, contemporary ideas of sexual physiology and appropriate sexual behaviour resulted in differences of emphasis in portraits of old maids and old bachelors. While the old maid was often depicted as at once lecherous and prudish, the ‘Gentleman Rake, that appears under the Denomination of an Old Bachelor’ was a picture of undisguised venery, reflecting robuster ideas of masculine

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<sup>134</sup> Effeminacy did not necessarily signal homosexuality; P. Carter argues that the fop was ridiculed more for social than sexual deviancy. ‘Men about town: representations of foppery and masculinity in early eighteenth-century urban society’, in Barker and Chalus, *Gender*, 34, 38, 41.

<sup>135</sup> A. Rauser, ‘Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni’, *ECS*, 38:1 (2004), 106.

<sup>136</sup> Carter, ‘Men about town’, in Barker and Chalus, *Gender*, 41; B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), 230; *Spectator*, no. 260, Fri. 28 Dec. 1711, 188 (montclair).

<sup>137</sup> *Wagstaffe*, 41; *Spectator*, no. 96, Wed. 20 Jun. 1711, 355 (montclair); *Confessions*, 4; *Miss Casandra*, 9.

<sup>138</sup> *Miss Casandra*, 10; see also *Confessions*, 2, 4; *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 44.

<sup>139</sup> *Confessions*, 322; ‘peevish maids [...] rail and quarrel with all humane kind’, *Recantation*, 10.

<sup>140</sup> John Marten, *Gonsologium Novum* (1709), in J.C. Mueller, ‘Fallen Men: Representations of Male Impotence in Britain’, *SECC*, 28 (1999), 88, and *ibid.* The themes, stereotypes, and idioms of social concern were long-lived: a pre-*Spectator* complaint (1674) against newly fashionable coffee-drinking accused coffee-house men of ‘Tatling’ like women. *Ibid.*, 93–4.

reputations.<sup>141</sup> His fault was misdirected virility, doomed to a dead end in the selfish and socially sterile pursuits of gaming and whoring. It was assumed men would have (and should be excused) youthful indiscretions, but a mature man who failed to marry raised suspicions that he would dissipate the family assets. The third duke of Hamilton, with three daughters to marry, had to remind his son that familial inheritance and familial responsibility went hand-in-hand: ‘Before long your sister Susan will be married which brings payment of tochers [dowries] fast upon me and which should be your part by bringing in a good portion rather than being a charge to me.’<sup>142</sup> The pamphleteer ‘Miss Casandra’ traced the likely career of the man who failed to make the transition to paterfamilias: ‘[you] drown yourselves in Debauch [...] till you take a Leap in the Dark, leave your remaining Estate to some distant heir, which he enjoys by hereditary Right’.<sup>143</sup> Abandoned in the foundling hospital were the rake’s illegitimate children, whose faces ‘bespeak they were not ignobly born [...] the Innocent seems as though not made for servile Offices’.<sup>144</sup> This cut at masculine pride stresses the idea of gentility as innate and recognisable in the person, not resident solely in manners. Visibly, in his own children, the rake set at naught the natural order. However, marital redemption remained a possibility for the old bachelor. While still physically capable of fatherhood he might yet be brought ‘into the trammels of order and decency’.<sup>145</sup> The ageing husband with a youthful bride was not depicted as harshly as the old maid and her lover. Legitimate continuation of a genteel family line justified the union and, in reality, many men married younger women after losing their first wives.<sup>146</sup> But if age difference mattered less when age was on the husband’s side, a blatant difference in rank drew scorn on his head. The genteel old bachelor was held up as a man at risk of being foolishly lured into marriage with a woman of much lower status, perhaps his servant. If she was young, he was gratifying his lust and would inevitably be cuckolded; if she was older and his

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<sup>141</sup> *Miss Casandra*, 6.

<sup>142</sup> In Hufton, *Prospect*, 107.

<sup>143</sup> *Miss Casandra*, 7.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* Other texts argued that both excessive lechery and the ‘self-pollution’ of mature virgins led to impotence. Mueller, ‘Fallen Men’, 91.

<sup>145</sup> *Tatler*, no. 9, Thurs. 28 Apr.–Sat. 30 Apr. 1709, 81 (montclair).

<sup>146</sup> Barclay observes this in her study of Scottish marriages. *Love, Intimacy and Power*, 20.

housekeeper, he had irretrievably lost household authority by encouraging her to usurp the directorial status of a wife.<sup>147</sup>

The dismissive reference to a ‘distant heir’ expressed the belief that financial help had greater moral worth when it created a living tie of benevolence and gratitude. But ‘how common is the Reflection’, asked another pamphleteer, ‘He gave it because he could keep it no longer?—We are mightily oblig’d to him for his Benevolence, for could he have made any Use of it himself, we should not have finger’d a single Sous’.<sup>148</sup> While the spendthrift represented one extreme, it was the miser who most often embodied the personal, physical, economic, and national sterility of old bachelorhood. The miser lived ‘to no end’, saving for ‘he knows not who’.<sup>149</sup> He did not enhance his status by gentlemanly liberality, so his hoarded riches were ‘of no Use to himself, nor of any Service to the Publick’.<sup>150</sup> Nor was the man himself of any public service. While his ‘Liberties and Estates [were] secur’d by the Loss of other Men’s Lives’—perhaps his king’s son among them—he was not ‘industrious to repair from [his] own Loins the native Strength of the Kingdom’.<sup>151</sup> Regular proposals were made to tax or fine these ‘Drones, in the great Hive of the Common-Wealth’, and to deny them the advantages of gentility, such as ‘sitting in Parliament (for what Regard can they have for Posterity who are resolved to leave none behind ’em)’.<sup>152</sup>

This necessarily brief overview of the critique of old bachelors shows that both writers and readers understood it as complementary to the critique of old maids and thus part of the broader discourse on appropriate social behaviour. It was a gentleman’s duty to set up a marital establishment which reflected and supported his own and his family’s private and public status. The example of the old bachelor’s household, ‘inhabited with nothing nobler than the Domesticks you keep, to look at

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<sup>147</sup> See, e.g., *A Comical Wedding, Between an Old Bachelor 65 years of age, and a Young Woman of 19* (Edinburgh: ?1825) (NLS L.C. 1268 (056)); *Confessions*, 42.

<sup>148</sup> *Recantation*, 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Miss Casandra*, 8, 10; see also *Dr Syntax*, 15, 43.

<sup>150</sup> *Recantation*, 5.

<sup>151</sup> The author suggested mischievously that bachelors under 50 should be pressed into service ‘when ever His Majesty’s Forces shall need a further Recruit’. *Female Grievances*, 160.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 160; *Recantation*, 2, passim; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 1, Feb. 1731, 61 (bodley). ‘Drones’, a common insult levelled at bachelors, exemplifies how prescriptive idioms could be used by the marginalised to challenge norms: the reformer Thomas Paine attacked Britain’s ruling classes as ‘drones’. In Colley, *Britons*, 170.

each other', was an admonishment to do so suitably and early.<sup>153</sup> The gentlewoman's role was that of household deputy, hence the old maid in her own home was portrayed as foolishly usurping an authority she was inherently incapable of exercising. Despite calls for a tax on bachelors, no such suggestion was made with regard to unmarried women; to do so would have presumed their financial autonomy. For the same reason, they were less likely than old bachelors to be portrayed as misers. The costs of marriage were reckoned financially for men, but emotionally for women.<sup>154</sup> These differences of emphasis underlined the sexes' mutual responsibility to maintain the hierarchies of ideal gentility.

The existence of the discourse on old bachelors calls for modification to the assessment that 'All these texts [on wilfully single old maids] also suggest that marrying is solely a woman's choice—a patent contradiction in a social system that makes women the passive parties in courtship rituals'.<sup>155</sup> Ideas of romantic love valorised the personal choices of both sexes. The caricature old maid who boasts of past conquests illustrates the reactionary response to this shift in the balance of power between parents and children, men and women: if women prioritised their own desires, how many might reject all the offers made to them? But although women were advised, 'if we cannot help ourselves with such Husbands as we would have, we ought to content ourselves with as good as we can get', they were not held solely responsible for the supposed decline in genteel marriage.<sup>156</sup> Men were told not to expect 'angelic excellence'.<sup>157</sup> The figure of the old bachelor, held up beside that of the old maid, warned both sexes against being 'too nice, too wise, too proud', altogether too 'fastidious'.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *Miss Casandra*, 9; also, e.g., *Tatler*, no. 95, 17 Nov. 1709, 316 (montclair).

<sup>154</sup> Costs to men can be found in *The Batchelor's Estimate of the Expences of a Married Life* (London: A. Moore, 1729) (NLS Crawford + E.T. 1724–29); *Jovial Batchelor; Confessions*, 211. The *Recantation* is an itemised refutation of the *Estimate*. For the cost to women, see the never-married poet Joanna Picken (1798–1859), 'An Auld Friend Wi' A New Face', in J.G. Wilson, *The Poets and Poetry of Scotland* (London: Blackie, 1877), II, via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

<sup>155</sup> Lanser, 'Singular Politics', in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 313.

<sup>156</sup> *Female Grievances*, 144.

<sup>157</sup> The moralist James Fordyce, in J. Dwyer, *The Age of the Passions, An Interpretation of Adam Smith and Scottish Enlightenment Culture* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 126.

<sup>158</sup> *Reflections; Confessions*, 226.

If, as Shevelow argues, authors relied as much on the covert persuasion exercised by readers' internalised 'network of social conventions' as on their overt rhetoric, it might be thought that stereotypes such as the old maid could not be easily challenged.<sup>159</sup> Textual evidence seems to bear this out. Positive representations of mature single women within the framework of what the author William Hayley called 'Old-Maidism' are uncommon, at least until the early nineteenth-century rise in texts by published never-married women authors. Some earlier authors did attempt a more positive portrait, among them Frances Brooke. Scholarly citations of her periodical *The Old Maid* give it something of the status of a counterblast, but as it ran for only a year (1755–6) and was collected only once, her contemporaries arguably preferred her well-received novels. Hayley's three-volume *A Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids* (1785), in contrast, went through six editions and was translated into French and German.<sup>160</sup> Claiming to be 'A Friend to the Sisterhood', Hayley stated his intent to catalogue the virtues as well as the failings of single women, but revealed his essay as an extended reworking of worn themes by his reiteration of faults such as envy, affectation, and ill-nature, and his remark that lowly old maids did not have the consolation of playing 'a very useful and necessary part in the scenes of human life'.<sup>161</sup>

Nonetheless, the largely negative discourse on old maids was only one strand of the wider discourse on gentility which preoccupied writers and readers of print culture throughout the period under scrutiny. Flynn and Schweickart argue that members of socially 'muted groups' are 'disadvantaged in articulating their experience, since the language they must use is derived largely from the perceptions of the dominant group'.<sup>162</sup> If they wish to be heard, they must 'learn the dominant idiom and express themselves within its parameters'.<sup>163</sup> Unmarried gentlewomen, doubly disadvantaged by female singlehood, were nonetheless fluent in the idioms of their comparatively elevated social rank. The language of gentility enabled them to

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<sup>159</sup> Shevelow, 'Fathers and Daughters', in Flynn and Schweickart, *Gender and Reading*, 108.

<sup>160</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 179.

<sup>161</sup> W. Hayley, *A Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids* (London: T. Cadell, 1785), xvi, via [books.google.co.uk](http://books.google.co.uk)

<sup>162</sup> Flynn and Schweickart, *Gender and Reading*, 21.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

construct narratives of their lives which sidestepped the figure of the vulgar, marginalised old maid. Well versed in epistolary self-representation, these women were often skilled manipulators of social personae, and as dutiful daughters, pious gentlewomen, loyal sisters, and household managers, they wrote themselves into genteel family life.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Wulf's observation that post-colonial American women 'used the language of republican motherhood to gain access to the political arena'. *Not all Wives*, 201.



## Chapter 2

### **Narratives of the never married: familial duties, lovers lost, examples of piety**

In most cases singlehood was probably a combination of circumstance, chance, and choice. It has been suggested that, ‘tangled together in the lives of individual women, these factors should perhaps not be disentangled by historians’.<sup>1</sup> This chapter does just that, in order to examine how the Scots gentlewomen whose writings underpin this thesis used contemporary narrative frameworks to represent these disparate factors as morally coherent, and hence socially acceptable.

Heilbrun states, ‘if I had to emphasize the lack of either narrative or of language to the formation of [women’s] lives, I would unquestionably emphasize narrative’, but also asks, ‘How can women create stories of women’s lives if they have only male language with which to do it?’<sup>2</sup> According to Jacobus, women writers in a patriarchal society experience a rift ‘where language itself may reinscribe the structures by which they are oppressed’.<sup>3</sup> Heilbrun suggests this ‘can condemn women to silence’ even where their education ‘seems to have permitted them utterance’.<sup>4</sup> Or, as Austen’s Anne Elliott put it in *Persuasion*, ‘Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands’.<sup>5</sup> Yet, evidently, Austen was not silenced. Nor were other sophisticated female consumers of, and contributors to, print culture. Women readily took up their pens to write their own lives into the structure of society as they understood it, for themselves, for their relatives and friends, and sometimes as a statement to a wider public. If ‘power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter’, then arguably many unmarried gentlewomen gained a measure of social power in the sense that their social influence was acknowledged by others,

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<sup>1</sup> Bennet and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 22.

<sup>2</sup> C.G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 40, 43. This chapter developed from the connection which Miller makes between Heilbrun’s arguments and the life narratives adopted by eighteenth-century women. “‘My Part Alone’”, 365n.36.

<sup>3</sup> M. Jacobus, in Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.



notwithstanding that they achieved this by strategic expression within the linguistic bounds of patriarchy.<sup>6</sup>

Few women identified themselves as old maids in contexts which could be thought of as public. There were notable exceptions. The artist Anne Boone, a minor social celebrity, defiantly adopted as a public persona one of the most negative characterisations. Mrs Thrale reported that she was ‘accomplished enough [...] and is surprizingly handsome too, her immense Magnitude considered—the Men however as I am told now—call her Baboon’. This taunt with its undertone of sexual insult recalled the folkloric punishment reserved for old maids of leading apes in hell.<sup>7</sup> Boone’s disdainful response was to keep a pet monkey, to which she left a £10 annuity when she died in 1787. As a will was a carefully considered public document, and a legacy underlined both parties’ status in family networks, Boone’s last word can be taken as a particularly barbed comment on contemporary attitudes. The writer Jean Marishall published in Edinburgh in 1789 a series of discursive letters in which, acknowledging personal interest, she challenged the stereotype of the old maid as peevish and ill-looking. ‘Is it because they have not got husbands?’ she asked. ‘No. If they have money enough to ensure their consequence, entertain their friends, dress in the mode of the times; take my word for it they will neither be particularly ill-looking, fretful, nor discontented’.<sup>8</sup> But the ‘neglect’ of society and the ridicule ‘practised by all ranks’ were cause enough for peevishness, said Marishall. ‘Put as many of you mighty sovereigns of the creation under the same predicament, I am persuaded two-thirds of you would hang or drown yourselves in less than a twelvemonth’.<sup>9</sup>

Few unmarried women rose to the challenge of popular prejudice with such éclat. Female gentility was easily compromised by any association with vulgarity,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Shevelov, whose discussion of a ‘covert rhetoric’ in *The Tatler* which ‘triggers the female reader’s deep-seated inclination to adapt herself to the male viewpoint’ insufficiently acknowledges women’s manipulation of that rhetoric. ‘Fathers and Daughters’, in Flynn and Schweickart, *Gender and Reading*.

<sup>7</sup> In Rizzo, *Companions*, 35, 355n.15. Cf. the novelist A.E. Skinn’s reversal of the insult: ‘why one should be tied to a great ape in this world, to avoid leading a little one in the next, I can’t conceive [...the boorish] Mr Clayton has put me more out of love than ever with the male baboons of every degree’. *Miss Ravensworth*, 89, 90.

<sup>8</sup> J. Marishall, *A Series of Letters*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: printed for the author, 1789), II, 114 (n.b. Marishall is listed in the NLS catalogue as Jane Marshall).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 114, 116.

and it was safer to avoid direct engagement. But if a never-married woman was to sidestep the narrative of old-maidism successfully, she had to create an alternative reading of her single state. The prevailing cultural attitude was expressed by Hayley in his *Essay*: the old maid should ‘represent her own exclusion from [marriage], not as the effect of choice, arising from a cold and irrational aversion to the state in general, but as the consequence of such perverse incidents as frequently perplex all the paths of human life’.<sup>10</sup> A socially convincing alternative to the suspicion of ‘cold and irrational aversion’ allowed relatives, connections and, most importantly, the unmarried woman herself to put her non-marriage into an acceptable context. Not all never-married women chose to represent their single status as involuntary, but most were consistent in underlining their conformity to proper female behaviour. How closely practice followed principle could be left discreetly obscure. In the construction of a life-story, rigid adherence to fact was less important than the moral truth the author wished to convey. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *Cranford*, the elderly Miss Matty recalls of her deceased sister, ‘Deborah said to me, the day of my mother’s funeral, that if she had a hundred offers she would never marry and leave my father. It was not very likely she would have so many—I don’t know that she had one’, but, significantly, ‘it was not less to her credit to say so’.<sup>11</sup> Never-married gentlewomen were adept at glossing their spinsterhood as useful and even praiseworthy.<sup>12</sup>

Three main narrative frameworks emerge: familial duty, expressed in the natal rather than the marital family; fidelity to a suitor who succumbed to illness or the lure of a larger dowry, and social usefulness expressed through exemplary piety and active charity. Of these, familial duty was the most frequently invoked, which suggests that it was understood as the most justifiable reason for a woman remaining unmarried. Here these narratives are examined separately, the better to view how they functioned in self-representation but, like the factors which contributed to singlehood, they were less distinct in real life. Further, they were narratives in broad

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<sup>10</sup> Hayley, *Essay*, 13. Fifty years later a sympathetic writer suggested spinsterhood was ‘often involuntary’. *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> E. Gaskell, *Cranford* (London: The Gresham Publishing Co., n.d.), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. actresses’ self-representation in the language of approved femininity (motherhood, charitable benevolence) as a counterweight to the stereotype of the actress as whore. K. Crouch, ‘The public life of actresses: prostitutes or ladies?’ in Barker and Chalus, *Gender*, 26, 59, 67.

outline, easily filled in according to the particular circumstances and purposes of individual women. At all levels of gentility, unmarried gentlewomen drew on them to construct the personal narratives which gave shape and meaning to their lives.

### Familial duties

The genteel spinster was negatively characterised as a woman whose failure to make the transition from natal to marital family prevented her from fulfilling the roles which her gender, her rank, and her religion required of her. However, the responsibilities of a daughter were not eclipsed by those of a wife and mother, and it was believed that a mature woman continued to owe obedience to her father throughout his life.<sup>13</sup> This valorisation of female filial duty opened a conceptual space for an unmarried woman to remain in her natal home, especially if her father was a widower. Like the old bachelor, an elderly widower was thought to be at risk of falling under the undue influence of servants and allowing his household to slide into disorder. In these circumstances, an unmarried daughter's presence could be represented not as an encumbrance but as a blessing, as she lifted from siblings or other relatives the responsibilities of caring for the head of the natal family, and of ensuring that his home was genteelly managed.<sup>14</sup> In both private and public writing, care for a father appears to have been more noteworthy than care for a mother. It was not only the clearest statement a never-married woman could make of her willingness to fit herself to the hierarchies of familial obligation, but also a context in which she could claim the pre-eminent domestic status of mistress and manager. If living with both parents or with her mother, her status remained subordinate. Even so, her role might contribute a great deal to the smooth functioning of the wider family. Lady Louisa Stuart, youngest of eleven children of George III's prime minister Lord Bute, spent many years as her mother's companion at home and in

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<sup>13</sup> The never-married playwright and poet Joanna Baillie's dramatisation of this precept (*The Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie*) was the most applauded of her *Metrical Legends* (1821). A. Gilroy, 'From Here to Alterity: The Geography of Femininity in the Poetry of Joanna Baillie', in Gifford and McMillan, *Scottish Women's Writing*, 145.

<sup>14</sup> This role was not always confined to the domestic. Maria Edgeworth deputised for her father in estate management, as well as running his household and supervising her siblings' education. W.J. McCormack, 'Edgeworth, Maria (1768–1849)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Jan. 2008).

public.<sup>15</sup> Her sister Lady Portarlington hoped she would secure a husband ‘for her own sake’, but confessed ‘when I reflect upon the loss she would be to my mother, I cannot heartily desire to see her married’.<sup>16</sup> Lady Portarlington did not need to mention the loss to herself and her married sisters, fully occupied as they were with promoting the interests of husbands and children.

As this example shows, the dutiful daughter was a pattern for women of all ranks, but the framework was particularly helpful to gentlewomen whose financial circumstances meant neither marriage nor independence was likely. A gentlewoman might find her prospects limited by her family’s inability or unwillingness to give her a dowry sufficient to tempt a suitor of her own rank or higher. When a family was large, or finances pinched, resources were concentrated where they were likely to yield the greatest return—on the eldest son or, failing a male heir, on the daughter most likely to marry well. A daughter not expected to make a good match (because her looks or personality were thought unattractive, or because her health was poor<sup>17</sup>) could not expect to have family resources invested in her. In such cases, her own and her family’s status was upheld by suggesting that duty and gratitude had prompted her to devote herself to her parents.

The virtues demanded of a woman ‘destined to remain an inhabitant in her father’s house’ were ‘cheerfulness, good temper, and obliging resignation of her will to others’, according to the female author of *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798).<sup>18</sup> The spinster should remember that it was ‘equally her duty, and her interest’ to practise them. This hardly differed from the advice given to prospective wives, a fact perhaps not lost on the widowed fathers of unmarried daughters. A fictional old bachelor faced with the problem of genteel housekeeping

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<sup>15</sup> The uncertain status of this role could be problematic, especially if a gentlewoman became a companion to a distant relative or connection; in this context she was often seen as an object of charitable patronage or, worse, a semi-servant. See Rizzo, *Companions*.

<sup>16</sup> Lady Portarlington [previously Dawson and Carlow] to Lady Macartney, 14 Apr. 1787, in Mrs G. Clark (ed.), *Gleanings From An Old Portfolio*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: privately for David Douglas, 1895–8), II, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Women whose physical or mental health was poor were least likely to be able to create a familial role based on domestic usefulness. In Henrietta Bowdler’s *Pen Tamar, or, The History of an Old Maid* (1831), the heroine nobly refuses a proposal from her former suitor when they are reunited, because she is by then crippled. See also Froide, *Never Married*, 184; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 215–6; Rizzo, *Companions*, 32; S. Burton, *A Double Life: A Biography of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London: Viking, 2003), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Priscilla Wakefield, in Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 188.

might lament that he was ‘now too old to think of looking out for another quite young girl, to train up for a wife; where was I to find one ready trained to my liking?’, but the widowed father of a spinster daughter need have no such fear.<sup>19</sup> He had only to turn expectantly to a young woman who owed deference and gratitude, and who knew intimately the ways of the household and his domestic preferences.

The writers Elizabeth Hamilton (c.1757–1816) and Susan Ferrier (1782–1854) devoted considerable periods of their lives to the care of, respectively, an uncle *in loco parentis* and a father. In their letters, they used remarkably similar language and imagery to convey the tenor of their daily lives. Both wrote to siblings to whom they emphasised their ‘obliging resignation’ and strong sense of duty. Hamilton was a merchant’s daughter who was sent to be brought up by her aunt and uncle near Stirling following her father’s death when she was still a child. After her aunt’s death in 1780, Hamilton, then in her mid-twenties, remained with her uncle by marriage, a prosperous farmer who had nonetheless been thought socially beneath his wife. Her rural life, as she described it to her brother, was circumscribed in the extreme. Knowing her uncle was ‘too generous to impose or even to sanction the sacrifice of her pleasures’, she took the decision to refuse any invitations which did not include him, and for six years after her aunt’s death ‘scarcely absented herself from Ingram’s Crook unaccompanied by her uncle’.<sup>20</sup> During the day, ‘From the time I get up in the morning, till my uncle makes his appearance at dinner-time, I have no more use for the faculty of speech than the Monks of La Trappe’ (clearly, talk with servants did not count as conversation<sup>21</sup>). In the evening, she got ‘a little conversation in the style of the country, of the badness of the weather, the deepness of the roads, the qualities of manure, or *politics*’. Four hours of reading aloud to her uncle usually followed.<sup>22</sup> This, she said, was ‘a picture of the last three months, and may serve as one for many more to come’.<sup>23</sup> It served much longer; the passage of two years found her writing to her brother, ‘This is one of the most solitary winters I have ever passed [...] I

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<sup>19</sup> *Confessions*, 227.

<sup>20</sup> E. Benger, *Memoirs Of The Late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton, With A Selection From Her Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), I, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. chp.1, 45 above: the presumption that a gentlewoman living with one or two servants was living alone.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton to Charles Hamilton, ?Dec. 1781, Benger, *Memoirs*, I, 85.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

might, to all intents and purposes, be as well shut up in a monastery'.<sup>24</sup> One of her few friends in the neighbourhood had married, taking her still unmarried sister to live with her, and although Hamilton had had 'many invitations' to visit, she did not want to leave her 'worthy' uncle to spend his evenings alone. 'On that account', she explained, 'I cheerfully give up the pleasure I might expect from a more enlarged society. Indeed', she added, driving home her point, 'I very seldom think of going further than the gravel-walk.'<sup>25</sup> For a gentlewoman—whose status was maintained largely through social intercourse with her peers—this was self-denial indeed. But Hamilton also represented herself as central to the proper functioning of the household in which she lived in self-imposed isolation. Her presiding presence was essential to her uncle's wellbeing; her absence 'could not be supplied by any friend or neighbour, however intimate or confidential'.<sup>26</sup>

Susan Ferrier, one of ten children of an Edinburgh lawyer, and the only one of four sisters to remain unmarried, took on the management of her widowed father's household at the age of twenty. Her responsibilities were divided between their home in the New Town and a summer residence on the edge of the city. In 1809 she wrote, 'I'm doomed to doze away my days by the side of my solitary fire [...] My father I never see, save at meals, but then my company is just as indispensable as the tablecloth or chairs, or, in short, any other luxury which custom has converted into necessity'.<sup>27</sup> Like Hamilton, Ferrier had many invitations to visit, but even those from close friends and immediate family were rejected. She explained to her sister that she was unlikely to accept a 'very pressing' invitation from another sibling because there was 'very little hope of obtaining my father's permission, as the family is now so small that one makes a great blank'.<sup>28</sup> Two decades later, aged forty, she remained consistent in her self-representation as a submissive daughter. To the same sister she wrote, 'As to my promising a visit, you surely have very erroneous ideas of my power if you think I could take upon me to promise anything of the kind'.<sup>29</sup> To

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<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton to Charles Hamilton, 1782, *ibid.*, 87–8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Ferrier to Charlotte Clavering, ?1809, in J.A. Doyle (ed.), *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782–1854* (London: John Murray, 1898), 59.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Ferrier to Mrs Connell, 17 Jan. 1802, *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Same to same, 12 Jul. 1821, *ibid.*, 159.

counter her father's wishes in the least degree would be not just undaughterly but ungenteel, she implied. 'If I were to tease him very much he might be wrought upon to consent—but that I never do and never will do for any purpose whatever, as I think it much more fitting and reasonable that he should have his way than I should have mine'.<sup>30</sup> Like Hamilton, Ferrier drew attention to her filial virtue by emphasising that she was not under tyrannical compulsion; she freely sacrificed personal inclination to familial duty.<sup>31</sup> Repeating to a friend the impossibility of a visit, she too positioned herself at the heart of domestic life: 'That [my father] could live without me I make no doubt, so he could without a leg or an arm, but it would ill become me to deprive him of either; therefore, never even for a single day could I reconcile it either to my duty or inclination to leave him'.<sup>32</sup>

Emphasis may render such representations incomplete, without rendering them untruthful. Hamilton, according to her biographer, allowed herself an 'occasional excursion to Glasgow or Edinburgh', which may have meant genteel visits of several days' duration, rather than day jaunts.<sup>33</sup> Ferrier's father was often away on business during her early years as mistress of his household, but as she did not take advantage of his extended absences to fulfil her personal social obligations, her customary rejection of invitations may have been prompted as much by her own wishes as by his. Nonetheless, failure to participate in genteel sociability could be read as a slight on one's acquaintance. Consequently a gentlewoman who disliked the relentless visiting required to maintain connection might find it expedient to represent her own taste for a quiet life as deference to age and infirmity. Ferrier justified the infrequency of her meetings with her good friend Sir Walter Scott by reference to her father's aversion to leaving home, but she admitted of a rare visit in 1829 that if she had not been promised a quiet time with just Scott's immediate family, 'I should not have gone'.<sup>34</sup> Ferrier also expressed to her father a domestic decisiveness missing from the self-portrait she penned to siblings and friends. In

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lady Louisa Stuart on Lady Frances Douglas: Douglas, she claimed, 'from principles of duty' wished to spend time with her unpleasant mother even after becoming financially independent. L. Stuart, *Memoire of Frances, Lady Douglas* (Edinburgh/London: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 59.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Ferrier to Charlotte Clavering, ?1809, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Benger, *Memoirs*, I, 74.

<sup>34</sup> S. Ferrier, 'Recollections of Visits to Ashestiel and Abbotsford', in *Marriage* (Edinburgh/London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1881), I, 41, 43, via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

1803, suffering from poor health, she determined to visit the southern English spa of Tunbridge. It was common for gentlewomen to emphasise that their personal travel plans were dependent on male relatives' wishes, but James Ferrier's response indicates that he was neither surprised nor offended by his daughter's independent decision to take an extended absence from his household.<sup>35</sup> 'You judged right', he replied, 'in thinking that whatever was thought best for your health would be most agreeable to me'.<sup>36</sup>

The similarity of language and imagery in Ferrier's and Hamilton's letters is not evidence of similarity of circumstances, or of purpose in writing. Rather, the way they constructed their life-narratives argues for both the availability and the adaptability of the frameworks identified here. Ferrier found (as did Louisa Stuart) that her sisters were 'so engrossed with their respective husbands and children that their society is no longer to me what it was wont to be'.<sup>37</sup> Writing to them, she underlined her own household responsibilities and thus (like Stuart) her contribution to the functioning of the wider family. However, although Ferrier's letters reveal a need to articulate her familial role, she wrote nothing to suggest she doubted her status as a gentlewoman. Elizabeth Hamilton's letters show her to have been insecure on both counts.

Hamilton's letters were written to her brother—conventionally her protector as her nearest male kin—whom she had not seen for many years. He was far away in India, and a poor correspondent.<sup>38</sup> Her married sister lived in Ireland, and her uncle by marriage was of 'very inferior station' by birth.<sup>39</sup> Hence her credentials as a woman of genteel family were not immediately evident. Her letters reveal uncertainty about whether the role she had created for herself in her uncle's household would continue serve her. After her aunt's death in 1780 she reasserted her kinship ties by sending her brother a miniature of herself, accompanied by a pen-portrait of impeccable gentility: '[my uncle] treats me with the affection of a father, and all the confidence of a friend. He leaves everything entirely to my management

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<sup>35</sup> See Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 144.

<sup>36</sup> James Ferrier to Susan Ferrier, 21 Sept. 1803, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Ferrier to Charlotte Clavering, ?1809, *ibid.*, 58. Cf. Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Dawson, 31 Aug. 1778, Clark, *Gleanings*, I, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton to Charles Hamilton, 1781, Bengier, *Memoirs*, I, 83, 92.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



within doors, and expresses approbation of every thing I do. Indeed, I never take a step without his advice'.<sup>40</sup> She urged her brother to return and live with them, but the prospect of rural contentment she held out was undermined by her criticism of provincial manners. In describing both her uncle and neighbours as 'worthy', Hamilton conveyed a respectability which fell short of refined gentility.<sup>41</sup> 'In people of a genteel education', she explained, 'the rougher particles are so polished, as not to give offence, while, in those of an inferior station, they appear in all their native deformity'.<sup>42</sup> Repetition of the keywords solitary and solitude expressed her sense of extreme social isolation.<sup>43</sup> When her brother 'forcibly' recommended contentment with her lot, she accused him of preferring to live 'in splendid banishment from every tender relation', to improve a fortune already sufficient to confer 'peace, ease, and independence'.<sup>44</sup> The framework of familial duty which shaped Hamilton's correspondence with her brother during this period operated on several levels. Her description of home life with her uncle illustrated gentility maintained in trying circumstances; her exemplary domestic behaviour showed her to be deserving of her brother's remembrance and recognition, and as his sister she claimed consideration in his plans.

The plausibility of the narratives constructed by Hamilton and Ferrier can be gauged by their longevity, and the formats in which they survive.<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, who became known as a novelist and a writer on education, later 'anticipated' and 'even commenced a biographical sketch' of her life.<sup>46</sup> Her self-representation as a gentlewoman of strong family feeling was reinforced posthumously by her sister and by her biographer (Elizabeth Benger, c.1775–1827, another never-married writer), the former providing additional material for the latter. Benger stated explicitly that it was her intention to focus on Hamilton's moral character, 'to enforce her precepts by

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton to Charles Hamilton, 1780, *ibid.*, 77–8. Her need to reassert their relationship is evident in her note to the miniature: 'I don't know if you remember me well enough to trace the likeness'.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; same to same, 1782, *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>42</sup> Same to same, 1780, *ibid.*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*; same to same, 1782, *ibid.*, 87, 88.

<sup>44</sup> Same to same, 1780, *ibid.*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> They persist in Hamilton's and Ferrier's biographies in the current ODNB, in which Hamilton is described as 'devoted to her uncle', Ferrier as having 'devoted care for her father'. P. Perkins, 'Hamilton, Elizabeth (1756?–1816)' (ODNB 2004 online); E. Yeo, 'Ferrier, Susan Edmonstone (1782–1854)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Oct. 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Benger, *Memoirs*, I, 3.

the more powerful authority of her example'.<sup>47</sup> Ferrier's letters were collected for publication in 1898 by her grand-nephew, whose biographical introduction to her published correspondence highlighted her 'strong family affections'. Her 'devotion to her father' he noted, was 'well known'.<sup>48</sup> Emphasis on the exemplary family lives of unmarried female authors counteracted any suggestion that they had a public persona which was improperly independent of their family's social presence. In a biographical preface to the poetical works (1810) of Anna Seward, her literary executor Walter Scott praised her domestic character before he considered her talents as an author. After her sister's death Seward's society became 'indispensable' to her parents, and 'she was never separated from them', he told his readers.<sup>49</sup> Later she paid her widowed father 'constant and unremitting attention' for the last decade of his life.<sup>50</sup> Offers of marriage were rejected, 'in one instance entirely, and in others chiefly, from a sense of filial duty'.<sup>51</sup> Scott deliberately left out of his account Seward's stated objection to the 'cares, pains, anxieties and submissions' of marriage, extant in a letter which she willed to him with other biographical material.<sup>52</sup> Nor did he mention Seward's self-confidence in her intellectual abilities, or her problematic relationship with a married man.<sup>53</sup> By writing his potentially difficult subject as a pattern of female gentility, Scott conventionally upheld his responsibilities as custodian of her public reputation, without compromising his own.<sup>54</sup> (Fellow poet Anne Grant of Laggan, wishing to 'do justice to her merits', asked in the same vein 'Could there be a better daughter, a warmer friend, or one that had more home feelings?' but, being no connection, felt free to point out 'Her bad

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1, 2, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> W. Scott (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence* (Edinburgh/London: James Ballantyne and Co; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), ix.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Seward to ?, Jun. 1763, ann. 'Omit' (NLS MS 879). Seward's sister Sarah had received a proposal from a man 20 years older, with £40,000. Sarah would have £3,000 on their parents' death, and Seward was aghast that, with this 'steady anchor, on which to lean in the Harbor of Celibacy', she 'shou'd think forty thousand pds a price worth a moment's deliberation, for her virgin liberty!'

<sup>53</sup> Seward (1742–1809) formed a friendship with Lichfield cathedral chorister John Saville, who later separated from his wife and moved into a house near Seward's which she bought for him. T. Barnard, 'Anna Seward and the Battle for Authorship', *CW3 Journal*, pars 1, 17, via [www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/](http://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/)

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Seward's assertion that 'just biographic record [...] ought not to spread over [faults] the veil of suppression'. *Memoirs Of The Life of Dr. Darwin* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), x.

taste and self-opinion are too obvious to escape detection'.<sup>55</sup>) A review of the poet Joanna Baillie's *Metrical Legends* in the *Scots Magazine* (1821) similarly validated her public, authorial, status by reference to her domestic virtue. Praise of the *Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie* was grounded in the fact that the 'admirable authoress [...] was herself a pattern of filial duty, exalted, tender, and devoted, like that of her heroine'; the poem could not have been written by a 'negligent' or 'fashionable' daughter.<sup>56</sup> Like Hamilton's biographer, the reviewer found it impossible to 'withhold such a lesson [...] from the sex'.<sup>57</sup> Gilroy argues that these public representations drew 'a set of parameters for the woman and the poet, enforcing ideals of femininity both at home and on the page', but women authors, particularly if they were unmarried, were often the first to write themselves into this framework. To be held up as a pattern to one's sex was, after all, a genteel retort to popular characterisations of the old maid.

The memoir, used in these instances to anchor publicly recognised unmarried women in their families, can itself be read as an expression of filial duty. By writing a memoir of her father (or another male family representative) a never-married woman could claim, like her married relatives, a role in perpetuating the family name.<sup>58</sup> Such a memoir might comprise no more than a few manuscript sheets addressed to a relative but, as with letters, there was an expectation that it would be read aloud or passed among a circle of acquaintance. It was often published for a wider, public, readership after the death of the memoirist herself. Susan Ferrier cited the 'natural desire in the human heart to connect the past with the future' as her reason to 'transmit some slight record of my dear father's early life to those who may hereafter inherit his name', specifically her nephew.<sup>59</sup> Brief as it was, Ferrier's memoir was publicly acknowledged as a link in the chain of family history: in 1898

<sup>55</sup> Anne Grant (1755–1838) to Mrs Smith, 12 Aug. 1811, in *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Grant of Laggan* (Edinburgh: Thomas Allan & Co.; Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845), I, 280, via [books.google.com](http://books.google.com)

<sup>56</sup> In Gilroy, 'Geography of Femininity', in Gifford and McMillan, *Scottish Women's Writing*, 146. A contemporary article in the *Monthly Review* observed that Baillie's depiction of the 'most touching instances of filial affection, in this her family-heroine, does infinite credit to her heart as well as to her poetical genius.' *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the Adam sisters' efforts to maintain the reputation of their architect brother Robert Adam after his death, and to oversee his visual memorialisation. I.G. Brown, "'The Resemblance of a Great Genius': Commemorative Portraits of Robert Adam', *BM*, 120:904 (Jul. 1978).

<sup>59</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 5.

her grand-nephew published it with his own introductory memoir to her correspondence. Such statements of connection were also reminders of familial obligation. The years a never-married woman spent ministering to her father's comfort might be quickly forgotten after his death, but a memoir of the father by the daughter brought both to the recollection of readers. Her relatives could less easily dismiss any claims she might make on them in her own old age.

Memoirs of and by single women communicated their membership of a family, one reason why never-married women known as published authors in their own right turned to the form.<sup>60</sup> The memoirist wrote ostensibly not for selfish reasons, but to convey a portrait of a close relative to wider kin, or to offer to a wider readership a pattern of gentility.<sup>61</sup> The familial memoir focussed not on public record but on commemoration of private virtue and character. It was less formal than biography, to which women's talents were thought unsuited. Christian Dalrymple, who unexpectedly found herself heiress to her father's East Lothian estate in 1792, tried to gather a record of his achievements as a legal writer and historian. She intended to employ a young lawyer to write Lord Hailes's biography rather than do so herself, but even so, when she turned for help to her paternal uncle, he was not encouraging. Although 'respectable & respected', Lord Hailes's life did 'not afford Materials for a Biography', he told her.<sup>62</sup> There were 'no Incidents in Your Fathers Life that were striking, or such as would interest the Publick'.<sup>63</sup> After several years trying to gather correspondence Dalrymple gave up the attempt, but her wish to show respect for male relatives connected to her inheritance emerges again in her attempt at a memoir rather than a biography, a manuscript 'Character' of her cousin Sir James Dalrymple, whose 'valuable life' was lost at sea. Sir James inherited Lord Hailes's baronetcy but not (as he had believed he would) the estate, which went to Dalrymple. 'The whole of his behaviour on the occasion was such as she will ever remember with pleasure & with gratitude', she recorded for the benefit of both

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<sup>60</sup> See also, e.g., the novelist Catherine Hutton's *The Life of William Hutton* (1816).

<sup>61</sup> E.g., the familial presentation of astronomer Caroline Herschel's *Recollections*, which she herself called a 'little history of my life': 'It was not to tell about herself, but of others, that she wrote them'. Mrs J. Herschel (ed.), *Memoir and Correspondence of Caroline Herschel* (London: John Murray, 1876), vii.

<sup>62</sup> [Alexander] Dalrymple to Christian Dalrymple, 10 Dec. 1802 (NLS MS 2547, 30).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

branches of the family.<sup>64</sup> Her own tact and propriety in making the record was implicit.

Because memoirs did not challenge masculine ideas of feminine propriety, women were able to use the fluidity of the genre to their advantage.<sup>65</sup> Dalrymple's unrealised biography would have been not just a tribute to her father but also a public statement of her own position in the family lineage. Semi-public memoirs functioned as a more oblique expression of the writer's status and, in writing the life of her subject, the memoirist often articulated the place she wished to claim in her family or in society. Lady Louisa Stuart conspicuously avoided memorialising her father Lord Bute, choosing instead her great-uncle the duke of Argyll as a more distant figure on which to practise her talents for scene-setting and character delineation.<sup>66</sup> She also wrote a life of her close friend and kinswoman Lady Frances Douglas for familial circulation.<sup>67</sup> In commemorating Douglas, who decisively rejected the political for the domestic sphere, Stuart no less decisively distanced herself from the public history of her family, which had been shaped by satires published against her father and her grandmother Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.<sup>68</sup> The poet Anna Seward, in contrast, claimed public notice with her *Memoirs of the Life of Dr Darwin*. Seward's literary ambition impelled her to memorialise someone more prominent than her father, although she spliced into her text a tribute to the latter's ephemeral critical

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<sup>64</sup> C. Dalrymple, 'Character of my Cousin Sir James Dalrymple', n.d. [c.1801] (NLS MS 25498 (i), 72f.). The importance attached to such gestures is evident in the next generation: Dalrymple's nephew, her heir, interrupted his 'prosaic' grand tour journal to memorialise her (from S. Laing, National Trust for Scotland, Newhailes).

<sup>65</sup> Works published as memoirs ranged from moral reflections on historical figures to titillating lives of actresses, often presented as *Authentic* or *Genuine* (sometimes, they were). Novelists wrote *Memoirs*, as they did *Letters*, to reinforce the revelation of character. The never-married historian Lucy Aikin, who presented her royal biographies as *Memoirs*, supplemented her oeuvre with a paternal *Memoir of John Aikin, MD* (1823). B.B. Schnorrenberg, 'Aikin, Lucy (1781–1864)' (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>66</sup> L. Stuart, *Some Account of John Duke of Argyll and his Family* (London: 1863). However, when her father's reputation was directly attacked, by Lord Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review* of Jul. 1838, Stuart acted to extract a revision. J. Rubenstein (ed.), in L. Stuart, *Memoire*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> The inclusion in the *Memoire* of details which relatives would have known suggests she foresaw eventual publication. Both memoirs were addressed to Caroline Lucy Douglas (later Scott), Douglas's daughter and Argyll's great-granddaughter.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart did allow her nephew to publish her brief memoir of Montagu, perhaps in hope that a family-authored text offering 'authentic' details would supersede those brought out by enterprising publishers. L. Stuart, 'Introductory Anecdotes', in Wharnccliffe (ed.), *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1837).

works.<sup>69</sup> She disingenuously assured Walter Scott that he should not consider her ‘little work as a life [of Darwin] it neither assumes nor merit’s a title so responsible’.<sup>70</sup> The purpose of her ‘feminine Darwiniana’ was only to ‘draw aside the domestic curtain;—to delineate the connubial and parental virtues [...] to analyse his poetic claims’.<sup>71</sup> A two-chapter criticism of Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden* was clearly intended to reinforce Seward’s own claim to a place in the annals of literature.

Susan Ferrier’s memoir of Walter Scott, like her memoir of her father, situated her conventionally as a gentlewoman. It was not obviously meant for readers beyond her own circle (when published it numbered only ten pages), but her ‘Recollections of Visits to Ashestiel and Abbotsford’ can likewise be read as authorial self-representation. Ferrier depicted Scott as a gentleman and a domestic patriarch rather than as a literary lion. Her portrait acknowledged his self-identification as a country laird and underlined her own distaste for ‘the *fuss* of authorism’.<sup>72</sup> Her memoir of her father similarly focussed on genteel familial virtues. Drawing attention to James Ferrier’s professional probity in the same context as his early family life, she illustrated the precept that public character rested on private virtue. In her brief but effective memoirs, Ferrier rounded out her self-portrait as a gentlewoman who gave the domestic virtues their proper value.

While the language of memoirs differs little from other textual expressions of gentility, one theme is noteworthy in memoirs written by never-married women: the proper choice of a genteel wife. Ferrier noted that her father had chosen as his wife a woman whose ‘sole endowments were virtue, beauty, and sweetness of disposition’.<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton likewise emphasised that her mother, ‘against the arguments of rigid prudence’, had been chosen for her ‘intellectual endowments [...] beauty, and all the charms of grace [...] the talents which nature had so liberally bestowed, had been as liberally cultivated by education’.<sup>74</sup> Seward credited Darwin’s wife with

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<sup>69</sup> She also demonstrated filial devotion by requiring her literary executor Walter Scott to publish her father’s poems, a duty he evaded. Scott, *Poetical Works of Anna Seward*, xxxv, xxxviii.

<sup>70</sup> Anna Seward to Walter Scott, Jul. 1803, Barnard, ‘Battle for Authorship’, par. 29.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Ferrier to Mrs Kinloch, 1823, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 178.

<sup>73</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Benger, *Memoirs*, I, 22.

every genteel feminine virtue, not least an educated mind which displayed ‘delicacy, animated by sprightliness, and sustained by fortitude’.<sup>75</sup> These encomiums reflected as much on the man choosing as on the woman chosen. While contemporary newspapers and magazines habitually recorded the marriage of Mr— to Miss—, with a fortune of —, the gentlewoman’s dowry was notable here by its absence. The truly genteel suitor rejected all mercenary considerations in this most important of life’s choices.

### Lovers Lost

The caricature old maid spurned good offers when young, and pursued any man who came into her orbit when old. A gentlewoman, however, was not under absolute social obligation to marry, whatever popular texts suggested. Circumstances might make it not only acceptable but right for her to reject a suitor. Margaret Ramsay, an Edinburgh spinster who struggled to maintain a genteel household for her mother and sister, refused an offer of marriage in 1828 from an elder in her church. Despite his respectable position, ‘Mr. K’ was a drunkard of unstable character, and the middle-aged Ramsay does not seem to have had any doubts about dismissing him.<sup>76</sup> Even the widely read conduct writer John Gregory, advising his daughters how best to fit themselves for marriage, conceded he would rather see them stay single than marry unwisely. ‘Heaven forbid you should ever relinquish the ease and independence of a single life, to become the slaves of a fool or a tyrant’s caprice,’ he exclaimed.<sup>77</sup>

Women were sometimes willing to say what they wanted in a husband, but they distanced themselves from the stereotype by emphasising the modesty of their wishes. In 1794 Agnes Porter, the Edinburgh-born daughter of a clergyman, imagined that someone like the ‘very amiable’ curate her sister had married, with ‘ten years or more over his age’, would make her ‘a very happy woman’.<sup>78</sup> The ideal (expressed by a nameless poet c.1770) was an ‘Unblemish’d’ character and a fortune

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<sup>75</sup> Seward, *Memoirs*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Ramsay’s journal was probably written for private reflection, although her miniscule shorthand also saved expensive paper. Her birthdate is unknown, but at this time she had been a communicant for 28 years. Mr. K. proposed in March; in May he married another woman, and was seen drunk in public. M. Ramsay, journal, 1828: 27 Jan.; 17 Feb.; 26 Mar.; 7, 8 May (NLS Adv. MS 22.6.7).

<sup>77</sup> J. Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (London/Edinburgh: W. Strahan, T. Cadell; W. Creech, 1774), 109–10, via [www.rc.umd.edu/editions/](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/)

<sup>78</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 22 Jul. 1794, Martin, *Journals*, 144.

‘easy but not great’.<sup>79</sup> ‘Be this my fate if e’er I’m made a wife, / Or keep me happy in a single Life’, the poet prayed.<sup>80</sup> Fifty years later, another anonymous versifier hoped to find a man of ‘open heart, a generous mind, / To be well bred, not too refined, / In judgement good, in reason clear, / In friendship firm, in love sincere’, but, most importantly, ‘Religion must his soul inspire, / That more than all I should desire’.<sup>81</sup> If such a man could not be found, better to remain single than marry ‘a Clown [...] / A fool, a fop, or one ill bred, / [...] / Twill spare my heart full many a pain’.<sup>82</sup> Novelists across the period showed the misery that inevitably ensued if a woman entered marriage for the wrong reasons, such as physical passion or the wish to make a fine figure.

Given the importance of not choosing rashly, even gentlewomen who had received offers were able to construct acceptable frameworks for continuing spinsterhood. A spinster could represent herself as the moral obverse of the foolish old maid by claiming that the memory of a lost love restrained her from marrying. Having once accepted a suitor she believed to be deserving, she could not afterwards bring herself to accept attentions from other men. In this narrative, her singleness resulted from an ideal and reassuring female fidelity, sexual self-control, and acceptance of the dispensations of Providence. In *Pen Tamar, or, The History of an Old Maid* (1831), by the never-married Henrietta Bowdler, the heroine comforts herself in her many trials with the reflection that ‘her feelings were regulated by principle;— her passions were subdued by religion [...] No guilt, no imprudence of her own, had dashed from her lips the untasted cup of happiness: it was not the will of Heaven she should enjoy it; — and let Heaven’s high will be done!’.<sup>83</sup> In private and public texts, similar readings of singleness cast the never-married woman in a positive light regardless of whether her lover had died, defected to a wealthier woman or, alternatively, been rejected by her family for his lack of prospects.

In the case of a lover’s death, a demonstration of discreet but enduring faithfulness to his memory allowed the single woman to imply that her constancy

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<sup>79</sup> ‘The Maiden’s Choice’, in Wulf, *Not all Wives*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> ‘The Choice of a Husband’ (c.1825), in Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, pl. 10.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> H. Bowdler (1750–1830), *Pen Tamar, or, The History of an Old Maid* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), 150, via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)



merited respect. Like the sober widow, she accepted her lot. At a time when many younger sons of genteel families pursued their fortunes in the army, the navy, or the East India Company, it was not uncommon for death to blight, if not necessarily end, a woman's hopes.<sup>84</sup> If her lover left her to pursue a better dowry, she could hint that his heart had guided him to make first choice of a woman endowed only with genteel virtues. Agnes Porter suggested as much in journal entries made in the early months of 1791. Porter, who spent most of her life as a governess to the children and grandchildren of the second earl of Ilchester, kept a series of journals from 1790–1805. Her writing was an exercise in self-monitoring, from which she cut several passages before passing the volumes to her former pupils before her death in 1814.<sup>85</sup> It seems she always intended them to be an *apologia pro vita sua*, and the narrative framework of the lover lured away by wealth explained why she never actually received an offer.

Porter made it clear she would have been glad to find a companion in life. She portrayed herself as socially attractive, capable of 'engrossing a good deal of the gentlemen's attention' by her agreeable conversation.<sup>86</sup> In December 1790 she hoped to hear from a 'particular correspondent'.<sup>87</sup> When the long-awaited letter finally arrived, it 'vexed and disappointed' her, and she resolved to put aside 'too tender an interest' in the writer, Dr Macqueen, 'and in fine not to be duped by the name of friendship to expect, or entertain, a sentiment beyond it'.<sup>88</sup> A few weeks later she noted that Macqueen was 'on the point of matrimony with a lady of fortune'. Disturbed by another 'extraordinary' letter from him, Porter recommended herself 'with entire resignation' to God's will.<sup>89</sup> However, she did not deny herself the satisfaction of recording verbatim Macqueen's greeting when they next met: "My dear Miss Porter, you are her superior, and you will feel yourself so the first instant,

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<sup>84</sup> Nenadic notes that the 'spinster problem' in Highland gentry families was 'partly a consequence of mass employment in the military profession'. 'Impact of the Military Profession', 81–2, 87, 93–4. See, e.g., Jane Innes (case study, chp. 6), whose suitor died of yellow fever on military service; Cassandra Austen's fiancé, a serving military chaplain, also died of yellow fever in 1797. Austen took the blow with 'resolution & propriety' and apparently gave up all thought of marriage; her fiancé's legacy of £1,000 was effectively her widow's portion. C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London/[...]: Viking, 1997), 124–5.

<sup>85</sup> Martin, *Journals*, 1, 3.

<sup>86</sup> 25 Oct. 1796, *ibid.*, 166.

<sup>87</sup> 23 Dec. 1790, *ibid.*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> 8 Jan. 1791, *ibid.*, 100.

<sup>89</sup> 28 Jan., 26 Feb. 1791, *ibid.*, 103, 108. See also Froide, *Never Married*, 188.

but for my sake, search her not with too critical an eye”’. Thereafter Porter mentioned Macqueen only in passing, until another meeting five years later. ‘He said he was as happy, he believed, as most people—there must always be some deficiency’.<sup>90</sup> Wealth and rank had not made up that deficiency, she hinted broadly.

Porter rounded out this picture of opportunity lost by noting—as her hopes of Macqueen disappeared—that she had bought a sixteenth share of a lottery ticket.<sup>91</sup> She had heard a story of a poor gentlewoman whose win of £1,200, also on a sixteenth share, had gained her the better prize of a ‘man of fortune’ who fell in love with her. ‘She now rides in her own coach and proves a woman of good sense and much merit’, wrote Porter, who found by experience that possession of such virtues must be its own reward.<sup>92</sup> Other details of Porter’s narrative reinforce the implication that the only difference between women who married and those who didn’t was luck.<sup>93</sup> Her younger sister, who did not marry her curate until the relatively late age of thirty, had previously been ‘tenderly loved’ and left by a man whom ‘Interest, or prudence it is called, taught [...] to make a more worldly marriage’.<sup>94</sup> The writer Elizabeth Hamilton used her aunt’s experience to illustrate the disjunction between genteel merit and marital reward. Her aunt was left impoverished on her father’s death and her then suitor ‘gave up his mistress as soon as he was desired to seek a richer wife’. Finding that ‘for talents and accomplishments there was at that period no resource’, she had to reconcile herself to marriage with a man of inferior station.<sup>95</sup>

Conversely, if a woman’s preferred suitor was rejected by her family because he was of lower status, or had insufficient prospects, her continuing singleness attested to her appreciation of true worth and her own disdain for mercenary considerations. This neatly turned on its head the popular portrait of the old maid who rejected deserving suitors in the vain expectation of snaring wealth and position. A gentlewoman who claimed the moral high ground in this way was in effect claiming superior gentility, although singleness as a demonstration of both fidelity

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<sup>90</sup> 24 Sept. 1796. Martin, *Journals*, 164.

<sup>91</sup> 6 Feb. 1791, *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>92</sup> 11 Mar. 1791, *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Lady Macartney on her sister Lady Louisa Stuart’s prospects: ‘Never was anybody more unlucky than she is [...] everything that comes to her in the shape of a lover comes attended with very strong objections’. To Lady Portarlington, 14 Apr. 1787, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 82.

<sup>94</sup> 17 Jan. 1791, Martin, *Journals*, 101; see also 42n.105.

<sup>95</sup> Benger, *Memoirs*, I, 13, 15.

and filial obedience was also available to women of lower status. In Skinn's *The Old Maid; Or, History Of Miss Ravensworth*, an 'old maiden housekeeper' justifies her sympathy with a young gentlewoman in romantic difficulties by explaining that in her youth her own family 'hindered her of the man of her choice, and she has lived a maiden for his sake ever since'.<sup>96</sup>

In the case of Marion Trotter, born into a Lothian gentry family in the mid-eighteenth century, it seems no formal approach was made for her hand. However, Trotter openly blamed family members for the departure of 'the only one in the whole world that ever showed me any tenderness or affection'.<sup>97</sup> Her representation of her spinsterhood in terms of family tyranny and unrecognised worth passed into the public realm by inclusion in Clementina Stirling Graham's *Mystifications* (1859) and the *Memoir of Susan Ferrier*.<sup>98</sup> As told in Graham's *Mystifications*, when a young woman Trotter formed a deep and mutual attachment with Jamie Pitcairn, a medical student 'of a noble nature, and [...] kindly heart'.<sup>99</sup> Trotter related this story to her niece when she 'felt that her end was approaching', so it can be assumed she particularly wanted this episode in her life to be remembered, and remembered in the way she told it.<sup>100</sup> The couple had opportunities to meet at the home of Dr Cullen, a prominent and respected physician, and at the home of Trotter's sympathetic eldest sister. Unfortunately Trotter's mother and another sister were 'proud an' overbearing', and their disapproval cut short the young man's suit.<sup>101</sup> One evening, Trotter recalled, as they were talking, 'building our airy castles [...] the door opened and four black eyes like a thunder-cloud darkened the room. They fell upon me like a spell that froze my very hear's blood. I never can forget the look of disdain they coost upon Jamie'.<sup>102</sup> Pitcairn 'never spoke, but took up his hat, gave one kind look

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<sup>96</sup> Skinn, *Miss Ravensworth*, I, 19.

<sup>97</sup> C.S. Graham, *Mystifications* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869), 111.

<sup>98</sup> *Mystifications* is a slightly eccentric, formerly popular memoir of bygone Scottish society and manners. Like Trotter, the never-married Graham was in her day considered a type of the Scots gentlewoman.

<sup>99</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*, 111.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. Jean Marishall was 'astonished at the little attention which is paid to young gentlemen who come [...] to this city to study medicine [...] who, by their appearance and education, are intitled to the best company'. Pitcairn, of respectable lineage and a connection of Cullen's, was entitled to politeness at least. Marishall, *Series of Letters*, II, 106–7.

<sup>102</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*, 113.

to me, opened the door and left the room, and I never saw him again'.<sup>103</sup> As Trotter remembered it, that moment signalled the end of her hopes: 'They were cruel to me. I was ta'en hame to suffer, and he never married'.<sup>104</sup>

A variety of sources undermine the factuality of this dramatic representation, in particular Trotter's assertion that Pitcairn never married. An early letter suggests that Jamie Pitcairn was actually David Pitcairn, who, as Trotter said of her lover, 'rose to distinction in his profession'.<sup>105</sup> Dr David Pitcairn became well known in the London-Scottish medical network; he also married well, to Dr Cullen's niece.<sup>106</sup> Trotter's feelings when a young woman were also less clear-cut than in her final version of events. When her lover left for London she resolved to 'quit as soon as possible every tender impression, which to my utter astonishment was much sooner accomplished than I expected'.<sup>107</sup> Further evidence suggests she did not feel herself suited to the role of wife and mother. Secure in old age, she joked about a 'fearfu' dream' of waking up in heaven, surrounded by 'ten thousands upon ten thousands, o' stark naked weans! That wad be a dreadfu' thing! for ye ken I ne'er could bide bairns a' my days!'<sup>108</sup> She was not alone in these feelings.<sup>109</sup> The unmarried Mary Lamb, commiserating on a friend's miscarriage, added 'Mrs Rickman has just buried her youngest child. I am glad I am an old maid, for you see there is nothing but misfortunes in the marriage state'.<sup>110</sup> Jane Austen, passing on news of a relative's pregnancy, added 'Poor Animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty.—I am very sorry for her.—Mrs Clement too is in that way again. I am quite tired of so many Children.—Mrs Benn has a 13th'.<sup>111</sup> When another relative had her eighteenth child, Austen drily recommended 'the simple regiment of separate rooms'.<sup>112</sup> In public,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>105</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (pre-1793), (GD113/5/81d/3): Trotter describes 'David P-', recently returned from London, and her feelings for him.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. the construction of male professional representations: S. Nenadic, 'Writing Medical Lives, Creating Posthumous Reputations: Dr Matthew Baillie and his Family in the Nineteenth Century', *SHM*, 23:3 (Apr. 2010).

<sup>107</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (pre-1793), (GD113/5/81d/3).

<sup>108</sup> H. Cockburn, *Memorials Of His Time* (Edinburgh/London: T.N. Foulis, 1909), 61.

<sup>109</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 104.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart, 30 Mar. 1810, Burton, *A Double Life*, 234.

<sup>111</sup> Jane Austen to Fanny Knight, 23–5 Mar. 1817, Le Faye, *Letters*, 336. Vickery, discussing women's fears of childbirth, notes 'perinatal complication was probably the single most common cause of death in women aged twenty-five to thirty-four'. *Gentleman's Daughter*, 97–8.

<sup>112</sup> Jane Austen to Fanny Knight, 20–1 Feb. 1817, Le Faye, *Letters*, 330.

however, the diplomatic spinster reassured her acquaintance that ‘the happy wife and mother is placed in a far more useful, – in a far more enviable situation. I will own that such was the happiness on which *my* heart was fixed’.<sup>113</sup>

Sources written across the private/public spectrum naturally suggest a more complex picture. But Marion Trotter’s valedictory self-portrait successfully set her long, socially active life into the approved framework. Her tale of young love thwarted (perhaps rather easily on the gentleman’s part) became, through the *Mystifications*, the enduring representation of her singlehood. It was repeated on the cusp of the twentieth century in the Ferrier *Memoir* (1898), given added credibility by the reminder that James Ferrier senior had been Trotter’s ‘man of affairs’ and the details of her life ‘must have been familiar’ to Susan Ferrier herself.<sup>114</sup>

The adaptability of the framework can be seen by turning for comparison to a woman in very different social circumstances. In adulthood Lady Louisa Stuart had at least two prospective suitors.<sup>115</sup> As a daughter of Lord Bute (who retained his wealth if not his political pre-eminence) she could be seen as a good match. However, like Trotter, it seems doubtful that she had any formal proposals. Focus on the loss of an early love may have helped to distract attention from the fact that both Stuart and her suitors avoided declarations of intent.

Her early attraction to her second cousin Sir William Medows was apparently mutual.<sup>116</sup> Stuart’s readiness to hold him up as a *beau ideal* implies that their involvement was over before his marriage in 1770.<sup>117</sup> At this date she was only thirteen to Medows’s thirty-two, which may have been reason enough for Lord Bute to put a stop to the relationship. According to family lore, he ‘would not hear of an engagement’, although in a retrospective letter Stuart described herself as too socially inexperienced to give Medows appropriate encouragement to prosecute his

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<sup>113</sup> Bowdler, *Pen Tamar*, 167.

<sup>114</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 21. James Ferrier’s main employer and patron was the duke of Argyll, kinsman to Lady Louisa Stuart.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. also Massachusetts spinster Rebecca Dickinson, who referred to an early ‘Stroke which mowed Down all my earthly hopes’, but who also refused two later proposals and acknowledged, ‘my lot is of my own Chusing’. Miller, “‘My Part Alone’”, 366.

<sup>116</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Portarlington, 6 Apr. 1787, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 77.

<sup>117</sup> A.W. Massie, ‘Medows, Sir William (1738–1813)’ (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Jan. 2008).

suit.<sup>118</sup> ‘Good God!’ she wrote in 1787, ‘is it possible that I had happiness within my reach and let it slip for want of knowing the world and myself?’<sup>119</sup> Whether or not the relationship was in any sense a formal courtship, Stuart, for the rest of her life, measured her response to other suitors against her remembrance of what it was ‘to like heartily’ with the intensity of youth.<sup>120</sup>

As Bute’s daughter, she conceived a strong distaste for the political arena, and particularly for the familial pressures which politics imposed upon elite women.<sup>121</sup> By raising the memory of Medows, an honourable serving officer, at the approach of political suitors such as Henry Dundas, Stuart signalled her unwillingness to compromise her standards.<sup>122</sup> Dundas was divorced and steadily expanding his political hegemony in 1785, when his interest became obvious enough to attract the attention of Stuart’s married sisters. They discussed the unfortunate circumstances ‘which must prevent his being an acceptable offer’: aside from being divorced, he had the ‘encumbrances’ of grown daughters still themselves to be married off, and an elderly unmarried sister who had been in charge of his household for some years.<sup>123</sup> However, the daughters might be sent to their aunt, and the sister appeared ‘quite to adore Louisa’.<sup>124</sup> Stuart was urged to consider ‘if you could accept of him, as you are better suited than most people to a man older than you’.<sup>125</sup>

Stuart—who, as Dundas’s wife, could hardly have avoided political involvement—turned aside this advice with the joke that if her sisters wanted preferment, ‘really it is worth your while to pay [me] court’.<sup>126</sup> She hinted that political complications would ultimately dissuade Dundas from making an offer, and indeed the whole affair seems to have been a bit of a damp squib, fizzling out in a matter of weeks. It was two years before another supposed suitor appeared, in the person of John Charles Villiers, second son of the first earl of Clarendon. ‘How very

<sup>118</sup> Clark, *Gleanings*, I, 26. Cf. the bluestocking Elizabeth Robinson, who married Edward Montagu when she was 22, he 50.

<sup>119</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Portarlington, 6 Apr. 1787, Clark, *op. cit.*, II, 77.

<sup>120</sup> Same to same, 13 Mar. 1787, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>121</sup> See L. Stuart, *Memoire*; see also Chalus, *Elite Women*.

<sup>122</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Carlow, May 1785, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 26: ‘Fye upon Cupid, the nasty little devil has used me always ill’.

<sup>123</sup> Lady Macartney to Lady Carlow, 18 May 1785; Lady Carlow to Lady Louisa Stuart, n.d., *ibid.*, 8, 18.

<sup>124</sup> Lady Macartney to Lady Carlow, May 1785, *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Lady Carlow to Lady Louisa Stuart, n.d., *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Carlow, May 1785, *ibid.*, 26.

provoking that he should not have been the eldest brother!’ lamented her sister.<sup>127</sup> But the elder brother was a bachelor, and might remain so. Stuart, now nearly thirty, was depressed at the prospect of ‘marrying prudentially and in sober sadness on the chance of Lord C’s never marrying, and Mr. Pitt’s always continuing minister’.<sup>128</sup> Reminding her sisters of her youthful attachment to Medows, she rejected the idea of accepting a proposal ‘in cold blood for esteem, and good opinion, and convenience’.<sup>129</sup> She made her point again in a subsequent letter. ‘Poor and *triste* as my prospects are, my spirit revolts at the thought of marrying upon such considerations’.<sup>130</sup> In fact, Stuart and Villiers met on only a few social occasions, and she adroitly steered him away from any open declaration. He did not push the matter. ‘I think he will comfort himself elsewhere in half a year’s time’, she told her sisters.<sup>131</sup>

Stuart more than once voiced misgivings about the ‘solitary’ life of the old maid, but she had a busy social network both before and after her mother’s death, when she began making regular, extended visits in Scotland.<sup>132</sup> Six months before Dundas appeared on the scene to raise her sisters’ hopes, she had briskly advised a friend ‘to pluck up a spirit and say, as I was determined to do for the future, instead of I *can’t* and I *shan’t*, I *won’t* marry’.<sup>133</sup> Nonetheless, a woman who represented herself as staying single for the sake of one man risked being seen as emotionally self-indulgent.<sup>134</sup> The narrative of the lost lover was therefore most persuasive when combined with themes of familial duty, and the single woman who lost her chosen suitor and thereafter devoted herself to caring for a relative in default of a husband was one of the most positive representations of never-married women to be found in print culture. Instead of retreating into self-regarding romantic seclusion she was, as

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<sup>127</sup> Lady Macartney to Lady Portarlington, 14 Apr. 1787, *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Portarlington, 13 Mar. 1787, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Same to same, 6 Apr. 1787, *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. Villiers married in 1791; his only child, a daughter, died unmarried in 1835.

<sup>132</sup> See, e.g., Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, Oct. 1821; same to same, May/June 1822, in J.A. Home (ed.), *Letters of Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1901), 192, 257.

<sup>133</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Portarlington, 25 Nov. 1784, Clark, *Gleanings*, I, 293.

<sup>134</sup> See Marianne Dashwood in Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*. Bachelors who justified themselves similarly were accused of hypocritical physical self-indulgence: ‘Has that given him a Distaste to the whole Sex? Does he as much dislike a Lady in Character of Mistress, as he does of Wife? I dare him to answer in the Negative: therefore it is all chimerical’. *Miss Casandra*, 10.

best she could, making herself useful in society. Ross, in her novel *The Balance of Comfort*, epitomised the irreproachable unmarried gentlewoman in the character of Mrs Charlton, handsome, pleasing, heiress to a ‘very considerable’ fortune, but jilted by her lover for a woman of even greater wealth: ‘the recollection of him *preserved* her from matrimony through the rest of her life [...] “The death of my mother, indeed, soon after my unhappy disappointment, threw my father so entirely on my cares for all his domestic comforts, that he soon became reconciled to a determination which secured them to him for ever”’.<sup>135</sup> The protagonist of Frances Brooke’s periodical *The Old Maid*, Mary Singleton, is also abandoned for a richer woman, and when her sister dies leaving an infant daughter, she determines to remain single to devote herself to her niece.<sup>136</sup>

Louisa Stuart secured her place in her family network by her attention to her mother and, when the latter’s death left her with a fortune of £12,000, by financial help to her sister Lady Portarlington’s family.<sup>137</sup> Marion Trotter had a relatively small income and few nieces or nephews, as most of her siblings also remained unmarried.<sup>138</sup> However, in genteel Edinburgh society it was remembered that ‘though slenderly endowed, she did, unnoticed, acts of liberality for which most of the rich would expect to be advertised’.<sup>139</sup> As Trotter’s case suggests, generalised benevolence, if unostentatiously performed, was another acceptable framework in which unmarried gentlewomen could set their lives.

### Examples of piety

Among the extremes of representation to which the never-married were subject were the old maid who blasphemed by refusing the conjugal/maternal roles allotted her by God, and the old maid who blasphemed by railing against the single state allotted her by Providence. Evident piety was to some extent a safeguard against these charges. Even the author of the *Satyr Upon Old Maids* acknowledged in an exculpatory ‘Postscript’ that ‘there be some who continue Maids to Old Age, through Choice, on prudent or pious Considerations; who deserve all the Encomiums [that] can be

<sup>135</sup> Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, 25, 178, 182.

<sup>136</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 178.

<sup>137</sup> Lady Macartney to Lady Portarlington, 8 Nov. 1794, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 222. See also chp. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Roles and hierarchies in their connected households are examined in chp. 7.

<sup>139</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 60.



merited by the Best of their Sex'.<sup>140</sup> A narrative of pious singlehood can be read as a moral refinement of narratives of familial duty: a woman who remained at home to look after her parents, for example, daily fulfilled the commandment to honour her father and mother. If, on the other hand, she had few connections and lived alone, she could emphasise her resignation to the will of God, who had detached her from worldly ties to prepare her for her true home in heaven.<sup>141</sup> A spinster who represented herself as a pious Christian gentlewoman might still be socially disregarded if she lived very simply, but she could not easily be disrespected, as the author of the *Satyr* acknowledged.

Public piety indicated nuances of social position. Never-married women who lacked confidence in their status may have found their social identity strengthened by adherence to congregational practice and doctrine, as Margaret Ramsay did. During the years she lived in Edinburgh, Ramsay conscientiously attended the city's popular St Cuthbert's parish church. Due to her small income this seems to have been her only regular social interaction, other than the frequent letters she exchanged with a close friend, unmarried like herself. In 1827 she noted in her journal that she and her mother had been asked, along with prominent divines such as Dr Thomas Chalmers and Dr Robert Gordon, to approve a new minister. Ramsay's elderly mother replied that the appointment would be 'highly gratifying' to them, and Ramsay's record of the occasion suggests both women appreciated this mark of membership of the city's more refined nineteenth-century evangelical circles, to which Susan Ferrier also belonged.<sup>142</sup>

Gentlewomen secure in their rank often gave religion a more personal expression through acts of charitable benevolence which they directed as they saw fit. In memoirs of never-married gentlewomen written by relatives or friends, their piety is illustrated not by the regularity of their church attendance, but by their charitable interaction with others. Marion Trotter rarely went to church, saying she

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<sup>140</sup> *Satyr*, 12.

<sup>141</sup> This theme was expressed repeatedly in the diary of Massachusetts spinster Rebecca Dickinson, who recorded her religious conversion at the age of 23, the 'same year when other women chose a mate'. Dickinson reassured herself that her 'Solitary' state was 'the will of god Concerning me no other Place would Doe [...] to wean me from the world'. Miller, "'My Part Alone'", 344, 350, 351–3.

<sup>142</sup> Ferrier's family burying place was in St Cuthbert's; Ferrier herself joined the Free Church after the Disruption. Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 326n.1, 339.

‘never profited by their lang prayers and their weary sermons’, and moreover had no interest in looking at her neighbours in their Sunday finery.<sup>143</sup> However, the biographical *Mystifications* shows her putting Christianity into practice among those same neighbours. Passing the home of a sick widow, Trotter called in, to find the woman on her deathbed commending her children to God’s care. She returned home and instructed her niece to transfer £2,000 of her savings ‘for behoof of thae orphan bairns’, explaining that she wanted ‘to make good the words, “that God wad provide for them,” for what else was I sent that way this morning, but as a humble instrument in His hands?’<sup>144</sup> On another occasion, she saved from hanging a friend’s only son, a ‘simpleton’ who had stolen £500 in his position as a bank clerk. Trotter halted proceedings by paying down the sum, and gave the same again to send the youth abroad.<sup>145</sup> Benevolence—a core element of genteel female patronage—not only bound a never-married gentlewoman into her family networks, but also demonstrated her capacity to do good in the wider social sphere.<sup>146</sup> It was not measured solely in monetary terms. Susan Ferrier, like many of her peers, believed ‘few things are more hurtful than lavish and indiscriminate charity’.<sup>147</sup> In old age she had ‘little of gold or silver’ to give, but she continued to set a social example by sending her maid to the home of poor acquaintances ‘to aid them in Christian offices, no less precious in the sight of God!’<sup>148</sup> No one who read her letters, said her biographer, could doubt that ‘a deep sense of religion [...] ran through Miss Ferrier’s life’.<sup>149</sup> The acceptability of piety as a framework for the single life can be gauged by the fact that it was adopted by relatives and friends writing about never-married women, as well as by women writing about themselves.

Piety—along with more worldly virtues like politeness and learning—was circumscribed by notions of propriety; by definition, a pious gentlewoman did not challenge the established order. Anything approaching religious fervour was suspect. Catholicism remained beyond the pale in popular culture, and Protestant

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<sup>143</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*, 115.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–10.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–11.

<sup>146</sup> Charity and benevolence in never-married women’s patronage activity is examined further in chp. 5.

<sup>147</sup> Susan Ferrier to Helen Tovey-Tennent, 7/8 Nov. 1851, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 319.

<sup>148</sup> Same to same, 1 Oct. n.y., *ibid.*, 329.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

nonconformism continued to be regarded with a degree of distaste by the orthodox genteel. The importance of the context in which piety was enacted can be seen in the case of May Drummond, daughter of an Edinburgh gentry family. Drummond was persuaded to become a Quaker in her early twenties, and around 1735 she left Scotland for England, where her public preaching attracted notice from all classes.<sup>150</sup> The lowest ranks gathered to hear her, and a royal audience added to her fame. She published a book on personal religious revelation, and a poem in her praise appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Arguably her self-representation as a pious woman was successful. But Drummond failed to reconcile her chosen sphere of action with her genteel status. Her relatives (including her brother, several times lord provost of Edinburgh and promoter of the city's New Town) were Church of Scotland members who strongly disapproved of her Quakerism. Her Friends, meanwhile, became uneasy about her habit of mentioning genteel connections. Like her family, they censured her for drawing too much attention to herself. In the late 1750s Drummond returned to Scotland, but neither her kin nor the Scottish Quaker community welcomed her, and her reputation slipped until her certificate to preach was withdrawn in 1764. She returned to England and spent several years travelling there, before returning in 1772 to Edinburgh, where she died. Her family 'forgave her sufficiently to allow her to be buried in the family vault'.<sup>151</sup> Drummond's situation can be compared with never-married women of lower rank who found that ministry in Quaker and other nonconformist communities offered them a public role and voice.<sup>152</sup> For a gentlewoman, however, association with movements which were seen as levelling was problematic.<sup>153</sup> When the influential moral commentator Hannah More's Church of England faith was revitalised by evangelicalism in the 1780s, she

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<sup>150</sup> G. Skidmore, 'Drummond, May (1709/10–1772)' (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> See, e.g., Hannah Ball, Ann Crowley, and Mary Alexander: E.D. Graham, 'Ball, Hannah (1734–1792)' (ODNB 2004 online); G. Skidmore, 'Crowley, Ann (1765–1826)' and 'Alexander, Mary (1760–1809)' (ODNB 2004 online). Both Crowley and Alexander had familial care commitments, but successfully represented their religious commitments as priorities. Cf. also prominent American Quaker communities in which pious single gentlewomen were accepted as positive role models. Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 41–55 passim, 83.

<sup>153</sup> Aristocratic women, by virtue of high rank and wealth, were largely able to rise above such criticisms, e.g., Lady Anne Agnes Erskine, never-married daughter of the 10<sup>th</sup> earl of Buchan, and a friend and trustee of the prominent Methodist supporter Selina, countess of Huntingdon. E.D. Graham, 'Erskine, Lady Anne Agnes (1739–1804)' (ODNB 2004 online).

was publicly accused of ‘fostering schism, Methodism, and Jacobinism’.<sup>154</sup> To first win and then maintain respect, the pious single gentlewoman had to convey orthodox sincerity without ostentation.

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The narrative frameworks outlined in this chapter worked for never-married gentlewomen because they were inclusive in several ways. They were available to gentlewomen of all degrees. A demonstration of filial duty enhanced the reputation of aristocrat or governess alike.<sup>155</sup> Women in circumstances as diverse as hymn writers, radicals and popular moralists, educationalists, salonistes, and successful and debt-ridden authors, all posited a lost lover as a shaping factor in the story of their lives.<sup>156</sup> Piety, if appropriately expressed, qualified a never-married gentlewoman to claim a place in civic Protestant society even if lack of money limited her sociability.

The narratives also spoke of concerns common to all gentlewomen: the proper performance of duty and piety; the difficulty of finding the right spouse. Even solitude, that emblematic motif of the old maid, was something which other gentlewomen might suffer and sympathise with. Wives too could be socially isolated by lack of female company of their own rank.<sup>157</sup> Hester Thrale, a successful hostess to male homosocial conviviality, complained that it was ‘melancholy’ to have ‘nobody one can speak to about one’s clothes, or one’s child, or one’s health, or what comes uppermost. Nobody but *Gentlemen*, before whom one must suppress everything except the mere formalities of conversation’.<sup>158</sup> Louisa Stuart, who late in life emphasised the difference between ‘the solitary old maid’ and ‘the daughter of people of any consideration in the world’, wrote in her twenties of family life at the

<sup>154</sup> S.J. Skedd, ‘More, Hannah (1745–1833)’ (ODNB 2004 online; online edn May 2009).

<sup>155</sup> The governess Agnes Porter’s employer reassured her she had acted ‘quite properly’ when she absented herself to care for her ill mother. Martin, *Journals*, 128.

<sup>156</sup> E.g. Anne Steele, Mary Hays, Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Harriet Lee, Mary Berry, and Mary Latter. J.R. Watson, ‘Steele, Anne (1717–1778)’ (ODNB 2004 online; online edn May 2005); M.L. Brooks, ‘Hays, Mary (1759–1843)’ (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Oct. 2009); Skedd, op. cit.; McCormack, op. cit.; A. Alliston, ‘Lee, Harriet (1757/8–1851)’ (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Jan. 2008); C. Kent rev. P. Rogers, ‘Berry, Mary (1763–1852)’ (ODNB 2004 online); T.A.B. Corley, ‘Latter, Mary (bap.1722, d.1777)’ (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>157</sup> One genteel wife whose husband refused to socialise cited her solitude as justifiable grounds for separation. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 199.

<sup>158</sup> Rizzo, *Companions*, 89.

Stuart seat of Luton Hoo in the same terms in which Elizabeth Hamilton wrote of life with her uncle, and Susan Ferrier of life with her father.<sup>159</sup> In the summer of 1778 she was at Luton with her parents and two brothers. ‘I only see them at meals’ she despaired.<sup>160</sup> As her parents always retired alone to the library after tea she attempted conversation with her brothers, but was defeated by them ‘eternally walking backwards and forwards, or now and then flinging themselves upon the couch, yawning’. ‘Sometimes, indeed, they have got into a dispute’, she wrote to her sister, ‘but otherwise I give you an exact description how our evening passes till there is a joyful acclamation at the sound of the supper bell. The rest of the day is employed as usual in trailing to the farm and dawdling to the flower garden’.<sup>161</sup> Stuart, drifting around Luton’s ‘inconvenient melancholy magnificence’, was little better off for company and conversation than Hamilton marching up and down her gravel-walk.<sup>162</sup> Cultivated social interaction was so central to the concept of gentility that a spinster who voiced concern about her opportunities to participate was arguably underlining her rank in her readers’ minds, rather than casting doubt on it.

This chapter has shown how never-married gentlewomen accounted for and justified their singlehood by expressing themselves in terms of virtues deemed particularly appropriate to their condition, such as filial piety and submission to Providence. The next chapter looks at how they represented themselves in terms of valued familial roles. Letters, wills, and obituary notices show that many never-married women lived not with parents but with a bachelor brother. Others (less easily discovered) moved into the home of a married sibling.<sup>163</sup> Not surprisingly, single gentlewomen in these circumstances emphasised that their relationship with their fellow householders was one of mutual assistance and obligation, not the dependence assumed in popular culture. If both the household and the single woman’s income were large enough, the problem could be dealt with by clear demarcations of physical space and financial contribution. A Yorkshire spinster who spent her adult life in the home of a sister and brother-in-law kept accounts for nearly thirty years

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<sup>159</sup> Stuart, *Memoire*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Dawson, 21 Jul. 1778, Clark, *Gleanings*, I, 23.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Same to same, 15 Jul. 1778, *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>163</sup> Wulf highlights this difficulty in *Not all Wives*, 85–7, 203.

recording her regular payments of board for herself and two servants.<sup>164</sup> She had two private rooms, and joint use of at least one public room in the house. Her long tenure suggests the arrangement worked well, but a spinster who lived in this style was less common than the woman who joined a married sibling's household and embedded herself by her practical contribution to the everyday running of home, family, and sometimes business. Her role was effectively that of a wife, a fact acknowledged in personal writing, if seldom in printed texts. This was true to an even greater extent for a single gentlewoman living with a bachelor brother. Her household responsibilities and routines mirrored those of her married peers, and by drawing attention to this she demanded the respect and social consideration due to the mistress of a household. The following chapter examines how the conceptual framework of the marital household was used by never-married women in claiming status within their families and social networks.

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<sup>164</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 213.



## Chapter 3

### The domestic manager: dependent sibling or household linchpin?

When the evidence of personal writing is taken into account, the popular conjunction of ‘wife and mother’ begins to look less like description and more like a prescriptive attempt to claim for married women exclusive rights to a social role which could be, and often was, amply fulfilled by the never married. Unmarried gentlewomen regularly took up the managerial role which was allotted in popular ideology to their married counterparts. Relatives and friends acknowledged this, to the extent that some never-married women were called wives within their families. Flexibility in defining relationship (stretched to apparent contradiction in this instance) was not unusual in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but to some degree the social and practical meanings once implicit in ‘wife’ need to be rediscovered. Tadmor shows that close kinship terms such as mother and father were used to describe social roles as well as blood and legal relationships: ‘the recognition of these relationships by naming [...] was an announcement of status and a possible undertaking of obligations’.<sup>1</sup> Some single women joined the families of married siblings and lifted the weight of management from wives confined by regular childbearing. Others kept house with bachelor brothers, mirroring the arrangements and dynamics of marital households. The language used by siblings living together shows that the marital household needs to be historiographically understood beyond its legal boundaries. It also provided a framework in which to express variants on the ideal of a household headed by the complementary authority figures of master and mistress. A brother noted that he began housekeeping with his sister ‘the same day on which my father was married’, suggesting he understood their establishment of a sibling household as a transition to domestic maturity.<sup>2</sup> The artist Sir Joshua Reynolds never married, but it was only when his sister and housekeeper Frances

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<sup>1</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 140–4, 158. Cressy notes that in English, relational terms were ‘limited and loose’ and used ‘without precision or consistency’. ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction’, 65–6, 68. Letters cited here show that looseness allowed these terms to be used with precise purpose; addressing a relative by a close kin term invoked the expectations belonging to that relationship.

<sup>2</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 74. The bachelor diarist’s sister later married and he lived with an ‘old maid’ cousin and his niece, retreating to lodgings when he had no kinswoman to manage his household.



was absent from home that he felt himself to be ‘quite a batchelor’.<sup>3</sup> When his sister returned to take charge again he could expect, like a husband, that domestic affairs would be ordered for his comfort. Some siblings explicitly referred to themselves as married couples: a sister thought herself her brother’s widow when he went abroad for a long period; another accompanied her ‘faithful husband’ when he travelled on business.<sup>4</sup> Married men who had a never-married sister or sister-in-law ready to help with the business of running a household spoke gratefully of their ‘dear wives’, or congratulated themselves on being ‘clever [enough] to have two wives’.<sup>5</sup> The non-legal meanings attached to marital terms are underlined by married couples’ complementary usage of the language belonging to singleness: in 1813 a young wife making familial visits wrote to her husband that she felt ‘quite an unmarried miss’ without him or her house to attend to, and thought herself in a ‘widowed state’.<sup>6</sup>

The domestic union of brother and sister, like the marital union of husband and wife, also had moral responsibilities. The lives of the never-married writers Charles and Mary Lamb were blighted by episodes of insanity, mostly Mary’s. Her brother reminded himself of their concern and responsibility for each other by recording ‘she has cleaved to me, for better, for worse’.<sup>7</sup> At Christmas 1797, when she was in an asylum, he described himself as ‘a widowed thing’.<sup>8</sup> Charles Lamb’s reflections on his co-dependent relationship with his sister make it clear that such unions could provide important emotional as well as practical support.<sup>9</sup> Use of words like wife, husband, widow expressed close bonds as well as recognition of status—although, as Wulf observes, an unmarried woman who feared her bachelor brother

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>4</sup> Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 107; C. Adams, ‘A Choice Not To Wed? Unmarried Women In Eighteenth-Century France’, *JSH*, 29:4 (summer 1996), 886.

<sup>5</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 77; Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 85. Philadelphian Henry Drinker had a close relationship with his sister-in-law Mary Sandwith; he had relied on her to promote his courtship and, in symbolic forecast of their future household arrangements, assured her she had a ‘large Apartment’ in his heart. Eustace, “‘Cornerstone of a Copious Work’”, 526.

<sup>6</sup> Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 68–9.

<sup>7</sup> Burton, *A Double Life*, 3. Notably, Charles also expressed moral obligation to his father by describing himself as ‘wedded [...] to the fortunes of my sister and my poor old father’. Ibid., 112.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hemphill, who cites ‘veritable love letters’ between American brothers and sisters, and ‘emotional language’ between brothers, in the context of the ‘egalitarian’ post-revolutionary period (*Siblings*, 7, 67); see also Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 328. Idioms of attachment were used in a variety of contexts with different intent; see also chp. 4 below.

would marry might foresee herself as a widow.<sup>10</sup> This event could lead to a sudden and painful change in status and circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Wordsworth's symbolic wearing of her brother's wedding ring the night before his marriage in 1802 may have been a unique gesture, but her situation was far from being so.<sup>12</sup> The astronomer Caroline Herschel destroyed diaries covering the period of her brother's marriage in 1788 and her subsequent move into lodgings, a hint of the turmoil caused by the rupture or realignment of a close relationship.<sup>13</sup> Both private writing and published texts indicate that tensions were expected to arise between a new wife and a domestically established sister-in-law.<sup>14</sup> However, if many brothers took their sisters' contribution to their wellbeing for granted, others showed sensitivity to the sibling bond. Both William Wordsworth and Charles Lamb dedicated their first volumes of published poetry to their sisters, a public avowal of obligation.<sup>15</sup> When Lamb proposed marriage to the actress Frances Kelly in 1819 he asked her to join 'us', making it clear Kelly, if she accepted, would become a partner in an existing and enduring relationship.<sup>16</sup> In the late eighteenth century William Constable of Burton Constable did not marry his 'long-term sweetheart' until after the death of his sister Winifred, with whom he had chosen to be represented in a joint portrait as the Roman republican Cato and his wife Marcia.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 107. Cf. Gaskell's *Cranford*: at the end, when Miss Matty's long-lost brother returns to offer a financially secure and happy home together, her friends have a last-minute panic: 'If Peter should marry, what would become of poor dear Miss Matty?'. *Cranford*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the feelings of sisters, and brothers, on the marriage of a mothering sister. Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 137, 139–40.

<sup>12</sup> P. Woof (ed.), *Dorothy Wordsworth, The Grasmere Journals* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 126. Her intense feelings have sometimes been read by historians as incestuous. As this thesis is concerned with representations of never-married women, by themselves and others, and there are no contemporary suggestions of incest regarding the Scottish case studies, the fact or otherwise of incest in specific relationships is not considered here (cf., e.g., Horace Walpole's gossip about Elizabeth and Thomas Pitt. Froide, *Never Married*, 63). For a review of sibling incest and the Wordsworths in particular, see Davidoff, *op. cit.*, chp. 8, especially 205, quoting Reiman, 'our real subject is emotional attachment', and 209, arguing the link between Dorothy's attachment and her 'domestic dream'.

<sup>13</sup> M. Hoskin, 'Herschel, Caroline Lucretia (1750–1848)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Oct. 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Ross, *Balance of Comfort* (II, 210), has a mercenary young wife refer contemptuously to her new husband's sister and aunts as 'the three old maids [...] so long accustomed to rule'. Cf. chp. 2, 77: Lady Louisa Stuart's sister noted that at least Dundas's spinster sister/housekeeper was not likely to be difficult—suggesting the opposite was generally assumed.

<sup>15</sup> Burton, *A Double Life*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 310–11. Cf. the Wordsworths to Mary Hutchinson, Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 210.

<sup>17</sup> Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune', 394–5; the portrait's potential meanings are not examined (Cato divorced his second wife Marcia so she could marry and give heirs to his friend, and then received her back into his household on the latter's death).

These examples of marital language and imagery in the context of sisters and brothers living together are a reminder that this relationship was not simply a case of never-married women providing ‘free’ or ‘unpaid’ housekeeping in return for a home, as Froide and Vickery define it.<sup>18</sup> The previous chapter showed that a never-married gentlewoman could claim familial respect by acting as household manager for a father or other older male relative. As household manager for a sibling of similar age to herself, she had potentially greater opportunities for improving her social as well as her familial status. (Both Mary Lamb and Sarah Sophia Banks, for example, enjoyed the company and recognition of a range of literary and scientific visitors to the London homes they shared with their better known brothers.<sup>19</sup>) A well managed household was a powerful signifier of gentility, and the mistress of a household was in principle the apogee of genteel feminine status. This was the role which gentlewomen were expected to fulfil, and the one for which they were practically and morally educated.<sup>20</sup> Non-marriage did not release them from this expectation. Families assumed single gentlewomen had a responsibility to help where they were needed, just as they assumed relatives in high places had a responsibility to help those further down the ladder. Inevitably some women felt this to be an imposition (for example, Ann Pitt, who accused her politician brother of wanting a domestic ‘slave’<sup>21</sup>), but others turned it to their advantage. Here, a brief overview of how never-married women could claim status through the role of household manager precedes case studies of Margaret Adam and her niece Susanna Clerk, whose familial status as household managers of the Adam family’s architectural enterprise in London rested partly on the good opinion of their kin in Scotland. Adam’s and Clerk’s experiences show that the respect accorded to the household manager by her immediate and wider family rested as much on her skilful management of relationships and hierarchies as on her practical capabilities. These

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<sup>18</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 60; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 211. See intro., 22 above.

<sup>19</sup> Burton, *A Double Life*, 150, 324; J. Gascoigne, ‘Banks, Sarah Sophia (1744–1818)’ (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>20</sup> Such tutelage, usually under maternal supervision, went mostly unremarked outwith prescriptive texts; more attention was given in family papers to the results of paid-for tutoring. For familial expectations of female education, see Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, chp. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 61. Unmarried or married, women used similar language to challenge overbearing household patriarchs. Lady Louisa Stuart, however, described Pitt as her brother’s ‘counterpart’. *Account*, 57.

case studies complement studies of the Scottish marital household by Barclay and Leneman, by contributing to the ‘detailed examinations of the “lived” family experience’ which remain particularly called for with regard to never-married women.<sup>22</sup>

A genteel wife was expected to host social interactions, to promote her husband’s public and if necessary his professional reputation, to increase her immediate family’s status by patronage to poorer relatives and other carefully selected dependants, and, of course, to mother the next generation. Short of actually bearing the children, all these duties could be fulfilled by a never-married household manager in a variety of domestic contexts. Indeed, helping to mother and educate a growing family of nephews and nieces was one of the main reasons why single women joined the households of their married sisters and brothers. As Larsen notes, the single woman was ‘empowered by demonstrating her feminine ability to care for children’.<sup>23</sup> The family of a Manchester physician benefited in the mid-eighteenth century from the practical support of the youngest (and perhaps the fittest) of his five never-married sisters. She lived in his household, helping to educate her oldest nephew and nurse the younger children, and in addition became her brother’s business partner, jointly creating a shorthand system which was patented under his name.<sup>24</sup> (He acknowledged her input, calling the patent bill ‘hers’, ‘just as I would call everything that I can call my own yours’.<sup>25</sup>) Occasionally, the presence of a co-manager sanctioned wives’ absence from their homes to fulfil potentially conflicting duties of care in their natal families.<sup>26</sup> In this context the never-married woman could

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<sup>22</sup> Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*; Leneman, i.a. ““A natural foundation in equity””, ““Disregarding the Matrimonial Vows””; R. O’Day, in Barker and Chalus, *Gender*, 17. E.g., Vickery asserts that bachelors ‘had the burden of creating their own domesticity’ and ‘had to marry to benefit in full from housekeeping’ even if unattracted to women. Her review of single women’s domestic circumstances notes the widely evident sibling household only in passing (*Behind Closed Doors*, 56, 82, 210). This imbalance in family history, noted by Froide, is partly redressed by Davidoff, although the latter’s statement that only a ‘minority’ of never-married siblings passed their lives together implies this was particular to their domestic relationships, rather than evidence of the extent to which household families generally were permeable and variable in composition—cf. Tadmor, *Family and Friends*. Froide, *Never Married*, 44, 52, 75; Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Larsen, ‘For Want of a Good Fortune’, 396.

<sup>24</sup> Phebe and John Byrum. Froide, *Never Married*, 77. See also the Drinker/Sandwith family, Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 85–6, and Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 142–3, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Froide, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Wulf instances a family in which this arrangement enabled the wife’s regular absences over 6 years, caring for her ill father. *Not All Wives*, 109.

claim recognition and gratitude from both immediate and wider kin. If she contributed financially to the household, or invested (as some did) in family business ventures, she conformed to the assumption that a single woman's wealth was in trust and should be available to her family if needed, while at the same time reinforcing her status as a contributor to, rather than a consumer of, household resources.

A sister running a bachelor brother's household could expect to have a greater degree of responsibility and recognition than a co-manager in a married sibling's household. In the latter case, the married couple had social precedence outside the home, and the wife was expected to lead sociability within it, at least as a figurehead. Contemporary texts urging marriage highlight the importance of well managed domestic sociability to gentlemen wishing to promote themselves in polite society.<sup>27</sup> However, professional men in particular often found that their ability to attract a wife with good connections was hindered by insecurity of income and status while they were establishing themselves.<sup>28</sup> Lawyers, men in middling government positions, and physicians fell into this group.<sup>29</sup> Genteel but not wealthy Scottish families who maintained London establishments in order to aggrandise themselves can also be included. Many men in these circumstances relied on politely educated spinster sisters to fill the gap.<sup>30</sup> When the physician Matthew Baillie set up for himself in London in the early 1780s, his sisters Agnes and Joanna and their widowed mother came down from the family's small Lanarkshire estate in order to run his household. Baillie relied on them for nearly a decade, until he made a good marriage in 1791.<sup>31</sup> The Perth burghs M.P. George Dempster (hard hit by the costs of re-elections in the 1760s) was joined in London in 1762 by his sister Jean, who spent

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., *Recantation*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> For the evolving status of professional men, see Corfield, *Power and the Professions*.

<sup>29</sup> Many are found in the ODNB, among them the physician Thomas Milner who processed to church every Sunday with his 3 unmarried sisters following 'in linear succession'. N. Moore rev. C.L. Nutt, 'Milner, Thomas (1719–1797)' (ODNB 2004 online). Upper trade and artisan families also concentrated assets in never-married sibling households.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the newly returned, wealthy, but not yet established Edinburgh nabob of whom Susan Ferrier commented, 'He has got a sister and a female cousin to do the honours, but they are invisible to the prying eyes of man. I suppose they are in training, as they are but newly imported from the country; their manners have not yet received the last finish'. To Mrs Connell, 10 Feb. c.1801, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> J. Jones, 'Baillie, Matthew (1761–1823)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Jan. 2008).

several years as mistress of his household and his companion in public sociability.<sup>32</sup> James Boswell approvingly described the pair as having ‘gentleness of manners as well as cleverness’.<sup>33</sup> Jean in particular created a favourable impression when she ‘threw out elegant sentiments’ in conversation, suggesting she took care to display social polish when opportunity arose.<sup>34</sup>

Sibling couples such as the Dempsters clearly benefited from their domestic co-operation. Similarly successful relationships were described by friends and connections in the same language which described the pattern married couple: the sibling pair were ‘devoted’ and had ‘but one mind between them’, or were ‘univocal’.<sup>35</sup> Mary Lamb was praised for ‘the sweetness of her disposition, the clearness of her understanding, and the gentle wisdom of all her acts and words’; despite her periods of insanity she was ‘enabled to guide, to counsel, to cheer’—in other words, she had an ideal wifely nature.<sup>36</sup> It was implied that her relationship with her brother was marriage in its purest form: ‘their Union of affection is what we conceive of marriage in Heaven’.<sup>37</sup> ‘Univocal’, however, can easily be read as being the man’s voice, and Lamb herself once reflected that the younger brother she had once dominated had ‘become my lord & master’.<sup>38</sup> Sibling unions were no more likely to be harmonious than marital ones. Unlike a wife, a sister was not legally subsumed in the head of the household; nor had she stood at the altar and promised to obey. But a spinster sister still had to negotiate the dynamics of a family hierarchy determined by ‘gender, birth order and access to capital’.<sup>39</sup> Single women sometimes found it difficult to claim familial capital they were due, while others found that a brother’s autocratic exercise of authority left them inhabiting only the shadow, not the substance, of a managerial role.<sup>40</sup> The prudent spinster did not rely on the sibling tie alone, but gauged which relationships among her extended kin would boost her

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<sup>32</sup> F.A. Pottle (ed.) *Boswell’s London Journal 1762–1763* (London: The Reprint Society, 1952), 40, 68, passim.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>35</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*, 102, 103; Burton, *A Double Life*, 363.

<sup>36</sup> Burton, *op. cit.*, 164. Cf. chp. 2, 59.

<sup>37</sup> Burton, *ibid.*, 253.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 324.

<sup>39</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 203; see also L. Davidoff, ‘Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century English Siblings’, *JSH*, 39:2 (winter 2005), 415.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Froide, *Never Married*, 63.

status and buttress her position in the wider family. Such relationships were established and nurtured through familial patronage, expressed in a variety of ways. This could range from acting as a supplier/courier of valued commodities (urban luxuries and gossip, rural provisions or local news) to creating mutually beneficial openings for relatives to join the household for brief or extended periods. Several of these strategies were practised by Margaret Adam, the subject of the first case study.

### *Roles and reciprocity: Margaret Adam*

All the Adam siblings, married and unmarried, were expected to play a part in ‘endeavours to elevate the race of Adam’.<sup>41</sup> The eighteenth-century advancement of this professional family from Fife was driven by Robert Adam, who laid the foundations for success well before his ambitious move to set up an architectural practice in London. He and his younger brother James toured Italy in the mid-1750s, taking care to present themselves as gentlemen amateurs rather than professionals in training.<sup>42</sup> His unmarried sisters at home in the Scottish capital were also encouraged to think strategically. Robert monitored their progress in French and commented on their management of existing and new friendships.<sup>43</sup> Meantime he began making plans to launch a household in London, with ‘Furniture & Servants & Chariot [...] & the Lord knows what all’. This, he admitted to his brother James, would be a ‘very Serious & Laborious Task’.<sup>44</sup> He was not of high enough rank to make a marriage which matched his ambition, so there was no other remedy than ‘calling to my aid Some of our Females, Two of whom transporting themselves to London by the time I arrive, will with Judgement & Oeconomy aid me in Domestick determinations, &

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<sup>41</sup> James Adam to Margaret Adam, 13 Dec. 1760 (GD18/4878): Clerk of Penicuik papers, NRS (hereafter GD18/).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Adam’s self-belief and early success with the chequered parallel career of his architectural contemporary William Mylne, who also travelled to Italy with his brother in hope of launching in London. Mylne’s brother achieved some success; Mylne, a bachelor, lived in Edinburgh (briefly with an unmarried sister) until professional and financial embarrassment prompted his emigration to America and Ireland. R. Ward, *The Man Who Buried Nelson: The Surprising Life of Robert Mylne* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2007), 20–30, 79, 101–2.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Adam to Margaret Adam, 27 Mar. 1756 (GD18/4804); same to same, 10 Jan. 1756 (GD18/4796); see also J. Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle* (London: John Murray, 1962), 187; Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 30–2.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Adam to James Adam, 24 Jul. 1756 (GD18/4811). He estimated the combined cost of business/household/family at c.£700 p.a. Same to Margaret Adam, 13 Nov. 1756 (GD18/4825).

leave me more time to transact my Worldly Interests'.<sup>45</sup> In judging his sisters' involvement as interchangeable and their contributions in the aggregate, Robert revealed how far they were expected to submerge their individual identity in that of the family. Nonetheless he acknowledged indirectly that their roles in the London venture would be complementary, not subsidiary, to his own. From Rome in 1756 he admitted to his sister Margaret the difficulties of maintaining professional sociability as a travelling bachelor: 'I have 2 grand dinners to give, to those who have so often had me to dine I wish I had one of you gipsys to direct it, but I must do the best I can'.<sup>46</sup>

In the Adam family papers, Margaret Adam emerges early as Robert's preferred correspondent and a family mediator. The same year, again from Rome, he complained about his brothers' failure to communicate, and asked for 'ample Information' about their activities and intentions.<sup>47</sup> He urged her to use her influence indirectly to make sure workmen were employed in Scotland who would be useful later in London.<sup>48</sup> Although physical distance exacerbated family tensions (particularly between Robert and his eldest brother John, head of both the family and the Scottish practice), gentility demanded that family hierarchies be maintained, in private as well as in public. Via Margaret, Robert reassured his siblings that he looked for the advice of the 'united Body' of the family in 'Corum'.<sup>49</sup> He could expect his sister to repeat this conciliatory phrasing when reading aloud his projected schemes to the assembled Edinburgh household.

When Margaret Adam moved south to join the London household a few years later, she was still unmarried. By contemporary standards she had failed to make the most of her education and opportunities. Nonetheless, over nearly five decades she grew to be a pivotal figure in a never-married household which included at various stages her brothers Robert, James and William, her sisters Janet, Elizabeth and Eleanor, her niece Susanna Clerk, a nephew looking to benefit from metropolitan

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Adam to James Adam, *ibid.* Glover points out that the Adams 'occupied a much lower rung on the social ladder than even the more modest families [...] whose houses they helped to remould'. *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Adam to Margaret Adam, 13 Nov. 1756 (GD18/4825). He also told his sisters he had 'fully considered' their advice on taking a house. Same to same, 14 Jan. 1757 (GD18/4830).

<sup>47</sup> Same to same, 10 Jan. 1756 (GD18/4796).

<sup>48</sup> Same to same, 27 Mar. 1756 (GD18/4804).

<sup>49</sup> Same to same, 2 Oct. 1756 (GD18/4820).



connections, and a genteel complement of servants. In her early years in London Margaret continued to play a part in forwarding her brothers' business affairs. At this time her sisters were also involved: in 1762, for example, James, still in Italy, wrote to Janet requesting information, and received his reply from Elizabeth.<sup>50</sup> However, as the London household took shape with Robert at its head, Margaret again emerged as the main intermediary.<sup>51</sup> By the 1780s her position was established enough for letters to sometimes be addressed to her directly as her brothers' representative. Correspondents evidently expected her to be conversant with her brothers' business activities and able to relay important information during their frequent absences from home. Included in the range of correspondence she received were patronage approaches and a long verbatim report of a civic meeting relevant to Robert's commissions in Scotland.<sup>52</sup> Margaret may have made active efforts to secure this intermediary role for herself during a period when her older sisters were nominally in charge of domestic management. As their health deteriorated her domestic responsibilities increased, as did her duties of care. In 1796 the death of her sister Elizabeth raised her to the status of household manager, but also reduced the Adam household to Margaret and her sole surviving brother, William.<sup>53</sup> The brothers' metropolitan advancement strategies had previously ground to a halt in the wake of bank failures, the collapse of their speculative Thames-side Adelphi development, and increasing awareness of their financial unreliability, and it seems that by this date Margaret no longer had close knowledge of, or any direct involvement in, the architectural practice.<sup>54</sup> However, she was well aware that it was the foundation of her own security. Robert had named Margaret and Elizabeth as his heirs, giving Margaret a legal as well as a *de facto* investment in the Adams' public reputation.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, her relatives in Scotland looked to her to represent their interests in

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<sup>50</sup> James Adam to Janet Adam, 20 Nov. 1762 (GD18/4947); Elizabeth Adam to James Adam, 21 Dec. 1762 (GD18/4950).

<sup>51</sup> Her married sister Mary Drysdale acted similarly in Edinburgh. M.H.B. Sanderson, 'Robert Adam's Last Visit to Scotland, 1791', *AH*, 25 (1982), 43.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., J. Lindores to Margaret Adam, 3 Jul. 1787 (GD18/4964); John Clerk to same, 15 Feb. 1791 (GD18/4966).

<sup>53</sup> Janet died in 1788, Robert in 1792, James in 1794. Elizabeth was attended by Dr Pitcairn (see chp. 2, 75 above).

<sup>54</sup> Robert's poor financial reputation resulted in 'virtual exclusion from official patronage'. A.A. Tait, 'Adam, Robert (1728–1792)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Oct. 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Testament of Robert Adam (CC8/8/129 p.162), via [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

London, while she looked to them for support in her attempt to secure, as far as she could, the Adam name and her own future. Her correspondence over the next two decades shows that until her death she continued to pay close attention to the running of the business, and did not hesitate to use her influence indirectly as she saw fit, as she had done at Robert's behest when a young woman.

How successful was Margaret Adam in creating a place for herself in the family's London establishment? Unlike Jean Dempster, who supported her M.P. brother's social profile, Adam seems to have avoided public sociability. Robert Adam had encouraged and thoroughly primed his sisters so that they could make a smooth entrance into polite metropolitan circles, but there is no evidence that any of them achieved this goal. Margaret in particular was 'prone to melancholy', which may have deterred her from making the necessary effort when she arrived in London about 1760.<sup>56</sup> Frances Burney met her some ten years later, when she was about thirty, and thought her 'ugly in person and too reserved in manners to permit me to judge of her'—clearly not a description of a gentlewoman who presented herself effectively in company.<sup>57</sup> In her letters to relatives in Scotland Margaret relayed the names of connections who had breakfasted or dined in the Adam household, and once noted that she had gone out to dine on her brother William's behalf when he was called away by business, but there is no mention in her careful record of either 'grand' dinners, musical evenings, or any similar occasions calculated for the polite display of polished manners.<sup>58</sup> While this suggests she did little to help raise the family profile in the circles in which her brothers hoped to get commissions, she nonetheless found a role. The London household, successively located in polite Lower Grosvenor and Albemarle streets, served as both domestic and business base and Margaret, who in her own words was 'never over the door', was able to respond promptly to visitors and correspondents.<sup>59</sup> She thus came to be known as a reliable channel to her brothers.

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<sup>56</sup> Robert criticised his family generally for their 'foolish Shyness & Modesty'. Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 153, 173.

<sup>57</sup> Burney met Adam at a dance with her brothers Robert and James, and noted she was called '*an old flame*' of a gentleman present. A.R. Ellis (ed.), *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768–1778*, 2 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), I, 91.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., GD18/4961, 'Letters [...] mainly on personal, family and social matters'; Margaret Adam to ?, 22 Apr. 1795 (GD18/4961/73).

<sup>59</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 9 Nov. 1789 (GD18/4961/19).

Her reliability was emphasised in other contexts. Like Susan Ferrier, she professed herself too busy to visit her married sisters. In the summer of 1789 she rejected a suggestion that she travel north with Robert on his annual journey to oversee Scottish projects. There were ‘unsurmountable objections arising from the unsurpassed depravity’ of London servants, she argued.<sup>60</sup> It was not simply a matter of locking up the silver: ‘the things that are left in this house are not like what other people leave behind them because the Books & drawings are like the stock in trade. & are at the same time very perishable’.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, a few weeks later she accompanied her sister Elizabeth on a visit to Knaresborough spa in Yorkshire to try the waters for the latter’s eye complaint.<sup>62</sup> As letters between Ferrier and her father show, a gentlewoman could justifiably absent herself from her domestic responsibilities to visit a spa for health reasons.<sup>63</sup> Such visits could be socially as well as physically invigorating.<sup>64</sup> Spa sociability in assembly and pump rooms put considerably less performance pressure on a gentlewoman than social interaction which took place in her own home under her direction; in Knaresborough, the Adam sisters ‘thought it extraordinary if we were one whole day in the house’.<sup>65</sup> On their return to London they were surprised and pleased to find that the servants had ‘really done wonderfully well in our absence’, and Margaret conceded that her brothers James and William had been ‘so much engaged otherwise that it is not of much consequence to them having us in the house’.<sup>66</sup> Despite this evidence that both brothers and servants could safely be left, when an invitation to Scotland was accepted the following spring, Margaret emphasised that she and Elizabeth could not simply set out.<sup>67</sup> Preparations to ensure the household would run smoothly while they were away would take at least two weeks. Worse, ‘We have the ill luck to be changing a Housemaid at this time which is a very serious business in London, as the

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<sup>60</sup> Same to same, summer 1789 (GD18/4961/15).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Same to same, 9 Nov. 1789 (GD18/4961/19).

<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Ann Pitt’s brother William condoned her visits to friends in France if they were for her health. Froide, *Never Married*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> When the Adam sisters and their mother visited Moffat spa, Dumfriesshire, in 1755, the ambitious Robert followed their social interactions closely by letter. Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 153–5.

<sup>65</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 9 Nov. 1789 (GD18/4961/19).

<sup>66</sup> Same to same, Sept. 1789 (GD18/4961/16).

<sup>67</sup> Same to same, 29 Apr. 1790 (GD18/4961/23).

safety of your property & even of your life depends on the servants you take into the house [...] It is almost always by the connivance of servants that houses are broken into and when we are gone it is but a dismal thing Jamie or Willy being alone in the house lying in a distant room & no creature within their hearing'.<sup>68</sup> As Margaret wrote it, the very existence of the household depended on the constant vigilance of the mistress.

Like other never-married women who took up the role of genteel household manager, Margaret Adam's focus on the duties which kept her and her sister Elizabeth at home ('so many little jobs to do [...] that we never can get out'<sup>69</sup>) reflected both actual responsibilities and self-imposed restrictions intended to enhance and protect their reputations. The Adam sisters may have led retired lives, but the same could not be said of their brothers, 'Four Scotchmen, by the names of Adams, / Who keep their coaches, and their madams', as a scurrilous rhyme had it.<sup>70</sup> Robert had long ago teased Margaret that 'Jamie & I look down on the Matrimonial Bands & Agremens of a Married State'.<sup>71</sup> James in particular had set up a separate household for his mistress, an arrangement which Margaret managed to avoid mentioning even to her married sisters until he unfortunately died there.<sup>72</sup> Writing to tell her sister Susanna Clerk in November 1794, she could not bring herself to mention 'the woman' by name, and confessed, 'It is a great comfort to us to find there was no marriage as we are certain now that she is a woman of no character. whatever her Birth'.<sup>73</sup> She was equally rigorous about the company she herself kept. The previous year, 1793, she and Elizabeth had been surprised by the appearance in London of an old acquaintance whom they had thought guillotined in France. The sisters had been 'really hurt at being obliged to act a very un hospitable part to her', but felt unable even to invite her to drink tea, as 'the truth is her character was too

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Same to same, 9 Nov. 1789 (GD18/4961/19).

<sup>70</sup> The gratuitous inclusion of John Adam was a swipe at Scots clannishness; the rhyme also voiced popular prejudice against Lord Bute. *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (London: 1784), IV, 189, via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) Tait (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Oct. 2009) emphasises the importance of Bute's patronage for Adam's early career. For the extent and effectiveness of Scots London networks, see S. Nenadic (ed.), *Scots in London in the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> In a letter congratulating the Clerks on the birth of a daughter who he hoped would be a future comfort as 'Child Maid & Wife'. Robert Adam to Margaret Adam, 27 Mar. 1756 (GD18/4804).

<sup>72</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 6 Nov. 1794 (GD18/4961/77).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

bad when she was last in England to admit of her being seen with you. & we are so overlooked by neighbours that nobody comes in without being seen.’<sup>74</sup> The Adam sisters may have genuinely disliked the self-conscious sociability of polite and fashionable London, but distaste for urban or aristocratic excess was a common trope of female gentility, and their equally self-conscious seclusion helped to dissociate them from the taint of metropolitan vice.

As a mature woman, Margaret Adam reaped the rewards of good relationships with her wider family which she had built up over several decades through directed familial patronage. Her role as a familial patron dovetailed with the intermediary activities she undertook on her brothers’ behalf, and also rested on her position as household co-manager and later manager. In particular she had forwarded the interests of her married sister Susanna Clerk’s family. She was a close partner in the promotion of John Clerk’s *Naval Tactics*, and advised the Clerks and acted for them on many occasions as they tried to forward their son’s naval career.<sup>75</sup> In a move which benefited both families, the Clerks’ daughter Susanna had also been welcomed into the Adam household some time after Elizabeth’s death in 1796. This patronage won Margaret the respect of her relatives in Scotland and the Clerks’ especial gratitude, and when the London household began to suffer the effects of the Adam brothers’ longterm financial mismanagement, she was able to rely on them for assistance.

In the spring of 1795, three years after Robert Adam’s death, Margaret was supported by John Clerk when it seemed that her brother William, now in charge of the business, would offer a partnership to an ambitious employee who was pushing for preferment. This plan was approved by Margaret’s married sisters in Scotland, ‘to secure him in case of my Brother Willie’s death’.<sup>76</sup> Margaret, however, had ‘the most invincible dread of all partnerships [...] it puts you so entirely in the power of another person’.<sup>77</sup> She had a very low opinion of the employee John Robertson, and warned ‘we are not to depend on generosity or justice & far less on gratitude from

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<sup>74</sup> Same to same, 23 Apr. 1793 (GD18/4961/56).

<sup>75</sup> These examples of familial patronage are discussed in chp. 5 below.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, spring 1795 (GD18/4961/72).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

him or any body like him'.<sup>78</sup> She argued 'it is certainly easier to make terms with him before he knows his own consequence than after', making good Robert's advice to her forty years before, that 'when you have Seen more of the world you will find dependance keeps people quiet who might turn more or less insolent, upon the prospect of what they may think an advantageous Settlement'.<sup>79</sup>

John Clerk was made aware of Margaret's concerns when her married sister Mary Drysdale complained to him that 'in spite of all she could say', Margaret 'continued inflexible' on the matter.<sup>80</sup> He already knew that William was proving even less of a businessman than his brothers had been, as Margaret had confessed as much to his wife.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps to Drysdale's surprise, Clerk 'heard her to an end without saying a word but soon replied that I differed from her and agreed intirely with you'.<sup>82</sup> He proceeded to support Margaret's arguments, reporting the conversation in a letter to her in which he addressed her as 'My Dear Madam', a considered mark of respect in contrast to their usual informal writing style. Clerk's intervention in this familial dispute was a model acknowledgement of, and repayment of, his personal obligations to Margaret Adam. Moreover, he successfully brought her married sisters round to her opinion and restored sibling unity. He concluded by assuring her that 'Mrs Drysdale acknowledged she was perfectly sattisfied by these reasons, of which I immagine she has already informed you'. His wife, 'tho of a contrary opinion at first was so much convinced that she has insisted, that I should give you the trouble of this [letter]'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Clerk's deliberate involvement was a restatement of Margaret's position in the London household/business, a position which her brother William had undercut by absenting himself from the house as much as possible to avoid discussing the matter with his sisters.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.; Robert Adam to Margaret Adam, 2 Oct. 1756 (GD18/4820).

<sup>80</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, spring 1795 (GD18/5486/32).

<sup>81</sup> 'Considering to what an extent he does business for Government [...] I doubt if there is another man in England would have contrived in such a situation to keep himself & those connected with him in extrem poverty. I cannot account for it'. Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 23 Apr. 1793 (GD18/4961/56).

<sup>82</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, spring 1795 (GD18/5486/32).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, spring 1795 (GD18/4961/72). Elizabeth Adam, in ill health, died the next year.

These circumstances illustrate both the value of Margaret Adam's influence and its limitations. Support from kin buttressed her position, but ultimately all decisions relating to the business lay with William. As head of both the business and family his position was not to be challenged, whatever his personal inadequacies. It is unclear whether he took John Robertson into partnership, but over the next few years he became more reliant on and more closely involved with the Robertson brothers. Events were to prove Margaret Adam's judgement correct.

In October 1801 the appearance of an article in a London newspaper forced Margaret to acknowledge to her sister Susanna Clerk that the sixty-three-year-old William was bankrupt. He had told her nothing until a few days previously, but she had known about his 'perilous situation' for some time because her nephew—John Adam's eldest son, also William—had written to warn her of the impending disaster.<sup>85</sup> Once again, intervention by a close male relative underlines the respected status accorded Margaret in the wider family. To Susanna she declared herself unconcerned about the domestic economies she would have to make, but she confessed to 'very deep mortification [...] on account of the ridiculous disgrace'.<sup>86</sup> What mattered was to retrieve the family's reputation as far as possible, and to this end, as before, her brother's status was not to be challenged. Susanna was told she could ask any question she pleased, but 'as to any reproach for Willy having ventured too far you will naturally avoid it in writing as I have done in conversation'.<sup>87</sup> This manoeuvring around the nominal head of the family helped to preserve the façade of stability for several years longer. To her sister and trusted correspondent, however, Margaret voiced increasing criticism of William's judgement, preparing Susanna (and by proxy her other Scottish relatives) for the further losses she foresaw.<sup>88</sup>

In 1812 William's mismanagement of an Ordnance contract drew him into another crisis. This time it was seventy-six-year-old Margaret who set things in motion by writing to her nephew. Now she was blunt about her brother's capabilities: '[He] is not a person to keep any body to the strict limits of their power, they get full

<sup>85</sup> William Adam, politician and judge. D. Wilkinson, 'Adam, William (1751–1839)' (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 29 Oct. 1801 (GD18/4985).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Same to same, 8 May 1802 (GD18/4986); same to same, 22 Jan. 1803 (GD18/4987).

scope till they abuse it, which has hitherto been invariably the case [...] I am enclined to think that Bankruptcy would be less troubling'.<sup>89</sup> Although this letter sidestepped her brother's position, it was consistent with her responsibility to consult with relatives and friends on matters which affected them. It also respected family hierarchy, as her nephew William Adam was, next to her brother, the senior representative of the Adam name. He consulted in turn with male kin. Their collective opinion was expressed in a letter which emphasised that the family patriarch had the writer's 'most affectionate regard and sincere sympathy'—but which was addressed to Margaret nonetheless.<sup>90</sup> Nor was this simply an instance of relatives channelling difficult communications through the non-confrontational medium of female correspondence. Margaret's nephew considered both her 'pure spirit of independence' and the 'very severe effect on your separate property' before tactfully offering financial support to the elderly sibling couple. The language in which he did so demonstrates clearly the use of close relationship terms to express roles, responsibilities, and status: 'you must remember that you are our only Parents, now living, that we have all of us a right to consider ourselves as Your Children and Your Grand Children – that in this Light [I] hold myself authorized to request, candidly, to learn, from you, the state of things, that we may gratify ourselves by Doing what it is fit we should do on this occasion'.<sup>91</sup> In this context, 'parents', 'children', and 'grandchildren' signalled acknowledgement of duty on the part of subsequent generations, as well as gratitude for the part played by the London household, and by Margaret herself, in enlarging the opportunities of the wider kin group. By judiciously promoting and consulting the interests of relatives beyond her immediate household, Margaret Adam had strengthened the ties of familial reciprocity and thus protected her own interests as far as she could.

*Roles unacknowledged and reciprocity denied: Susanna Clerk*

Susanna Clerk spent two decades in London as her aunt's companion and co-manager, followed by two years as sole domestic manager for her uncle, but she never managed a brother's household. That role was filled for many years by two of

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<sup>89</sup> Margaret Adam to William Adam, 6 Apr. 1812 (GD18/4989).

<sup>90</sup> William Adam to Margaret Adam, 12 Jul. 1812 (GD18/4990).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



her sisters, who lived with their eldest brother John in Edinburgh. Clerk's experience of never-married sibling households illustrates the precarious situation of women who could not rely on the sibling relationship, and who failed to identify and create within their kin network reciprocal relationships capable of supporting them in times of need.

When Elizabeth Adam died in 1796, it was understood that the blow would fall most heavily on Margaret, the last of the never-married sisters in London.<sup>92</sup> Even when Elizabeth was still alive, Margaret had lamented the amount of time the two women spent by themselves.<sup>93</sup> Their social reserve, coupled with their brothers' habitual absences from home, meant that they rarely engaged in the civilising social interaction which defined gentility. 'Betty & I by living so much alone are turned quite wild', unfit even for the 'bustle' of Edinburgh, wrote Margaret to her sister Susanna of a projected visit in 1790.<sup>94</sup> It was not long after Elizabeth's death that Susanna came to live with her aunt in London. She would provide company, and help in running the household, and at the same time her father would be relieved of any immediate necessity to provide for her—a significant saving in a family of three sons and four daughters, none of whom married. Susanna not only boarded free of charge but was also given occasional allowances of £20 by her aunt and uncle.

Although the arrangement benefited both families, there is evidence that Susanna herself worried about the implications for her future. Her inability to pay board cast her in the role of dependant, while her social connections were severely limited by her lack of an income and her aunt's extremely retired mode of life. Little more than a year after her arrival, concern for her niece's physical and mental health prompted Margaret Adam to write to her married sister Mary Drysdale. Susanna had become very thin, and she suffered from 'various complaints', including headaches, pains, and sickness.<sup>95</sup> Adam was convinced that she 'dreads the Idea of being fixed here for my life (& no wonder) she Grieves at the thought of leaving me alone, and

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<sup>92</sup> William Adam to Andrew Dalzel, 8 Aug. 1796 (GD18/4978); see also C. Innes (ed.), *Memoir of Andrew Dalzel, Professor of Greek in the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1861), 94.

<sup>93</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 16 Jul. 1792 (GD18/4961/46).

<sup>94</sup> Same to same, 19 Oct. 1790 (GD18/4961/30).

<sup>95</sup> Margaret Adam to Mary Drysdale, 29 Jun. 1798 (GD18/4961/82). Ill-health as a means by which unmarried women expressed lack of agency is explored in Davidoff, 'Kinship as a Categorical Concept', 418.

in this conflict of her mind [...] she then sais but why will you force me away from you. As to the expence which has been supposed to be a reason for wishing her gone [it is] very little more than when my sister was alive'.<sup>96</sup> Susanna had recently refused an invitation to visit a relative 'on account of leaving me alone which I desired her by no means to consider as any objection either to that or any other journey'.<sup>97</sup> The conflict seen by Margaret Adam echoes that expressed in Elizabeth Hamilton's letters on life with her uncle—that of an unmarried woman in her late twenties or early thirties who dreaded the prospect of passing her life in the company of a reclusive elderly relative, yet dreaded too finding herself un-needed, with no role and hence no status in her family.

Over the next fifteen years William Adam's weakening grasp on his affairs and his deepening entanglement with the Robertson brothers put the household on an increasingly precarious footing. During this period Susanna spent some time in Edinburgh in the home of her brother John and sisters Margaret and Elizabeth, but she did not join them on a permanent basis, as might have been expected given the Adam family's example. Uncertainty over her position may have urged her final return to Albemarle Street, where she received news of her father's death in May 1812. Any hope she had that inheritance would enable her to contribute to the London household was forestalled by a letter from her sister Margaret informing her that John, now head of the family, was making use of their 'furniture and plate and linnens'.<sup>98</sup> Such valuable goods were often left to women in lieu of financial legacies, and left by them in turn to their legatees.<sup>99</sup> These furnishings were a significant contribution to a household's assets, but when the property of a single woman they were often assumed (like her money) to be available for family use. Margaret Clerk assured Susanna she would 'take every opportunity of encouraging John to have a stock of his own' and also 'take a strict Charge of your particular interest [and] give you a consciencious account'.<sup>100</sup> She noted pragmatically that 'feather beds are the better of being used and Plate is not the worse', but suggested

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<sup>96</sup> Margaret Adam to Mary Drysdale, *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Margaret Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 14 Jun. 1813 (GD18/5574). See Froide, *Never Married*, 80–1.

<sup>99</sup> Vickery calls this the 'customary possession of a maiden housekeeper, the core of an expectant bridal collection'. *Behind Closed Doors*, 214.

<sup>100</sup> Margaret Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 14 Jun. 1813 (GD18/5574).

Susanna might want her share of uncut linen ‘by the first opportunity’. Margaret concluded ‘we may be the less scrupulous in the mean time in accepting [money] from him’, but it was not until 1816, by which date Susanna had been supported by the Adams for more than a decade, that John finally offered an allowance which would enable her to pay board to her aunt and uncle—and, as her sister Elizabeth pointed out, ‘there should be some good arrangements for making payments easy, as you & I have lived too long not to understand the difficulties attending such like things’.<sup>101</sup>

Margaret Adam’s death around 1820 placed Susanna in an awkward position with regard to family loyalties. Adam’s nieces and nephews were her heirs, but the liferent of her property remained with William Adam. As her elderly uncle slid further into debt, Susanna was criticised by her siblings and cousins in Scotland for not keeping them sufficiently informed of his affairs. Her relatives feared that creditors would try to claim what remained of their aunt’s property, and that they would be liable for heavy fines if their uncle failed to pay the succession tax due on her estate. Her cousin Mary Drysdale asked whether an inventory had been made of Margaret Adam’s effects, emphasising that it was ‘extremely disagreeable’ to have to write with such questions.<sup>102</sup> Susanna was urged to reply ‘as soon as possible and tell us whether it has been done or not [...] you cannot fail to have more knowledge of my Aunt’s and Uncle’s affairs’.<sup>103</sup> This letter was shortly followed by another complaint in the same vein, which concluded, ‘but I cannot help you have never in any of your letters made the smallest allusion to an inventory or a valuation of the property in short we know almost nothing of what is going on All we want is to be informed’.<sup>104</sup> Margaret Adam’s heirs were ‘determined [...] to at least run no risk of being ruined’ by William’s executorship of her will.<sup>105</sup>

Susanna had already warned her fellow legatees not to expect any benefit from the will.<sup>106</sup> This fact, coupled with Drysdale’s repeated request for information she failed to provide, suggests she was not ignorant of her uncle’s affairs, but

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<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth Clerk to same, 3 May 1816 (GD18/4993/2).

<sup>102</sup> Mary Drysdale to Susanna Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4994/3).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Same to same, 3 Apr. [n.y.] (GD18/4994/4).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

unwilling to reveal the true extent of his financial disgrace. Her later actions support this reading. However, her personal loyalty to William Adam was interpreted by her kin as a failure of duty to the wider family and, worse, to her natal family. Unlike her aunt in similar circumstances, when the final crisis came she had no support for the steps she took to salvage her uncle's—and thus her own—affairs.

Early in 1821 a final attempt was made to detach William Adam from his undesirable business connections. His nephew William invoked familial responsibility: he was the trustee of Margaret Adam's fortune not only 'for your own present enjoyment but for the future use of others [...] she never could mean that those for whom she intended it should be sacrificed to the Robertsons'. He was urged to remember a still closer responsibility, 'Susy Clerk whose attachment to you is devoted and is not confined to expressions but is shewn by her acts'.<sup>107</sup> William Adam acknowledged this obligation by addressing to Susanna the letter in which he promised to give up all connection with the Robertsons, 'In consequence of your wish and the express desire of my nearest & best friends'.<sup>108</sup> The day after receiving this letter, Susanna signed an indenture in his favour for £1,000 of annuities (which raised £711 5s), in return for the assignment of an Ordnance debt to him worth £829 8s 10d and an unpaid bequest dating from 1812 worth £200.<sup>109</sup> It was witnessed by his nephew William, but Susanna's brother John, whom she had a duty to consult as head of her natal family, was apparently unaware of these financial arrangements.

This was not all. A few years previously a memoir of Susanna's father John Clerk had been read to the Royal Society. The author had named Henry Dundas, Lord Melville, as a supporter of Clerk's *Naval Tactics*, cited correspondence which praised Clerk as 'one who has merited so highly of his country', and expressed surprise 'that no mark of public favour was ever bestowed on the author, nor any acknowledgement made by Government'.<sup>110</sup> Susanna, after consulting unnamed relatives, wrote directly to Dundas's son, the second lord Melville and First Lord of

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<sup>107</sup> William Adam to William Adam, 25 Jan. 1821 (GD18/4995/2).

<sup>108</sup> William Adam to Susanna Clerk, 25 Jan. 1821 (GD18/4996).

<sup>109</sup> Indenture, William Adam and Susanna Clerk, 26 Jan. 1821 (GD18/4997).

<sup>110</sup> 'Memoir relating to the Naval Tactics of the late John Clerk, Esq. of Eldin; being a Fragment of an intended Account of his Life. By John Playfair, F.R.S. Lond. & Edin. Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. 1818.' (GD18/4287).

the Admiralty, to request a pension for herself.<sup>111</sup> Only then did she tell her brother of her actions, begging that he would express his anger mildly.<sup>112</sup> A letter from her sister Elizabeth reveals the condemnation which followed. In seeking such a public remedy on her own initiative Susanna had openly disregarded her brother's familial authority and position, transgressing the boundaries of what was appropriate to her sex and status.<sup>113</sup> Her news, said Elizabeth, had come as 'the most painful & distressing of all the distressing letters you have lately written to me'.<sup>114</sup> She criticised the 'well meaning woolly people' whose advice had led Susanna to take 'so Strong, & so delicate a step without the knowledge and consent of those most concerned'. 'Drysdales, Dalzels, Adams', she continued, 'all see the matter at present, in the same point of view, none approve'. Susanna's entire kin network was apparently united in censuring her.

Her efforts to rescue her uncle from ruin were in any case of little avail. Further correspondence points to approaching financial collapse; in September 1821 Elizabeth warned her sister to put her papers and securities into trustworthy hands.<sup>115</sup> Susanna knew her uncle would find dependence on her easier than relying on other relatives, as having so long supported her he had 'a just right to expect a share of every thing I had', but it was now clear she would be unable to keep them both and he was 'quite resolved not to accept of a maintenance from his nephews'.<sup>116</sup> At the end of January 1822 the eighty-four-year-old William Adam committed suicide.

In the immediate aftermath Susanna had to exert herself in an attempt to retain some control over her future circumstances. As her uncle's heir she could expect only 'a deal of trouble' and the loss of her home.<sup>117</sup> The shockwaves of the event quickly reached Scotland. Elizabeth Clerk confessed she had evaded the truth by telling inquirers that 'there had been some indications of his complaint but that it

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<sup>111</sup> Possibly including her cousin William Adam who (although politically opposed to Melville) successfully defended the latter in his 1806 impeachment, creating an obligation. Wilkinson (ODNB 2004 online).

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 1 Feb. 1821 (GD18/4999/1).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. William and Ann Pitt: when Ann received a government pension in 1760, William (who had previously embarrassed her by publicly mentioning his £200 annuity to her) was similarly embarrassed to see his surname on the pensions list. Notwithstanding, he accepted a pension for himself with his new peerage the following year. Froide, *Never Married*, 62.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 1 Feb. 1821 (GD18/4999/1).

<sup>115</sup> Same to same, 23 Sept. 1821 (GD18/4994/2).

<sup>116</sup> Susanna Clerk to John Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4999/9).

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 4 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/2).

was very sudden at the last'.<sup>118</sup> 'God grant that they may never never know to the end of all our existence', she added. She reassured her sister that no shame could attach to her 'for attending to the very last a poor misguided old uncle with whom as you once said you had already spent the best or nearly the best part of your life'.<sup>119</sup> But this too was an evasion, for the threat of public scandal was very great, and Susanna Clerk's nearest relations considered her tainted by the connection. She had written to her brother proposing a return to Edinburgh; he replied that he was 'quite convinced along with your friends here whom I have consulted that it would not be advisable for you under all the circumstances to come to Scotland'.<sup>120</sup> Reminding her that her application to Lord Melville had been stopped, he offered an allowance of £220 a year, on condition that she remove herself to 'any other situation which you may like best either in London or in the neighbourhood or any country place, or at Bath, or abroad'. Determined to make himself clear, he repeated, 'we think it would be far better for yourself not to come to Scotland, and for us, considering all circumstances we think that there would be no end to the inconvenience of it. It would be shocking on Such a Subject to particularise [...] let me know what you think best, excepting as to coming to Scotland which is evidently out of the question'.<sup>121</sup>

Susanna did not reply immediately, but wrote instead to the spinster Hepburn sisters, friends who lived near her brother in Edinburgh's New Town, asking if she could board with them. Their reply was longer and more apologetic than John Clerk's, but it was a refusal nonetheless. She was also warned against applying to other friends: 'the Miss Pringles I am sure would not do, and they would be so conscious that this life they lead would not suit you that they will not agree to your proposal if you made one from thinking so'.<sup>122</sup> However, she was sure to hear of many opportunities; perhaps 'cousins of the Miss Wards [...] agreeable sensible women', not known to them personally, would do? The Hepburns also assumed Susanna would go first to her eldest brother. It was understood this was unlikely to be a permanent solution, for Elizabeth, now sole domestic manager, was treated by him as not 'above childhood, and she never by using any influence, persuades him of

<sup>118</sup> Same to same, 9 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/6).

<sup>119</sup> Same to same, 6 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/3).

<sup>120</sup> John Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 8 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/4).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> A. Hepburn to Susanna Clerk, 11 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/5).

the contrary, he is complete master she seems to have nothing to say in the family but to order the Dinner – I confess I could not be so submissive to any body’, admitted the writer.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless the Hepburns were shocked when they learned that John had opposed her return, and hoped that his better feelings would lead him to ‘do as he ought’.<sup>124</sup>

While trying to secure somewhere to live, Susanna was also considering her limited options for a degree of financial independence. Within two weeks of her uncle’s death she offered the fifty-four folio volumes of Robert Adam’s sketches and designs to the British Museum, ‘all that could be collected of the labours of 30 years & more during which time he was reckoned one of the most eminent Architects of his time’.<sup>125</sup> It is unclear whether she consulted relatives before taking this step, although her cousins certainly thought they had a claim on the drawings’ monetary value.<sup>126</sup> The folios were in any case not accepted, and the Adam collection languished until it was finally sold to Sir John Soane for £200 in 1833.

Susanna challenged familial rejection by continuing to represent herself in the language of family and gentility. To the Hepburns she wrote of her ‘horror at living alone’.<sup>127</sup> At the end of February, however, she told her brother that she had decided to remain in London. Her letter was written in a manner calculated to place the steps she had taken in an acceptable light.<sup>128</sup> She began with gratitude for his offer of an allowance, which she assured him was ‘very great & truly sincere’, and reminded him of an earlier promise that she and Elizabeth would each have £2,000 from their father’s estate. She made it clear she was not challenging his refusal to receive her; her letter would ‘breathe nothing but the sorrow of disappointed affection & not the resentment of mortified pride’. But John Clerk’s fear of scandal was neatly turned against him by her explanation that ‘it looked better for us all that I should after so long an absence take refuge with you at first & every body supposed that I would go

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. Cf. the father who boasted of his 15-year-old daughter, ‘her domestic virtues [...] are very great. She seems to have no mind of her own’. Rizzo, *Companions*, 121.

<sup>124</sup> A. Hepburn to Susanna Clerk, 17 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/7).

<sup>125</sup> Susanna Clerk, 13 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4998).

<sup>126</sup> Mary Drysdale to Susanna Clerk, 3 Apr. [n.y.] (GD18/4994/4). A.A. Tait criticises Clerk severely for her part in separating and regrouping the folios, in ‘The Sale of Robert Adam’s Drawings’, *BM*, 120:904 (Jul. 1978). However, she followed a precedent set by the Adams themselves in response to dire financial straits.

<sup>127</sup> A. Hepburn to Susanna Clerk, 11 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/5).

<sup>128</sup> Susanna Clerk to John Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4999/9).

to see my family at least'. By turning to the head of her family, she had shown 'that there was nothing but sisterly kindness in my mind & a resolution to comply with every thing that might be wished'. She continued by putting her application to Lord Melville in the light of female duty. Having 'lived so long' supported by her maternal uncle, and becoming aware that his talk of suicide was serious, it would have been both 'ungrateful [...] & unwomanly in me not to have been anxious to do every thing in my power to save him from self destruction'. Refusing to sweep the events of the last few weeks under the carpet as her family wished, she added, 'That he is better dead I am perfectly sensible. but his death was dreadful in the manner of it & has left an impression in my mind which I don't think I shall ever get the better of'. She concluded by saying she had taken the cheapest lodging she could find in the neighbourhood of her old home. Perhaps to forestall future quibbles over her allowance, she closed her letter with a final cut at her brother's sensitivity to public reputation: 'I take it for granted that you would wish your sister to live something like a gentlewoman'.

Susanna's opportunities to create reciprocal relationships among her kin had been limited by the fact that she spent 'nearly the best part' of her life as a household dependant. The alliances she did make did not serve her well. After Margaret Adam's death, when she took up the hopeless task of trying to save her uncle's affairs, she followed her aunt's lead in acting with or on the advice of her cousin, William Adam the younger. By doing so she laid a familial obligation on him to aid her in turn. However, in 1821 he had warned he could no longer be 'of the least use' financially.<sup>129</sup> Susanna may not have known that the losses he had suffered by his uncle's previous failures totalled the huge sum of £25,000.<sup>130</sup> Her misjudgement of this relationship's worth to her had other repercussions. By aligning herself with the Adams' representative in her own generation Susanna offended her eldest brother, head of her natal/paternal family, who was not only prone to 'infantine self-deification' but also taking steps to dissociate himself from his scandal-hit maternal

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<sup>129</sup> William Adam to William Adam, 25 Jan. 1821 (GD18/4995/2); a copy was sent simultaneously to Susanna. Charles Adam to Susanna Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4995/1).

<sup>130</sup> Wilkinson (ODNB 2004 online).



relatives.<sup>131</sup> Although the allowance he offered Susanna was adequate, it was on the blunt condition that she stay out of Scotland.<sup>132</sup> Thus she was unable to place herself publicly under his protection, even temporarily. Susanna also failed to respond to her cousins' very real fear that they too would be drawn into the financial collapse of the Adams' London venture, despite their direct request that she take up an intermediary role. None now intervened for her to restore sibling harmony.<sup>133</sup>

Susanna remained in London for several years.<sup>134</sup> In 1827 she named her brother William as her heir (Elizabeth had presumably died, as a will of 1822 had been in her favour).<sup>135</sup> He was to receive almost all her money, her silver plate, household furniture, linen and books. As was usual in women's wills, bequests of jewellery among female friends marked important social relationships and indicated families in which the testatrix wished to be remembered. A silver gilt scent bottle was left to the eldest daughter of Sir George Clerk of Penicuik, with the explanation, 'It belonged to Lady Clerk her great great grandmother 120 years in the family'. With this bequest, Susanna claimed remembrance in the senior branch of her family and a role, however small, in familial continuity.<sup>136</sup> She also remembered her Edinburgh friends the Miss Hepburns and the Miss Pringles. John Clerk, who died in 1832, was not mentioned.

Susanna Clerk was, perhaps, particularly unfortunate. When she first entered the Adam household in the late 1790s in the combined role of companion/co-manager, she could reasonably have hoped to progress from dependence to greater responsibility and status as her aunt aged. However, Margaret Adam remained conspicuously competent into old age, on one occasion (aged seventy-eight) having meals brought to her room so that she lost no time in revising accounts which had

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<sup>131</sup> Lord Cockburn, in G.F.R. Barker rev. A.M. Godfrey, 'Clerk, John, Lord Eldin (1757–1832)' (ODNB 2004 online). After Robert Adam's death Clerk involved himself in familial efforts to maintain the architect's posthumous reputation. However, about 1821 he commissioned a portrait of his father, but not his mother, an omission significant enough to cause familial comment. Brown, "'Resemblance of a Great Genius'"; Elizabeth Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 4 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/2).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Ann Pitt's mid-18thC annuity of £200 from her brother. Froide, *Never Married*, 61.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Clerk echoed her brother's opinion, writing a year after the event, 'that terrible letter to Lord M has come in the way & deranged us all [...] I will not add to your griefs by harping upon it'. Elizabeth Clerk to Susanna Clerk, 4 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/2).

<sup>134</sup> She later returned to Scotland, to a small house in Portobello near Edinburgh, where she died in 1835.

<sup>135</sup> Testament of Susanna Clerk, 3 Apr. 1827 (GD18/2003).

<sup>136</sup> Susanna's father was a younger son of the Clerk of Penicuik family.

‘got into utter confusion’.<sup>137</sup> Susanna thus had little chance to highlight her own managerial capabilities and contribution in letters to kin.<sup>138</sup> When she eventually took over, the household’s economic viability was beyond retrieval. Her uncle’s suicide less than two years later nullified any familial status she had gained and threatened her public character. Her cousin was unable to repay his obligation practically, while her brother made it clear he felt little moral obligation towards the sister who had openly disregarded his authority. Her final extant letter to her brother testifies to the importance of maintaining the public form of kin relationships even when the substance had worn thin. Susanna Clerk’s experience is a salutary reminder of the degree to which a never-married woman with no independent income had to exercise strategic discrimination in establishing and maintaining her familial relationships.

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Chapters two and three have considered the opportunities which existed for unmarried gentlewomen to create active roles for themselves in households headed by male relatives. These opportunities were remarkably diverse. Notwithstanding the marital household’s cultural pre-eminence, real households were both varied and flexible in composition, adapting over time to changing family needs and priorities.<sup>139</sup> An unmarried gentlewoman might live with her father or an uncle, like Susan Ferrier and Elizabeth Hamilton. She might live for half a century in the family of a married sibling, spend a similar period with a bachelor brother, or help to run the household affairs of several brothers as they passed from bachelorhood to marriage to widower status.<sup>140</sup> Sometimes the domestic load was further distributed among unmarried female cousins, or, as with the Adams, lightened by the next generation.<sup>141</sup> A genteel professional family of unmarried siblings might combine resources for a

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<sup>137</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk (yngr), n.d. (GD18/4277).

<sup>138</sup> Early correspondence recognises her managerial skills: when a young woman, her father relied on her to oversee his colliery business in his absence, with her brother as ‘Lieutenant’. John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 24 Jul. 1796 (GD18/5486/43).

<sup>139</sup> See, e.g., Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 29, 34.

<sup>140</sup> Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 85, 106; Burton cites the less successful example of Charles and Mary Lamb’s aunt Sarah Lamb. *A Double Life*, 16, 116.

<sup>141</sup> E.g., Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 108.

period of years or decades, as the Baillies and the Adams did respectively; in a wealthier family, the eldest brother and sister might live in some state in the family home, while junior siblings lived more modestly nearby.<sup>142</sup> The latter arrangement was preferred by the Trotters of Mortonhall, who had a small estate near Edinburgh. The oldest sister, Margaret, enjoyed the status of mistress of Mortonhall House, but had to accommodate herself to a self-regarding brother, like her Edinburgh contemporaries the Clerk sisters. Her younger sisters Marion and Jane spent their adult lives in an old family property a few miles distant. There they claimed a degree of domestic independence, but they were expected nonetheless to make themselves available to the main household when needed. This caused intermittent resentment, but never rupture, as the younger sisters' physical proximity also kept in public view their membership of a long-established family.<sup>143</sup> Finally, some sibling couples became established only in old age, on a brother's return after long service in the army, the navy, or the East India Company.<sup>144</sup> This happened in lesser landed families such as the Scotts of Malleny (connected to the Trotters, but unlike them unable to live permanently on their estate), and among those who could claim to be 'descended from, and allied to, many of the gentry in the county'. One such couple were John and Frances Fraser, who lived frugally together in St Andrews and then Edinburgh when the former retired from the navy, 'keeping up their respectable status in society'.<sup>145</sup>

What then of unmarried gentlewomen who had no male relatives for whom they could act in a managerial capacity? Many retreated to provincial towns where, by practising what the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell sympathetically called 'elegant economy', they kept up a level of genteel female sociability.<sup>146</sup> Often their choice of residence was influenced by the family ties they could claim. Society in the east coast town of Montrose, for instance, was 'composed of the widows and unmarried

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<sup>142</sup> See also Adams, "'A Choice Not To Wed?'".

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Gertrude Savile, who in the early 18thC spent years quarrelling bitterly with her baronet brother over money, yet, when unexpected inheritance made her independent of him, took up residence near the family seat in Nottinghamshire. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 188–92.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. the end of Gaskell's *Cranford*.

<sup>145</sup> Letters from and about the Scotts are in the Innes of Stow papers (GD113/5); Graham, *Mystifications*, 102.

<sup>146</sup> *Cranford*, 3.

daughters of the Lords in the neighbourhood'.<sup>147</sup> A few women, however, fortunate enough to be not only of upper gentry rank but also wealthy in their own name, effectively turned the hierarchical tables by heading their own households. They too represented themselves primarily in terms of family ties, but their privileged position gave them authority over the composition of their household family. The next chapter looks at the roles and influence exercised in their kin networks by wealthy single gentlewomen who, as a contemporary aptly put it, lived in 'a Family of Friends'.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> A. Hepburn to Susanna Clerk, 17 Feb. 1822 (GD18/4999/7).

<sup>148</sup> A. Dalrymple to Christian Dalrymple, 29 Dec. 1792 (NLS Mss 25457, 3–4f.)



## Chapter 4

### **'A Family of Friends': the importance of wider kin links**

Just a few days after her father's death late in 1792, Christian Dalrymple, of Newhailes, near Edinburgh, was surprised to discover that 'I was the heiress of this estate instead of being banished from this Place which I had expected'.<sup>1</sup> She was given the news by her step-uncle Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran, an indication of the central place which her kin by marriage would take in her later adult life.

Christian, eldest of Sir David Dalrymple's two daughters by two marriages, was nearly twenty-seven when she came into possession of Newhailes and associated parcels of land and farms. Her inheritance was recognised by her relatives as something of a mixed blessing, as the Newhailes estate was heavily indebted, and had been for many years. Her evident attachment to the place may have influenced her father's decision to make her his heir. On his own inheritance he had been advised to sell, but had replied he would 'rather eat porridge in New Hailes than the most delicate Fare any where else'.<sup>2</sup> As a dutiful daughter, Christian Dalrymple now asked her uncles for advice on how to proceed as the proprietor of the family patrimony. Both took their niece's personal interests into account in their replies. Her maternal uncle noted that the estate's affairs were in such a bad way that a sale of some parts seemed 'not a matter of Choice but of necessity'.<sup>3</sup> The sale of Newhailes itself 'at once struck me as what would give the most decided relief as well as be the most advisable in point of prudence both for you & those to come after you who in this question are also to be considered'. He reminded her that a fine house on a small estate inevitably had high financial charges which she could not easily offset by selling her lesser properties, as potential buyers would be put off by the long leases her father had been known for granting. However, having 'fairly given you my opinion', Dalrymple's uncle told her she should judge for herself, assuring her he would not be offended if she did not follow his advice, 'nor do I consider myself as entitled to be so'.<sup>4</sup> He had done his duty by stating what he thought best for his niece,

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<sup>1</sup> Dalrymple, 'Private Annals of my Own Times' [1765–1811] (NRS RH, 8, 23).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Dalrymple to Christian Dalrymple, 29 Dec. 1792 (NLS Mss 25457, 3–4f.).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Brown to Christian Dalrymple, n.d. (NLS Mss 25457, 5–8f.).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

and for relatives whose future inheritance depended on what she did at this important juncture, but his concluding comments also explicitly acknowledge her status as the person in whom her father had invested this trust. Sir David, after all, could have passed Newhailes to his nephew along with the baronetcy title of Hailes; the young man in question had certainly expected as much.<sup>5</sup>

Her father's brother gave greater weight to the value of her inheritance as an expression of the family's lineage and domicile. Old Hailes Castle had been given over to tenants, but the crumbling fifteenth-century tower represented long-established rank, and he would be 'sorry [it] should be sold out of the Family whilst there is a Male Heir'.<sup>6</sup> He admitted he had rarely been at Newhailes since childhood, but the elegant mansion on the estate similarly spoke of the Dalrymples' current social standing and influence, and it was his opinion that 'when it is sold the Family is broke up'. He was 'so much for keeping New Hailes' that he was willing to countenance the sale of most of the remaining lands. His concluding advice, however, is a succinct reminder that the usual division of landed property to sons and capital provision to daughters was thought to be in the best interests of both sexes. 'In making the choice of keeping New Hailes You determine your own fate in Life', he warned her. 'A Lady with a good House & small fortune must not expect Suitors like a Lady with a good fortune: If You keep New Hailes You must be satisfied with the Comforts you already enjoy in a Family of Friends bound by mutual Love & affection'.<sup>7</sup>

Dalrymple may have taken other, more personal, factors into account. Her letters show that she was strongly attached to family life, and close correspondents occasionally teased her about her fondness for pregnant women and small children.<sup>8</sup> But tradition has it that she was hunchbacked, which in the eyes of her

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<sup>5</sup> See chp. 2, 67 above.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Dalrymple to Christian Dalrymple, 29 Dec. 1792 (NLS Mss 25457, 3–4f.). Notably, Hailes had only belonged to the Dalrymples since 1700; for the attachment of established status to new families, not just as a means of aggrandisement but also as an expression of social order, see Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 77. Cf. the royal family's symbolic use of Windsor, chp. 1, 33 above.

<sup>7</sup> To Christian Dalrymple, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Jean Dalrymple to Christian Dalrymple, 11 Apr. 1794 (NLS Mss 25455, 132–6f.); same to same, 20 Oct. n.y. (NLS Mss 25457, 13–14f.).

contemporaries would have disqualified her for the rigours of childbearing.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the deciding factors, Dalrymple chose Newhailes and lived there for nearly half a century as its chatelaine, paying off creditors in the early years and later improving the estate for her successor.<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence in her surviving papers that she ever regretted her choice.

Inheritance by the unmarried (that is, by offspring already past the age by which they might have been expected to marry) was not exceptional among Scottish gentry and aristocratic families in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Various bachelors can be cited, ranging from London-based public figures such as the notorious fourth duke of Queensberry ('Old Q', 'the goat of Picadilly'), to the ninth and tenth brother earls of Cassillis, both enthusiastic improvers of their Ayrshire estate (the latter called in Robert Adam to rebuild Culzean Castle), down to local magnates such as Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran and gentlemen proprietors with professional interests, as in the Midlothian families of Trotter, Scott, and Innes.<sup>11</sup> Somewhat more unexpected given the gendered structure of inheritance is a number of spinster heiresses, who like their male counterparts frequently left evidence of their tenure in dressed stone and mortar. Among them were Alicia Erskine of Dun, in Angus, and Elyza Fraser of Castle Fraser, in the eastern Highlands.<sup>12</sup> The relationship networks of Elyza Fraser and Christian Dalrymple, laid out in their estate, household and personal papers, illustrate the argument of this chapter: that financially independent (even wealthy) spinsters rarely opted for a life of splendid isolation, most choosing instead to live in a way which cemented their familial ties and obligations. Financial independence was seldom seen as a way to detach oneself from the reciprocities of family life; rather, it was a means to deeper familial and social integration, and consequently to enhanced status. Both Dalrymple's and Fraser's inheritances generated incomes which rendered them independent of their kin, yet both highlighted their familial connections by seeking

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<sup>9</sup> H. Montgomery-Massingberd and C.S. Sykes, *Great Houses of Scotland* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1997), 121. Tradition similarly suggested she was 'ugly': E. Sier, 'Miss Christian Dalrymple: A Gentleman's Daughter', undergrad. diss., University of Edinburgh (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Debts paid ranged from £600 to £3,500. Dalrymple, legal and financial papers (NLS Mss 25498(i)).

<sup>11</sup> Montgomery-Massingberd and Sykes, *Great Houses*, 41, 202.

<sup>12</sup> Female estate inheritance was rare in the western Highlands; possible causes are suggested in Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*, 27, 29, 115.



their domestic companions in their kin circles, and by designating a sister's family line as their heirs. Dalrymple especially defined and represented herself by reference to her kin by blood and marriage.

Inheritance by, and from, sons or daughters who remained unmarried can be placed in the context of contemporary understandings of family which incorporated aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews as close kin. Froide alleges that if a single woman had a large estate, 'the issue of inheritance was especially contentious', giving the illustration of a never-married Yorkshire gentlewoman whose willed endowment of almshouses for spinsters was challenged by her nephews.<sup>13</sup> This example arguably shows the practical if not the prescriptive normalcy of inheritance via the unmarried; the woman's relatives did not challenge her right to hold her property during her life, but her right to unilaterally alienate it from them at her death.<sup>14</sup> Such public disregard for the interests of family was bound to be heavily censured, in either sex. However, a spinster heiress could forestall her relatives' apprehensions by locating herself early and clearly in family strategies of wealth generation. By taking particular notice of and encouraging the prospects of her intended heir, she effectively created a moral entail. Her position can be compared with those who enjoyed property in life. As in Dalrymple's case, relatives generally acknowledged her legal right to use her property as she saw fit, but if they thought her actions likely to diminish its worth, they did not hesitate to remind her that she had a responsibility to future beneficiaries.<sup>15</sup> This chapter examines both the relationships which helped to define and support an unmarried gentlewoman's position as head of a household, and the ways in which she met family expectations of her position.

### *The family circle*

The proper connections for a gentlewoman, married or single, were those formed within her family. New relationships, if they were to be deemed respectable, had to be established via existing ties. However, the broad definitions of relationship which

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<sup>13</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 44, 81.

<sup>14</sup> The nephews' legal challenge was not upheld, but in making it they claimed what they felt to be a moral right. *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. William Adam, chp. 3 above.

facilitated a social culture of connection and interdependence meant that never-married gentlewomen had many interlocking circles of relations and friends in which they could hope to find compatible domestic companions. By looking to their extended families by marriage as well as birth, single women increased their opportunities to form relationships with other unmarried women who were their equals, or near equals, in rank. Such relationships were sanctioned by the existing marriage bonds between families; the broader familial and social connection had already been approved by relatives on both sides. Moreover, a never-married woman who welcomed (for example) a cousin by marriage into her home could be fairly confident that in doing so she was enhancing, not undermining, her status. A cousin by blood, on the other hand, might feel entitled to residence in a family home, or be more inclined to dispute the nicer points of familial precedence.

Christian Dalrymple found ‘the dearest friends I ever had’ among her step-cousins, nieces of her father’s second wife Helen Fergusson.<sup>16</sup> Dalrymple also had a half-sister, Jean, but it was the five Fergusson sisters, nearer in age, who were to become in turn her favoured companions.<sup>17</sup> Her close connection with them was socially irreproachable, having been created by her father’s marriage into the Fergusson of Kilkerran family, and established in childhood, when the sisters made the first of what became regular visits to the Newhailes family.<sup>18</sup> In a manuscript notebook titled ‘Private Annals of my own Times’—a tribute to her father’s respected *Annals of Scotland*—Dalrymple recorded her own birth at the end of 1765, the birth of Jean Fergusson, ‘my dearly beloved friend’, in the following year, and the birth in 1769 of ‘My Dear Allan Fergusson’.<sup>19</sup> Dalrymple’s friendships were focussed and loyal, and she wrote candidly of Elizabeth, another sister, ‘I did not think she would have become so dear a friend’, but Elizabeth duly took her sisters’ place after Allan’s death in 1794 (Jean married in 1785, taking her out of Dalrymple’s immediate orbit, and in 1798 she too died).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Their father was Charles Fergusson, a younger brother of Sir Adam Fergusson of Kilkerran.

<sup>17</sup> Jean, later Mrs Dempster (1766–98); Elizabeth (1768–1804); Allan (1769–94); Helen (1770–93); Catherine, later Mrs Moody.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Fergusson recalled that Sir David Dalrymple ‘always behaved like a parent to me’. To Christian Dalrymple, 1 May 1793 (NLS Mss 25455, 125–6f.).

<sup>19</sup> Dalrymple, ‘Annals’ (NRS RH, 8, 23). For the bestowal of male names on daughters, see chp. 6, 198n.159 below.

<sup>20</sup> Dalrymple, *ibid.*

The Fergussons were only gradually (and never permanently) absorbed into Dalrymple's household family, as they had other family commitments. However, the nucleus of an enduring female household already existed at Newhailes in the persons of Dalrymple herself, her widowed stepmother, Helen, Lady Hailes, and her spinster aunt Rachel. Dalrymple's capable stepmother and aunt were core members of the existing Newhailes family rather than her chosen companions, but her letters show her reliance on them and her genuine affection for them, and she negotiated her sudden transformation of status from unmarried daughter to owner of the estate with considerable tact. The presence of Lady Hailes, as both a chaperone and a female authority figure to whom servants were accustomed to defer, may have helped Dalrymple to ease into her new position. There was no obvious disruption to the family's established domestic rhythms, and Lady Hailes continued to advise on the smooth running of the household for many years.<sup>21</sup>

Elyza Fraser's familial circumstances were very different to Dalrymple's, but she too formed her closest relationships among the marriage connections of her kin.<sup>22</sup> Both her father and her eldest brother were committed Jacobites.<sup>23</sup> The latter was killed at Culloden where, with Simon Fraser, Master of Lovat, he commanded the Jacobite Fraser troops. Despite this political taint, the family managed to keep a foot in the Hanoverian camp. In 1759 Fraser's youngest brother died at Quebec, serving in the 78<sup>th</sup> regiment of foot which had been raised by Lovat after he was pardoned for his part in the rebellion.<sup>24</sup> The two families were thus closely tied by the militaristic culture which shaped Highland gentry life in the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Their connection was reaffirmed when Elyza Fraser found her lifelong companion in Mary Bristow, a sister of Lovat's wife.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Lady Hailes to Christian Dalrymple, 2 Aug. 1804 (NLS Mss 25456, 113–14f.).

<sup>22</sup> The Fraser/Bristow papers are in Aberdeen University Special Libraries and Archives, MS 3470 Fraser family of Castle Fraser and Inverallochy, hereafter (AUSLA MS 3470/).

<sup>23</sup> Charles Fraser, 'Auld Inverallochy', and Charles Fraser of Inverallochy.

<sup>24</sup> Lovat's father, however, was the last nobleman to be beheaded on Tower Hill, in 1747. F.M. Fraser, Lady Saltoun, *Clan Fraser: a history* (Edinburgh: Scottish Cultural Press, 1997), 10, 13.

<sup>25</sup> For the militarisation of the Highland gentleman, see Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*.

<sup>26</sup> Lovat married Catherine Bristow. Mary Bristow could also claim establishment connections; another sister, Frances, married Richard Neave, who in 1780 became Sir Richard and governor of the Bank of England. W. Betham, *The Baronetage of England*, 4 vols (London: 1804), IV, 298–9.

The two women met in 1781 at Clifton spa, Bristol, where Bristow had gone to ease a consumptive condition.<sup>27</sup> Fraser was then forty-seven, and would not inherit Castle Fraser from her surviving brother for another eleven years. The relative informality of spa sociability may have made it easier for gentlewomen to find companions who were personally as well as socially compatible. How, or by whom, Fraser and Bristow were introduced is unknown, but shared points of familial reference probably speeded the preliminaries of their quickly forged friendship.<sup>28</sup> Fraser's circumstances at this time are also unknown, but whether she had an independent income, lived with her unmarried brother, or was at Clifton for her own health, she was sufficiently independent to take the decision to join Bristow, first travelling to Swansea with her, and then on to Lisbon for the winter.<sup>29</sup> Both women had connections in Lisbon, as Bristow's wealthy merchant family had long had a foothold in the city, and Fraser of Lovat lived there for extended periods.<sup>30</sup> This was the first of several sojourns in Portugal, Switzerland and France, which suggests that—unlike Susan Ferrier or Elizabeth Hamilton—Elyza Fraser did not have a familial position which she wanted to maintain by her domestic presence. Over the next few years Fraser and Bristow lived together abroad for many months at a time. They had (or were remitted) funds to rent, and employ servants for, villas which they took by the season.<sup>31</sup> Winters took them to Nice, and warmer weather to the clear air of Lausanne.<sup>32</sup> Bristow, however, did not relish the prospect of permanent exile, and in 1786 she 'determined to return home & give up my wandering life'.<sup>33</sup> During the next six years she lived mostly with her married sister Lady Lytton in Worcestershire, where Fraser was welcomed for long visits, evidence that their friendship was approved at a family level.<sup>34</sup> Bristow, the fifth of eight daughters, apparently did not have an income sufficient to set up for herself, and when Fraser

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<sup>27</sup> Bristow, journal (AUSLA MS 3470/7/8).

<sup>28</sup> See chp. 3, 97 above.

<sup>29</sup> Bristow, journal (AUSLA MS 3470/7/8). Fraser had left Castle Fraser only two weeks before meeting Bristow at Clifton. Fraser, memorandum book [1781–2] (AUSLA MS 3470/7/7). She does not seem ever to have lived with her sister Martha, married to Colin Mackenzie of Kilcoy, Ross-shire. (AUSLA MS 3470/7/23,24).

<sup>30</sup> Betham, *Baronetage*, 298–9. Lovat saw army service in Portugal, and met his wife Catherine there.

<sup>31</sup> Fraser, journal, 10 Nov. 1782 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/12).

<sup>32</sup> Bristow, journal (AUSLA MS 3470/7/8).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; L. Smiley, *The Frasers of Castle Fraser* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1988), 44.

inherited Castle Fraser in 1792 and offered a permanent home, she agreed, despite its chilly northern location.<sup>35</sup> Her acceptance set the seal on their well established relationship. The move can be read as Fraser's wish to live where she could hope to be seen as not just an unmarried and ageing gentlewoman, but as the representative of a family name which generated respect among her neighbours and deference from her social inferiors. Inheritance enabled her to transform herself at the age of fifty-eight from clichéd peripatetic spinster to a chatelaine of ancestral lands, and to establish her own household family with her preferred domestic companion.

The ability to offer a home was also central to Christian Dalrymple's formation of domestic relationships. Four of her step-cousins lived with their widowed father, but individually and jointly they also made long annual visits to relatives' and friends' homes, which eased their father's expenditure on them. Newhailes had particular advantages in this respect, being a modern, comfortable mansion which was well placed for sociability in the Scottish capital—something which the letters of many Scottish gentlewomen reveal a longing to participate in.<sup>36</sup> The Fergusson sisters (or their father) may have considered that residence with the extremely sociable Dalrymple might lead to marriage opportunities for one or more of them. By 1792 when Dalrymple came into her inheritance only Jean, the eldest, had married, to Captain John Dempster, brother of the M.P. George Dempster.<sup>37</sup> Newhailes was a convenient staging post between Jean's marital home in Sutherland, Kilkerran in Ayrshire which was the home of the family head Sir Adam Fergusson, and Dulwich, where the remaining sisters had moved unwillingly in 1791 with their father as part of his attempt to live cheaply near his business affairs in London.<sup>38</sup> Despite the distance, visits to Scotland were made most years, and Dalrymple looked forward to several months at a time of the sisters' company. When apart she relied on long 'narrative' letters to maintain her relationships.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Another sister also remained unmarried, and Bristow's father additionally had to provide for three sons. In the preceding generation of 11 siblings, Bristow had a never-married uncle and two never-married aunts. Betham, *Baronetage*, 298–9.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 94.

<sup>37</sup> Dalrymple, 'Annals', 1785 (NRS RH, 8, 23); see also chp. 3, 92 above.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 15 Jul. 1791 (NLS Mss 25454, 73–4f.). Their father Charles Fergusson was a wine merchant. Sier, 'Miss Christian Dalrymple', 12.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Dempster to Christian Dalrymple, 30 Apr. 1795 (NLS Mss 25457, 11–12f.).

Dalrymple seldom used the language of passionate sensibility which many women adopted when articulating close female friendships, but her correspondence reveals a possessive jealousy of her favoured companions which was similarly emotionally heightened. Jean's husband was resented because he had taken his wife north to Sutherland, where Dalrymple imagined her 'dearly beloved friend' living as 'a Prisoner', far from her kin.<sup>40</sup> In her journals, friends were carried off or taken away, and news of their departure was 'sad intelligence [...] long dreaded'.<sup>41</sup> She hated to see them leave Newhailes 'an hour sooner than necessary'.<sup>42</sup> Her fearful language anticipated actual losses, for few years went by in which she did not record in her 'Annals' the deaths of close friends and relations.<sup>43</sup> A year which saw a single death was notable.<sup>44</sup> More commonly, her entries were headed 'a mournful year', 'The events of this year afford subjects for melancholy Retrospection', 'No year was more fatal to us than this', 'a year upon which I look back with horror'.<sup>45</sup> 'Our friends drop off apace' she observed sadly in 1803.<sup>46</sup> In just over a decade she lost, from among those she considered close family, Allan Fergusson, Elizabeth Fergusson, Jean Dempster, her aunt Rachel and her half-sister Jean.<sup>47</sup> Worse, she could not console herself that they would meet again 'never to separate', as she believed this to be a hope without Biblical justification.<sup>48</sup> Dalrymple's consequent tenacity in friendship barely acknowledged the claims of sisters, fathers, or heads of family. Shortly before Jean Dempster's death in 1798, Elizabeth's decision to leave Newhailes to accompany her ailing sister home caused 'a painful Conversation', soon to be regretted.<sup>49</sup> At the end of that year 'a painful Letter' gave the news that Elizabeth and Catherine, the two surviving sisters, had decided to live permanently

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Cf. Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 2, 3 Jan., 10 Mar. 1798 (NLS Mss 25458).

<sup>42</sup> Anne Whitefoord to Christian Dalrymple, 6 Jan. 1792 (NLS Mss 25456, 16–17f.).

<sup>43</sup> 'of what friends has Death & absence deprived us!' she wrote at New Year 1799. Journal (NLS Mss 25458); see also journal, 19 Jun. 1800 (NLS Mss 25459).

<sup>44</sup> Dalrymple, 'Annals', 1806 (NRS RH, 8, 23).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1794, 1801, 1804.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Dalrymple married the Fergussons' brother James, later 4<sup>th</sup> baronet of Kilkerran; her children Charles, Anne, and Helen were central to Christian's later life.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 18 Oct. 1794 (NLS Mss 25455, 43–4f.); Jean Dalrymple to same, 22 Oct. 1794 (NLS Mss 25457, 9–10f.).

<sup>49</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 7 Apr. 1798 (NLS Mss 25458).

with their father.<sup>50</sup> This was a heavy blow to Dalrymple, who had to be reminded by a mutual friend that families were expected to show unity in the face of loss, and the Fergussons' 'going to their Father when they did was highly proper'.<sup>51</sup> She was quick to invoke the obligations of friendship, and quick to express 'severe' disappointment when thwarted.<sup>52</sup> A gentlewoman (especially an unmarried one) who prioritised her own wishes in this way laid herself open to familial censure. However, Dalrymple's status as the head of a large house and estate can be read in the family record, for when her friends were unable to comply with her demands, their letters were conciliatory. When Elizabeth visited Jean in Sutherland, the latter, knowing Dalrymple hated to see her friends venture north of the Forth, wrote reassuringly that she had 'no plot on immuring her for life in this outlandish corner'.<sup>53</sup> Another time she pointed out that Elizabeth's presence at Kilkerran would be 'of the greatest use to that family', again reassuring Dalrymple 'You will I daresay go [there] this summer and bring back your stray Sheep'.<sup>54</sup> On one occasion Lady Hailes risked a breach with her brother and nieces by writing a 'strong' letter in support of Dalrymple's expectation that Elizabeth would come to Newhailes.<sup>55</sup> This time Dalrymple had to concede defeat, but at least once she prevailed over Sir Adam Fergusson, another unmarried and wealthy head of household who, as the Fergusson sisters' uncle and head of their family name, arguably had prior claims on their attendance.<sup>56</sup> These complex examples of familial power-play between widowed, married and unmarried kin of both sexes, with the unmarried at the top, highlight the fact that wealth was often a greater determining factor of familial position than either gender or marital status.

Dalrymple's careful records of deaths and related minor anniversaries—a memorial brooch or a last note received, a final departure from Newhailes—were

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1798. Helen Fergusson was the first of the sisters to die, unexpectedly in 1793.

<sup>51</sup> ?A.W. to Christian Dalrymple, 10 Dec. 1798 (NLS Mss 25455, 114–15f.). Cf. Susanna Clerk's hope (and friends' expectation) that her brother would receive her after her uncle's death, chp. 3, 109 above.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Dalrymple, 'Annals', 1800 (NRS RH, 8, 23); journal, 4 Jun. 1824 (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>53</sup> J. Dempster to Christian Dalrymple, [? July 1795] (NLS Mss 25455, 60–1f.); see also journals, 14 Apr. 1798 (NLS Mss 25458), 9 Jun. 1800 (NLS Mss 25459).

<sup>54</sup> Same to same, n.d. (NLS Mss 25457, 16–17f.)

<sup>55</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 10 Oct.–23 Nov. 1800 *passim*. (NLS Mss 25459); 'Annals', 1800 (NRS RH, 8, 23).

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 19 Oct. 1797 (NLS Mss 25455, 112–13f.).

more than stark tallies of loss.<sup>57</sup> They were also restatements of relationship. Acts of commemoration could nurture new friendships as well as recall old ones. Her successive friendships with the Fergusson sisters were founded on mutual comfort over loss, and mourning correspondence reiterated her place in their close family circle. In the weeks following Allan's death in 1794, Elizabeth acknowledged that Dalrymple had 'had as great a regard for her as if she had been your Sister', and looked forward to 'having sufficient time to converse at our ease upon the subject that most occupies our thoughts'.<sup>58</sup> Dalrymple felt she 'got the best consolation after losing my old friend by acquiring in a manner two new ones' in Elizabeth and Catherine Fergusson, a sentiment echoed by their elder sister Jean.<sup>59</sup> After Elizabeth's death in 1804, Lady Hailes re-affirmed familial bonds by naming in her letter to Dalrymple 'those whom you would most wish to see & from whom you will receive the most consolation', particularly Catherine and her brother James, the latter only recently the widower of her own daughter, Dalrymple's step-sister Jean.<sup>60</sup> 'May we all be thankful', she emphasised, 'for the many blessings we enjoy in the Friendship & attentions we experience from so many good & valuable Friends'. She signed her letter 'your sincerely affectionate Mother'.<sup>61</sup>

While Dalrymple strengthened her family ties by the restatement of relationship in the face of loss, she maintained those ties by the more cheerful strategy of visiting. In this she was indefatigable. In the late summer of 1797 she had a 'favourite Scheme' of getting the Fergussons to Tynninghame House in East Lothian, where she herself was making a visit. Elizabeth, then at Kilkerran with her sisters, had to remind her of practicalities: 'You complain [...] that you do not hear from us often enough [...] but while you are Flying all over the Country there is no saying where to catch you'.<sup>62</sup> Dalrymple's thirty-nine volumes of journals, from

<sup>57</sup> Dalrymple, journals, 9 Apr. 1799 (NLS Mss 25458); 16 Nov. 1824, 19 Jan. 1825 (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 4 Oct. 1794 (NLS Mss 25455, 41–2f.); same to same, 18 Oct. 1794 (NLS Mss 25455, 43–4f.); see also Anne Whitefoord to same, 7 Nov. 1794 (NLS Mss 25456, 38–41f.).

<sup>59</sup> Dalrymple, 'Annals', 1794 (NRS RH, 8, 23); Jean Dempster to Christian Dalrymple, 30 Apr. 1795 (NLS Mss 25457, 11–12f.).

<sup>60</sup> Lady Hailes to Christian Dalrymple, 16 Dec. [1804] (NLS Mss 25456, 119–20f.). On James's marriage to Jean Dalrymple, Christian had named him 'Brother'. Journal, 10 Nov. 1799 (NLS Mss 25459).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 19 Sept. 1797 (NLS Mss 25455, 104–5f.).



1798–1837, record a great variety of social interactions, from ‘Tete à Tetes’ to ‘Company’ dinners (by which she meant formal invitations and mixed company), to overnight stays in Edinburgh if late at the theatre or the assembly, attendance at the Musselburgh races, and long visits to her extended kin in the Lowlands and south-west Scotland.<sup>63</sup> Winter snows failed to deter her from attending balls either in town or at country houses within reach of her coach, and on these occasions she often did not retire until the early hours of the morning.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes she came home just in time to greet arriving visitors; at other times she was annoyed to find she had missed potential guests because of her own impromptu stays in town.<sup>65</sup> The names of her companions, visitors, and hostesses were noted meticulously, but days when she was not visiting and had no resident guests at Newhailes merited only the briefest of entries, ‘at home no Company’.<sup>66</sup> Dalrymple’s journals mapped her social networks, literally and figuratively. Her circles of acquaintance connected her to most of the prominent families in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and several further afield, linking her to a number of the gentlewomen cited elsewhere in this thesis. Among those she visited regularly, or was visited by, were the duchess of Buccleuch (kin to Lady Louisa Stuart), the Balcarres family of Fife who were also friends of the Inneses of Stow, and Lady Clerk of Penicuik, kin to Susanna Clerk the younger.<sup>67</sup> Closer links to the latter were the Miss Pringles, with whom Dalrymple often dined or stayed during visits to Edinburgh.<sup>68</sup> Her journals make it clear that single women, if they chose, could participate fully in the social life of the capital. Nor was this a prerogative of just one or two wealthy spinsters. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus recalled that in 1815 the ‘last party of the season’ was given by her spinster kinswoman Grace Baillie in her ‘small and ill-furnished rooms’ in an old-fashioned house in Queen Street. Undaunted, Baillie had the doors and furniture taken out, and the rooms hung with coloured lamps, ‘a cage of birds’ and garlands of paper flowers.

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<sup>63</sup> Sier notes 14 theatre attendances between 1798–1801. ‘Miss Christian Dalrymple’, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Dalrymple, journals, 8 Feb. 1799 (NLS Mss 25458); 5 Jan. 1814 (NLS Mss 25465).

<sup>65</sup> E.g., 22 Apr. 1799 (NLS Mss 25458); 25 Oct., 20, 27 Nov. 1813 (NLS Mss 25465).

<sup>66</sup> 24 Mar. 1798 (NLS Mss 25458); also, e.g., 11 Jan., 21 Jun. *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> See, *i.a.*, 7 Mar., 22 Apr. 1799 (NLS Mss 25458); Oct. 1799 (NLS Mss 25459); 26 Nov., 21 Dec. 1813; 5 Jan. 1814 (NLS Mss 25465). Glover notes ‘in Edinburgh, unlike in London, there was no separate aloof or risqué beau monde [...] many gentry enjoying close aristocratic connections’. *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Pringle of Yair. 16 Sept., 13 Oct., 5, 23–26 Nov. 1813; 12, 14 Jan., 19 Feb., 13 Jun. 1814 (NLS Mss 25465).

Her guests were met by ‘a shepherdess, in white muslin, a wreath of roses and a crook, offering ices, a Highland laddie in a kilt presenting lemonade’.<sup>69</sup> ‘The town [was] so amused by the affair’, remembered Grant, that ‘half a dozen poems were written upon this Arcadian entertainment’. A diary kept by Susan Ferrier’s niece Helen Graham recorded the Miss Pringles’ presence at a well attended ‘grand ball, rout and supper’.<sup>70</sup> Relatives of her own, the Miss Edmonstones, entertained at home and went out to the theatre, while Graham herself enjoyed taking tea with the elderly Miss Campbells of Newfield.<sup>71</sup> Graham, at nineteen a close observer of Edinburgh’s social scene, was of the opinion that ‘it is much more allowable to an old maid than a married woman to have a love for amusements, for an old maid may gratify her own wishes without asking anybody’s leave, or without going contrary to any person’s wishes’.<sup>72</sup>

Dalrymple’s female kin by marriage were central to her ability to socialise with ease and propriety, those twin pillars of gentility. While she was still a relatively young woman her father’s widow Lady Hailes could chaperone sociability at Newhailes. In urban settings such as the theatre or assembly, where an unmarried gentlewoman was not expected to venture alone, the companionship of the Fergusson sisters allowed her the social freedom enjoyed by sibling households such as the Pringles, the Edmonstones, and the Campbells.<sup>73</sup> In broader terms, by aligning herself with the Kilkerran family after her father’s death, Dalrymple kept visible her connection to Edinburgh’s legal aristocracy.<sup>74</sup> She was a frequent inmate at Kilkerran House, the Ayrshire home of Sir Adam Fergusson, and her secure position and respected status in the Fergusson family can be gauged by the fact that following Sir

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<sup>69</sup> E. Grant (ed. Lady Strachey), *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (London: John Murray, 1911), 288.

<sup>70</sup> H. Graham (ed. J. Irvine), *Parties and Pleasures: the diaries of Helen Graham 1823–1826* (Perth: Paterson, 1957), 50, 53.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 47, 54, 116. The Edmonstones were assumed to be the originals of the spinster aunts in Ferrier’s *Marriage*.

<sup>72</sup> Graham, *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>73</sup> Rizzo, observing that a single woman ‘could not take her maid to the theater’, rightly emphasises that a gentlewoman on her own had to find a suitable companion, but single status did not always equate with living singly. *Companions*, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Both her father and her step-uncle George Fergusson, Lord Hermand, were lords of justiciary.

Adam's death in September 1813, she co-wrote an obituary which appeared in the *Scots Magazine*.<sup>75</sup>

While Dalrymple's frequent residence at Kilkerran highlights her familial position, her ability to get there underlines her independent status. A coach was a significant expenditure in any family, yet Dalrymple readily set out not just on visits to relatives, or to spas in search of health, but on sightseeing tours lasting several weeks, and jaunts of a few days taken on a whim.<sup>76</sup> On the last day of May 1824 she noted 'after Dinner it was suddenly proposed we should go to Melrose & it was immediately settled to set out the next morning'. The next three days were spent in a leisurely fashion, sketching views and ruins, reading from Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and admiring the improvements of local landowners, before Dalrymple and her three guests returned home 'after a very pleasant little tour'.<sup>77</sup> This example of gentlewomen going about as they pleased together can be compared with the feminine compliance normally expressed with whatever travelling arrangements the men of a family chose to make, or break. (Lady Hailes, at Buxton in 1804 with her brother Sir Adam, wrote to Dalrymple 'I have heard at second hand that he has thoughts of making next week the last of our Stay here; which I dont mean to object to'; while Allan Fergusson, in Margate with her father in 1789, wrote that on being asked when they should leave, she had 'of course' answered "'when you please papa"'—not that in truth that is altogether the case'.<sup>78</sup>) A single woman of means could please herself, a disconcerting truth which may have lain behind the caricature of the gadabout old maid who filled her empty life with endless visiting. Dalrymple was a keen tourist who made annual spring 'excursions' into England to visit 'Gentlemens Places', houses associated with historical figures, and the romantic ruins of castles and abbeys. Her excursion of 1816 took her as far south as the Isle of Wight, and into Wales.<sup>79</sup> In later years she seems to have viewed these long tours in

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<sup>75</sup> With Sir John Sinclair, author of the *Statistical Account of Scotland*. Sier, 'Miss Christian Dalrymple', 27, 31, 40.

<sup>76</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 31 May–3 Jun. 1824 (NLS Mss 25481). On the expense, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 124.

<sup>77</sup> Dalrymple, *ibid.* The company included two Miss Halketts.

<sup>78</sup> Lady Hailes to Christian Dalrymple, 23 Aug. 1804 (NLS Mss 25456, 115–16f.); Allan Fergusson to same, 29 Aug. 1789 (NLS Mss 25454, 15–20f.).

<sup>79</sup> Dalrymple, 'List of Gentlemens Places we have been at during our Excursion 1816' (NLS Mss 25498(i), 75f.).

the same light as Lady Louisa Stuart, who advised a younger unmarried woman, ‘Put the case you never marry—*then* you ought to seek opportunities of seeing and knowing the world, to enable you to be of some use to your younger sisters’.<sup>80</sup> In the late 1820s, when Dalrymple gave her nephew an annual allowance of £200 to offset the costs of his grand tour, she took her niece with her on improving travels around the beauties of Britain.<sup>81</sup> A correspondent who followed their route by letter remarked ‘It is almost as great a pleasure to observe the delight with which an intelligent young person such as your Neice Anne, visits fine scenery as to see it first oneself’.<sup>82</sup> Dalrymple was commended for her ‘good sense & good taste in moving about and visiting yr. friends, & beautiful parts of the Country, when it is in your power to do so’.<sup>83</sup>

Louisa Stuart, like Dalrymple, expressed family connection through a pattern of extended visiting. On her mother’s death in 1794, when she was left the substantial inheritance of £12,000, her sister pointed out that she had been made ‘perfectly independent’ and could live ‘exactly in the manner that suits you [...] one of your great subjects of uneasiness used to be being obliged to conform to her company-hours, etc., and not being sufficiently mistress of your own time; now you have it in your power to do as you please’.<sup>84</sup> Within a few years Stuart established a routine of travelling north annually from her London home to stay with her kinswoman the duchess of Buccleuch at Dalkeith Palace near Edinburgh, and with her close friend Lady Frances Douglas at Bothwell Castle near Glasgow. From Dalkeith and Bothwell she visited a range of connections in the Lowlands and the Borders, including the earl and countess of Haddington at Tynninghame, the Nisbets of Archerfield, and the duke and duchess of Roxburghe at Floors. Evidence of her busy schedule belies her claim in old age that ‘the state of the solitary old maid’ whose parents were dead differed ‘in all respects [...] to that of the daughter of

<sup>80</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, 11 Dec. 1822, Home, *Letters*, 284.

<sup>81</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 27 May 1824 (NLS Mss 25481); Charles Dalrymple Fergusson to same, 20 Oct. 1825 (NLS Mss 25456, 142–3f.).

<sup>82</sup> Countess of Dalhousie to Christian Dalrymple, 5 Dec. 1827 (NLS Mss 25456, 160–1f.).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Lady Macartney to Lady Portarlington, 8 Nov. 1794, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 222; Lady Portarlington to Lady Louisa Stuart, 16 Feb. 1795, *ibid.*, 228. In 1800 Stuart inherited a further £6,000 from her uncle. Lord Bute to same, 7 Apr. 1800, *ibid.*, III, 1. To Lady Macartney’s disappointment Stuart chose not to live with another brother, the Bishop of St David’s. Lady Macartney to Lady Portarlington, 6 Oct. 1794, *ibid.*, II, 215.

people of any consideration in the world [...] acquaintanceships, aye & sometimes what have been taken for friendships, march off along with the rest of the establishment'.<sup>85</sup> In 1809 she turned down an invitation to visit her good friend Walter Scott with the excuse that she could not call on him 'without going on to Mount Teviot, but there would be A.B.C. following each other, Minto, etc., etc., etc.'<sup>86</sup> Trying to keep the duchess of Buccleuch up to date with her itinerary, she concluded it was best if the duchess 'Always direct to Gloucester Place', her London home, although she could not confirm when she would be there.<sup>87</sup> Such extended absences, and returns to a house with 'no carpets, no window curtains, books papered up', sometimes left her feeling as if she was 'but a bird of passage in London, and as thoroughly uncomfortable as if I were in an inn'.<sup>88</sup>

Relatives by marriage were not the only connections Stuart and Dalrymple had in common. Both were acquainted with the celebrated spinster couple of Llangollen, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, whose elopement from familial coercion to a life of romantic sensibility in a cottage ornée made them a tourist draw of their day.<sup>89</sup> Stuart confessed that in her youth she had been 'captivated' by their story, but from the vantage point of aristocracy she came to consider that 'there was nothing the least romantic about them, and that nobody knew the world so well, or was so desirous to keep up a close connection with it', adding 'Poor I myself have been in three or four instances the object of their distant passion'.<sup>90</sup> Dalrymple visited the two women during her tours of 1816 and 1827 with her niece, and corresponded with them for several years, on one occasion receiving thanks for her gift of a theological work by her father Lord Hailes in a letter gracefully addressed to

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<sup>85</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Bromley, 7 Feb. 1836, in *Memoire*, 12. After their mother's death, Stuart's sister urged her to acknowledge the 'inestimable blessing' of friends. Lady Portarlington to Lady Louisa Stuart, 16 Feb. 1795, Clark, *Gleanings*, II, 228.

<sup>86</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Walter Scott, 26 Jul. 1809, Clark, *ibid.*, III, 220. She told him she would be at Bothwell for three months, and hoped to see him there.

<sup>87</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to duchess of Buccleuch, 8 Sept. 1803; see also same to Lady Portarlington, 13 Nov. 1802, *ibid.*, 94, 110.

<sup>88</sup> Same to duchess of Buccleuch, 18 Dec. 1806, *ibid.*, 176.

<sup>89</sup> When they eloped in 1778, the 39-year-old Butler was under pressure to enter a convent, while the 23-year-old Ponsonby had been sexually approached by her guardian's husband. N. Reynolds, 'Cottage Industry: The Ladies of Llangollen and the Symbolic Capital of the Cottage Ornée', *TEC*, 51:1-2 (spring/summer 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, Oct. 1821, Home, *Letters*, 188. Stuart's sister Lady Lonsdale visited them and relayed their compliments. Lady Lonsdale to Lady Louisa Stuart, 12 Aug. 1806, Clark, *Gleanings*, III, 158.

‘his Lordship’s Daughter and Representative’.<sup>91</sup> As a highly visible example of single women who lived as a ‘Family of Friends’, the carefully crafted self-representations of Butler and Ponsonby, and contemporary reception of those representations, bear a brief scrutiny here. In the context of this thesis their historiographical reception as a lesbian couple is less relevant. In considerations of the lives of historical never-married women living together, descriptions such as ‘lesbian continuum’, ‘lesbian-like’, and ‘acts [which] shaded into the lesbian’ can seem so inclusive as to be interpretively meaningless.<sup>92</sup> Lanser sensibly suggests that ‘Understanding the historical implications of women’s intimacies [...] depends less on *private acts* than on *public relations*’ (her emphasis), adding that ‘except in rare cases of explicit public “proof,” *female intimacies were perceived as chaste or sapphic according to the conventions through which they could be read*’.<sup>93</sup> From this perspective, the social self-representations of Butler and Ponsonby can elucidate ways in which other, less visible, unmarried women represented their shared lives. It cannot be assumed that the use of either passionate or marital language by women living together expressed a relationship which would have been considered transgressive by their contemporaries.

Butler and Ponsonby did not altogether escape insinuations of sexual relationship, although this may have been as much a response to their conspicuously successful modelling of female householding as any belief that they indulged in an ‘unnatural’ physical relationship.<sup>94</sup> Overall, however, their self-representation in terms of virtuous rural retirement and cultivated polite self-improvement must be

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<sup>91</sup> Dalrymple, ‘List’ (NLS Mss 25498(i), 75f.); countess of Dalhousie to Christian Dalrymple, 5 Dec. 1827 (NLS Mss 25456, 160–1f.); Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby to same, 8 Feb. 1817, 31 ?Jan., 3 Aug. 1822 (NLS Mss 25457, 48–9f., 60–3f.).

<sup>92</sup> A. Rich, in S.S. Lanser, ‘Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts’, *ECS*, 32:2 (winter 1998–9); J.M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms”, *JHS*, 9:1/2 (Jan.–Apr. 2000); M.R. Hunt, ‘The Sapphic Strain: English Lesbians in the Long Eighteenth Century’, in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 283.

<sup>93</sup> Lanser, ‘Befriending the Body’, 184.

<sup>94</sup> It was not until their home and public status were well established that a ‘suggestive’ newspaper article appeared, in 1790. Lanser, *ibid.*, 194. In 1816 Walter Scott used sexual innuendo to mock their supposed usurpation of the male householding role. Reynolds, ‘Cottage Industry’, 217. Cf. Mary Carter, a financially independent European traveller whose self-assurance goaded both William Beckford and Edward Gibbon into describing her as sapphic; in contrast, another female traveller described her as ‘certainly one of the most independent People I ever saw, but good humoured singular and sensible’. Rizzo, *Companions*, 268–88 *passim*.

considered successful.<sup>95</sup> Their retirement was more figurative than literal, for the Llangollen valley was becoming known as a picturesque destination, and they became a focus for droves of visitors.<sup>96</sup> The two women made rigorous distinctions between those they received personally and those who were shown the gardens and a few rooms by their housekeeper, in accordance with conventions of country seat visiting. This strategy reinforced their local status and boosted wider public recognition of their position as gentry.<sup>97</sup> In 1785 Queen Charlotte requested a plan of their retreat; as the embellisher of a royal cottage at Kew she well understood the popular idealisation of rural domesticity that the cottage ornée represented.<sup>98</sup> Further evidence of their joint public status lies in the award to Butler of a government pension which, after her death in 1829, was transferred to Ponsonby.<sup>99</sup> The pension was secured for them by the patronage of Lady Frances Douglas, Lady Louisa Stuart's venerated friend.<sup>100</sup> In 1809 they were left a joint legacy of £500 by Lady Clarges, companion of the never-married traveller Mary Carter.<sup>101</sup> In this context the tribute of William Wordsworth, whose 1824 sonnet called them 'sisters in love [...] above the reach of time', is less pertinent than the never-married Anna Seward's decision to make their 'sacred Friendship, permanent as pure' the subject of her epic poem 'Llangollen Vale'.<sup>102</sup> The author Elizabeth Hamilton, ever careful of her respectability, was happy to visit, and found them to be 'characters of a very superior stamp'.<sup>103</sup> The notice paid them by single women who themselves had public reputations to maintain, as well as by private gentlewomen like Dalrymple, suggests that Butler and Ponsonby constructed a narrative of their lives which was broadly

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<sup>95</sup> Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773) posit friendship between women with about ten years' difference in age as an ideal. Reynolds, 'Cottage Industry', 213n.9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 220; see also Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 77–8. In May 1824 Dalrymple recorded in her journal the visit to Newhailes of 'a Mrs Fraser, the wife of a Major Fraser who had expressed a wish to see the place' (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>98</sup> Reynolds, 'Cottage Industry', 218.

<sup>99</sup> R. Vanita, review of M. Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778–1928*, in *JWH*, 20:4 (winter 2008), 137.

<sup>100</sup> Reynolds, 'Cottage Industry', 218.

<sup>101</sup> Rizzo, *Companions*, 291.

<sup>102</sup> Lanser, 'Befriending the Body', 179, 193, 194. Cf. the description of the Lambs' 'Union of Affection [...] what we conceive of marriage in Heaven', chp. 3, 92 above.

<sup>103</sup> Perry, *Novel Relations*, 163n.47.

accepted in society, and specifically attractive to other unmarried gentlewomen by virtue of its subtext of discreet self-determination.<sup>104</sup>

The pair expressed their relationship in language which, like that used by brothers and sisters living together, consciously invited comparison with genteel marriage, not just as a practical union but also as a beneficial social tie. They called each other ‘my Beloved’ and ‘my Better half’, and sent letters jointly, as if the one spoke for the other.<sup>105</sup> Butler’s journal recorded the ‘exquisite retirement’ of their home, where evenings of domestic felicity were spent in improving reading and ‘converse sweet’ with the ‘darling of [her] Heart’.<sup>106</sup> Contemporary uses of the marriage trope and kinship terms in the context of relationships between women have sometimes muddied the historiographical waters.<sup>107</sup> Lanser argues that in calling Butler and Ponsonby ‘sisters in love’ Wordsworth sanitised their domestic and relationship ties. She emphasises that the two ‘saw themselves not as siblings but as spouses’, and reads the ‘wedded or bedded partnership’ as a ‘much more threatening kinship analogy’.<sup>108</sup> This risks overstatement, for it was the fluidity of relationship terms, and the applicability of the marriage trope beyond the narrow definition of legalised sexual union, which allowed the single of both sexes to situate themselves in an acceptable social framework.<sup>109</sup> As the preceding chapter shows, brothers and sisters who lived together and blurred the linguistic lines between sibship, friendship and marriage were in most cases expressing mutual support, not raising the spectre of incest. Female friends in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also drew on established tropes of genteel or aristocratic friendship among

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<sup>104</sup> After their early familial rebellion, the two women spent the rest of their lives demonstrating the exemplary class conformity which Lanser perceptively terms ‘compensatory conservatism’. ‘Befriending the Body’, 187.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 179; cf. the description of the Lambs as ‘univocal’, chp. 3, 92. Fraser and Bristow also wrote jointly to Fraser’s Scottish connections (AUSLA MS 3470/7/29).

<sup>106</sup> Reynolds, ‘Cottage Industry’, 211, 216. Cf. Dorothy Wordsworth’s evocation of a domestic idyll in her journals.

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g., Vanita, review of *Vicinus*, 135.

<sup>108</sup> Lanser, ‘Befriending the Body’, 179.

<sup>109</sup> Retaining focus on ‘public relations’ rather than ‘private acts’, their insistence on returning from visits to their own ‘State Bedchamber’, for example, may have been less a subversive assertion of spousal relationship than an extension of the careful control they maintained over their conservative gentry image. By returning to their own household to sleep they lessened the risk of encountering disrespect from other people’s servants. Cf. the self-expressed lesbian Anne Lister’s experience of insults from social inferiors, *ibid.*, 190.



women in which ‘a longing for intimacy [was] figured in bodily terms’.<sup>110</sup> In this context, passionate address between friends claimed a spiritual intensity which lifted the relationship beyond the corporeal.<sup>111</sup> The poet Anne Finch asked in 1713 ‘What is Friendship when complete?’, and answered ‘’Tis to share all joy and grief; / ’Tis to lend all due relief / From the tongue, the heart, the hand, / ’Tis to mortgage house and land; / For a friend be sold a slave; / ’Tis to die upon a grave, / If a friend therein do lie’.<sup>112</sup> This selflessness was echoed by later generations of educated gentlewomen who looked to the contemporary ideal of social reciprocity as well as classical tradition to affirm the value of their friendships. Mary Bristow, who enjoyed a forty-year friendship with Elyza Fraser, copied many similar sentiments into the commonplace books she kept over several decades. In a notebook begun almost twenty years before they met, she pondered the nature of friendship. It was, she wrote, ‘fed by an Union of Souls [and] Nourished by a Constant Succession of virtues’.<sup>113</sup> From a French novel she took the assertion that she was ‘not Capable of Moderation towards My Friend – My love – my joy My Grief – are all Excessive – when you Occasion them’.<sup>114</sup> After death the souls of friends would seek each other out, to ‘Converse together in that region of silence & shadows’.<sup>115</sup> Echoing (or perhaps paraphrasing) Finch, she insisted that ‘The necessary Appendages of Friendship are Confidence & Benevolence – the heart & the Purse, ought to be open to a Friend – nor do we run any Hazzard in Trusting to a Friend, Either our secrets or our Strong Box, the person who can reserve Either knows not Friendship’.<sup>116</sup> If selfishness was the great criticism of the single life, friendship could redeem the single.

Elyza Fraser adopted the idioms of friendship to represent both her relationship and her travels with Bristow. The two women left Portugal for the Mediterranean in the spring of 1782 at a time of ongoing naval hostilities in the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. Cf. Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 213.

<sup>112</sup> R. Lonsdale (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>113</sup> Bristow, notebook, 29 Jun. 1764 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/2).

<sup>114</sup> Headed ‘Turkish Spy’; probably G. Marana et al., *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy (L’Espion Turc)*, 1684 and later, with 15 editions by 1801.

<sup>115</sup> Bristow, notebook, 1764 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/2).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

region, and in poems composed at sea Fraser touched a note of heroic selflessness. Becalmed near Almería in May 1782, having passed through a Spanish convoy of ‘120 Sail besides five men of war’, she answered ‘MB who accused her of repenting the Voyage’, ‘Can I repent What you approve / Or talk of Joys Unshared by thee / Whose health Whose Friendship & Whose Love / Are blessings [so much] Prized by me’.<sup>117</sup> Her friend’s health, she assured her, was ‘than Life to Me More dear’. A gentlewoman’s personal care was usually given to relatives and as such it was a recognised mark of intimacy.<sup>118</sup> By daily attentions to her weak travelling companion, Fraser demonstrated the sincerity of her friendship, and its importance to her.<sup>119</sup> A night when the consumptive Bristow slept well was as worthy of note as their encounter with an ‘English cutter of 22 Guns’ which ‘brought us too & questioned us’, and which Fraser soon after saw engage another vessel.<sup>120</sup> At midsummer, enduring ‘the horrors of a Quarantine’ at Genoa, she reflected that it was only a year since they had met in the genteel surroundings of Clifton spa. Wondering where another year would find them and resolving to submit to ‘heavens decree’, she asked only to ‘live or die with thee: / Even in this Lazzaret Confined, / to Share thy fate, & Sooth thy mind / were such thy fate, My days Il end / And die, or live thy faithful Friend —. / For Adverse fate can only prove / the Strength or Value of our Love’.<sup>121</sup> In the event no such self-sacrifice was required, and within a few years both had returned to Britain, where a more sedate pattern of travel between the homes of English and Scottish relatives acknowledged the familial rather than the heroic stamp of their relationship.<sup>122</sup> Domestic proximity rather than adverse fate proved the value of their union to each, and the high worth Fraser had early set on

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<sup>117</sup> Fraser, memorandum book [1781–2], 26 May 1782 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/7). At this time Gibraltar was under siege by the combined forces of France and Spain, a contest which culminated in the ‘Grand Assault’ of September that year.

<sup>118</sup> When Hester Thrale wanted to represent her relationship with Frances Burney as one of close friendship, not patronage, she let it be known that when Burney fell ill at her house, ‘I gave her every Medicine, and every Slop with my own hand; took away her dirty Cups, Spoons, &c, moved her Tables, in short was Doctor & Nurse, & Maid’. Rizzo, *Companions*, 91.

<sup>119</sup> See, e.g., Fraser, memorandum book [1781–2] (AUSLA MS 3470/7/7).

<sup>120</sup> ‘[We] know not who Conquered’ she wrote. *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Bristow first visited Aberdeenshire with Fraser in the summer of 1787, travelling north via Harrogate spa after wintering in southern England on her return from Europe late in 1786. Bristow, diaries (AUSLA MS 3470/7/8).

their friendship was reasserted by her several decades later in definitively familial terms, in a document which was discovered after her death by her nearest blood kin.

### Succeeding generations

When Elyza Fraser inherited Castle Fraser in 1792, it was as part of a joint inheritance with her widowed sister Martha Mackenzie. The sisters agreed that Martha would have the barony and lands of Inverallochy near Fraserburgh, and Elyza the barony and lands of Castle Fraser, including the patronage of the parish of Cluny. Castle Fraser was deemed the more valuable estate, so Martha received £400 in balance.<sup>123</sup> This division was formalised in 1794, by which date Elyza had already begun extending the enclosure work started by her brother.<sup>124</sup> It was thought that the castle itself could be made habitable ‘at considerable expence’.<sup>125</sup> William Fraser left over £35,000 in English and Scots money, and even after payment of debts Elyza probably received a large capital sum.<sup>126</sup> She lost no time in making her mark on both house and lands. A week after the legal division was signed she received plans from the Edinburgh architect John Paterson suggesting alterations to form an entrance hall in the modern style.<sup>127</sup> That year she also commissioned the landscape designer Thomas White senior, ‘foremost exponent of the picturesque in Scotland’, to improve the policies.<sup>128</sup> Confident of her own judgement, she followed some but not all of his recommendations.<sup>129</sup>

Fraser’s plans for her estate were intended not just to increase its productivity, but to make statements about her residence and her familial status. The dilemma of whether to view family lands as a support to lineage or simply as an asset to support an urban lifestyle was one facing many Highland families at this time. In the words of a younger son trying to persuade his London-based older brother to

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<sup>123</sup> When Elyza died in 1814, rental income on Castle Fraser was £668. Fraser, accounts and receipts (AUSLA MS 3470/2/3/9).

<sup>124</sup> ‘Submission and decree arbitral between Mrs Martha Fraser & Miss Elizabeth Fraser’, 8 Feb. 1794 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/24).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Legal correspondence, Elyza Fraser and Martha Mackenzie (AUSLA MS 3470/7/20/1–17).

<sup>127</sup> ‘Plan and Section [...] 13 Feby 1794’ (AUSLA MS 3470/21/14).

<sup>128</sup> F. Greenoak, *The Gardens of the National Trust for Scotland* (London: Aurum Press, 2005), 34. For White’s career, especially in the north-east, see also A.A. Tait, *The Landscape Garden in Scotland, 1735–1835* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980), 147–60.

<sup>129</sup> Greenoak, *ibid.*

refurbish the family home in Argyll, ‘it was here the head of the family for centuries resided [...] we cannot perpetuate their memory so well as by any means as by improving the original seat, so as to attract the attention of all sorts of people who will be anxious to know who originally lived there’.<sup>130</sup> Fraser’s brother had lived in London before his death; she now chose to return to the ancestral seat. There is no indication that she ever considered living in Edinburgh, where she and her sister had inherited a house.<sup>131</sup> Her improvements to Castle Fraser were calculated to be cost-effective but publicly visible. New entrance lodges announced her presence and her taste for relatively little outlay, and obviated the need for major rebuilding of Castle Fraser itself. In the castle’s great hall, she opened up large windows to light its venerable architecture. She also built new farm steadings and stables to Paterson’s design, connecting herself to the growing interest in agricultural improvement shown by Scotland’s landed proprietors.<sup>132</sup> Twelve months later she recorded with satisfaction, ‘The Castle was Begun By Fraser laird of Muchall In the Reign of Alexander the Third Added to in the Reign of King Robert Bruce The wings were Built by the first Lord Fraser In the Reign of Charles the First And the whole Restored And Beautified By Elyza Fraser 1795’.<sup>133</sup> Her boast placed her at the head of a long line of Frasers and set her custodianship within the framework of Scottish history (notably, she omitted the Hanoverian succession from her roll call of lineage).<sup>134</sup>

Mary Bristow’s position as Fraser’s adopted near relation was emphasised when the two women took up residence at Castle Fraser. Together they collected books and music for the library and laid out a walled flower garden, suitably polite pursuits for gentlewomen. However, a diary entry suggests Bristow’s role was more akin to that of co-proprietor than domestic companion. In July 1797 she recorded ‘I

<sup>130</sup> Memorandum to Neil Malcolm of Poltalloch, 14 Mar. 1798, in Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*, 170.

<sup>131</sup> In George Square.

<sup>132</sup> The ‘manorial’ stables of 1795 (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland) can be compared to, e.g., the contemporary castellated Maam steading on the duke of Argyll’s Inveraray estate (ibid.), via [canmore.rcahms.gov.uk](http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk) However, by 1823 the 7<sup>th</sup> duke was ‘voluntarily [absenting] himself from the Seat of his Consequence, to bury himself amidst the “feculence & froth” of London & its Hells’. Charles Dalrymple Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 1823 (NLS Mss 25456, 125–6f.).

<sup>133</sup> Fraser, note (AUSLA MS 3470/7/40).

<sup>134</sup> Many years later she wrote ‘We cannot [imagine] Homes like Castle Fraser to have been built & inhabited by any who were not Gentlemen & Ladies in the best sence of the Word (altho it was Middle Ages)’. Loose note in Fraser’s hand in Bristow, notebook (AUSLA MS 3470/7/3).

began working at the wood'.<sup>135</sup> This plantation, within sight of the castle's inhabitants and visitors, was given the name Miss Bristow's Wood, evidence of Fraser's wish to graft her friend onto her family history. After Bristow's death in October 1805, Fraser erected a memorial there, inscribed with a tribute to her friend's many genteel virtues—'a Benevolent Heart, Elegant Taste, Unassuming Manners, an Informed Mind Unruffled by Passion'—and a Latin verse lamenting her loss. As in Dalrymple's case, death did not weaken Fraser's chosen familial ties. Bristow's widowed sister Lady Lyttleton continued to visit Castle Fraser until she herself died there in 1809.<sup>136</sup>

Fraser's sister Martha Mackenzie does not seem to have spent much time at Castle Fraser, but after Bristow's death Fraser emphasised that her testatory intentions lay with her nearest blood relatives.<sup>137</sup> She had long intended that her nephew Alexander Mackenzie Fraser would inherit, but his death, also in 1809, prompted her to protect her chosen dynastic line by laying an entail on her eldest great-nephew.<sup>138</sup> Her nephew was memorialised on Bristow's monument, further entwining the two families via the funerary monuments which Fraser had erected for herself and her friend.<sup>139</sup> As a senior and wealthy member of her family she was consulted on the guardians and tutors appointed for her great-nephews, and she followed the career of her heir, Charles Mackenzie Fraser, with interest, writing to assure him she had 'not the smallest doubt of your Conduct, & Merit, Intittling you, to the Friendship & Preference we bestow on you'.<sup>140</sup>

Elyza Fraser died in January 1814 aged eighty. As a statement of her status and connections (and notice of her heir's intent to claim this social inheritance), announcements of her funeral were sent to all the families of note in the north-east Highlands, among them the Forbes of Craigievar, Echt, and Pitsligo, Gordon of

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<sup>135</sup> Bristow, diaries (AUSLA MS 3470/7/8).

<sup>136</sup> Memorial tablet in Fraser's mausoleum, Cluny old churchyard, via [canmore.rcahms.gov.uk](http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk) (the mausoleum, built 1807, was designed by her friend and neighbour, the antiquary, architect, and Jacobite James Byres of Tonley). Fraser was also godmother to Bristow's great-niece. Fraser, copy of will with codicils, 1814 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/44).

<sup>137</sup> Martha died in 1803. Smiley, *Frasers of Castle Fraser*, 226.

<sup>138</sup> Fraser, copy of will with codicils, 1814 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/44); deed of entail, 28 Apr. 1809 (AUSLA MS 3470/23/21); Smiley, *Frasers of Castle Fraser*, 226.

<sup>139</sup> Anne Mackenzie and Elyza Fraser to Charles Mackenzie Fraser, 8 Aug. 1810 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/38/1–2); see also n.136 above.

<sup>140</sup> To Charles Mackenzie Fraser, *ibid.*

Cluny, Burnett of Crathes, the duke of Gordon, Lord Seaforth, Lord Saltoun, and the countess of Kintore.<sup>141</sup> Following the episcopal service, Fraser's papers were opened in the presence of Charles Mackenzie Fraser and others of his name, including a Mackenzie lawyer.<sup>142</sup> Among the papers was found a deed by which Fraser gave the Castle Fraser estate 'heritably and irredemably to and in favour of Miss Mary Bristow [...] in liferent during all the days of her lifetime after my decease'. On succession Bristow was to 'assume use hear and constantly retain the surname arms and designation of Fraser of Castle fraser and none other as [her] proper & only surname and designation'.<sup>143</sup> Whether or not Charles Mackenzie Fraser, aged twenty-two at his great-aunt's death, would have challenged her wishes in the event of Bristow still being alive is impossible to say. As it was, he accepted and acknowledged the incorporation of Bristow into the Fraser family lineage and history by having inscribed on another side of Bristow's monument a tribute to 'Elyza Fraser, late possessor of this Castle', in which he named himself her 'grateful relation and successor'.<sup>144</sup> The ties between Elyza Fraser and her intended and actual successors, both her blood kin and her chosen family, were thus given public and permanent recognition.

Like Elyza Fraser, Christian Dalrymple took a close interest in the improvement of her property. Her involvement seems to have increased with age, when records of social interactions in her journals give way to equally detailed records of her almost daily supervision of tree planting, ploughing, shearing, and harvesting on her estate. A few years after inheriting Newhailes, she had written disparagingly to her step-cousin Jean Dempster in Sutherland of the limited knowledge of gentlemen farmers.<sup>145</sup> She may have been referring to the fact that

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<sup>141</sup> Funeral arrangements of Elyza Fraser, 17 Jan. 1814 (AUSLA MS 3470/7/42). For the performance aspect of Highland funerals, see Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*, 184.

<sup>142</sup> Copy of minutes, opening of Elyza Fraser's repositories (AUSLA MS 3470/7/43). Nenadic notes the symbolic as well as practical importance of kin involvement in 'the business of managing death and inheritance', op. cit., 23.

<sup>143</sup> Legal papers, Charles Mackenzie Fraser (AUSLA MS 3470/8/31/2). The copy paper states that the deed was 'found', suggesting it was an unexpected discovery.

<sup>144</sup> Unusually, he noted that Fraser was 'Distinguished by her intellectual attainments' before going on to praise her 'polite accomplishments' and 'Christian duty'. Smiley, *Frasers of Castle Fraser*, 44.

<sup>145</sup> Jean Dempster to Christian Dalrymple, 30 Apr. 1795 (NLS Mss 25457, 11–12f.).

gentlemen farmers in the Highlands were often absent on military service; she herself was to prove a particularly hands-on proprietor.<sup>146</sup>

By 1800 Dalrymple was in receipt of an income of £900, putting her in a position to plan not just aesthetic improvements to the house and its surroundings, but long-term investments which would increase the profitability of her property.<sup>147</sup> She negotiated carefully with local developers of coalmines, salt pans, and tanneries, and was vigilant in ensuring these industries did not pollute the environs of the house. At one point she signed a petition against an encroaching railway.<sup>148</sup> In 1817 she engaged the respected gardener John Hay to design a flower garden, having admired one at Oxenford Castle in Midlothian.<sup>149</sup> Like Elyza Fraser in similar circumstances she asserted her preferences and ‘determined to adopt Mr Hay’s plan only in part’.<sup>150</sup> Despite this horticultural demonstration of polite female taste, however, Dalrymple’s great interest was timber. Whether travelling around Lowland Scotland or further afield into England, she paid close attention to other people’s trees. In February 1814 she saw beeches at nearby Pinkie ‘equal to my own’; at home again two days later, she ‘walked alone & meditated Improvements’.<sup>151</sup> Dalrymple’s enduring interest may have been partly inspired by the writings of Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, an indefatigable tree-planter whose poem ‘The Country Seat’ (1726–7) recommended that house, garden and policies should be appropriate to the site, status and pocket of the proprietor and, ideally, in a sheltered location with a view of the sea—as was Newhailes.<sup>152</sup> Clerk’s improvements at Penicuik included the Broad Walk, a raised path on a retaining wall which gave views over grazing livestock; the

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<sup>146</sup> For military lairds’ patchy involvement and investment in their Highland estates, see Nenadic, *Lairds and Luxury*.

<sup>147</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 5 Dec. 1800 (NLS Mss 25459). Cf. Julia Howard, never-married daughter of the earl of Carlisle, who had an income of £850 in 1778. Larsen, ‘For Want of a Good Fortune’, 392.

<sup>148</sup> E.g., Dalrymple, journal, 20 Dec. 1813, 30 Jun. 1814 (NLS Mss 25465); ‘Observations’ and ‘Minute of Agreement’ (NLS Mss 25498 (i), 53f., 55f.); C. Rutter, part transcript of Dalrymple, journals, 1798–1837, for The National Trust for Scotland (2001), 11 Sept. 1815, 11 Apr. 1825, 3 Jun. 1833.

<sup>149</sup> She also noticed English examples while touring. Rutter, transcript, 16, 18 Nov. 1817; Sier, ‘Miss Christian Dalrymple’, 56; Dalrymple, journal, 11 Jul., 1 Nov. 1817 (NLS Mss 25471).

<sup>150</sup> Rutter, transcript, 18 Nov. 1817.

<sup>151</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 23, 25 Feb. 1814 (NLS Mss 25465); see also, e.g., 20 Oct. 1813, and her Melrose tour of May/June 1824 (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>152</sup> W. Spink, ‘Sir John Clerk of Penicuik: Landowner as designer’, in P. Willis (ed.), *Furor Hortensis, Essays on the history of the English Landscape Garden in memory of H.F. Clark* (Edinburgh: Elysium Press Limited, 1974), 35.

Ladies' Walk Dalrymple had built at Newhailes, with sheep and cattle grazings on either side and views to the sea, is similar.<sup>153</sup> This consideration of utility in the grander setting of the designed landscape puts Dalrymple, like Fraser, in a local and national context of enlightened improving landowners. Timber gave cover to game and would be profitable to her heirs.<sup>154</sup> She sought endorsement for her schemes from Fergusson relatives and other friends, taking visitors to see new plantings and sometimes involving them in planning, as in November 1813 when she spent the day with a female friend 'lining out a proposed plantation'.<sup>155</sup> The close attention she paid to estate affairs can also be read in her constant references to her gardeners, the most frequently mentioned of her servants, indoor or outdoor. Towards the end of her life, such was her determination to remain personally involved that she had herself wheeled around in an invalid chair when unequal to walking her grounds.<sup>156</sup>

Dalrymple's improvements extended to building. As Elyza Fraser had done, she settled on estate offices and a lodge house as visible but not challengingly grandiose statements of her taste and social position. However, having rejected a neighbouring proprietor's suggestions and engaged the architect James Gillespie Graham to design the offices, she later regretted that they were built 'on so large a scale', a rare admission of doubt in her own judgement on such matters.<sup>157</sup> She was better pleased with her new lodge, ideas for which were gathered from her travels.<sup>158</sup> Within Newhailes house itself she had the servants' garrets improved, commenting with satisfaction that they were 'rooms fit for anyone to inhabit'.<sup>159</sup> In the library, a material legacy of her father's public status, she introduced a display closet for her grandmother's china and commissioned overdoor paintings of the historic Hailes and Tantallon castles, visually drawing together the male and female sides of her family and illustrating long lineage in this important room.<sup>160</sup> By choosing to use the library

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 36. Cattle parks at nearby Dalkeith Palace can also be viewed from raised wall walks.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, whose impecunious father stripped his estate of timber. *Highland Lady*, 351.

<sup>155</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 22 Nov. 1813 (NLS Mss 25465); see also 1 Oct., 3 Nov., 11 Dec. 1813, *ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Rutter, transcript, 1828–37 *passim*.

<sup>157</sup> Sier, 'Miss Christian Dalrymple', 63n.360; Rutter, transcript, 2 Jun., 12 Sept. 1807, 28 May 1810, 26 Oct. 1827.

<sup>158</sup> Dalrymple, journal, 28, 29 May; 2 Jun. 1824 (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>159</sup> Rutter, transcript, 29 Oct. 1816.

<sup>160</sup> I. Gow, The National Trust for Scotland, called the library 'a shrine to family piety'. Sier, 'Miss Christian Dalrymple', 50–1.



regularly as a drawing room, dining room and ballroom, she kept in her guests' view her position as Lord Hailes's 'Daughter and Representative'.

Dalrymple too turned to her nearest blood relations when her adopted family members were removed by death and marriage. Lady Hailes died in 1810, recording in her will her gratitude to Dalrymple, who had 'uniformly acted the part of a dutiful Daughter to me'.<sup>161</sup> This public statement of the status she wished the Fergusson family to continue according her step-daughter was endorsed by Sir Adam Fergusson, who observed in his condolence letter that their longlived mutual affection 'could not be exceeded though the relation between you of Mother and Daughter had not been that of Law but of blood'.<sup>162</sup> As a mark of his respect he urged Dalrymple to come to Kilkerran after the funeral with her companion Catherine Fergusson. Some ten years later Catherine, last of the Fergusson sisters, married the minister of Inveresk, to the great displeasure of Dalrymple, who complained that she would have 'acted a more prudent part, to have continued in her comfortable home' at Newhailes.<sup>163</sup> From this time Dalrymple began to focus her attention on her nephew Charles and her nieces Helen and Anne, children of her half-sister Jean. Jean's widower had remarried promptly after her death and went on to have a large second family, so Dalrymple's personal interest was important to her nieces (who both remained unmarried) as well as to her nephew, whom she had chosen as her heir. Early in 1819 she offered to send Helen to a London boarding school, and in later years Anne spent long periods resident at Newhailes, as her Fergusson aunts had done before her.<sup>164</sup> Dalrymple's relationship with her nephew, however, was not always easy. Her self-representation as a gentlewoman had a national cast; she referred to the 'national sober faith' and was disappointed by his irregular church attendance and apparent lack of religious feeling.<sup>165</sup> Her journals show that she negotiated this disappointment carefully, preferring not to confront

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<sup>161</sup> Lady Hailes, will, 12 Sept. 1810 (NLS Mss 25498 (i), 41f.).

<sup>162</sup> A. Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 12 Nov. 1810 (NLS Mss 25457, 42–3f.).

<sup>163</sup> Countess of Dalhousie to Christian Dalrymple, 16 May 1819 (NLS Mss 25456, 149–51f.). Her brother James Fergusson, who by this date had inherited the Kilkerran baronetcy from Sir Adam, was 'Mortally offended' by her independent choice of husband in her early forties. *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Rutter, transcript, 27 Jan. 1819.

<sup>165</sup> Dalrymple, note on Sunday schools (NLS Mss 25498 (i), 89f.). She was also an emotional patriot; in 1791 she was angered by a suggestion that Jean Dempster's health improved in England, and had to be assured 'it is finding no fault with Scotland [...] Nor is it any dishonor to your Native Country'. Allan Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 22 May 1791 (NLS Mss 25454, 65–8f.).

him about this failing.<sup>166</sup> But when it came to his expectations as her heir, and her right to manage her estate as she saw fit, she was forthright, despite her stated dislike of ‘Money Conversations’.<sup>167</sup> She reminded him that the sums she spent improving her estate were at her ‘own Discretion’.<sup>168</sup> In a letter written when he was twenty-five, Charles tried to reconcile his concerns that his benefactor’s outlays would not ‘needlessly fetter or incumber’ him, and his concern to assure her he did not presume to be her heir, and had no ‘shadow of intention to interfere in what it appertains to you alone to decide, without reference to the opinion of any Human Being’.<sup>169</sup> Charles Dalrymple Fergusson grew surer of his position as his aunt grew infirm and less able to oversee estate business. In 1837, some nine months before her death, Dalrymple was ‘much distressed’ to discover that trees had been felled near the house on his orders, exposing to view ‘ugly objects, which I had at last succeeded in getting shut out’.<sup>170</sup> She was undaunted, however. The penultimate entry in her journal records ‘I wheeled in my chair and occupied the Gardener for an hour and a half but the conversation was important and to me highly interesting. I reprieved most of the Trees that Charles had marked’.<sup>171</sup> To the last, she was determined that his inheritance would be on her terms.

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Of all the never-married gentlewomen whose manuscript papers were read for this thesis, Christian Dalrymple expressed most frequently and feelingly her dislike of solitude. Yet she enjoyed a status which allowed her to personally initiate both ‘amusements’ and familial visits, and her journals show that she was extremely socially active. As a head of household, Dalrymple followed to some degree patterns of masculine rather than feminine sociability. Newhailes was the setting for a variety of social interactions designed to maintain her visibility as a wealthy estate owner

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<sup>166</sup> See, e.g., Dalrymple, journal, 6, 13 Jun. 1824 (NLS Mss 25481).

<sup>167</sup> Charles Dalrymple Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, 20 Oct. 1825 (NLS Mss 25456, 142–3f.).

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Rutter, transcript, 5 May 1837. Dalrymple’s journal was left to her niece Anne, ‘to keep or destroy as she pleases’. Dalrymple, note/codicil to will, 27 Oct. 1837 (NLS Mss 25498 (i), 57f.).

<sup>171</sup> Rutter, transcript, 6 Jul. 1837.

among her relations, friends, and neighbours. (In her sixties, for example, she held two balls for upwards of a hundred guests, and remained present at both until the early hours of the morning.<sup>172</sup>) She also used her marriage connections to create a pattern of migratory sociability which reinforced her position in her kin networks. Unlike Margaret Adam, Susan Ferrier, or Elizabeth Hamilton, Dalrymple did not represent herself in terms of domestic boundaries and constraints. As a householder rather than a household manager, she did not choose to suggest that her domestic presence was constantly required. Despite her evident attachment to Newhailes, she left it as readily, and as regularly, as Louisa Stuart left her London home. Elyza Fraser's situation was rather different. Having come into her independent inheritance much later in life than Dalrymple, she had less to gain from a peripatetic sociability which, in her case, had a greater likelihood of being read as the sign of a domestically dependent spinster. She also differed in having entered into a domestic companionship long before being in a position to offer a home. Consequently, when she and Bristow settled at Castle Fraser after periodically living together abroad, their relationship was less obviously that of benefactress and beneficiary, and they lived on an apparent footing of equal status. In contrast, the Fergusson sisters were unable and perhaps unwilling to take up permanent residence at Newhailes, and their sisterly relationship with Dalrymple served rather to secure her place in the wider Fergusson family through extended periods of residence together at Newhailes and Kilkerran.<sup>173</sup>

Notwithstanding the difference in the detail, Fraser's and Dalrymple's lives were similar in outline. Neither of these wealthy gentlewomen chose to use her inheritance as an asset to fund a life of townhouse sociability in Edinburgh.<sup>174</sup> Instead, both demonstrated their personal status and their commitment to the family patrimony by investing in material improvements to their estates. Both turned to their relations by marriage to find domestic companionship; in this as in so many other contexts, the marriages made within a kin group drew together the unmarried as well

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 28 Mar. 1828, 6 Apr. 1829.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Frances Burney, who guarded her status vis à vis the wealthy and demanding Hester Thrale by making visits 'at her own discretion and with regard to the complex needs of her family'. Rizzo, *Companions*, 89.

<sup>174</sup> A contrasting portrait is given in chp. 6 of the Innes of Stow family, whose estates were an adjunct to status gained and maintained in an urban context.

as the married. Both conformed to the expectations of their families and wider society in their choice of an heir, demonstrating in this way their ability to contribute to the continuity of their family names. Dalrymple, for example, was not so unorthodox as to leave Newhailes to a niece. In leaving the estate to her nephew, she increased the status of her nearest male relative in the next generation and created a legacy for her family name: a new baronetcy of Newhailes was created for Charles Dalrymple Fergusson's second son Charles Dalrymple in 1887.<sup>175</sup> Fraser too was successful in securing her legacy through her heir, as Charles Mackenzie Fraser remained an involved landlord at Castle Fraser for fifty-seven years.<sup>176</sup> The wealth which Elyza Fraser and Christian Dalrymple inherited was used by them to tighten their familial ties during their lifetimes, and to claim a lasting place in their respective families after death.

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<sup>175</sup> She underlined her intention by leaving her most valuable jewellery to Charles's wife. Note/codicil to will, 27 Oct. 1837 (NLS Mss 25498 (i), 57f.). The Hailes baronetcy fell dormant on the death without issue of Sir John Pringle Dalrymple, 5<sup>th</sup> baronet, in 1829. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 99, pt II (1829), via [books.google.co.uk](http://books.google.co.uk)

<sup>176</sup> Smiley, *Frasers of Castle Fraser*, 46. Between 1840–50 he tried to break the entails of Inverallochy and Castle Fraser in the hope of selling the former. C. Mackenzie Fraser, copies of legal papers, c.1840–50 (AUSLA MS 3470/23/21).



## Chapter 5

### **'Benevolent Feelings': patronage as a signifier of social status**

Christian Dalrymple's position in her family was boosted by her ability to offer a home to female kin. Her wealth was exceptional, but her use of her wealth to cement family ties was not. Never-married women in much more modest circumstances made a point of helping their relatives and friends whenever they were in a position to do so. They recorded their benevolent actions in their journals, and preserved letters which expressed a protégé's thanks or reported a public acknowledgement of obligation. The attention paid to such behaviours points to patronage as a key support, and expression, of social hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> The skilful exercise of patronage was thus particularly important to never-married gentlewomen, whose status rested to a significant degree on their ability to create for themselves non-dependent relationships which validated their rank. Genteel status was judged not just by an individual's place in the web of social reciprocity, but also by how they conducted themselves in that position. By sharing her material prosperity, or by using her influence to forward the interests of those to whom she was connected, a never-married gentlewoman demonstrated her participation in the normative behaviours of genteel family and social life. If she was the beneficiary of patronage in turn it showed that her social character and behaviour had been noticed and approved by those of higher status, and she was thought deserving of their interest and protection. Patronage reflected on both patron and protégé in their mutual demonstration and reinforcement of established social structures. This chapter will focus on never-married women as patrons, looking at the activities which they and their contemporaries defined or understood as patronage, their expectations of it, and how it benefited them. (Never-married women as the recipients of patronage are considered in chapter seven.) The language they used when talking about patronage shows that it was practised by both sexes at all levels of gentility, and that it had its roots in familial reciprocity.

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<sup>1</sup> Chalus makes the important point that 'deals forged in private are displayed in public'. *Elite Women*, 110.

Historians long viewed patronage primarily in its public manifestations of electoral contests, military and naval promotion, and the award of government posts at national and provincial levels.<sup>2</sup> Anachronistic readings of sources sometimes marred interpretation; Sunter, for example, acknowledges that the twentieth-century historiography of Scottish political patronage was influenced by the ‘persuasive, but not strictly accurate’ writings of early nineteenth-century Whig reformers.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the historiographical division into public and private spheres left the activities of women marooned in the latter. Consideration of women’s involvement in political patronage generally stopped short at Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire, whose high profile made her the cynosure of historians as well as contemporary satirists. There was no sustained study of the roles and tactics adopted by politically active women until Chalus’s recent analysis.<sup>4</sup> The activities of the many women who helped to secure army and navy promotions for male relatives also remained largely unexamined, the best known example of female influence in this sphere being Mary Anne Clarke, the royal mistress whose sale of commissions caused a national scandal in 1809. Female patrons of the arts have received more attention, but this too has tended to focus on royal or aristocratic women.<sup>5</sup>

More recent scholarship, however, has asked how far women of middling and gentry rank, including single women, were involved in the patronage strategies which so preoccupied their fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers. Froide and Wulf have looked at unmarried women’s involvement in familial patronage as part of their broader efforts to reinstate single women in the historiography generally.<sup>6</sup> Nenadic has uncovered the role of spinsters and widows in funding the purchase of

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<sup>2</sup> The accepted practice of making short-term personal use of tax revenues was a chief attraction of government service. R. Sunter, *Patronage and Politics in Scotland, 1707–1832* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1986), 77.

<sup>3</sup> He argues that corruption should be defined in context, but undermines this important point by references to ‘bribe-hungry burgesses’ and appointments given ‘in the guise of an act of friendship’. *Patronage*, 2, 3, 6, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women* (2005). S. Chapman and S. Kettering look briefly at the activities of early modern French noblewomen in, respectively, ‘Patronage as Family Economy: The Role of Women in the Patron-Client Network of the Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain Family, 1670–1715’, *FHS*, 24:1 (winter 2001), and ‘The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen’, *HJ*, 32 (1989).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., C.K. Lindeman, ‘The Age of Anna Amalia: Collecting and Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Weimar’, PhD diss., University of Arizona (2007); Strobel, ‘Royal “Matronage” of Women Artists’ (2005/6); Worsley, ‘Female Architectural Patronage’ (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Froide, *Never Married* (2005); Wulf, *Not All Wives* (2000).

commissions for the sons of Highland gentry.<sup>7</sup> The career of the never-married artist Katharine Read has received attention after a period of neglect.<sup>8</sup> The study of patronage itself has also gone beyond its most visible public manifestations. Tadmor's investigation of 'active [linguistic] usages', demonstrating that kinship, friendship and patronage ties were expressed in language common to all, is particularly relevant to this chapter.<sup>9</sup> She shows that 'by following connections of "friendship", we can trace our way from the prime minister of England [*sic*] to [the middle-ranking tradesman] Thomas Turner, and from him to a wide circle of "friends", and even down to the level of the village poor'.<sup>10</sup> Bannet creates useful classifications of estate, coterie, and familial patronage, and shows that gentlewomen had considerable scope for activity in these areas.<sup>11</sup> Familial patronage is used in this chapter as a general term alongside public patronage. As a descriptive term it conveys more accurately than domestic patronage the ways in which gentlewomen, and never-married gentlewomen in particular, used influence with the intention of enhancing their status in social circles beyond their physical bounds of activity. By forwarding the interests of a connection (however closely or loosely defined) they could hope to be publicly well spoken of in a way which did not compromise their gentility. Contemporary usages of words like patronage, benevolence, charity, friend, obligation, and gratitude make it clear that patronage was understood not as a blunt *quid pro quo* between individuals, but as a nuanced exchange of social credit and debit which functioned within associative social groupings over extended periods of time.

As a system of social support patronage worked through the extension into public life of hierarchical kin structures.<sup>12</sup> Samuel Johnson's definition of patronage

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<sup>7</sup> Nenadic, 'Impact of the Military Profession' (2006); see also S. Nenadic, 'Military Men, Businessmen, and the "Business" of Patronage in Eighteenth-Century London', in Nenadic, *Scots in London* (2010), 242.

<sup>8</sup> See P.R. Andrew, 'Scottish Artists in London: Careers and Connections', in Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 205.

<sup>9</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>11</sup> E.T. Bannet, 'The Bluestocking Sisters: Women's Patronage, Millenium Hall, and "The Visible Providence of a Country"', *ECL*, 30:1 (winter 2005), 27, 35, 43. For further discussion of female public networks, see E. Eger and L. Peltz, *Brilliant Women: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Because a gentlewoman's influence derived from her position in patriarchal hierarchies of family and society, patronage and patron have been preferred to the neologism matronage, or the



as ‘Support; protection’ points to its familial foundations.<sup>13</sup> The idioms of patronage repeat the obligations of kinship, and the expectations of friendship. The inclusive relationship term friend, considered in the preceding chapter in the context of women’s close domestic companionships, could also define a person’s closest kin relationships, and the beneficial connections which they formed in their social networks. It is at the intersection of these latter two usages that the familial foundations of patronage become evident. A person’s immediate family members were her or his ‘natural’ and ‘best’ friends.<sup>14</sup> In principle at least, a father was the ‘nearest & dearest friend on earth’.<sup>15</sup> Following the ‘loss of so dear a friend’, the eldest son was expected to show himself a ‘steady friend and affectionate brother’ to his siblings, and in particular to act as the ‘friend and protector’ of his widowed mother and any unmarried sisters.<sup>16</sup> If these relationships failed or proved inadequate, support and protection were sought further afield. The writer Mary Wollstonecraft’s expression of her relationship with her publisher Joseph Johnson demonstrates the close links between kinship, friendship and patronage. When Wollstonecraft returned to London from France in 1787 Johnson offered her a temporary refuge in his household, before taking on a small house for her. In gratitude she wrote, ‘Allow me to love you, my dear sir, and call friend a being I respect.’<sup>17</sup> She underlined the importance of his role: he was her ‘only friend [...] I never had a father, or a brother—you have been both to me’.<sup>18</sup> Wollstonecraft did in fact have a father, and several brothers, but her dissolute father and her grasping eldest brother showed little concern for the family’s collective welfare. Johnson, her primary patron, stepped into the breach, and Wollstonecraft also received annuities

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contemporary but infrequently used patroness. See Chalus, *Elite Women*, 116: ‘if a “sphere” did exist with regard to patronage, it was one defined first and foremost by status and connexion, not gender’; also Bannet, ‘Bluestocking Sisters’, 35.

<sup>13</sup> S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, II (London: 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1766), via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org). See also George Scott to Jane Innes, 31 Oct. 1806, referring to her brother as ‘your support and protector’ (GD113/5/70c/10).

<sup>14</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 130–1, 161, 260.

<sup>15</sup> George Burnet to Gilbert Innes, 1808 (GD113/5/402/19).

<sup>16</sup> Helen Dawson to Jane Innes, 4 Apr. 1809 (GD113/5/113a/11); Joanna Baillie, notes on Hunter family, n.d., The Royal College of Surgeons of England, MS0014/8, Hunter-Baillie papers, H-B 6.19, hereafter (H-B –); Mary Wollstonecraft to Mr Cristall, 19 Mar. 1790, in W. Godwin (ed. W.C. Durant), *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London/New York: Constable & Co. Ltd/Greenberg, 1927), 188.

<sup>17</sup> Godwin, *Memoirs*, 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 178. See also Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 214.

from ‘friends [who] stood between her and any of the annoyances and mortifications of debt’.<sup>19</sup> Such patronage had important knock-on benefits. Securely settled in her own household, Wollstonecraft herself took on the role of familial support. When her eldest brother withheld a legacy due to all the siblings, and refused a home to a sister who had previously managed his household, she raised the money to settle a younger brother in America and used her connections to place her sisters as governesses. Johnson, who also helped her to manage her father’s affairs, later estimated that ‘she could not during this time, I think, expend less than £200 on her brothers and sisters’—a comfortable year’s income for a gentlewoman, and certainly a significant sum for Wollstonecraft.<sup>20</sup> Her successful expenditure of influence was hardly less remarkable.

*‘Warm and friendly attention from you and all our friends in London’: the workings of familial patronage*<sup>21</sup>

The circumstances in which Margaret Adam used her influence and personal funds to help family members were entirely dissimilar to those of Wollstonecraft, yet her actions were also understood, and expressed, in terms of friendship and kinship. By promoting the interests of her close relatives, the never-married Adam convincingly demonstrated her familial worth. Her relationship with her sister Susanna Clerk’s family was mutually beneficial and of long duration. She was able to rely on her brother-in-law John Clerk to support her judgement on business affairs in London, and to successfully carry her arguments to the family in Scotland. Clerk in turn was grateful for the advantages he and his family reaped from having familial ‘friends in London’: a permanent home for his spinster daughter Susanna; a metropolitan base close to patronage sources for his son James who was trying to progress as a naval officer, and help in his own attempts to win royal or public recognition for his book on naval tactics. He was particularly appreciative of the ‘warm and friendly

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<sup>19</sup> It was understood ‘this must cease when she married’; gossip said William Godwin, whom she married in 1797, concealed their union for several months to prolong payment of her annuities. Godwin, *op. cit.*, 315.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 8 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/9).

attention' which Adam bestowed on his own and his son's efforts to navigate their way through the competitive world of metropolitan patronage.<sup>22</sup>

Margaret Adam's longstanding correspondence with the Clerks allows a detailed examination of the dynamics of their relationship.<sup>23</sup> As her brother by marriage, John Clerk was counted as close kin, if not quite in the ranks of what Robert Adam called 'nous of the upper house of Adam'.<sup>24</sup> His letters were addressed variously to 'My Dear Peggie', 'My Dr Dr Sister Margaret' or 'My Dear Madam', communicating at different times the closeness of their connection and his respect for her judgement.<sup>25</sup> He first told Adam of his projected work on naval tactics early in 1779, but he had already begun to work out his thoughts on it in previous letters to her. Private correspondence which was read or passed on within an intimate circle served for Clerk, as for writers of memoirs and biographies, as a means of laying the groundwork for a text which might, by stages of private circulation, appear later in a more public context. In January 1779 he asked her not to destroy what he had sent, as 'tho scattered it may come to be a part of a whole', and warned her 'be on your guard not to Shew what is contained in what appears to be my letter'. 'If it is well received', he added, 'I may promise the publick something farther'.<sup>26</sup>

Clerk found Adam to be a sympathetic correspondent. A few months later he sent her a satire on admirals Keppel, Harland, and Palliser with a coy disclaimer 'who is the author I cannot tell', but asking her to 'take care that it shall be published' if the London newspapers failed to pick it up.<sup>27</sup> Like his brothers-in-law, Clerk was ambitious to win recognition in a British as well as a Scottish context, and to do so he needed friends in the capital. Margaret Adam was his main point of contact over the next decade, as he vacillated over pursuing select publication and a

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<sup>22</sup> Nenadic examines Scots' heavy reliance on London kin when seeking patronage in *Scots in London*.

<sup>23</sup> The familial patronage recorded in Margaret Adam's correspondence can usefully be read beside her siblings' patronage activities, in particular Robert Adam's masterly advancement strategies at home and abroad (detailed minutely in his letters to them), to give a full picture of how this gentry family boosted position and status, individually and collectively. See further Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 16, 31–2, 75, 148, 153; S. Nenadic, 'Architect builders in London and Edinburgh, c.1750–1800, and the market for expertise', *HJ*, 55:3 (2012).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Adam to Margaret Adam, 10 Jan. 1756 (GD18/4796).

<sup>25</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 22 Aug. 1782 (GD18/4226/5); same to same, 2 Jun. 1788 (GD18/5486/17); same to same, n.d. (GD18/5486/32). See chp. 3, 100 above.

<sup>26</sup> Same to same, 21 Jan. 1779 (GD18/4213/2).

<sup>27</sup> Same to same, 9 Mar. 1779 (GD18/4213/1).

royal pension, or public applause and thanks, while trying at the same time to adapt his advancement strategies in line with political changes.

Adam's roles were those of facilitator, adviser, and critic. Early in 1782 Clerk sent twenty-two privately printed copies of *An inquiry into Naval Tactics* to London, with directions to her on their proposed distribution. She responded promptly with a detailed account of initial patronage approaches.<sup>28</sup> Her letter was encouraging and Clerk acknowledged that her 'Flattering criticism' pleased him more than anyone's.<sup>29</sup> However, she did not hesitate to point out shortcomings in his promotional tactics, telling him bluntly that it was a pity he had not brought the book out at the beginning rather than the end of the war.<sup>30</sup> She also disagreed with Robert Adam's suggestion that the king should pay Clerk 'handsomely' to recall the distributed copies in order to prevent them falling into French hands, objecting that this would deprive Clerk of the public recognition which was his due.

Adam's letters to Clerk during this period adroitly convey her personal opinion within the framework of familial hierarchy. John Adam remained the titular head of the family, and it may have been to avoid setting up Robert Adam in opposition to him that advice and opinion from the London household was usually presented as coming from all members. But in prefacing advice with phrases such as 'we think', or 'we were all thinking', Adam also validated her own opinions.<sup>31</sup> (On another occasion she told Clerk that her brothers all thought the scheme to win a royal pension a clever one, significantly excluding herself from the general approval.<sup>32</sup>) Clerk, for his part, deferred both to the concept of family unity and to the London household's judgement on metropolitan patronage approaches. His copies of *Naval Tactics* were accompanied by letters to the king and lords North and Sandwich, 'Left open for your inspection and if it pleases to be Sealed and directed and forwarded as the Council shall direct'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, 11 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/1).

<sup>29</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 8 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/9).

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, 25 Jul. 1782 (GD18/4226/2).

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Margaret Adam to John Clerk, 7 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/3); same to same, 11 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/1); same to same, 20 Apr. 1792 (GD18/4961/41).

<sup>32</sup> Same to same, 7 Mar. 1782 (GD18/4226/3).

<sup>33</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam [copy], 11 Feb. 1782 (GD18/4226/11).

The ‘Council’ continued to manage the public presentation of the book. Copies were signed in Clerk’s name by Robert Adam and sent out to be rebound, as they were ‘rather shabby’.<sup>34</sup> The Adam brothers’ reputation rested partly on perception of them as arbiters of taste, and it was understood that a social *faux pas* on Clerk’s part would reflect on them as well as on him. Margaret Adam continued to manage communications with Clerk, telling him that the copy intended for the king would be in red morocco leather, as ‘there must be something showy in what is presented to him’.<sup>35</sup> Clerk accepted this with good grace, apologising in another letter for being unable to follow her advice and have copies printed on better paper.<sup>36</sup> Margaret Adam’s mediation allowed her brothers to avoid directly challenging Clerk’s status as a head of family in his own right.<sup>37</sup> Unwelcome advice was sometimes relayed through a double female buffer. When the brothers objected to Clerk’s proposal to dedicate the *Naval Tactics* to the duke of Clarence, Robert wrote a brief reply and ‘trusted that [Margaret] had wrote more fully their opinions upon the subject’—which, she later admitted, ‘I did not do’.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps careful of her own standing with Clerk, she wrote not to him but to her sister Susanna to explain that her brothers thought it ‘more gentlemanly’ to present the book without a dedication, as that seemed less like a plea for patronage. Mindful of both Clerk’s *amour propre* and her brothers’ apprehensions, she concluded, ‘that is the way it is viewed in this house, but if any of Mr Clerks friends see it in a different light [...] no doubt he will take care that it is a well said dedication & that all the forms are observed’.<sup>39</sup>

Eight years later, when it had become obvious that praise of Clerk’s work from ‘many persons of the first character in the [naval] profession’ would not translate into a pension or a position for him, Adam once again took on the role of mediator, delicately distancing her brothers from his lack of success.<sup>40</sup> ‘We were all thinking,’ she wrote, ‘what you propose yourself that it might be the best thing you could do to publish & I was to write to you to take the advice of your friends about

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<sup>34</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, 16 Feb. n.y. (GD18/4272/3).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, n.d. (GD18/4272/11).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the manoeuvring around William Adam, chp. 3, 101 above.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 6 Feb. 1790 (GD18/4961/21).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Same to John Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4272/1).

it'.<sup>41</sup> Her brothers, she said, had 'little in their power', and 'in the [hurry] of their own affairs it is really impossible for them to give great attention to it'. She advised Clerk to leave no avenues unexplored; he would be 'much in the right' to accept help from 'anybody that can do you service with the present ministry', and it might be right for him to write to the home secretary, Henry Dundas, 'as he was so much your friend'.<sup>42</sup>

This letter shows Adam managing expectations of familial patronage as well as practical demands made on her brothers' time. Anyone who successfully climbed the social ladder was expected to reach out a hand to help up 'brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, cousins and all their Respective husbands and wives a Band innumerable', and Clerk might well have felt offended by the hint that such close and prominently placed relations could (or would) no longer act the part of zealous friends.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless he continued to follow Margaret Adam's guidance; as William Adam observed, if the advice came from her, 'then you may be sure he'll do it'.<sup>44</sup> Clerk may have been mollified by the knowledge that his family would continue to benefit from this metropolitan connection. While corresponding with Clerk on publishing opportunities, Adam was also sending regular bulletins on her nephew's progress to her sister Susanna. James Clerk hoped to advance as a naval officer, and to this end he had joined the London household to be near sources of patronage. Once again it was Margaret who managed the constant exchanges of information on which successful advancement strategies depended: where to address letters so that no time was lost, who was in or out of political favour, whether or not the expected war with its opportunities for promotion had actually begun.

Her correspondence reveals how important the minutiae of social interaction was to ambitious families of genteel rank. The modern archival entry of 'mainly personal, family and social matters' gives little hint of the weight of meaning attached to actions such as replying promptly to a letter, accepting or refusing an

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<sup>41</sup> Same to same, 20 Apr. 1792 (GD18/4961/41).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 22 Aug. 1782 (GD18/4226/5), on the likelihood of patronage from Dundas: 'not having the honour to be a relation I can have little hopes'.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, 23 Apr. 1792 (GD18/4961/42); she repeated the compliment in her letter to him.

invitation, or failing to follow a potential patron's advice.<sup>45</sup> Adam made a point of telling her sister who had breakfasted with them, who had dined, and who her nephew and her brothers had visited since her last letter. In addition she relayed news from London newspapers not sent to Edinburgh, political gossip heard by her brothers at the Admiralty and in coffee houses, and information received from female acquaintances with links to Court.<sup>46</sup> All this helped the Clerks to assess James's progress and judge where best to apply on his behalf. Adam also sent detailed accounts of how her nephew spent his money. Both she and his occasional patron General Clerk impressed on him the need for frugality, as young naval officers, like their army counterparts, had to live for many years on a small income while maintaining a gentlemanly appearance and a high degree of sociability.<sup>47</sup>

Most of Adam's letters concerning James Clerk were addressed to her sister but it was her brother-in-law who replied, as head of his family, to keep her up to date with letters written to or received from potential patrons. It was important that the two families acted in concert, as approaches to more than one person could be counterproductive. Adam's involvement continued on and off for at least a decade, and her pivotal role can be gauged by the number of people on whose behalf she took up her pen. Her epistolary management maintained open channels of communication between her brothers and the Clerks, and between James Clerk and his parents. She often stepped in when her brothers failed to answer letters, telling her sister, 'I have been long expecting that Bob or Willy would write [...] but they are hurried with different things that prevents them taking time to answer Mr Clerk'.<sup>48</sup> All agreed that James Clerk was a deficient correspondent, particularly when travelling or on board ship. His father preferred to send important information via Adam, and asked her to

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<sup>45</sup> GD18/4961. Robert Adam, who suffered bowel and stomach complaints, hated the necessity of accepting regular invitations to heavy dinners. Margaret Adam to Susanna Clerk, 26 Oct. 1789 (GD18/4961/18). See also S.C. to M.A., n.d. (GD18/5486/50): on Admiral Duncan's victorious return from Camperdown, Susanna wrote that if he did not make a point of dining with the Clerks, it would be 'very Shabby in him [...] & a Postive proof that he means to keep all the merit of his Victory to himself'. Chalus notes political signals read in the company in which a person drank tea or played cards. *Elite Women*, 76, 90.

<sup>46</sup> The ability to network news speedily and accurately was a skill expected of, and practised by, women at the highest levels of patronage. Chalus, *ibid.*, 82, 83.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, n.d. (GD18/4961/13).

<sup>48</sup> Same to Susanna Clerk, 22 May 1787 (GD18/4961/12).

take charge of sums of money to be forwarded to him whenever his whereabouts could be confirmed.<sup>49</sup>

Late in 1792, James was in a quandary about his future. War seemed imminent, but despite strenuous efforts by the Clerk and Adam families he was not yet assured of a lieutenancy or even a midshipman's place, and he had to decide on a berth offered in the East India trade. His uncertain position and his preference for the navy made it imperative that he stay in close contact with his relations as they tried to find a suitable place for him. He was still vacillating early in December when Margaret Adam took matters into her own hands, with the explanation, 'Jamy wrote to you yesterday but did not send away his letter, & in case the same fate should befall it today I think it is better to write'. She gave his father the latest news: war was once again 'perfectly certain', although public opinion had changed twice since she had written two days previously. James had had an offer to join a frigate, and although his chances of promotion were slim, she made it clear she approved, concluding 'He is an Englishman'.<sup>50</sup> James, however, left to join a merchant ship later that month, followed by letters from his indefatigable and determined aunts in Albemarle Street. Margaret wrote again to Susanna, while Elizabeth Adam wrote for the third time to her nephew 'to desire him to come up without loss of time, that his uncle Willy may converse [with] him upon the subject of the war which must infallibly take place'.<sup>51</sup> Margaret was clear that the sisters' opinion must be taken into account, for 'Betty & I do not think Jamy qualified for being a merchant, we have often said so to he himself, & have told my Brother Willy so who has much less opportunity of observing his turn than we have'.<sup>52</sup> Earlier correspondence shows she had clear ideas on what constituted a suitable profession for her nephew.<sup>53</sup> In further letters she continued to press her opinion that war was inevitable, complained about James's failure to keep them informed of his whereabouts and, keeping in mind other patronage responsibilities, suggested to John Clerk that it might be a good time to re-

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<sup>49</sup> John Clerk to Margaret Adam, 15 Sept. 1792 (GD18/4248); same to same, ? Dec. 1792 (GD18/4248).

<sup>50</sup> Margaret Adam to John Clerk, [2] Dec. 1792 (GD18/4961/48).

<sup>51</sup> Same to Susanna Clerk, ? Dec. 1792 (GD18/4961/49).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Adam had previously told her sister that money made in the East Indies was 'an abomination before the Lord'. Same to same, ? Nov. 1786 (GD18/4961/3).



advertise the *Naval Tactics*. Her persistence eventually bore fruit. In mid-March she announced James's entry into the navy and his departure for Portsmouth, adding a list of all the benefactors he had called on before leaving.<sup>54</sup> The young officer continued to rely on his aunt. A letter of May 1793 reveals that he expected her to send funds, and to tell his parents he wanted his patronage letters renewed.<sup>55</sup>

Correspondence detailing an attempt to win promotion for James Clerk three years later uncovers the potential extent of female manoeuvring behind publicly male patronage approaches. James had not written for many months, so his aunts, by this time well versed in naval affairs, pieced together his likely movements from newspaper reports in the hope that a meeting with a potential patron could be arranged. His father intended to ask for Admiral Duncan's support but, as Susanna Clerk reported, 'we thought his letter ill said & prevailed upon him not to send it'.<sup>56</sup> James's sister Mary impressed on her aunt the difficulty of getting her father to write something suitable, adding, 'I hope you will not think it rud in me to speak so plain But it is really hard that a man so cramd full of genius [...] should neither be able to speak or write which is literally the case'.<sup>57</sup> A letter which could be sent without damaging John Clerk's pride was eventually written by the tactful expedient of getting William Adam to recommend the appropriate phrasing. This achieved, Clerk's female relatives saved him from further awkwardness by taking up the correspondence which necessarily followed such help. Susanna wrote to tell Margaret that her husband was 'extremely grateful', concluding disingenuously, 'this is intended as an answer to My Brother William but as he is not allways at home I thought it was better to address it to you Mr Clerk will write himself soon to day he has not time'.<sup>58</sup> This example shows that while women's intermediary influence on naval/military promotion was curtailed (as in politics) by the fact that 'final decision-making power remained firmly under male control', their management was instrumental.<sup>59</sup> Concerted female action could initiate, shape, and direct a familial patronage approach which was conventionally expressed through a male

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<sup>54</sup> Same to John Clerk, 18 Mar. 1793 (GD18/4961/54).

<sup>55</sup> Same to Susanna Clerk, 13 May 1793 (GD18/4961/57).

<sup>56</sup> Susanna Clerk to Margaret Adam, 19 Jan. 1796 (GD18/5486/35).

<sup>57</sup> Mary Clerk to same, 7 Feb. 1796 (GD18/5486/36).

<sup>58</sup> Susanna Clerk to same, 24 Feb. 1796 (GD18/5486/37).

<sup>59</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 61.

representative or figurehead. The effort which went into writing a single letter—part of a patronage campaign which sought interest from at least seven individuals, including three admirals and Henry Dundas, by then secretary for war—underlines the degree of familial consultation which preceded a public move. As Susanna Clerk commented with clear reference to her female kin network, ‘there is really few young men have such active friends as Jamie has’.<sup>60</sup> The archival classification of Margaret Adam’s patronage letters under ‘mainly personal, family and social matters’ has obscured her role in the advancement strategies of her kin, but it also demonstrates convincingly that patronage campaigns began at home, where the advice of all senior family members—including that of spinster managers like Margaret Adam whose competence was respected—was solicited and acted upon.

‘Only look on you as patrons, not friends’: the nuances of patronage, benevolence, and charity in the wider social sphere<sup>61</sup>

When familial patronage was expressed in terms of familial friendship there was generally an assumption of, or at least an attempt to claim, near parity of rank between the individuals concerned. From the beneficiary’s point of view the language of friendship smoothed out the wrinkles of unequal wealth or position, and situated the relationship in terms of the duty incumbent on all members of a family to promote their collective interest.<sup>62</sup> A never-married Midlothian gentlewoman assured her wealthier kinswoman, also unmarried, that although the ‘many many favours’ she had received weighed heavily on her, she would make return by willingly showing ‘that from a friend such as you I will be obliged to, as I can never pay off the debt I owe you’.<sup>63</sup> This was a subtle reminder that the beneficiary, by accepting material favours, conferred the intangible one of boosting the benefactor’s status in their mutual kin and social circles. Recipients of patronage whose kinship rested on the

<sup>60</sup> Susanna Clerk to Margaret Adam, 24 Feb. 1796 (GD18/5486/37).

<sup>61</sup> In J. Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle* (London: John Murray, 1962), 187.

<sup>62</sup> Tadmor notes the colloquial term ‘Cousin Betty’, used of female vagrants who entered houses and ‘claimed kindred’ and thus the right to claim help. *Family and Friends*, 124, 160.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (c.1818) (GD113/5/81c/13). Mary Wollstonecraft admitted to her primary patron Johnson that she felt the weight of her obligations to her supporters. By confiding in him, and assuring him she had ‘not that kind of pride, which makes some dislike to be obliged to those they respect’, she simultaneously complimented his ‘delicate assistance’ and placed him in close relationship. Godwin, *Memoirs*, 172, 180, 181.

loose but inclusive ties of cousinship commonly addressed their benefactor as a friend, subscribing themselves in stock phrases such as ‘your faithful friend and much obliged Cousin’.<sup>64</sup> Even those with only slight claims to connection wrote in terms of friendship, signalling genteel deference rather than servility. Friend was a term more often used by protégé than patron.<sup>65</sup> When the author Susan Ferrier spoke of the patronage bestowed on her father by the duke of Argyll, for whom he acted as agent, she described the duke as ‘benevolent’ and emphasised the ‘great personal friendship’ which existed for many years between the two men.<sup>66</sup> With similar intent, the London-based architect George Steuart described his patron the third duke of Atholl as ‘my best Friend’; the longevity of their relationship, and Steuart’s activities as the duke’s metropolitan agent, gave him some claim to this familiarity.<sup>67</sup> Notably, however, when the aristocratic Lady Louisa Stuart referred to another of the duke of Argyll’s longtime agents, she was clear that the duke’s position was that of ‘patron’.<sup>68</sup> Robert Adam, ever alert to the markers of social elevation, urged his sisters to prepare for their move to London by deliberately re-situating themselves as ‘patrons, not friends’ to their connections. If they managed to do this without causing offence, they would notice former friends ‘insensibly decrease the number of their visits till at last they drop all intercourse [...] ask and court your protection, not desire or hope for your conversation’.<sup>69</sup> In future, any aid the sisters offered an acquaintance—a letter of introduction, monetary help—would be a favour conferred, not a fulfilment of friendship’s obligations. These examples show how patron and protégé used the linguistic formulae of social connection to situate their relationship, to themselves and to observers.

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<sup>64</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81b/9).

<sup>65</sup> E.g. Helen Dawson to same, 4 Apr. 1809 (GD113/5/113a/11): ‘friendship & kind attention’, ‘friendship & respect’.

<sup>66</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> V. Coltman, ‘Scottish Architects in Eighteenth-Century London: George Steuart, the Competition for Patronage, and the Representation of Scotland’, in Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart, *Memoire*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Fleming, *Robert Adam*, 187. This was a delicate undertaking. Jane Austen reported that a formerly close friend had called ‘& gently upbraided me [...] with change of manners to her since she had been in Bath [...] Unlucky me! that my notice should be of such consequence & my Manners so bad! [...] her great want of a companion at home [...] gives her another claim on my attention. — I shall endeavour as much as possible to keep my Intimacies in their proper place, & prevent their clashing’. Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 21–3 Apr. 1805. Le Faye, *Letters*, 104.

As Adam's advice shows, the word patronage was itself a marker of status and context, as were the associated terms benevolence and charity. Patronage, benevolence, and charity described activities which had essentially the same purpose, to boost the social credit of patron, benefactor, or donor. Patronage, however, suggested a degree of condescension on the patron's part due to superiority of rank or the lack of a connection which could compel assistance, while benevolence suggested a relationship founded on sympathetic goodwill. Women's patronage was commonly described by contemporary commentators, and by female patrons themselves, as benevolence. This cast their motivations as selfless and unchallenging, removed from either personal vanity or any desire to undermine male status. Charity, meanwhile, signalled a clear separation of rank, and although it was understood as a duty in the wider Christian sense, it could not be claimed as a particular obligation. None of these interpretive categories was narrowly understood. Rather, contemporary usages suggest that the association of patronage, benevolence, and charity allowed women's exercise of social influence to be set safely into the framework of patriarchy. Key expressions of obligation and gratitude underline the close conceptual links which existed between them.

The name of patron was commonly applied to the small number of individuals who, at local or national level, had the allocation of public positions or pensions in their power, and to those whose wealth or influence was extensive enough to attract applications from strangers as well as connections. Few gentlewomen, and fewer never-married gentlewomen, had either positions of this kind or pensions at their disposal. Only the small minority who inherited parochial responsibilities with an estate (as Elyza Fraser did) could engage with public patronage in the specific sense of nominating a candidate for a position. Patron was in fact a title seldom claimed by never-married women for themselves, doubtless due to its unfeminine connotations of public prominence. It was sometimes used posthumously and flatteringly of women who had distinguished themselves publicly without overstepping the representational bounds appropriate to their rank and gender. Susan Ferrier's memoirist called her the 'early friend and patron' of the fashionable miniaturist Robert Thorburn; Thorburn's correspondence with Ferrier, continued after he had settled in London and won royal patronage, indicates that he

saw their relationship in this light.<sup>70</sup> He showed himself ‘much pleased to speak of Ferrier to a mutual friend who visited him in London, subscribed himself ‘Yours very gratefully’, begged her criticism of his sketches for a portrait of the royal family, and presented first his wife and later his newborn daughter as ‘a candidate for your friendship’.<sup>71</sup> He also made sure he visited Ferrier when he returned intermittently to Edinburgh, both at the beginning of his career and when he was well established.<sup>72</sup> Recognition of never-married women as patrons during their lifetimes, however, was usually implicit, or by association. In 1843 Maria Edgeworth wrote to Joanna Baillie to tell her she had read memoirs of David Wilkie in which Baillie’s early support of the painter was mentioned.<sup>73</sup> Edgeworth described this to her ‘very dear’ friend as ‘the charming way in which you lent Wilkie when he was ill and at his utmost need your house – & all that it contained’, adding of another supporter, ‘We are charmed with your high born, well bred generous delicate minded friend Sir George Beaumont, – every way worthy to be your friend and the patron and benefactor of Wilkie’.<sup>74</sup> Although Baillie was not given the accolade of patron, she clearly acted as both an intermediary and a direct support to Wilkie. Unlike Ferrier, however, for whom Thorburn painted portraits of herself and a brother, Baillie does not seem to have commissioned Wilkie in any way.<sup>75</sup> Another instance of direct patronage on Baillie’s part was her organisation of a subscription volume of poems by leading authors of the day for the benefit of an old schoolfellow.<sup>76</sup> Few never-married authors were prominent enough to request works from fêted poets, but literary patronage was one area of activity in which never-married women could engage at all levels. The appearance of a gentlewoman’s name in the subscription lists published with volumes of collected letters, poems, and ‘fugitive pieces’ was the most acceptable context in which she could win public recognition for support

<sup>70</sup> Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 265.

<sup>71</sup> Countess Pepoli to Susan Ferrier, 3 Jun. 1840; Robert Thorburn to same, 26 Sept. 1839; 8 Sept. 1846; 15 Jan. n.d.; 9 Sept. 1847, *ibid.*, 272, 294–6.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Thorburn to Susan Ferrier, 20 Oct. 1838; May ?1850, *ibid.*, 265, 303.

<sup>73</sup> Probably Allan Cunningham’s 3-vol. *Life*, published that year.

<sup>74</sup> Maria Edgeworth to Joanna Baillie, 5 May 1843 (vol. 42, H-B 5.89). Wilkie was attended by Matthew Baillie when ill. J.B. Slagle, *The Collected Letters of Joanna Baillie*, 2 vols (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), I, 379n.291.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Thorburn to Susan Ferrier, 26 Sept. 1839, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 272. Ferrier’s portrait later appeared as a frontispiece to her novels.

<sup>76</sup> Joanna Baillie to William Sotheby, 27 Jan. 1822 (H-B 9.35); Anna Barbauld to Joanna Baillie, 2 Feb. 1822 (H-B 4.2 181); Sotheby to Baillie, 5 Nov. 1822 (H-B 9.58).

offered. This was a form of public patronage in which even gentlewomen on small incomes could participate, and also a recognised way of supporting an impoverished fellow gentlewoman without the damaging appearance of charity.<sup>77</sup>

One context in which women's patronage can be said to mirror men's is the household. As household managers, women were regularly solicited for positions, and filled them on the basis of connection and recommendation.<sup>78</sup> A servant's place might be as desirable to a lower-ranking family as a government post to a gentleman, and the mistress of a substantial household could exercise considerable influence in this way, particularly if she lived rurally and drew her servants from surrounding families, as Austen's Marianne Dashwood, the 'patroness of a village', would have done.<sup>79</sup> Alluding to the widely held principle that social and even national stability rested on such close domestic relationships, the industrialist, saloniste, and philanthropist Elizabeth Montagu urged 'every Gentleman and Lady that live in the Country' to make themselves the first source of material and moral aid to poorer neighbouring families.<sup>80</sup> 'What an effect it would have on the common people!' she enthused. 'The desire of being in favour with such persons would keep them regular, make them industrious, and prevent the crimes, the follies and misfortunes that attend a dejected or a fearless state of mind'.<sup>81</sup> Even a modest genteel household could be a source of employment and support. When the never-married Marion Trotter needed extra domestic help as she aged, she looked to the rural relatives of her longterm maid Peggie, taking into her household family both Peggie's sister and sister-in-law.<sup>82</sup> Conduct books show that these relationships were understood in terms of patronage, if not explicitly described as such. Eliza Haywood, in her *Present for a Servant Maid* (1743), reminded female servants of 'the Advantage of living a great while in a Family'. Those who went on to marry would be 'entitled to the Advice of your Mistress, will be certain of her Assistance in any Business you shall take up; your Children [...] partake her Favour, perhaps some of them be taken into

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<sup>77</sup> Such volumes were usually authored by the educated but financially reduced gentlewoman for whom the profit was intended.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Mrs Stirling to Jane Innes, on the possibility of taking on her housekeeper. 19 Sept. 1817 (GD113/5/113a/34).

<sup>79</sup> Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 410.

<sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, 1 Nov. 1755, in Bannet, 'Bluestocking Sisters', 35.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, 30 May n.y.; same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/33,34).

the Family, and both you and yours receive a Succession of good Offices. If your Husbands behave well to you, they will be encouraged for your Sakes; and if ill, you may depend upon Protection from them'.<sup>83</sup> This understanding of the mistress-servant relationship is evident from both sides. Janet Paux, cook for many years to the wealthy Edinburgh spinster Jane Innes, returned to the latter's service from London when her husband refused to support her financially, and later moved into another family with Innes's recommendation.<sup>84</sup> She assured her mistress of her 'greatfull Respect' and the 'greatituate I owe you in miny a Respict that Cannot be put in words'.<sup>85</sup> Well-directed household patronage supported the respectable lower ranks, and was thus understood to have ramifications beyond domestic regularity. As a type of patronage which was exercised within culturally acceptable areas of genteel female activity, it was also a particularly effective way for a never-married domestic manager to support her status, whether her household was large or small.

Notwithstanding the direct patronage opportunities which existed in the immediate domestic sphere, the most common female role was that of intermediary. Chalus argues that much of women's activity is traceable only 'tantalizingly and anecdotally', as many engaged with patronage through the face-to-face contacts thought necessary to a successful approach.<sup>86</sup> The contemporary belief that influence was most persuasive, and opportunities best sounded out, in face-to-face meetings is borne out by a letter of Susan Ferrier, who was asked to help a young Graham kinsman in his approaches to the dukes of Northumberland and Atholl. Ferrier, having friends who could claim close connection with the latter, 'drove to Newington to *speir* at them [ask]; but my intimates, Lady Mackenzie and Miss J., are both in England, and I could not propound my queries on paper'.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, she took care to detail the effort she put into her abortive attempt in a letter to a Graham kinswoman. Her letters to relatives and friends qualify Chalus's conclusion that 'it is necessary to concentrate on the more formal aspects of patronage, particularly

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<sup>83</sup> In Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 28 Apr.; 2, 5 May 1807 (GD113/5/105/36-8); Janet Paux to same, 16 Feb. 1818 (GD113/5/113a/35).

<sup>85</sup> Janet Paux to Jane Innes, 19 Oct 1815; 17 Jun. 1816 (GD113/5/113a/19, 25).

<sup>86</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 112.

<sup>87</sup> Susan Ferrier to Helen Tovey-Tennent (née Graham), 22 Sept., 13 Oct, n.y., Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 298.

women's written requests preserved in political correspondences, to explore women's involvement'.<sup>88</sup> Ferrier put on record in her familial correspondence a wide range of both formal and informal patronage activity. A chaplain's post was secured for a male connection by a letter to the duchess of Argyll, who replied that the duke would have '*great pleasure* in signing [...] in favour of your friend [...] I assure you I am delighted at having it in my power to send you a favourable answer to anything you wish'.<sup>89</sup> This flattering response was preserved and later included in the correspondence published with the memoir of her life. A nephew travelling in Germany was sent a letter of introduction to the ambassadress at Munich, requested from a friend.<sup>90</sup> As with Christian Dalrymple's grand tour allowance to her nephew, this was calculated not only to help but to instil a sense of obligation in the next generation. On another occasion Ferrier simply told her sister that she had asked friends to mention her nephew to friends of theirs who might be useful.<sup>91</sup> She wasted no opportunities to help relatives and acquaintances and thereby boost her own status: 'Apropos, as Mrs. Fletcher and you have always an emporium of virtuous and reduced gentlewomen, can you recommend one to act as companion to a lady whose mind is a little—not much out of order?'<sup>92</sup>

These examples show that women's intermediary activities were useful and valued in a wide variety of contexts and circumstances. The importance of this role to women themselves is indicated by the care with which they guarded their influence. Petitioners who took an intermediary's support for granted, or who misrepresented her by using her name without leave, could expect swift reprisal.<sup>93</sup> Distant connections whose characters were unknown, relatives whose good conduct was doubtful, and candidates who were merely unpromising, were all avoided. The governess Agnes Porter agreed to help a friend's daughter find a teaching post only

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<sup>88</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 112.

<sup>89</sup> Duchess of Argyll to Susan Ferrier, 1827, Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 206.

<sup>90</sup> Susan Ferrier to James Ferrier, n.d., *ibid.*, 266.

<sup>91</sup> Same to Mrs Kinloch, 2 Apr. n.y., *ibid.*, 269.

<sup>92</sup> Same to Miss Fletcher, n.d., *ibid.*, 270. Cf. the West Lothian M.P. who, unwilling to waste the nomination of even a minor place, told a correspondent 'If its not worth the acceptance of any of our own side of the question, I shall willingly bestow it upon any of the other side [...] This I hope will convince both friends & foes that I have at least an inclination to serve the gentlemens familys of this country'. Sunter, *Patronage and Politics*, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 142.



‘on condition that she was duly qualified’.<sup>94</sup> Marion Trotter ‘positively refused’ to comply when asked to provide an East India Company letter of recommendation to Lord Dalhousie on behalf of a connection’s brother-in-law.<sup>95</sup> She made it clear she could easily get such a letter by naming the two prominently placed men whose services she could call on, but she would ‘neither trouble myself or them’, as she did not know the applicant personally. Further, he had been in the Indian army for thirty years and ‘if he had any merit or character [...] in thirty years he would not [have] been at his time of life only a Captain where the deaths are so frequent’.<sup>96</sup> Trotter was not going to risk her influence on such an unlikely proposition.<sup>97</sup>

The words which most commonly defined the gentlewoman as patron were benevolence and generosity. These were understood as virtues which, beginning in family circles, extended their beneficial reach into the public arena. David Hume believed that benevolence offered ‘the merit of meeting human need and bestowing happiness, bringing harmony within families, the mutual support of friends, and order to society’.<sup>98</sup> When John Adam offered financial help to his younger brother John, then travelling in Italy, the latter wrote to the London household to let his siblings know, and promised ‘I shall not fail to assure him how Sensible I am to this piece of generosity’.<sup>99</sup> Joanna Baillie described her maternal uncle as a ‘steady & liberal benefactor’ to his nephew and nieces in a family memoir; in Mary Wollstonecraft’s novel *Mary* (1788), a kinsman who offers a home and an education to the heroine is similarly termed her ‘benefactor’.<sup>100</sup> Agnes Porter, who spent most of her life in Lord Ilchester’s family, called him ‘my dear and generous benefactor’.<sup>101</sup> The 1799 edition of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary defined benevolence as the ‘disposition to do good; kindness; charity; goodwill’.<sup>102</sup> A later

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<sup>94</sup> 27 Feb. 1805, Martin, *Journals*, 249.

<sup>95</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/53). Cf. C. Bailey, ‘Metropole and Colony: Irish Networks and Patronage in the Eighteenth-Century Empire’, *IM*, 23:2 (2005), 161.

<sup>96</sup> Trotter to Innes, *ibid.* Unlike British Army officers, E.I.C. officers were usually advanced by time, or evident merit. They could retire pensioned after 22 years. Sunter, *Patronage and Politics*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Even the chairman of the E.I.C. could be damaged by recommending an ill-qualified candidate for a minor post. Sunter, *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), sect. II, ‘On Benevolence’, pt II, 143–4, via [www.livingphilosophy.org.uk](http://www.livingphilosophy.org.uk)

<sup>99</sup> John Adam to Elizabeth Adam, 24 Jul. 1762 (GD18/4839).

<sup>100</sup> Joanna Baillie, notes on Hunter family, n.d. (H-B 6.19); Godwin, *Memoirs*, 143, 148.

<sup>101</sup> 13 Feb. 1803, Martin, *Journals*, 220.

<sup>102</sup> S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, I, (London: 8<sup>th</sup> edn, 1799), via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

popular edition defined a benevolent person as ‘good, kind, affectionate’.<sup>103</sup> Someone who was not benevolent, in contrast, was ‘unfriendly’.<sup>104</sup>

Benevolence and generosity implied the unselfish exercise of goodwill towards others rather than concern to attain or maintain a worldly position. Benevolence especially implied sensibility, a character trait thought to belong particularly to educated and feeling gentlewomen—as Wollstonecraft’s eponymous heroine ‘learned the luxury of doing good [...] the sweet tears of benevolence frequently moistened her eyes’.<sup>105</sup> However, Wollstonecraft was also sensitive to the balance of social power implicit in benevolence, writing sarcastically in another novel of a husband who ‘very benevolently married for love; but took care to remind [his wife] of the obligation’.<sup>106</sup> The exercise of benevolence drew attention to, and confirmed, rank as well as goodwill. Where the radical Wollstonecraft argued that ‘Æconomy and self-denial are necessary in every station, to enable us to be generous, and to act conformably to the rules of justice’, the socially conservative Jane Innes drew attention to the fact that ‘Frugality [...] enables us [...] to do generous things to others, and gives us Respectability in the Eyes of All’.<sup>107</sup>

Innes herself was frequently commended for selfless benevolence by the many hopeful applicants for her patronage, particularly in old age when inheritance added her brother’s great wealth to her own.<sup>108</sup> A ‘high eulogium’ in the public press praised her ‘Benevolence and Justice’, and strangers let it be known that they had heard of her as ‘a Lady of great Benevolence’, hinting that she might wish to uphold this reputation by helping them.<sup>109</sup> Those who could claim connection expressed ‘grateful acknowledgements’ for her ‘generous kindness’, or thanked her for money ‘generously bestowed’, assuring her they would ‘ever cherish the truest gratitude’ for

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<sup>103</sup> *The Comprehensive Johnson’s Dictionary* (London/Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1845).

<sup>104</sup> S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, II, (London: 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1766), via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

<sup>105</sup> Godwin, *Memoirs*, 146. Cf. Susan Ferrier’s kinswoman Miss Edmonstone, ‘whose heart is still so overflowing with benevolence and practical kindness; she seems quite happy and never finds time hang heavily on her hands’. Ferrier to Mrs Connell, 30 Jun. n.y., Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 263.

<sup>106</sup> *Maria, or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), in Godwin, *Memoirs*, 140.

<sup>107</sup> *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), in *ibid.*, 214; Jane Innes, ‘Advice to the Leslies’, n.d. (GD113/5/499/4).

<sup>108</sup> Innes’s patronage is examined further in chp. 6 below.

<sup>109</sup> ‘An Officer’s Lady’ to Jane Innes, 2 Apr. 1832 (GD113/5/86c/13); John Cumin to same, 3 Apr. 1833 (GD113/5/80b/21); see also William Watson to same, 28 Feb. 1838 (GD113/5/113d/14).

her ‘very kind, great, and disinterested Generosity’.<sup>110</sup> Her friend and kinswoman Margaret Trotter expressed closer ties when she wrote with the ‘warmest sentiments’ asking her to ‘accept of a heart loaded with gratitude and affection’.<sup>111</sup> Marion Trotter’s often repeated gratitude and obligation for ‘Many Many [favours] conferred’ acknowledged the financial gulf which had existed between the two women for many years, although Marion also had confidence enough in their lifelong and close friendship to teasingly pronounce herself ‘quite angry with your generosity to poor old James’, her servant.<sup>112</sup> As a younger daughter Marion Trotter’s comparatively narrow income obliged her to be ‘penurious in small things’ throughout her life, although her contemporary Lord Cockburn remembered her ‘acts of liberality’.<sup>113</sup> Clementina Stirling Graham, who portrayed her to a later generation as a typical Scots gentlewoman, related anecdotes which showed that ‘her generosity could rise to circumstances’.<sup>114</sup> By setting Trotter’s patronage in a framework of Christian feeling appropriate to a gentlewoman, her relatives and friends avoided any suggestion that she had usurped a familial role which properly belonged to the brother who was head of her family (and from whom she had received her annuity). In contrast, applicants for Innes’s bounty implied that as the representative of her family name she had a duty to publicly demonstrate liberality. The contexts in which Trotter’s and Innes’s patronage were enacted and spoken of differed considerably, yet in both cases their activities were classed as benevolence, allowing them to be portrayed as unselfish—and unthreatening—contributors to society. Walter Scott similarly tempered the public nature of Anna Seward’s extensive patronage of individuals beyond her immediate circle by reference to the ‘warmth [which] was not alone displayed in regard for friends in the same rank of life [...] Her benevolence was universally felt among those to whom it afforded active and important support’.<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton’s biographer suggested to readers that the

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<sup>110</sup> William Cumin to same, 12 Dec. 1836 (GD113/5/80b/25); Elizabeth Burnet to same, 31 Mar., 14 Apr. 1833 (GD113/5/106a/6,7).

<sup>111</sup> Margaret Trotter to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81b/43); see also Marion Trotter to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/41).

<sup>112</sup> Marion Trotter to same, n.d. [c.1780] (GD113/5/81a/10); same to same, n.d. [c.1830] (GD113/5/81c/31).

<sup>113</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*, 108; Cockburn, *Memorials*, 69.

<sup>114</sup> Graham, *ibid.*; see chp. 2, 81 above.

<sup>115</sup> Scott, *Poetical Works of Anna Seward*, xxviii.

respectable author's 'active benevolence [...] was worthy of imitation'.<sup>116</sup> Hamilton's activities included helping to establish a 'House of Industry' for the 'lower order of females'.<sup>117</sup> In sum, benevolence was goodwill put into practice across the spectrum of genteel female social relationships, from familial friendship to public charity.

As the portrayals of Hamilton and Trotter suggest, benevolence and charity were linguistically and conceptually linked. A condolence letter on Joanna Baillie's death addressed to her sister praised her 'universal benevolence and Christian Charity'.<sup>118</sup> Like other forms of support, however, charity was not meant to be indiscriminate.<sup>119</sup> 'Prodigality and generosity are incompatible', thought Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>120</sup> David Hume warned, 'We praise alms given to a beggar; but when we observe his taking advantage of this in idleness, an act of charity that we initially considered a virtue we later judge as a weakness'.<sup>121</sup> True charity was based on rational judgement, and potential recipients were rigorously divided into the deserving and the undeserving. Susan Ferrier was well aware of the need for charity in 'romantic' Edinburgh—'alas! would there were less of that and more done for the sad realities of poverty and destitution which surround us!'—but she also assured her niece that she had 'learned from experience to be very wary in almsgiving [...] few things are more hurtful than lavish and indiscriminate charity'.<sup>122</sup> Among those she helped was an elderly woman who had previously nursed her sister, so she was both disbursing family charity and repaying a family obligation when she gave a proportion of the money her niece had sent her for her own use. Ferrier knew the woman and her daughter 'would be at the last extremity before they would beg or

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<sup>116</sup> Benger, *Memoirs*, 193.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>118</sup> George Bartley to Agnes Baillie, 26 Feb. 1851 (H-B 4.2 196). Condolence to Baillie's nephew William Hunter Baillie focuses on 'a loss which is not only peculiar but national'. T. Hodgson to W.H.B., 25 Feb. 1851 (H-B 4.2 205).

<sup>119</sup> Lady Louisa Stuart strongly criticised a kinswoman for giving her wasteful daughter and son-in-law thousands of pounds in 'dribbles of a few hundreds at a time', which 'bestowed at once and secured by settlement would have provided for her grandchildren at this day'. *Memoire*, 83.

<sup>120</sup> Godwin, *Memoirs*, 210, 214.

<sup>121</sup> Hume, *Enquiry*, sect. II, pt II, 143–4.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Ferrier to Helen Tovey-Tennent, 7, 8 Nov. 1851; 1 Oct. n.y., Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 319, 329.

make their wants known', implying by this their respectability and self-reliance.<sup>123</sup> Jane Austen looked forward to the 'pleasant' Christmas duty of laying out her brother's money for the poor, in addition to the more humble gifts of old underwear which she herself contributed to her poor neighbours' comfort.<sup>124</sup> By these acts of charity Ferrier and Austen demonstrated their sense of personal social duty and reminded their neighbours and associates that, although themselves obliged to practise economy, they belonged to comparatively wealthy families. Agnes Porter, who spent many years in the Somerset home of her 'benefactor' Lord Ilchester, underlined her membership of his household by dispensing charity to longterm residents of the nearby village. When Ilchester was away from home the servants were Porter's only adult companions, so her charitable activities also helped to distinguish her position within the household as a gentlewoman above the upper servants. Her charity consisted of small supplies of wood in winter and financial 'trifles', neither frequent nor valuable enough to raise expectation.<sup>125</sup> Although these monetary gifts were small, they were nonetheless given with the explicit aim of exemplifying and promoting proper social relations. One young woman was given 'a shilling for her poor old father – perhaps it may encrease her filial duty when she sees a stranger consider him'.<sup>126</sup> Although Porter's charity was practised on a small scale and in a narrow compass, her phrasing demonstrates a connection between private action and public enterprise like that to which Elizabeth Hamilton put her name. She advised another cottager woman 'to allow her daughter [...] one penny out of the money paid her for knitting a pair of stockings, to encourage the poor girl to industry. I began the little fund'.<sup>127</sup> By dispensing charity not just to relieve want but also to inculcate proper social behaviour, and by recording her purposes in a journal which would eventually be given as a moral legacy to her employer's family, Porter was able to reassure herself, and remind others, of her gentility.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 329. Cf. Agnes Porter, who wished she had donated more to an old woman who 'did not beg, yet had every appearance of poverty'. 21 Apr. 1791, Martin, *Journals*, 113.

<sup>124</sup> Jane Austen to Martha Lloyd, 29–30 Nov. 1812; same to Cassandra Austen, 24 Jan. 1813. Le Faye, *Letters*, 197, 200.

<sup>125</sup> 27 Sept. 1790, Martin, *Journals*, 88.

<sup>126</sup> 14 Jan. 1791, *ibid.*, 101.

<sup>127</sup> 18 Oct. 1790, *ibid.*, 90. Cf. also Hamilton's didactic novel, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808).

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Porter's private/public record of her charitable activities and their motivation indicates some of the tensions inherent in never-married gentlewomen's practice and representation of patronage activities. Even charity could be given the 'appearance of ostentation' by 'publick praise'.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, it was understood that 'patronage universally is power'.<sup>129</sup> Women confident of their social status were more likely to be open about the personal advantages which accrued, and the satisfaction they felt, in exercising patronage, like the married and wealthy Lady Mount Edgcumbe who boasted of her newsgathering skills 'you may depend upon it that I know the truth, & you may depend upon it that I tell it', or Elizabeth Montagu who acknowledged that 'The zeal I have on occasions shown to serve my friends has redounded to my credit, consequently to my power'.<sup>130</sup> But visibly successful female patrons attracted public censure from male commentators on social conduct. The author of *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) complained about the example set by women 'in the highest circles' whose ability to 'obtain a living, an appointment, a step in naval or in military promotion' afforded them 'the double delight of conferring an obligation [...] and of displaying their interest with the rulers of the state'.<sup>131</sup> This, he believed, was an 'encouragement to vanity' in other women. Vanity and presumption were criticisms regularly thrown at unmarried women, so they (and their relatives and friends) arguably had good reason to frame their patronage activities in terms less immediately challenging and more apparently dutiful. Benevolence, friendship, goodwill, kindness, and charity were all desirable virtues in a gentlewoman.

Despite contemporary fears that undue female influence was a sign of impending social dissolution, the evidence suggests that most never-married women engaged with patronage to demonstrate their adherence to family and rank. The time, effort, and money they expended on it was mostly for the benefit of close relatives

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<sup>128</sup> Eliza Dawson to Wilmer Gossip, n.d. [c.1788], in F. Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage, "The Thorp Arch Archive: Part I"', *TSWL*, 21:2 (autumn 2002), 354.

<sup>129</sup> Archdeacon William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), in Corfield, *Power and the Professions*, 3.

<sup>130</sup> E. Chalus, 'Elite Women, Social Politics and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England', *HJ*, 43:3 (2000), 680; Bannet, 'Bluestocking Sisters', 34.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Gisborne, in Chalus, *Elite Women*, 28.

and friends. It was appropriately advertised in family and social letters which were passed around and read among those same relatives and friends. There was an expectation that gratitude would also be expressed in the permanent medium of correspondence. Notwithstanding this familial focus, single women took opportunities to associate themselves with patronage in the broader context of national stability. When Agnes Porter visited London at Easter 1791 she went with her hosts to the ‘Orphan Asylum’ to listen to a music performance.<sup>132</sup> Visiting the capital again fourteen years later, she went to the same foundling hospital on two occasions, once to see the children ‘at their dinner’.<sup>133</sup> This was charity as both a polite public performance and, as Lloyd puts it, an ‘exercise of patronage and authority over the poor’.<sup>134</sup> As an expression of civic duty and tradition, and social and political involvement, it was relevant not just to a provincial governess of modest means like Agnes Porter, but to a wealthy and prominent figure like the bachelor banker Gilbert Innes, who was also in London in the spring of 1791 and who went to the Greenwich Hospital to see ‘2500 decayed Seamen their nurses & 150 Boys [...] the whole pensioners boys & all at Dinner in three vast halls’.<sup>135</sup> In 1796, *The Times* asserted that the anniversary dinner and orderly procession of the London and Westminster charity schools demonstrated ‘the beneficial effects which the poor derive from a well regulated state of society; protected by a Constitution superior to that of any other country; and [...] a complete refutation to the wild theories of modern Reformists’.<sup>136</sup>

Several decades later the author Susan Ferrier confessed to her niece that ‘one can scarcely help wishing for wealth, that they might enjoy its only true luxury—that of relieving the necessities of others’.<sup>137</sup> But she did not reflect whether a more equal distribution of wealth might relieve the poor from dependence on charity. To do so

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<sup>132</sup> 24 Apr. 1791, Martin, *Journals*, 114. This was the institution founded by Captain Thomas Coram in 1739.

<sup>133</sup> 3 Mar., 7 Apr. 1805, *ibid.*, 250, 258.

<sup>134</sup> S. Lloyd, ‘Pleasing Spectacles and Elegant Dinners: Conviviality, Benevolence, and Charity Anniversaries in Eighteenth-Century London’, *JBS*, 41:1 (Jan. 2002), 30.

<sup>135</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 12 Apr. 1791 (GD113/5/105/20). Lloyd examines fully the meanings implicit in public charity in ‘Pleasing Spectacles’.

<sup>136</sup> Lloyd, *op. cit.*, 37–8.

<sup>137</sup> Susan Ferrier to Helen Tovey-Tennent, 12 Jan. n.y., Doyle, *Memoir and Correspondence*, 335. Cf. the heroine of Wollstonecraft’s *Mary*, who practised ‘the most rigid economy’ in order to ‘gratify herself in the highest degree’. Godwin, *Memoirs*, 148.

would have implied losing the hierarchical bonds which she and many other never-married gentlewomen made such consistent efforts to maintain.





## Chapter 6

### **Jane Innes of Stow (1747–1839): filial dependency to independent wealth**

Concepts of self-representation, family roles, and influence, previously considered in chapters two to five, are here reconsidered in a single case study. The considerable archive relating to Jane Innes of Stow makes it possible to build up a detailed picture of a never-married gentlewoman's family and social ties and to examine comprehensively her management of relationships.<sup>1</sup> In the course of a long life (1747–1839) Innes was placed in very different circumstances at different times. She began as a younger daughter under patriarchal sway. At the age of thirty, in 1777, she had annually 'a pittance of thirty pounds' at her own disposal.<sup>2</sup> After her parents' deaths she lived with her never-married siblings, taking up the responsibilities of household management for her bachelor brother when her older sister died. By the early 1800s, she was independently wealthy enough to make an annual contribution of £120 to the household's expenses. She eventually became a head of household and an estate owner in her own right. At the age of eighty-five, inheritance from her intestate brother gave her an income of thousands of pounds and a long list of would-be legatees.<sup>3</sup> Her surviving papers reveal how she negotiated these changes in status, and the degree of agency she had in assuming and fulfilling roles such as domestic manager, patron, and family representative. Letters and accounts reveal the dynamics of the three variations on the never-married household in which she lived. Innes's consistent representation of herself as a gentlewoman in her personal writing is unremarkable. The value of her letters and household books lies in the fact that they show her invoking particular ideas of propriety and correct behaviour likely to support her stance in specific situations, while both the immediate and cumulative effects of her careful self-representations can be gauged from the letters of her longterm correspondents. Innes's very visible upholding of genteel conduct codes was instrumental in winning her the support of friends when her brother's behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> Material relating to Innes runs from reports on her childhood schooling to her instructions on estate management shortly before her death aged 92.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 3 Aug. 1779 (GD113/5/206a/16).

<sup>3</sup> John Thomson, Royal Bank, to Jane Innes, 2 May 1832 (GD113/5/279/7).

made it necessary for her to challenge him to preserve her own status. The good opinion of servants was important as well, as a number of letters testify. Their respect, no less than her brother's, was a necessary prop to her household authority.

More broadly, this case study offers new perspectives in the historiography of Scottish family life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Innes's papers shed further light on the high proportion of never-married women and men in genteel Lowland families during this period, on a consequent degree of normalisation of their familial roles, and on the play of hierarchy between never-married households as well as between individuals. In Innes's immediate circle alone there were two never-married sibling households which, like her own, were headed by a bachelor who was the family heir and representative.<sup>4</sup> Such households were not unusual among Edinburgh gentry families of the period.<sup>5</sup>

'One on whom I have too much depending'<sup>6</sup>

Jane Innes was the second daughter of George Innes, cashier to the Royal Bank of Scotland and deputy receiver of the land tax in Scotland.<sup>7</sup> On her father's side the family was of north-east origin, of no great distinction, but already entrenched in the bank's service by the time of her birth in 1747.<sup>8</sup> By his marriage to a niece of Lord Fountainhall, George Innes had connected himself to a number of lairdly families with estates in the Borders south of Edinburgh. When he grew wealthy he underlined these ties by buying the estate of Stow which adjoined properties belonging to his wife's relations, but despite this he was not a man who willingly acknowledged the obligations of either kinship or friendship.<sup>9</sup> There were three surviving children of the marriage: Marion, probably born 1745, Jane, and Gilbert, born in 1751. The extensive Innes of Stow archive charts the family's rise over these two generations, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and continuing into the first half of the nineteenth century. Gilbert Innes built on his father's success to become a director of

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<sup>4</sup> Trotter of Mortonhall and Scott of Malleny.

<sup>5</sup> In later life Innes's neighbours were the Clerks of Eldin (see chp. 3 above).

<sup>6</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 15 Jan. 1778 (GD113/5/409/26/23).

<sup>7</sup> Comparable to today's chief executive. 'RBS Heritage Online', via [heritagearchives.rbs.com](http://heritagearchives.rbs.com)

<sup>8</sup> George Innes's younger brother and nephew worked for the bank. Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> I.a. George Innes to P. & J. Murdoch, 1 Dec. 1748; to Robert Finlay, 28 Dec. 1749 (GD113/1/270); to George Cockburn, 26 Aug., 30 Sept. 1752 (GD113/1/293).

the bank and a member of almost every socially significant club and institution in Edinburgh.<sup>10</sup> The numerous manuscript bundles comprising the collection were probably preserved due to extended legal processes to determine the family's heirs, as all three siblings died unmarried and intestate.

Throughout her life Jane Innes formed her most important relationships beyond her immediate family with cousins of varying degrees on her mother's side. Among them was her second cousin John Row, with whom she began a courtship in 1774 at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>11</sup> Row was of lesser gentry background and without prospects; his family emigrated to North Carolina in hopes of bettering their situation, but failed to prosper.<sup>12</sup> Row joined the British army, a route to advancement taken by many of his contemporaries. In 1775 he was a lieutenant in the ninth regiment of foot, stationed in Ireland. Over the next five years he wrote to Innes while on campaign, from Canada and America, from England while on the recruiting service, and finally from Jamaica in 1780, where he had been sent with the eighty-fifth regiment. Their correspondence is a record of his excruciatingly slow advance to the rank of captain, without the benefit of well-placed friends willing to exert influence on his behalf, or to help him financially. In Edinburgh, Innes lived a retired life, receiving his letters clandestinely to avoid the prohibition of her father who considered the match unequal. Row's sudden death from yellow fever in September 1780 cut short her hopes of marriage with him.<sup>13</sup>

Between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-three the relationships which had the strongest influence on the course of Innes's life were those with Row himself, with her father, mother, her older sister Marion and her younger brother

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<sup>10</sup> He has attracted attention as an arts patron: V. Coltman and S. Lloyd (eds), *Henry Raeburn: Context, Reception and Reputation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); H. Smailes, "'Uno Sfortunato Scultore Scozzese chiamato Campbell". The Correspondence of Thomas Campbell (1791–1858) and his Banking Maecenas, Gilbert Innes of Stow (1751–1832)', *WS*, 71 (2009).

<sup>11</sup> Barclay's analysis gives an average age of 20 for Scottish women's first marriages in the period 1650–1850 (*Love, Intimacy and Power*, 19, table 1.3). Cf. Vickery, who cites the mean age of brides in the late eighteenth century as 24.9 (*Gentleman's Daughter*, 53n.38), and Jane Austen's wry acknowledgement that in many people's eyes a 27-year-old woman was past all matrimonial hope (*Sense and Sensibility*, 40).

<sup>12</sup> His parents and 7 siblings were dead by 1776.

<sup>13</sup> For this relationship, see also A. Duncan, 'Patronage and presentations of the self: a late eighteenth-century correspondence', MSc diss., University of Edinburgh (2007). Disease killed hundreds of troops in Jamaica, and the life of army officers generally was more likely to end in debt and early death than in glory. J. Hayes, 'Scottish Officers in the British Army 1714–63', *SHR*, 37 (1958), 28, 31, 33; Nenadic, 'Impact of the Military Profession', 81, 82, 90, 97.

Gilbert. Her social circle was small, and maintained mostly by correspondence. Her matrimonial choice was made in opposition to her filial duty, and as an unmarried and still relatively young woman Innes appropriately sought support for her position from her nearest female relations. Her younger brother Gilbert was an occasional but inconstant advocate for her, and her belief that he was essentially selfish was to define her later characterisations of their sibling relationship. Innes's letters during this time show her adopting the language of genteel courtship and marriage to validate her acceptance of Row as her suitor in the face of her father's disapproval. At the time and retrospectively, she emphasised Row's gentlemanly virtues and conduct to deflect attention from the fact that the letters themselves were physical evidence of the unsanctioned correspondence by which they continued their relationship.

Innes's father was authoritarian and parsimonious, unwilling to allow his family to participate in the social life of Edinburgh's 'Beau Monde', and able to impose his will on his wife and daughters at least.<sup>14</sup> His apparent lack of affection for his youngest daughter was evident enough to draw censure from her lover, and matter-of-fact acknowledgement from her brother.<sup>15</sup> Innes did not have the advantage of physical beauty and, although she had been soundly schooled when young, in her own words her social education had been 'contracted & suspicious'.<sup>16</sup> In these circumstances, with few opportunities to meet eligible suitors, she was painfully aware how reliant she was for her future provision on her father's goodwill. Within the family circle she was close to both her mother and her sister Marion, who was near in age. While her brother Gilbert was still a young man she was the channel through which he conveyed apologies to their father for his frequently prolonged absences from home on social jaunts.<sup>17</sup> It is not clear whether Innes was a willing

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<sup>14</sup> George Innes to P. & J. Murdoch, 1 Dec. 1748; to Robert Finlay, 28 Dec. 1749 (GD113/1/270); to George Cockburn, 26 Aug., 30 Sept. 1752 (GD113/1/293). See also Nelly Spottiswoode to Jane Innes, c.1771 (GD113/5/116/7).

<sup>15</sup> 'Nothing is to be expected, either on the score of affection, or common humanity, from your Father, where his money is concerned': John Row to Jane Innes, advising a Bath visit, 15 Jul. 1778 (GD113/5/73a/13). 'As for my father you know he does not care a farthing about you': Gilbert Innes to same, c.1775 (GD113/5/65a/10).

<sup>16</sup> Against the polite trend of urban education and polish for gentry daughters, Innes was sent out of Edinburgh for her schooling. Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 33. John Row to Jane Innes, 1 Jul. 1778 (GD113/5/206b/1); Jane Innes to John Row, 21 Jul. 1778 (GD113/5/73b/1).

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 14 Oct. 1774, and n.d. x 4 (GD113/5/65a/2,5,8,11,15).

mediator, but it is clear the role did not benefit her in any way. Gilbert showed little inclination to repay his obligations on this score a few years later when his consistent support might have tipped the balance in favour of his sister's marriage.

Innes's correspondence with John Row began in December 1775. In early letters her suitor adopted the standard tones of the polite lover, alluding conventionally to both the strength of his attachment and his self-control.<sup>18</sup> The rhetorical range of men's epistolary courtship reflected their greater freedom in choosing and approaching the object of their affection, a freedom which in most cases was only lightly masked by protestations of romantic subservience. Row assured Innes that the warmth of his regard was 'Checked by the timidity of offending', yet in a single letter he allowed the restrained emotion of 'My Dearest Madam' to spill over into 'My Dear, Dear Miss Innes' and the concluding warmth of 'Adieu My Dearest Girl'.<sup>19</sup> Innes, however, was adamant from the start that 'the Billet doux stile from [him was] unnecessary'.<sup>20</sup> What she wanted was something 'less imaginary'. Her pronounced distaste for romantic flattery can be read on several levels. It suggested genteel female modesty. It also signalled the reserve which a prudent young woman maintained during courtship, before an offer of marriage had been openly made, approved, and accepted. But as she had agreed to correspond and, at his request, had given Row a lock of her hair, it can also be read as a discreet confirmation of her feelings in response to the challenge posed by his initial declarations. In the opinion of late-eighteenth-century Scottish moralists, emotional sincerity and well-founded affection were naturally expressed in the voice of reason.<sup>21</sup> More prosaically, Innes was no longer a young woman in the eyes of her contemporaries. Just a few years previously she had suggested that a female friend and correspondent write her 'something in the Lover Stile'.<sup>22</sup> This self-conscious trying out of voices was in line with their intermittent efforts to practise elegant and

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<sup>18</sup> John Row to Jane Innes, 6 Feb. 1776 (GD113/5/74/4). On the linguistic conventions of epistolary courtship, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 45–8.

<sup>19</sup> Row to Innes, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 23 Jan. 1776 (GD113/5/409/42); John Row to Jane Innes, 9 Mar. 1776 (GD113/5/74/6).

<sup>21</sup> Dwyer, *Age of the Passions*, 120–4.

<sup>22</sup> Nelly Spottiswoode to Jane Innes, 31 Aug. 1772 (GD113/5/116/9).

moral reflection on appropriate topics such as rural pleasures, or mortality.<sup>23</sup> Now she represented herself to Row in terms of the ideal wife who accepted her husband's interest as her own and worked tirelessly to promote it. On one occasion she teased him that she was 'qualifying [herself] for a Soldiers wife'; her pragmatic advice and unadorned prose spoke consistently of the same intent.<sup>24</sup> Practically there was little she could do, as at this stage in her life she had no influence and very little money to spare. Nonetheless, in four years she saved £100 from her 'pittance' with the object of helping him to purchase a company. Her sister Marion made a similar offer, and promised to be 'no rigorous Creditor'.<sup>25</sup> The sisters' decision to offer assistance from their small store underlined not just their personal trust in Row, but also their readiness to make judgements of moral or credit worthiness independent of the opinions of either father or brother.

Friendship was perhaps the most important rhetorical device which Innes employed in her letters to Row. She asked her lover to treat her as a friend '& confide in me accordingly', meaning that he should inform and discuss with her fully all his plans.<sup>26</sup> Row agreed that 'the tender, and fond expressions of the Billet doux' had properly given way to 'the dry detail of business, which I conceive you a party concerned in, and intitled to every information of', but he often failed to acknowledge her advice or to answer her questions.<sup>27</sup> On these occasions Innes applied pressure by reminding him of friendship's obligations: 'I have [...] every reason to believe that you esteem me as a friend which you may open your mind to, why then do you never let me into your reasons for having adopted this scheme with so much partiality'.<sup>28</sup> If this pressure was ineffectual, friendship offered a framework in which she could rewrite his behaviour without any loss of status to herself. When Row forestalled her objections to his entering a new regiment by writing to say he had already taken up his commission, she pronounced herself satisfied he had 'done nothing without the Advice and Approbation of your Friends, I chearfully give up

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<sup>23</sup> Innes to Spottiswoode, 23 Aug. 1770 (GD113/5/116/2); Spottiswoode to Innes, 27 May; 11, 24 Jun. 1771 (GD113/5/116/4,5,6).

<sup>24</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 12 Sept. 1778 (GD113/5/74/28).

<sup>25</sup> Same to same, 14 Nov. 1778; 6 Jul., 3 Aug. 1779 (GD113/5/206a/3,14,16).

<sup>26</sup> Same to same, 15 May 1778 (GD113/5/74/27).

<sup>27</sup> John Row to Jane Innes, 12 Sept. 1779 (GD113/5/73a/19).

<sup>28</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 12 Sept. 1778 (GD113/5/74/28).

my own Ideas of things and am Easy & Satisfied', neatly turning his *fait accompli* into an opportunity to display her deference to male judgement.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, friend took a softer accent, reflecting the 'love mellowed into friendship [...] the finest feeling of the human heart' which the moralist James Fordyce described in his influential *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) as the basis of virtuous marriage.<sup>30</sup> The wide currency of this understanding of friendship is evident from both private correspondence and from examples of popular print culture such as the *Scots Magazine*, which in 1752 published several poems on the theme 'Love shall be with friendship join'd: / Rais'd on that basis, 'twill endure'.<sup>31</sup> After two years of correspondence Innes asked her 'best of friends' to confirm that his regard for her had not lessened, and when he took the decision to approach her father early in 1778, she assured him that he could rely on her 'friendship and sincerity'.<sup>32</sup> When it became obvious her father would not give permission for the match, she underlined her own constancy by reminding him 'there is no[one] more sincerely unfeignedly your Friend than J:I.', adding that her mother and sister were also still his 'two trusty friends'.<sup>33</sup> Several shades of friendship are hinted at here, including marital affection, kinship loyalty, and advocacy.<sup>34</sup>

The familial faultline caused by her relationship with Row is indicated by her reference to 'the female triumvirate who are almost equally your staunch friends'.<sup>35</sup> The couple had conventionally enlisted female support—Row rarely failed to conclude his letters to Innes without conveying compliments of gratitude and affectionate remembrance to her mother and sister—but Innes's seventy-five-year-old father was not a man to be swayed by either tender feelings or womanly persuasion. He conceded that Row's letter requesting her hand was 'very polite', but remained unmoved by Row's declaration that, should he be accepted as a suitor, he would 'demand no fortune or emolument for myself, as whatever you may have

<sup>29</sup> Same to same, 19 Jul. 1779 (GD113/5/206a/15).

<sup>30</sup> Dwyer, *Age of the Passions*, 124.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 118. See also John Row to Jane Innes, 31 May, 5 Jul. 1776 (GD113/5/74/9,10), and, e.g., C.M. Duncan-Jones (ed.), *Trusty and Well Beloved: The Letters Home of William Harness, an Officer of George III* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 43; Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 192.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 9 Aug. 1777 (GD113/5/409/8); same to same, 15 Jan. 1778 (GD113/5/409/26/23).

<sup>33</sup> Same to same, 2, 3 Oct. 1778 (GD113/5/206a/2).

<sup>34</sup> Innes's and Row's mothers were first cousins, née Lauder.

<sup>35</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 27 Sept. 1778 (GD113/5/206a/1).



originally intended for her, might be settled in any manner, you should judge proper, to render her totally independent of me'.<sup>36</sup> Unsurprisingly, the elderly banker was equally unimpressed by Row's 'sincere regard, and affection' for his youngest daughter, or by his genteel genealogy.<sup>37</sup> The former was an assurance which could be given by any young man with the wit to read a polite letter-writing manual, while the latter was no acquisition to the family in terms of either new or useful connections.<sup>38</sup> Innes felt herself 'on the brink of creating a thousand disputes & controvercys in the family, nay of perhaps subjecting myself for years to come to the displeasure of one on whom I have too much depending'.<sup>39</sup> Her brother Gilbert had been happy to welcome Row as a companion in male sociability but was unwilling to accept a closer tie. When his mood was 'complaisant' Gilbert simply ignored his sister's unwelcome attachment, but if circumstances forced it on his attention he did not hesitate to point out 'how disagreeable the topick was to him'.<sup>40</sup> His comments on Row were 'harsh and unfriendly'.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, at this critical juncture when it was clear 'of how little avail my Mother Sister & my own entreaty had proved', Innes and Row agreed to seek his help.<sup>42</sup> Prompted by dislike of his father's autocratic household rule, Gilbert 'stept forth' on his sister's behalf, but it was apparently the only occasion on which he showed anything other than 'cold indifference' to her difficult situation.<sup>43</sup>

As a younger daughter and a dependant, Innes experienced the limitations on action and influence which many never-married women laboured under throughout their lives. Without the support of a male family member, and with no influential female kinswoman on whom she could call, she could do little more than hope that her elderly father could not much longer actively oppose her. Two years later, in February 1780, her father died; the much more keenly felt loss of her mother on

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<sup>36</sup> John Row to Jane Innes, 22 Jan. 1778 (GD113/5/74/25); same to George Innes, [Jan. 1778] (GD113/5/113a/2).

<sup>37</sup> To George Innes, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> For examples of letter-writing manuals, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 47n.20.

<sup>39</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 15 Jan. 1778 (GD113/5/409/26/23).

<sup>40</sup> Same to same, 5 Jan. 1779 (GD113/5/206a/4).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 27 Jan. 1778 (GD113/5/409/26/29).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*; John Row to Jane Innes, 15 Jul. 1778 (GD113/5/73a/13). Gilbert was unsuccessful, so perhaps unwilling to display his lack of influence again.

September 10<sup>th</sup> prompted her ‘unlimited sorrow’.<sup>44</sup> By the death of their parents, Innes and her siblings became wealthy. But on September 29<sup>th</sup>, far off in the West Indies, John Row too died.<sup>45</sup> Her riches came too late, and, ironically, future demands on the family coffers would be made not by the offspring of an imprudent marriage, but by her brother Gilbert’s drove of illegitimate children.

Innes was shattered by her lover’s death, having ‘too long considered him as my sole Interest & object’.<sup>46</sup> His loss left her at the age of thirty-three ‘as one in a new world who has every thing to begin without Hope Scheme or Resource’.<sup>47</sup> Yet this was far from being her only chance of marriage. Indeed, Row’s company lieutenant who wrote to her with the news tried to insinuate himself into a correspondence by recalling details of Row’s last hours in further letters—doubtless on the consideration that Innes was wealthy as well as in need of consolation.<sup>48</sup> His offer to deliver in person several mementoes when he returned to Britain was dismissed with a polite but pointed reminder that he had no claim to any connection which could sanction a visit.<sup>49</sup> This invocation of propriety had the desired effect. In his reply the plan was given up, and no further letters from him are extant.<sup>50</sup> A discreet but determined marital attempt by another maternal cousin three years later was not so simply rebuffed. Carteret Scott was a financial protégé of the Innes siblings and a welcome houseguest, so it required tactful management to reject his suit while maintaining the familial friendship. When he wrote with conventionally romantic protestations of disinterested love, begging Innes ‘consult your heart and [do] not rashly drive me to despair’, she replied matter-of-factly the next day in ‘positive and Final determination’ against his suit, advising him to consider the matter ‘merely as it is, a common occurrence in life, which few men have either

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<sup>44</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, n.d. (GD113/5/409/30).

<sup>45</sup> Richard Brooke to Jane Innes, 29 Sept. 1780 (GD113/5/73c/1).

<sup>46</sup> Marion Innes to Gilbert Innes, [12 Nov. 1780] (GD113/5/156/156); Jane Innes to Richard Brooke, 3 Nov. 1781 (GD113/5/73c/5).

<sup>47</sup> Innes to Brooke, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Richard Brooke to Jane Innes, 8 Feb, 16 Jun. 1781; 22 Jan. 1782 (GD113/5/73c/2,3,4). Brooke, having read and destroyed Innes’s letters at Row’s request, would have known that before her parents’ death she had come into £5,400, relatively little in comparison with her inheritance, but more than enough to interest an ambitious lieutenant.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Your scheme of delivering them personally at some future period I own frankly I cannot approve of, Did your Profession or Conections call you to this place, nothing would give me Sir more satisfaction’. Jane Innes to Richard Brooke, 3 Nov. 1781 (GD113/5/73c/5).

<sup>50</sup> Richard Brooke to Jane Innes, 22 Jan. 1782 (GD113/5/73c/4).

escaped, or had reason to regret in after times'.<sup>51</sup> Scott did not give up so easily, but Innes's side of their continuing correspondence hints at a new degree of independence and confidence in her capacity to act for herself. While she was still cautious with regard to public appearance (several of his frequent letters were received under cover from a mutual friend), her domestic freedom to receive her own visitors is evident in her advice that should he wish to talk directly, he should 'signify as much and leave it to my management'.<sup>52</sup> When her suitor left for London and then the West Indies in the hope of improving his prospects, they exchanged tokens which, dependent on context, might denote a romantic or a familial relationship, or acknowledgement to a benefactor.<sup>53</sup> Innes was prompt in her rejection of anything in Scott's letters which smacked of 'Billetdoux', warning that it was 'not the Stile in which you ought to write to me if you wish for a warm reception or speedy return'.<sup>54</sup> What she called the 'familiar dialogue' of her own letters acknowledged his status as a regular visitor and sometime inmate in the Innes household but also, by its informality, indicated her refusal to consider their relationship in such serious terms as courtship.<sup>55</sup> By assuring Scott of her continuing 'friendship and good will' she reminded him of the familial benevolence which she and her siblings had shown him in the form of financial aid.<sup>56</sup> As she pointed out to him several times, she was now rich and could provide for herself all her material wants, however frivolous.<sup>57</sup> Though she did not say so explicitly, the inference was clear enough. She did not need to marry. A decade after Row's death, aged forty-

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<sup>51</sup> Carteret Scott to Jane Innes, 30 Jul. 1784 (GD113/5/75a/1); Innes to Scott, 31 Jul. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/1).

<sup>52</sup> Carteret Scott to Jane Innes, 29 Nov. 1784 (GD113/5/75a/7); Innes to Scott, 9, 11 Nov. 1784 (GD113/5/206a/20); same to same, 19 Oct., 2 Dec. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/2,5).

<sup>53</sup> They exchanged a portrait and locket, as Innes and Row had done (Row likewise being both a suitor and a kinsman who might not return from a dangerous climate). Innes also sent Scott a volume of sermons and accepted a ring from him. Perhaps intentionally, the latter could conceivably be read as both romantic token and a protégé's mark of gratitude. Jane Innes to Carteret Scott, 26 Oct., 2 Dec. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/3,5); Scott to Innes, 29 Nov. 1784 (GD113/5/75a/7). Cf. the gift of a valuable gold watch from an 'affectionate and grateful nephew' to his benevolent uncle (Nenadic, 'Military Men, Businessmen', in Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 239), and Scott's will of 1792, leaving a topaz ring to Marion Innes, and a gold watch to Jane (GD113/5/402/23).

<sup>54</sup> Jane Innes to Carteret Scott, 2 Dec. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/5).

<sup>55</sup> 'Methinks I talk with you as if I were below stairs in the dining room with you upon my left hand, & my right shoulder leaning against the marble of the chimney'. Same to same, 6 Dec. 1787 (GD113/5/75b/11).

<sup>56</sup> Same to same, 31 Jul. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/1).

<sup>57</sup> Same to same, 2 Dec. 1784; 29 Sept. 1787; 23 Sept. 1791 (GD113/5/75b/5,10,15).

four, she underlined this evident truth with a teasing aside on ‘all those Guineas & Jewels [...] which have procured me those Suitors of late’.<sup>58</sup> Scott could at least console himself that he retained his kinswoman’s ‘friendship and services’.<sup>59</sup> But she could not be persuaded to accept him as a suitor, even by the friend who assured her that ‘a living Dog is much better than a Dead Lion’.<sup>60</sup>

The importance of Innes’s attachment to John Row in shaping her self-representation as a lifelong spinster is highlighted by a memorial written in 1810, ‘thirty years (this day) [...] since his Imortality commenced’.<sup>61</sup> In a long eulogy she listed his many perfections of appearance, mind, and character, followed by an equally detailed genealogy which showed him ‘related (& that nearly) to many of the principal familys in Scotland’.<sup>62</sup> In sum, he was ‘a model of the compleat Gentleman, in Word & Deed’.<sup>63</sup> Looking back, she emphasised his ‘perfect & unblemish’d Integrity’ and recalled that ‘our Conduct certainly (as our Integrity) was unblamed & unblemished!’.<sup>64</sup> This echoed Row’s own focus on gentlemanly honour throughout their correspondence, and his declared ‘consciousness of propriety and Rectitude in our conduct, however liable it may be to censure from some individuals’.<sup>65</sup> In the decades after his death Innes copied and recopied their correspondence as ink faded and paper deteriorated.<sup>66</sup> In doing so she arranged to her own satisfaction the trajectory of their relationship, drawing it to a close with her valedictory ‘Last Words’ on receiving news of his departure for the West Indies.<sup>67</sup> In this letter she commended him for having supported himself ‘with Honour and as a Gentleman upon an extreme scanty pittance’.<sup>68</sup> In another, dated May 1780 just before he sailed, she conveyed wishes for his ‘Happiness & Prosperity’ from herself,

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<sup>58</sup> Same to same, 23 Sept. 1791 (GD113/5/75b/15).

<sup>59</sup> Same to same, 2 Dec. 1784 (GD113/5/75b/5).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Jane Innes, ‘Character & Description of John Row’ (GD113/5/409/25).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> John Row to Jane Innes, 6 Feb., 26 Sept. 1776; 21 Nov. 1777 (GD113/5/74/4,12,16).

<sup>66</sup> ‘the present Copyes of my three last letters have been later wrote than the former ones, as their scrolls were written on printed & detached pieces of paper which though preserved has taken me some time and pains to arrange so as to produce a Faithful transcript’. Ann., Jane Innes to John Row, 2 May 1780 (GD113/5/206a/19).

<sup>67</sup> Same to same, 9 Mar. 1780 (GD113/5/73b/5).

<sup>68</sup> Same to same, 2 Mar. 1780 (GD113/5/73b/4).

her mother, and sister.<sup>69</sup> When she copied it forty years later, she annotated it ‘this Letter was the last I ever wrote him’, finalising for posterity her early life’s narrative.<sup>70</sup> Among Innes’s and Row’s maternal relations at least, the portrayal of their relationship in terms of virtuous gentility was accepted. Row’s first cousin and nearest relation Sir Andrew Lauder Dick of Fountainhall had spoken in his favour (albeit unsuccessfully) to Innes’s father; after Row’s death he wrote to Innes to express his sorrow at the loss of ‘so dear’ and ‘worthy’ a friend, concluding his letter ‘with much Esteem & respect Madam’.<sup>71</sup> In 1833, when Innes was eighty-five, Lauder’s son sent her ‘ten letters written by Captain Row – which I found among some papers [...] – They must be interesting to you’.<sup>72</sup> Her personal narrative of an ideal lover tragically lost was notably and enduringly effective.

‘Would you only do as I bid you’<sup>73</sup>

By 1786 the Innes siblings had set up home together in Edinburgh’s New Town. The shift of aristocratic and genteel society from the vertical divisions of rank in the High Street’s tenements to a spacious horizontal layout of streets named for the Hanoverian monarchy signalled modernity and order. The old family home in a court off the High Street had been a flat which shared private/public space with families of different rank on the same stair. The new townhouse in St Andrew Square had an imposing street door, a garden, and coach house, reflecting the siblings’ status as a rising family with substantial wealth founded on liquid capital. Gilbert Innes’s social and political influence rested on his positions as director and later deputy governor of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and St Andrew Square was an address with which the bank had a long connection.<sup>74</sup> The family’s social focus remained firmly urban.

<sup>69</sup> Same to same, 2 May 1780 (GD113/5/206a/19).

<sup>70</sup> Her actual last letter was a grief-stricken, angry note which informed him of her mother’s death in September 1780 and accused him of sending ‘circular letters’ from Jamaica which removed his correspondence ‘to no inferiour distance to that of your person’. The two-paragraph scrawl, undated and unsigned, concluded, ‘I trust you pay proper attention to health in your present dangerous Climate & remain &cc’. It is unclear if it was sent, but it was clearly not what she wanted to remember as her last words to him. (GD113/5/409/30, also 118).

<sup>71</sup> Sir Andrew Lauder Dick to Jane Innes, 1 Dec. 1780 (GD113/5/73c/6).

<sup>72</sup> Sir Thomas Dick Lauder to same, 11 Feb. 1833 (GD113/5/83b/6).

<sup>73</sup> ‘... it would materially tend to your Content health happiness & every thing that is worth having in this World’. Gilbert Innes to same, 6 Jul. 1799 (GD113/5/105/31).

<sup>74</sup> The mansion of Sir Lawrence Dundas, ousted as bank governor in 1777, stood on the east side and was acquired as the bank’s head office in 1825 during Gilbert’s tenure as deputy governor.

Ownership of the Stow estate, bought twenty years before, gave the social gloss conferred by land ownership, but there was never any suggestion that either Gilbert or his sisters would live there. Stow and other estates bought later were investments on which financial and social returns were expected, not trustholdings on which money was spent for the benefit of future generations.<sup>75</sup> Setting up the new household resulted in a flurry of accounts which were, conventionally, in Gilbert's name. The demonstration of taste through connoisseurship was a way of validating new wealth, and as a budding connoisseur he may well have imposed his preferences, but the absence of his sisters' names on the bills does not mean they had no say in establishing their home. In this as in other points the sibling household mirrored the marital, and a veil of polite feminine deference to masculine judgement and authority was drawn over whatever practical and financial negotiations may have taken place.<sup>76</sup>

The St Andrew Square household functioned for nearly a quarter of a century as the family home, initially under Marion Innes's governance. Despite the outlay on furnishing, however, Gilbert was unable to exploit it as a setting for sociability. Although his sisters conformed to social expectation by taking up household responsibilities, they refused to step forward as hostesses. From their point of view the rise in familial status demonstrated by the display of domestic taste and consumption was undermined by Gilbert's flagrant disregard for genteel codes of behaviour. His constant sexual pursuit of low-ranking women was notorious, and his illegitimate children were imposed on his sisters' notice. After Marion's death in 1799, Jane spent an increasingly difficult decade as her brother's domestic manager until she finally moved into her own home in 1809. During this period the bulk of her personal papers, from correspondence to journals and household accounts, log her attempts to manage her relationship with Gilbert. She held herself socially aloof from him as far as possible, refusing either to accompany him in public or to allow indiscriminate sociability in their home. While her sister was alive she seems to have confined her reflections on his behaviour to private notebooks, but after Marion's

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<sup>75</sup> Pirntaiton, Carolside, and the Drum, the latter possibly leased. Gilbert's indifference to the dynastic symbolism of land is evident in his use of Stow as somewhere to rusticate his illegitimate sons (GD113/5/402/22,31).

<sup>76</sup> For private and public representations of marital choice in the home, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, chps 3, 4.

death left her isolated in the household she increasingly opened up her situation to the scrutiny of her peers via letters to friends. Among them was her maternal cousin Colonel George Scott, brother of her onetime suitor Carteret, who gradually took up some of the familial obligations of support and protection which Gilbert had blatantly failed to fulfil.

During the early years in St Andrew Square, Jane Innes's status, like that of Margaret Adam, remained that of a junior family member. Although now in her forties, she was often addressed by relatives and friends not as Miss Innes (that title belonged to her older sister) but as Miss Jane or even Miss Jeanie.<sup>77</sup> She had no distinct familial or household role. When Gilbert's business affairs took him to London, it was Jane to whom he sent detailed progress reports to be communicated to his fellow directors but, unlike Margaret Adam, nothing in her correspondence suggests she encouraged this habit with the aim of creating a recognised intermediary role for herself.<sup>78</sup> She was not reliant on her brother's business abilities, and although he offered financial advice and often acted for her, she had already taken charge of her own investments.<sup>79</sup> Benevolent patronage to kin offered a surer way to command respect. As financially independent gentlewomen the Innes sisters were now in a position not only to offer help as they saw fit, but to give considerable sums, a fact which caused their brother some concern. 'Tell Marion to mind Number One a little more', he fretted from London in 1791. 'I hear she is gifting away her Substance and is only Oeconomical in my matters'.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless the sisters followed the dictates of conventional propriety in patronage as in their other social relationships. Their benevolence was directed primarily to closely connected families such as the Scotts of Malleny and the Trotters of Mortonhall. In larger families there was often insufficient capital to maintain the status of both the family representative and the personal status of younger siblings. The sisters contributed both individually and jointly with Gilbert to advance the careers of male cousins and to support the rank of their less well-off kinswomen. Among the beneficiaries were George and Carteret

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<sup>77</sup> E.g. Rachel Cumin to Marion Innes, 4 Feb. 1783 (GD113/5/80b/5); George Scott to Jane Innes, 23 Feb. 1801 (GD113/5/70b/13).

<sup>78</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 1 Feb.; 9, 19 Mar.; 31 May 1791 (GD113/5/105/15,17,18,23).

<sup>79</sup> E.g. 'Old Stock Papers', annual records of sums received (GD113/5/279/12); Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 9, 19, 28 Mar; 31 May 1791 (GD113/5/105/17-19,23).

<sup>80</sup> Same to same, 9 Mar. 1791 (GD113/5/105/17).

Scott, and Margaret, Marion, and Jane Trotter.<sup>81</sup> The Scotts, like the Trotters, were a numerous family of whom several, including the heir, remained unmarried. Correspondence shows sibling relations were sometimes strained and, like the Trotters, they found the best way to avoid conflicts of status was to reduce the core familial household to the senior brother and sister. In both cases the Inneses' patronage helped to maintain cordial family relations: the Trotter sisters were given contributions to their separate household, while George Scott apparently made St Andrew Square his home whenever he returned from army service.<sup>82</sup> He was there when Marion Innes died in February 1799, and he proved a steadfast ally and adviser to Jane as her relationship with her brother deteriorated.

The hope that Gilbert and Jane would be 'long very long [...] a Mutual Comfort to each other' after Marion's death was overly optimistic.<sup>83</sup> Domestic accounts, jottings, and calculations of expenditure survive in great number for the decade 1799–1809. The carefully preserved papers, some little more than scraps, suggest Jane's need to represent to herself, and to Gilbert, the value of her managerial and financial contribution to their shared home. Evidence of her struggle to establish her position emerges as early as the summer of 1799, when Gilbert was once more in London. He suggested she meet him in the spa town of Harrogate on his return journey north, which she could do 'without any trouble whatever more than putting your best Cloaths in a trunk'.<sup>84</sup> In her reply she tried to win his recognition of the fact that she was now running the household. Like Margaret Adam in similar circumstances, she drew attention to the propriety as well as the necessity of her supervisory presence, pointing out that the mistress of a household could not suddenly relinquish her responsibilities and set off travelling on a whim. 'I have lived in terrible confusion since your departure with all the trouble & fracas of whiteners & painters [...] & stinking washings of Walls', she reminded him.<sup>85</sup> 'To leave your House empty [and] set out upon a few hours warning (for so I calculated

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<sup>81</sup> £1,000 was given jointly to help George Scott purchase a captaincy. Jane Innes, journal, 3 Jul. 1793 (GD113/5/46/4); also records of regular small sums given to the Scotts (GD113/5/279/13c). Innes's patronage of the Trotter sisters is discussed in chp. 7 below.

<sup>82</sup> He is first mentioned as an inmate in 1786. Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 6 Oct. 1786 (GD113/5/105/4).

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to same, 25 Feb. [1799] (GD113/5/59b/69).

<sup>84</sup> Gilbert Innes to same, 20 Jun. 1799 (GD113/5/105/27).

<sup>85</sup> Jane Innes to Gilbert Innes, 25 Jun. 1799 (GD113/5/105/28/2).



from your purposed departure from London) [...] was a proposal which I can receive in no other light than a showy substanceless suggestion of the moment'.<sup>86</sup> Her refusal in the face of her brother's offer to bear the expenses of the 'jaunt' highlights her sensitivity to dependency, however gilded. The implication that she did not contribute to the household, managerially or financially, threatened to undermine her status at home and beyond. Gilbert's letters expressed the satisfaction he took in managing Scottish fiscal affairs, but showed him ignorant of or indifferent to the financial management of his domestic commonwealth. He declared magnanimously, and publicly, that his sister sat free at his table.<sup>87</sup> Jane, well aware that this cast her in the role of dependant, recorded that like her sister she had 'Ever & Regularly' paid board.<sup>88</sup> She resolved to pay no more until she received a receipt from her banker brother, judging that 'the sum remaining in my hands would the readier procure me a Discharge – Righteously my due'.<sup>89</sup> To add insult to injury, she could 'clearly and distinctly prove' that the annual household expenditure on provisions, coals, and servants' wages did not exceed her board of £120. A few years later she asked rhetorically 'how Mr Innes could think that the house could be maintained 50 whole weeks and during that time £30.10.6 be paid in wages to female servants and all upon nothing?'<sup>90</sup> She had been forced to draw on her own money to make up a deficit, for the household family had expanded to include 'his two Bastard sons [...] and for the most part Col Scott', then on home furlough.<sup>91</sup> When she finally gave up the struggle for recognition in 1809 she made a last effort to represent what she saw as the true state of domestic finances at St Andrew Square, possibly because Gilbert, displeased by her decision to leave, continued to tell friends she had lived rent free.<sup>92</sup> As a closure to her household book she drew up an 'Account of all Moneys Received by Me since my Sisters death from Mr Innes or by any means whatever towards the Maintenance of his Houshold with their exact dates of Receipt – from Janr 25<sup>th</sup> 1799

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Jane Innes, household/personal account book (GD113/5/502/2).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Cf. Ann Pitt's embarrassment when her brother mentioned publicly that he gave her an annuity. Froide, *Never Married*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> Innes, household/personal account book, *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Jane Innes, housekeeping calculations 1799–1809 (GD113/5/44b/1).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Jane Innes to ?, 18 Jan. 1810 (GD113/5/409/83).

till the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1809'.<sup>93</sup> The comments which she had appended to her financial records over the years show that they served as more than an *aide-memoire* to prudent housekeeping. Her 'jot-books' gave her the opportunity to express her feelings, and she used them to cast up more than accounts.

The reference to Gilbert's 'Bastard sons' makes the point that his illegitimate children could not simply be kept at a discreet distance, as was often the case.<sup>94</sup> His liaisons were not confined to the Old Town's courts and wynds but crossed the North Bridge to the broad streets of the New Town, and even the threshold of the St Andrew Square house. He seduced his own and other people's servants; one tryst which particularly struck home to Jane was with a maidservant who boasted of the ease with which she was able to fool 'the old maiden Lady' her mistress.<sup>95</sup> The latter was persuaded to visit on Sundays and to give her other servants permission to go out, leaving her maid (thought to be at church) free to let Gilbert into the house. A disorderly household reflected on the reputation of all members, but particularly on the mistress's ability to exercise proper authority, so Gilbert's affairs were breaches of social trust on several levels. Jane determined to remain neither ignorant of nor silent about her brother's behaviour. If she could not prevent it she could at least protect her reputation by making it clear she did not condone it. She copied letters from Gilbert's doctor advising him on mercury pills for 'venereal poison', as well as his accounts of money paid over two decades to twenty-six named women and others unnamed who regularly received sums ranging from five shillings to two guineas during liaisons which lasted months or years.<sup>96</sup> Several were recorded under both their own and a married name, and these assumptions of respectability in the context of unsanctioned or adulterous relationships may have been at the root of Jane's own rejection of the honorific 'Mrs' which was adopted by many spinsters.<sup>97</sup> Several women received maintenance for children, although others were given only a few

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<sup>93</sup> Jane Innes, household/personal account book (GD113/5/502/2).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Allan Fergusson to Christian Dalrymple, on her brother-in-law's illegitimate child: 'such children as those ought to be brought up in a decent honest way [...] but I hate the thought of bringing them up like proper children, I would likewise teach them what they are & what they may expect'. Oct. 1791 (NLS Mss 25454, 87–9f.).

<sup>95</sup> Jane Innes, note, 1800 (GD113/5/402/31); she rarely recorded this much detail.

<sup>96</sup> Jane Innes, notes and copy letter, n.d. & 1807 (GD113/5/402/5,7,17).

<sup>97</sup> Among several hundred preserved letters, only two are addressed to 'Mrs Innes of Stow'. Gilbert teased 'I did not observe till closing your Frank tother day, the respectable appellation of M<sup>rs</sup>. given you by that Goose Pitfour – how did you take it?'. 18 May 1808 (GD113/5/105/48).

guineas on the birth (or death) of their child. Of the resulting families only one, the Burnets, successfully claimed a degree of recognition, although another became well enough known to Jane for her to make provision for them after Gilbert's death in 1832. The Burnets were first insinuated into the Innes household after their mother's death in 1793. Gilbert, who was in London at the time, admitted 'I never thought I cared much for them till they had nobody else to take Charge of them', but it was in fact his sisters whom he expected to take on 'the task which chance has thrown on you'.<sup>98</sup> Marion and Jane received the elder girls, their namesakes, at St Andrew Square, but Marion emphasised to Gilbert that his connection with their mother was 'now loosed, and in a way most striking for you', and urged him to 'choose between your right hand and your left'.<sup>99</sup> 'You can no longer plead the restraint of Parents', she reminded him, 'the impetuosity of Passion, or the imprudence of Youth. You have now the full power of your Fortunes & Faculties, & if you fall you fall'.<sup>100</sup> The introduction of seven of Gilbert's illegitimate children while he himself remained in London, 'too confused and useful at the board to Scotland to write on my private business', caused considerable friction between the siblings.<sup>101</sup> Marion struggled to reconcile her sense of duty with her sense of propriety, while Jane demanded 'some proofs of a Reformation before I would plunge myself into water the depth of which I knew not'.<sup>102</sup> The forty-two-year-old Gilbert had been eighteen years a father '& could not be a novice as we were of what was necessary to be done', she argued. She saw 'no reason to volunteer & by striping him of every Care encourage him like a Canary bird to build a new nest & hatch again over the old'.<sup>103</sup>

It was the Burnets, formerly 'in terrible awe' of the Innes sisters, who bore the brunt of Jane's anger as their social visibility and 'insolence' increased over the next decade.<sup>104</sup> They understood the importance of public signifiers of status: Marion

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<sup>98</sup> Gilbert Innes to Marion Innes, 30 May 1793 (GD113/5/46/1-2). Also same to Jane Innes, 14 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/105/25).

<sup>99</sup> The mother died in childbirth. Marion Innes to Gilbert Innes, 21 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/441/65); Marion and Jean Burnet to same, 27 May 1793 (GD113/4/160/151). Also Gilbert to Marion Innes, 24 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/498/68): 'I pray you give a name to the young one to save me speaking about it when I return'.

<sup>100</sup> Marion Innes to Gilbert Innes, 21 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/441/65).

<sup>101</sup> Gilbert Innes to Mr Simpson, 30 May 1793 (GD113/5/46/1-2).

<sup>102</sup> Jane Innes, journal, 28 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/46/4).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 14 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/105/25).

Burnet thanked her brother for addressing a letter to her with ‘that honorable & pleasant appellation Miss B—’.<sup>105</sup> By 1807 the family was ensconced in a ‘small but magnificently finished’ former aristocratic townhouse in the Old Town.<sup>106</sup> However, a clearer sign of Gilbert’s public (although not formal) acknowledgement of his illegitimate children was their increasing presence at St Andrew Square. Jane, whose union with John Row had been thwarted by the fear that children of the marriage would be dependent on the family fortune, looked back and felt she had been ‘crossed in all my expectations and hope’ by her brother. ‘Now in the decline of life I am held in contempt & retained to advance his, & the interest of his spurious issue [...] No wonder that I mourn.’<sup>107</sup> Because she had not married, her brother was her closest male relative, and as such he had a duty to be morally as well as materially supportive of her status. Instead, ‘after watching all night and every night for his return home to supper I am treated with utter neglect & with glances of contempt & even derision because neither my face nor my manner is so young as that where who he has from hypocrisy left’.<sup>108</sup> In copying Gilbert’s meticulous accounts of money paid to low-ranking women for sexual services, she depicted a sterile use of patrimony which was at odds with his reputation for artistic patronage but entirely in accord with the stereotypical portrait of the rakish old bachelor. She also recorded her suspicion that he had given to his illegitimate daughter pearls which had once belonged to her sister Marion, in careless alienation of the important legacies by which gentlewomen confirmed their family ties.<sup>109</sup>

Her friends had begun speaking openly of the possibility of her leaving St Andrew Square as early as 1800, a sign of how seriously her reputation was jeopardised by her brother’s blatant ‘vice & multiplicity of [...] base low vulgar connections’.<sup>110</sup> Gilbert’s continuing liaisons and his acceptance of the Burnet family as his own meant that genteel boundaries were erased. He seemed indifferent to the

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<sup>105</sup> Marion Burnet to George Burnet, 11 Dec. 1807 (GD113/5/402/19). In *Rich Old Bachelor*, 210, a cook who allows a letter to be addressed to her as Miss— is rebuked by her employer the bachelor ‘You’d only be Miss I do declare, / Was I to make of you my heir’.

<sup>106</sup> J. Grant, *Old and New Edinburgh* (London/Paris/New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880–3), III, 38, via [www.oldandnewedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.oldandnewedinburgh.co.uk)

<sup>107</sup> Jane Innes, note, n.d. (GD113/5/410/10).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Jane Innes, note, 23 Nov. 1803 (GD113/5/402/22).

<sup>110</sup> Same, note, n.d. (GD113/5/410/10).

awkward social position in which he had placed his sister; when in London he asked her to write to the Burnets as he could not be troubled doing so.<sup>111</sup> Colonel Scott, then with his regiment, wrote to Jane to sympathise over the ‘embarrass’d Situation [and] many Vexations and entanglements that has lately surrounded you’.<sup>112</sup> But he advised her to consider well before making a decision, adding ‘if it is possible to remain where you are I think it would be by far the Most eligible plan [...] at all events you can not live alone you must have some Companion’.<sup>113</sup> There could be no impropriety in a gentlewoman in her fifties living quietly with a few servants, but knowing her now habitual aversion to going into company he feared she would retreat further into social isolation.<sup>114</sup> He need not have worried. The wealthy woman who sat in her own drawing room could be sure that, wanted or not, company would come to her.

Jane delayed making up her mind longer than even her most cautious friends could have required. She waited until both her maternal and paternal cousins pressed her to do so, which gave the necessary appearance of unanimity among her kin. By 1805 there was general agreement that she should remove herself from the sibling household. The projected move was presented as her duty to follow her friends’ advice. ‘Determination is all that you want for sensible I see you are of the propriety of what I am urging’, wrote her maternal cousin Elizabeth Lindsay. ‘Delaying after what you have told me is unkind to yourself, nay let me say almost unkind to those who love you’.<sup>115</sup> Seizing the moment, Lindsay recommended a house not far from St Andrew Square which was suited to polite sociability, being ‘genteel looking [...] within, and without’.<sup>116</sup> ‘I am going to say a bold thing’, she added, ‘do take my advice My Dear Friend and purchase it before this day week’. Jane did not buy this house, nor one heard of ‘from a Lady that was calling’, nor another recommended by

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<sup>111</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 19 Jun. 1799 (GD113/5/105/26).

<sup>112</sup> George Scott to same, 4 Jun. 1800 (GD113/5/70b/7).

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Susanna Clerk’s expression of genteel ‘horror at living alone’, chp. 3, 109 above.

<sup>114</sup> E.g. his letter of 21 May 1800, ‘you really ought to go out more’ (GD113/5/70b/6). Cf. Margaret Adam’s concern, ‘Betty & I by living so much alone are turned quite wild’, to Susanna Clerk, 19 Oct. 1790 (GD18/4961/30).

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to Jane Innes, 25 May 1805 (GD113/5/59b/36); George Scott to same, 31 Oct. 1806 (GD113/5/70c/10).

<sup>116</sup> Lindsay to Innes, *ibid.*

Colonel Scott.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless Scott thought matters were getting ‘worse and worse [and] there are no prospects of their ever being at an end while you remain under the same roof’.<sup>118</sup> He agreed she was ‘neglected and ill treated by those who ought to be your support and protector’.<sup>119</sup> Gilbert’s reputation had by this time become public property. He received a letter alleging that an Edinburgh lawyer had spent a night ‘drinking and whoring with the Miss Burnets’, and another, anonymous, asking why he did not fulfil a father’s duty and give his illegitimate daughters his name, which would ‘relieve their friends of embarrassing questions’.<sup>120</sup> A woman claiming him as her child’s father was ‘at law’ with him.<sup>121</sup> Scott urged Jane to ‘set up an establishment for your self [...] then you will be independent and free I may say almost from your present vexations, which are the ruin of your health, and peace of mind’.<sup>122</sup> In April 1807 she paid £1,000 moiety on a house being built in Picardy Place, a broad palace-fronted street not far from St Andrew Square.<sup>123</sup> The following year she noted that nearly £3,000 of stocks inherited from her sister ‘were sold [...] and laid out for my behoof’.<sup>124</sup> During this period Gilbert spent several months in London—taking the Burnets with him—and when not on bank business he executed Jane’s commissions for furnishings. By spring 1809 all was at last in place, and she was able to fulfil Mrs Lindsay’s wish to see her settled in ‘your own beautiful Mansion where I long to behold you placed at your own fireside’.<sup>125</sup> At the age of sixty-one Jane Innes was established, however reluctantly, as an independent householder.

### ‘My Dear Madam’

Innes’s departure from St Andrew Square was a public repudiation of her brother’s mode of life. As such, it reflected on his entire household. The housekeeper decided

<sup>117</sup> Same to same, n.d. & 17 May 1805 (GD113/5/59b/37,50).

<sup>118</sup> George Scott to Jane Innes, 31 Oct. 1806 (GD113/5/70c/10).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> James Reid, Commissary General’s Office, to Gilbert Innes, 8 Sept. 1806 (GD113/5/455/18); anon. to same, 13 Oct. 1807 (GD113/5/457/145). Edinburgh’s commissary court dealt with marriage, divorce, and bastardy cases.

<sup>121</sup> Anon. to same, 21 Apr. 1808 (GD113/5/402/3).

<sup>122</sup> George Scott to Jane Innes, 31 Oct. 1806 (GD113/5/70c/10).

<sup>123</sup> House purchase accounts, Picardy Place, 1807–9 (GD113/5/61c/1).

<sup>124</sup> Accounts, Gilbert and Jane Innes, 31 Dec. 1800 (GD113/5/105/32), (GD113/5/364/179); Jane Innes to Robert Burns, architect, 3 Jun. n.y. (GD113/5/113a/8).

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to Jane Innes, 22 Jun. n.y. (GD113/5/59b/65).

to make the move with her, and other servants hoped to do likewise, as they could no longer claim to be living in a genteel family.<sup>126</sup> Evidently Innes managed to preserve both her servants' respect and her status, in a public context as well as privately. When she tried to find new servants for Gilbert she found that 'candidates come in the belief that it is for myself, and my new house that they are wanted, and when informed that it is for [St Andrew Square] they refuse to engage and take their departure. What can this proceed from? Other than an idea having gone abroad that the [Burnets] are to have the rule'.<sup>127</sup> The Picardy Place establishment, however, was planned to avoid troublesome ostentation. Innes drew up careful accounts which showed that after setting up the house she would still have £14,000 capital, giving a large income of about £600.<sup>128</sup> However, for two years she made do without a manservant, a taxable luxury whose wages of £30 would nearly equal the allowance for three women servants.<sup>129</sup> For the mistress of a household, footmen were not only a status symbol but a potential challenge to female domestic authority, and Innes told her brother bluntly she would rather not have them, as they caused her more trouble than she caused them.<sup>130</sup> She never had more than one manservant, in contrast to the four (including butler) thought necessary at St Andrew Square. She kept no saddle horses and did not buy a coach until her seventy-fifth year, and by employing neither coachman nor grooms she avoided the expense of extending her household beyond the house itself, and the difficulty of managing what was usually regarded as a male domain.<sup>131</sup> She continued to use hired horses, even after buying a coach.<sup>132</sup> Innes's arrangements were obviously those of a rich woman, but her low-key establishment reflected on her brother's nearby household. The visible expression of wealth required judgement, particularly from an ageing spinster who had neither a lineage to uphold nor legitimate nephews to advance the family name with her help. Innes, whose father and brother embodied the extremes of parsimony and excess, prudently

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<sup>126</sup> On servants' inclusion in the household-family, see Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 57–63.

<sup>127</sup> Jane Innes to William Simpson, 17 May 1807 (GD113/7/17/6).

<sup>128</sup> Calculations 1807–8 (GD113/5/279/3).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* In 1822 she had a chambermaid, but no 'upper maid'. Jane Innes to ?, 31 Jul. 1822 (GD113/5/409/29).

<sup>130</sup> Same to Gilbert Innes, 20 May 1807 (GD113/5/456/36).

<sup>131</sup> Tax assessments 1810–31 (GD113/5/404/143); Jane Innes, housekeeping calculations (GD113/5/44b/1); financial discharges 1832–5 (GD113/5/122/1).

<sup>132</sup> Jane Innes, accounts 1838 (GD113/5/404/97).

took the middle way. Although she limited the size of her household, and avoided the public scrutiny of the street by not going about by coach, she took care to furnish the private/public spaces of her home in a style which was at once complimentary to her visitors and illustrative of her standing as a gentlewoman of independent fortune.<sup>133</sup> The chimneypieces, mirrors, and plate for her drawing rooms were chosen and dispatched from London under the close supervision of Gilbert, who apparently reconciled himself to her move in the satisfaction of exercising aesthetic judgement.<sup>134</sup> When he was tempted by London shopkeepers to replace his own plate she turned down his offer of taking ‘as many of my Old Trash as you wish for without payment’.<sup>135</sup> Her home would not be furnished on the leavings of her brother’s establishment. She was ‘very delicate on these points’, and exact in her requirements.<sup>136</sup> Her commissions were eventually fulfilled to her satisfaction, and her approving friends began to anticipate polite gatherings in her ‘beautiful Mansion’.<sup>137</sup>

Despite their optimism, and the care with which she furnished her company rooms, Innes continued to express a preference for living ‘very retiredly’.<sup>138</sup> It was a stance appropriate to a mature unmarried woman, and a response to Gilbert’s continuing ‘irregularity’.<sup>139</sup> Lacking the restraining presence of a gentlewoman, his home became the focus of hospitality more suited to the tavern. When a travelling opera company visited Edinburgh, the singers, men ‘& Women’, were entertained at St Andrew Square till the early hours.<sup>140</sup> Innes felt ‘mortification’ at her brother’s indiscriminate sociability and dissociated herself with the tart comment ‘I can only regret it!’.<sup>141</sup> Her own small circle of visitors was constant, and drawn from

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<sup>133</sup> Sheraton’s *Cabinet Dictionary* (1803): ‘The grandeur then introduced into the drawing room is not to be considered, as the ostentatious parade of its proprietor, but the respect he pays to the rank of his visitants.’ In C. Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes: A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 101.

<sup>134</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 2 May 1807 (GD113/5/105/37).

<sup>135</sup> Same to same, 20 Jul. 1807 (GD113/5/105/42).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to Jane Innes, 25 May 1805, 11 Oct. 1808, 1 May 1809 (GD113/5/59b/36,48,52).

<sup>138</sup> Jane Innes to ? n.d. (GD113/5/409/18).

<sup>139</sup> Same to ?, 12 Jul. 1808 (GD113/5/409/17). Cf. the Adam sisters, chp. 3 above.

<sup>140</sup> Same to ?, 30 Oct. 1811 (GD113/5/409/4).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. Cf. the effects on household management of a rural squire’s ‘unpardonable licence towards his social inferiors’, Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 215; also Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 64–72 *passim*, on the link between the household-family’s timetable and its moral order.



established kin friends.<sup>142</sup> She also had occasional domestic companions, single gentlewomen in reduced circumstances whose presence answered her friends' insistence that she should not live alone. By inviting into her household gentlewomen with no direct kin tie, she may have hoped to create gratitude without raising a sense of entitlement. One such houseguest was the daughter of a former cashier to the Royal Bank; by this act of patronage, Innes drew attention to the fact that she had connections to the bank independent of her brother.<sup>143</sup> Another was the daughter of the minister of Stow parish. Innes's 'kind attention' to Helen Dawson was a reminder that despite her withdrawal from the family home in St Andrew Square she had continuing interests in the family estate. Dawson's life followed a trajectory common to never-married women, first as a parental carer and then as a domestic support to her married sibling.<sup>144</sup> This role was shortlived and she was invited to join Innes at Picardy Place, where she was given her own room and included in social invitations, signs that her genteel status was upheld in the household and in Innes's social circle.<sup>145</sup> Dawson's brother, however, neglected to show appreciation for Innes's tactful patronage of his family.<sup>146</sup> When Dawson died in 1812 he sent via his lawyer to say he would collect her belongings. Innes, who received his note 'the day & hour' of the funeral, expressed disgust when he arrived the same evening with two companions, 'a porter & a large empty trunk'. On being shown to Dawson's chamber the trio 'busied themselves in stuffing [her things] into their vacant Trunk which done they returned to me quite overheated & after all three being properly rested & refreshed with Cake & a Glass of wine they departed without any Compliment of acknowledgement for my two years Attentions towards the deceased & in the most compleat Ill breeding that is possible to conceive'.<sup>147</sup> Misplaced pride, and failure to make due and graceful acknowledgement for favours conferred, were inimical to a

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<sup>142</sup> Cf. the socially confident Christian Dalrymple, who invited to Newhailes for a 12-month visit a new friend met at a spa. 'Annals', 1805, 1806 (NRS RH, 8, 23).

<sup>143</sup> Christian Campbell, one of 7 daughters of John Campbell (obit. 1777), George Innes's predecessor as cashier. Arabella Campbell to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/86c/5). Requests for bank patronage: Anne Murray to Jane Innes, 21 Feb. 1818 (GD113/5/96b/6); Robert Innes to same, 4 Apr. 1836 (GD113/5/91/10).

<sup>144</sup> Helen Dawson to Jane Innes, 4 Apr. 1809, 8 Oct. 1810 (GD113/5/113a/11,12).

<sup>145</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to same, n.d. (GD113/5/218b/24).

<sup>146</sup> Helen Dawson to same, 8 Oct. 1810 (GD113/5/113a/12).

<sup>147</sup> W. Dymock to same, 15 Jul. 1812 (GD113/5/113a/14).

patronage relationship. Innes's attentions to the Dawson family apparently ceased as the door closed behind her late protégée's grasping brother.

An invitation sent to Innes, Dawson, and Colonel George Scott reveals that the latter was also a member of the household family.<sup>148</sup> Scott, a middle-aged bachelor and long-serving army officer, was no different to most of his peers, who took mistresses as a matter of course.<sup>149</sup> However, his demonstrations of concern for the domestic authority of both Innes and his own sister suggest he attached importance to familial reputation, and this may have prompted him to distance himself from Gilbert's household.<sup>150</sup> He apparently moved his urban quarters from St Andrew Square to Picardy Place soon after Innes's own removal.<sup>151</sup> Friends recognised him as a fixture in Innes's close family circle, and as someone who could make good Gilbert's fraternal deficiencies. They suggested he accompany her on visits and expressed pleasure that his retirement from the army would enable him to remain near her.<sup>152</sup> The ease with which he was drafted in emphasises that it was the norm for available kin to fill vacant familial roles, whether a cousin for a brother, as here, or a sister for a wife. Scott's position was recognised publicly as well as domestically. After Gilbert's death in 1832, various petitioners asked him to intercede with Innes for causes including Highland education, the Edinburgh Academy, and the city's Board of Health.<sup>153</sup> He not only acted as a channel for patronage but offered advice, a sign of the confidence Innes came to place in him as a surrogate sibling.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to same, n.d. (GD113/5/218b/24).

<sup>149</sup> In 1810 he asked Gilbert for money to pay for treatment of his 'old complaint', venereal disease. 24 Mar., 23 Jun. (GD113/4/165/364,381).

<sup>150</sup> Jane Scott suffered 'a great deal of unjust opposition from those that ought to Support her' during the long absences of her eldest brother General Thomas Scott, until the latter was persuaded to make her status clear to the rest of the family by '[taking] her part [and showing] her kindness'. George Scott to Jane Innes, 31 Jul. 1800 (GD113/5/70b/9).

<sup>151</sup> Tradesmens' bills and invitations to the theatre, dinners, and funerals were sent to him there. Jane Innes, accounts (GD113/5/404/22,38); Elizabeth Lindsay to same, n.d. (GD113/5/218b/24); Marion Trotter to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/18); Gilbert Innes to George Scott, 2 Jul. 1830 & n.d. (GD113/5/105/79,82).

<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay to Jane Innes, 1808–13 (GD113/5/218b/1–52 *passim*); Jane Cumin to same, 10 Apr. 1807 (GD113/5/80a/2).

<sup>153</sup> George Baird to George Scott, 31 Mar. 1832 (GD113/5/113b/14); Thomas Richardson to same, 19 May 1835 (GD113/5/72j/2); D. Anderson to same [enclosed], 14 May 1832 (GD113/5/72c/24).

<sup>154</sup> George Scott to Jane Innes, 14 May 1832 (GD113/5/72c/24).

Although she was willing to take advice, Innes never ceded control of her finances.<sup>155</sup> From an early date she instructed her brother closely on the administration of her funds, and he acknowledged her financial shrewdness.<sup>156</sup> She admitted to him that it was a ‘favourite plan’ to ‘enjoy every thing [she had] in [her] own time’.<sup>157</sup> She never distinguished a younger cousin as her heir, as she might have been expected to do from among the paternal kin who eventually inherited the Innes fortune. Her advice that a friend should ‘mention to no one the Legacy intended them because it laid her under a restraint or even obligation to perform’ indicates her own determination not to be dictated to in this regard.<sup>158</sup> Yet because Innes’s social circle was a small one, patronage remained her primary means of maintaining familial bonds throughout her life. The forms it took did not change across the years: gifts of seasonal or luxury foods were sent in conspicuous compliment to particular friends and later to her brother; regular loans and payments were made to the Trotter and Scott siblings (George Scott’s accounts for cognac and other gentlemanly necessities were paid), and longstanding annuities to needy relations were kept up. Several of these relationships continued across two generations, such as that with the Cumins, maternal connections in Glasgow. Two daughters of the family were named Marion and Jane, and a third was baptised Innes, in public acknowledgement and reinforcement of the relationship.<sup>159</sup> When the spinster Cumin sisters were left impoverished on their father’s death in 1820, Innes commented sourly ‘their expectations from friends I suppose are unlimited but the limitation of their gratitude I have already experienced’, but whatever her opinion of them personally, she did not reject the familial tie.<sup>160</sup> Although the sisters’ thanks for their annuity was often expressed tardily and sometimes perfunctorily, their brother

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<sup>155</sup> Her accounts are in her own hand until the month before her death aged 92 (GD113/5/279/10).

<sup>156</sup> Gilbert Innes to Jane Innes, 19 Mar. 1791; 16 May 1808 (GD113/5/105/18,47).

<sup>157</sup> Same to same, 18 May 1808; 13 Sept. 1824 (GD113/5/105/48,73).

<sup>158</sup> Jane Innes, journal, 29 Jun. 1793 (GD113/5/46/4).

<sup>159</sup> Patrick Cumin to Marion Innes, 23 May 1790 (GD113/5/80b/12). This fairly common form of patronage acknowledgement can obscure the archival presence of never-married women. Examples found are Allan Fergusson (never-married) and Graham Macdowell (married), kinswomen to Christian Dalrymple; Douglas Trotter and Henry Dundas (never-married), and Charles Anne Cumin (married), kinswomen to Jane Innes. Cf. Miss Nicholas, in Ferrier’s *Marriage*; also Maitland Mackintosh, named by her father for his patron the earl of Lauderdale (J. Rendall, ‘Scottish Citizens of London: Whigs, Radicals, and the French Revolution, 1788–1795’, in Nenadic, *Scots in London*, 284). Cf. the naming of boys to encompass maternal and paternal lineage, e.g. Robertson Gladstone; Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 58.

<sup>160</sup> Jane Innes to ?, n.d. (GD113/5/409/35).

did not fail to acknowledge his obligation when he became successful.<sup>161</sup> Letters from him make it clear that regularised longterm patronage benefited more than the direct recipients. Innes's help to his sisters lifted a financial burden, allowing him to pursue a successful career and provide properly for his own children. Read as a whole, the Cumin–Innes correspondence shows that kin patronage was considered a family enterprise, and that beneficiaries recognised it as such. Innes's continued participation maintained both her own and her late sister's reputation among their kin.

Patronage was also the means by which she created a public profile distinct from her brother. Where Gilbert supported a variety of artists (consistent with his self-representation as a man of taste), Innes avoided anything other than occasional subscriptions to genteel literary productions, concentrating instead on sober and worthy assistance to institutions such as Edinburgh's House of Industry and the Royal Infirmary.<sup>162</sup> Most important for her public status, however, was her contribution to the civic purse. She loaned £7,000 to the city corporation, on which she received interest for twelve years.<sup>163</sup> Though nothing in Innes's correspondence confirms she made the loan with the intention of gaining public influence as well as financial returns, she was certainly ready to exercise influence in the similarly public context of her estate tenants' votes.<sup>164</sup> Above all, by contributing to the civic commonweal she publicly refuted the popular caricature of the socially parasitic old maid.

After Gilbert's death in 1832, Innes received an influx of patronage requests. As his legal heir she inherited startling wealth. His estate in Scotland and England after payment of debts was valued at £775,000, and she also sold almost immediately

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<sup>161</sup> Jane Cumin to Jane Innes, 15 Aug. 1836; 12 Mar. 1838; 11 Mar. 1839 (GD113/5/80b/24,27,30); William Cumin to same, 18 Mar. 1833; 12 Dec. 1836; 20 Jul. 1837 (GD113/5/80b/20,25,26). He was Regius Professor of Midwifery at Glasgow University, 1834–40.

<sup>162</sup> William Smith to Jane Innes, 21 Feb. 1838 (GD113/5/113d/13); receipt, 5 Jan. 1834 (GD113/5/404/40). The never-married author Elizabeth Hamilton also patronised the House of Industry, chp. 5, 168 above.

<sup>163</sup> City chamberlain to Jane Innes, 9 Sept. 1825; John Turnbull to same, 31 Dec. 1838 (GD113/5/113a/50,54); lord provost to same, 17 Jan. 1839 (GD113/5/113d/37); also (GD113/5/111b/4/1–2).

<sup>164</sup> James Haig, agent, to Jane Innes, 30 Dec. 1834; 19 Jan., 30 Jun. 1837; Conservative Association of the County to same, 26 May 1838 (GD113/5/111b/3,12,18,31); Sir John Hope to same, 5 Jul. 1837 (GD113/5/499/55). Froide emphasises the importance of civic lending as a means of gaining influence, *Never Married*, 137–42.

foreign stocks worth £303,000.<sup>165</sup> Three months after his death she was assured of having £151,000 in ‘ready money’, and an annual income of £22,500.<sup>166</sup> Pleas for help arrived from a multitude of petitioners, from longstanding beneficiaries and from strangers who had read of her charity in the newspapers, from swindlers, ministers of the church, a woman trying to abolish cockfighting, an anonymous student who hoped she would pay his debts—and, of course, from Gilbert’s supposed offspring.<sup>167</sup> Letters were invariably addressed to Miss Innes of Stow, the landed appellation more than matching any dignity which could be conferred by the title ‘Mrs’. The writers saluted her as ‘My Dear Madam’, or ‘My Dear Miss Innes’ if they wanted to draw attention to a kinship claim. Any connection, however tenuous, was made use of if it placed the writer within Innes’s social orbit. A meeting forty years previously in the drawing room of a mutual acquaintance gave hope to a naval captain’s daughter in ‘much reduced’ circumstances.<sup>168</sup> Several hundred patronage letters survive, many annotated in Innes’s hand by date, sender, and request. Their diversity suggests most were kept, and the range means common approach tactics can be discerned. Genteel supplicants often avoided asking directly for money by requesting advice, or approval of plans to support themselves.<sup>169</sup> Gentlemen not wishing to advertise their lack of connections made their approaches through female relatives. Some women claimed to write without their husband’s knowledge, although similarities of phrasing suggest they had tacit consent on the understanding that ‘Man cannot stoop to what Woman will’.<sup>170</sup> Those with no claim to gentility relied on the social imperative of charity. Several letters which Innes received from men of lower rank were carried by their wives to Picardy Place, where the women humbled themselves, and applied pressure, by waiting in public for an answer.<sup>171</sup> Of these many applicants, beneficiaries who expressed their gratitude in straightforward,

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<sup>165</sup> Statement settling duty (GD113/5/122/7/1).

<sup>166</sup> John Thomson, Royal Bank, to Jane Innes, 2 May 1832 (GD113/5/279/7).

<sup>167</sup> James Begg to Jane Innes, 19 Aug. 1837; Anna Maria Tyler to same, 2 Mar. 1839; anon. to same, 5 Sept. 1839 (GD113/5/113d/4,39,42); ‘Officer’s Lady’ to same, 2 Apr. 1832; Jane Campbell to same, 8 Apr. 1835 (GD113/5/86c/13,19); Elizabeth Borthwick to same, 22 May 1832 (GD113/5/499/80); Jane Innes to Mrs Gibson, 2 Apr. 1832 (GD113/5/404/56).

<sup>168</sup> Isabella Yates to Jane Innes, 22 Oct. 1839 (GD113/5/113d/45).

<sup>169</sup> E.g. Jane Cumin to same, 24 Nov. [1820] (GD113/5/80b/15).

<sup>170</sup> ‘Daughter of a Gentleman’ to Jane Innes, 11 Dec. 1837 (GD113/5/113d/9); Mrs Campbell to same, 2 Apr. 1832 (GD113/5/86c/13).

<sup>171</sup> E.g. William Smith to Jane Innes, 21 Feb. 1838; A.W. Lambert to same, 12 Sept. 1838 (GD113/5/113d/13,25).

direct terms appear more frequently and over longer periods, which suggests frank acknowledgement of obligation was the way to achieve a productive relationship.

Innes's use of patronage to manage status is comprehensively illustrated by her responses to her brother's illegitimate families. Just a few months after Gilbert's death the five surviving Burnet siblings were paid off with the large sum of £134,000, divided between them according to seniority.<sup>172</sup> By this carefully calculated gesture Innes removed the prospect of litigation and won public praise for her 'noble feelings [...] shown for those left destitute by your Brothers death, who could not be called any relation to you'.<sup>173</sup> In return the Burnets were required to provide discharges of all claim on Innes as her brother's representative, and to leave the St Andrew Square house.<sup>174</sup> The Burnet sisters—who had been given the money at their 'free disposal', exclusive of any future husband's rights—recognised the benefits of this arrangement and were careful to express the 'truest gratitude, and the latest Remembrance' for the 'very kind, great, and disinterested Generosity, which it pleased you to shew'.<sup>175</sup> Another family, less blatantly in the public eye as Gilbert's offspring, was disposed of for £27,000 and a house.<sup>176</sup> At a very different level, several low-ranking artisans appear only once in the correspondence, suggesting their claims were rejected, or dismissed with a charitable donation.<sup>177</sup> However, Innes's relationship with one such applicant, a ship's carpenter named Robert Innes, shows that low rank and illegitimacy were not insuperable barriers. What mattered was the correct approach. Robert Innes succeeded in forming a strong and mutually respectful patronage tie. The foundations were laid just two months after Gilbert's death. His first letter was businesslike and respectful without any appeal to feminine sensibility or sympathy. He provided documents to support his claim but made it clear that unlike the Burnets he had no improper ambition to rise beyond the sphere in which Providence had placed him. 'Although [...] in the humble walk of life', he

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<sup>172</sup> Jane Innes, financial records 1832–5 (GD113/5/279/8).

<sup>173</sup> Anon. to Jane Innes, 11 Dec. 1837 (GD113/5/113d/9); also Jo.J. Crawford to same, 16 Mar. 1832 (GD113/5/113b/1).

<sup>174</sup> Elizabeth Burnet to Jane Innes, n.d.; Euphemia Burnet, discharge, 22 May n.y. (GD113/5/122/1,3); Anne Burnet to same (inventory), n.d. (GD113/5/106a/4).

<sup>175</sup> Euphemia Burnet, discharge, 22 May n.y. (GD113/5/122/3); Elizabeth Burnet to Jane Innes, 14 Apr. 1833 (GD113/5/106a/7).

<sup>176</sup> Jane Innes, financial records 1832–5 (GD113/5/279/8).

<sup>177</sup> E.g. Hugh Paton (for Archibald Innes) to Alexander Smellie, 13 Jun. 1839 (GD113/5/113d/41).

wrote, 'yet in that situation I have conducted myself as to obtain the respect of those who Move in higher circles'.<sup>178</sup> As the correspondence progressed he continued to negotiate it by deference to rank. He submitted his proposals to Innes's judgement and boosted his credentials by professing the same tory principles as his patron.<sup>179</sup> His success can be measured by the language and content of his letters. Three years after his first approach he confidently subscribed himself Innes's 'Affectionate and Ob<sup>t</sup> friend' and emphasised their connection by naming her the 'Benefactress' of his family.<sup>180</sup> Finally, in a bold stroke to highlight their shared name and blood relationship, he won her 'ready free and cordial' consent to name his daughter Jane.<sup>181</sup> In five years he rose from ship's carpenter to leaseholder of a shipyard. He thanked Innes for 'Raising me in the scale of society in which I now move', adding 'I trust what I have Received from you will Roll on and encrease not only to the benefit and comfort of my family but to the benefit of society in general'.<sup>182</sup> Robert Innes's expression of thanks demonstrated his understanding of his position in the 'great chain' of society, and likewise his understanding that the purpose of patronage was to strengthen that chain.<sup>183</sup> The benefits to Innes herself can also be read in this expression of gratitude. Like her other acts of well directed patronage, her relationship with Robert Innes demonstrated social connection and family feeling with the least risk of compromise to her carefully maintained status as a respectable single gentlewoman of independent means.

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As a case study, Jane Innes illustrates how far a never-married woman's life could diverge from the static condition of spinsterhood portrayed in popular culture. At thirty, the stereotypical spinster was gathering dust on the shelf. In the remaining sixty-two years of her life Innes established her familial and social autonomy in despite of both father and brother. When a young woman she described herself in

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<sup>178</sup> Robert Innes to Jane Innes, 10 Apr. 1832 (GD113/5/91/1).

<sup>179</sup> Same to same, 25 Oct. 1832; 26 Feb. 1835 (GD113/5/91/3,8).

<sup>180</sup> Same to same, 26 Feb., 21 Nov. 1835 (GD113/5/91/8,9).

<sup>181</sup> Same to same, 18 Feb. 1837 (GD113/5/91/13).

<sup>182</sup> Same to same, 19 Nov. 1836 (GD113/5/91/12).

<sup>183</sup> *Rich Old Bachelor*, 70.

traditional terms of dependency, complaining to her suitor John Row ‘I am indeed in no respect mistress of my own actions’.<sup>184</sup> This was partly belied by her act of correspondence, and by her determined participation in his advancement strategies, but Innes understood the practical constraints on her as the younger daughter of a wealthy but autocratic father. In old age she reflected ‘though my affections & my hand were at my own disposal, yet my Destiny & fortunes rested in other hands’.<sup>185</sup> The most significant decision she made regarding both her fortune and her destiny was to keep financial control of her parental inheritance. It was the norm for men to financially represent their female relatives, but the range of Innes’s surviving papers, from legal agreements to financial ‘jot-books’, makes it clear that behind the form of masculine representation she managed her affairs actively throughout her life. She monitored the returns on her stocks closely; her investment in the East India Company in particular points to single women’s contributions to both the British economy and expansionist trade.<sup>186</sup> As someone with ‘vote & interest’ in the E.I.C. directorship, Innes’s patronage was recognised privately and publicly.<sup>187</sup> Hufton memorably notes ‘There was no East India Company for women’, but although women could not go out as cadets, writers or soldiers, they could, and did, gain incomes from the company—which was after all the aim of both sexes, whether they invested their money or their person.<sup>188</sup>

In her accession to great wealth—‘the largest, we believe, ever gained by one individual in Scotland’—the trajectory of Innes’s life was exceptional, but the social strategies she adopted in response to her changing circumstances were entirely conventional.<sup>189</sup> As a relatively young woman she had defied her father to maintain a

<sup>184</sup> Jane Innes to John Row, 21 Jul. 1778 (GD113/5/73b/1).

<sup>185</sup> Jane Innes, ‘Character & Description’ (GD113/5/409/25).

<sup>186</sup> D.R. Green and A. Owens point out that spinsters’ and widows’ investments were ‘at the centre of a system of public finance that provided the government with revenues for imperial expansion and warfare’, ‘Gentlewomanly Capitalism? Spinsters, Widows, and Wealth Holding in England and Wales, c.1800–1860’, *EHR*, 56:3 (Aug. 2003). See also A. Laurence for spinsters’ and widows’ use of banks in this context, ‘The emergence of a private clientele for banks in the early eighteenth century: Hoare’s Bank and some women customers’, *EHR*, 61:3 (2008).

<sup>187</sup> M.J. Litchford to Jane Innes, 11 Oct. 1837; ‘To the Proprietors of East India Stock, Ladies & Gentlemen’, 1 Feb. 1838 (GD113/5/113d/6,10). Sunter notes that several Scottish politicians, valuing the patronage attached, were major E.I.C. stockholders or directors. *Patronage and Politics*, 8.

<sup>188</sup> Hufton, ‘Women Without Men’, 372.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Estimated at not less than a million sterling’. *The Annual Register* [...] 1839 (London: 1840), 376, via [books.google.com](http://books.google.com) In Britain in 1858 over 94% of men’s and 96% of women’s wills were valued under £10,000. Green and Owens, ‘Gentlewomanly Capitalism?’, 517.



courtship with her impoverished cousin. By late middle age she was a wealthy woman who had rejected several offers of marriage, declined to choose an heir from among her relatives, and lived largely removed from the social world. In sum, her decisions could be construed as selfish, showing little heed for the best interests of her family or wider kin. Representationally, Innes countered this by reference to specific tropes of gentility. In her twenties, her letters implied that the moral worth of integrity compensated for lack of material wealth. She validated her marital choice by emphasising her suitor's intrinsic gentlemanly honour, in contrast to her father's and brother's sterile gathering and spending of money. Looking back, she described her courtship as 'unblamed & unblemished!'; this became the enduring representation, rather than the reality in which her sister had first bribed the servants to keep quiet, and then refused to receive letters under cover.<sup>190</sup> In the correspondence and journals she kept up from middle age to the end of her life, Innes drew heavily on the ideal of female retirement from worldly distractions. This particular ideal of genteel femininity was often at odds with the requirements of sociability, as many contemporary letters testify, but for Innes a consistently stated preference for retirement was a way of avoiding unwelcome social interactions. To her brother she insisted that solitude was her 'chief solace', and at the age of eighty-four she declared that it had been 'during [her] whole life her desire [...] (though not unobserving) to pass unobserved'.<sup>191</sup> The one context in which her self-representation was ambivalent was lineage. About 1830 she began to use armorial bearings, and some years after her brother's death she commissioned a bust of him for public display, suggesting a late concern with familial representation and memorialisation.<sup>192</sup> However, like her brother and her older sister before her, she neglected to prepare for death by setting her affairs in order and providing for dependants in a will. This was a failure of familial and Christian piety, yet when she died in 1839 it was passed over (in public at least) in praise of her 'very moderate

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<sup>190</sup> Jane Innes, 'Character & Description' (GD113/5/409/25); Marion Innes to Jane Innes, 2 Aug. 1776 (GD113/5/67/1-2); Jane Innes to John Row, 9 May 1777 (GD113/5/409/19).

<sup>191</sup> Jane Innes to Gilbert Innes, 25 Jun. 1799 (GD113/5/105/28/2); same to Mrs Gibson, 2 Apr. 1832 (GD113/5/404/56).

<sup>192</sup> Tax assessment 1830-1 (GD113/5/404/36,143); Highland & Agricultural Society of Scotland to Jane Innes, 13 Nov. 1838 (GD113/5/113d/29).

and unostentatious' mode of life and her 'numerous and unostentatious' charities.<sup>193</sup> Innes's obituary in the *Annual Register* repeated her own emphasis on retirement and patronage, and in this way her lifelong self-representation was upheld and given a degree of permanence in a well-read contemporary social archive. The public epitaph of 'Miss Innes, of Stow' was a study in respectability.

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<sup>193</sup> *Annual Register*, 376.



## Chapter 7

### Maintaining appearances: gentility on a narrow income

In contrast with the previous chapter, this chapter looks at unmarried gentlewomen keeping up status from positions of reliance on others. As Chalus observes, claims of poverty by women in the upper levels of society are difficult to evaluate as they are both ‘highly personal and relative to social situation’.<sup>1</sup> Two case studies of women whose lives were passed in very different circumstances make the point that an unmarried gentlewoman’s sense of dependence was not quantifiable by pounds, shillings, and pence. The lives of Marion Trotter ‘of the Mortonthall family’ and Agnes Porter, governess, are considered here as examples of gentlewomen defending the reciprocity of their relationships, the one in the context of a kin family, the other in the context of a household family.<sup>2</sup>

Jane Innes’s kinswoman Marion Trotter was, like her, an unmarried younger daughter. Trotter’s life, however, was not in any sense atypical. She remained financially reliant on her relations throughout her life, like other never-married women who were her contemporaries in middling to upper gentry families in and around Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup> She continued into old age the genteel economies she had practised as a middle-aged younger daughter on £35 annually.<sup>4</sup> To avoid being socially defined by this financial dependency she emphasised parity of rank in her familial and social relationships, and portrayed life in her comparatively small household in terms of an idealised rural simplicity. She had the advantage of being able to look on this household, at Blackford Hill five miles south of Edinburgh, as a secure and lifelong home.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Susanna Clerk and many other women reliant on male relatives’ acknowledgement of responsibility for their welfare, she never had to press for payment of her familial income.<sup>6</sup> Agnes Porter is a more obvious example of an unmarried gentlewoman likely to experience snubs to her status. Porter, an

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<sup>1</sup> Chalus, *Elite Women*, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 68.

<sup>3</sup> See the never-married women in the Scott of Malleny and Clerk of Eldin families; also the Adams.

<sup>4</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, Dec. 1790 (GD113/5/81b/5). Cf. Innes’s description of her £30 income in 1779 as ‘a pittance’, to John Row, 3 Aug. 1779 (GD113/5/206a/16).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Vickery, ‘Few spinsters sighed aloud for the lost opportunity of marriage [...] but lament for a safe haven was recurrent’. *Behind Closed Doors*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> See, i.a., Froide, *Never Married*, 63; Vickery, op. cit., 188.

Edinburgh-born curate's daughter, had to support the rank of a gentlewoman in the two related families which employed her as a governess between 1784–1806. Historically and historiographically, the genteel governess/companion has been seen as an embodiment of the stereotypical spinster—painfully dependent, often disrespected and, of necessity, passively deferential in relationships.<sup>7</sup> Porter's letters and journals show that carefully considered deference could be an effective strategy for a woman in her position. She was punctilious in acknowledging nuances of rank, but equally punctilious in exacting acknowledgement of her own rank from those she associated with, including her employers, her pupils, and her employers' friends. She claimed a respected place by well-timed reminders of her long tenure, and by calculated use of familial language which emphasised her ties to her employers across three generations. Her income of £100 per annum was comparable with the annuities many spinsters received from their families, and indeed reflected her successful negotiation of semi-familial status.<sup>8</sup> Towards the end of her life her invested savings brought her an income closer to £150.<sup>9</sup> Yet both Agnes Porter and Marion Trotter felt their status pinched by their comparatively narrow incomes—comparative, that is, to the level of wealth enjoyed by those with whom they identified. Consequently they regularly reaffirmed their personal constructions of gentility to themselves and their connections.

*Supporting status in the family: Marion Trotter (c.1747–c.1835)*

Marion Trotter was one of six daughters of Thomas Trotter of Mortonhall. The laird of Mortonhall was of respectable lineage and had an estate just south of Edinburgh, but no great wealth with which to provide for his nine children, which may have contributed to at least five of them remaining unmarried. Like the Scotts of Malleny, the younger Trotters maintained sibling harmony by not making residence claims on the heir and representative. In the early 1800s Marion and her sister Jane moved out of Mortonhall House, leaving their eldest sister Margaret to manage the household

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<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Rizzo, *Companions*.

<sup>8</sup> The educationalist Maria Edgeworth recommended in 1798 that a governess in a wealthy family should get £300p.a.; in Westmorland in 1809, one governess received 30gns. Porter's successor was paid £50, but shared the post. Martin, *Journals*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Froide, *Never Married*, 188.

for their second brother Henry, who had recently inherited the estate.<sup>10</sup> The sisters' new home was nearby Blackford House, an old family property with an added wing which was described by Lord Cockburn in his *Memorials* as a 'melancholy villa'.<sup>11</sup> Their neighbour Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, with a more generous turn of phrase, called it 'venerable', although he acknowledged that it was 'not very large and [...] what there was of it [was] very rambling'.<sup>12</sup> The sisters themselves sometimes referred to it deprecatingly as 'the Cottage', in contrast to Jane Innes's newly built 'Palace'. By this they did not mean a fashionable rustic retreat like those satirised by Susan Ferrier in *Inheritance*, or a cottage orné like that embellished by the famous spinster couple of Llangollen.<sup>13</sup> Equally, they were not drawing comparisons with a labourer's home (more likely to be referred to as a 'hut').<sup>14</sup> Blackford, with its pillared entrance gate and short gravelled drive, had some pretensions to gentility. The range of houses described as cottages in genteel writing, whether printed or private, suggests the word was used less to describe physical buildings than to convey various ideas about the idealised simplicity of rural life. It was also a useful signifier for the unostentatious home thought appropriate to a spinster.<sup>15</sup> In the Trotters' case, the distinction and contrast was between an old-fashioned, inconvenient house with 'a good many small rooms' and the elegant domestic arrangements of a modern house such as Innes's, or indeed of nearby Mortonhall.<sup>16</sup> In calling Blackford 'venerable', however, their neighbour and kinsman Sir Thomas acknowledged the sisters' residence there as the continuation of a family link.<sup>17</sup>

The household consisted of Marion and Jane Trotter, two or three women servants, and an elderly manservant. This was comparable with Innes's household and seems to have been a domestic complement which signalled an unmarried

<sup>10</sup> Henry succeeded his unmarried brother John in 1803/4. Mortonhall House was built in 1769; this improvement to the entailed estate may have reduced the capital from which the siblings' incomes were drawn.

<sup>11</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 60.

<sup>12</sup> T. Dick Lauder, *Scottish Rivers* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), 19–20. In Gaskell's *Cranford*, 46, 'rambling' conveys the decayed grandeur of an aristocratic spinster's house.

<sup>13</sup> Ferrier, *Inheritance*, 106, 665; see also Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 271.

<sup>14</sup> Ferrier, *ibid.*, 28–30.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.*, 56; M. Brunton, *Discipline* (1814), in M. McKerrow, *Mary Brunton, The Forgotten Scottish Novelist* (Kirkwall: The Orcadian Limited, 2001), 174, and Bowdler, *Pen Tamar*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> Lauder, *op. cit.*, 19–20. Austen, visiting wealthy connections, wrote of the 'luxurious sensation' of sitting 'in idleness over a good fire in a well proportioned room'. To Cassandra Austen, 8/9 Nov. 1800, Le Faye, *Letters*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> The sisters' widowed mother had previously lived there.

gentlewoman's 'prudence' and 'economy' as well as her rank.<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of aristocracy, the unmarried Lady Louisa Stuart considered 'two women-servants, one man, and a sedan chair' to be the signs of 'an old maid of moderate fortune' and scant influence, but her somewhat dismissive social placement conveys important nuances of position nonetheless.<sup>19</sup> This was not the minimal gentility which many spinsters clung to with a solitary maid to keep up their status as well as to run errands.<sup>20</sup> The difference was expressed succinctly by the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell: 'our circumstances were changed; and instead of living at the rectory, and keeping three maids and a man, we had to come to this small house, and be content with a servant-of-all-work; but [...] we have always lived genteelly, even if circumstances have compelled us to simplicity.'<sup>21</sup> At Blackford there were few changes over the decades, and when new servants were needed, Marion Trotter's patronage drew into the household the relations of her existing maids. This continuity enabled Trotter to portray her servants as trustworthy family retainers, casting a glow of tradition over the unavoidably close-knit life she and her sister shared with them in the old-fashioned house.<sup>22</sup> When their long-serving maid-of-all-work married, it was from the Blackford drawing-room. Towards the end of her life Trotter congratulated herself on being 'well appointed in servants for fidelity and attachment'.<sup>23</sup> Their loyalty was not valued solely on the grounds of antiquarian pride, as she had a never-married acquaintance whose end had been made miserable by the 'entire worthlessness' of an 'old favourite servant'.<sup>24</sup>

Sociability at Blackford centred on closely allied families, in particular the Inneses, the Scotts, and the Dick Lauders of Fountainhall and the Grange. Consistent

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<sup>18</sup> The fictional Elinor Dashwood, reduced to living in 'merely a cottage' with her sister and widowed mother, shows 'discretion' and 'wisdom' in limiting their servants to 'two maids and a man'. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, 24, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart, *Memoire*, 61. Differences between contemporary perceptions and historiographical assessment are highlighted by Vickery's example of an 'affluent' mid-to-late-18<sup>th</sup>C spinster lodging in her married sister's home with a maid, a manservant, and a sedan chair. *Behind Closed Doors*, 213.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Sophia Johnstone 'of the Hilton family', who lived in an Edinburgh flat with one maid. Cockburn, *Memorials*, 54–6. Fictional examples are found in Ross (*Balance of Comfort*, 199) and Bowdler (*Pen Tamar*, 155). A gentlewoman's general maid might be paid up to £10 annually; see *Considerations On Establishing A College*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Cranford*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gaskell's genteel hostess who tried to hide the fact that she and her maid 'were on very familiar terms in their every-day intercourse'. *Cranford*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/33,34,39).

<sup>24</sup> Same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/39/63).

with Marion Trotter's domestic self-representation, the hospitality of the house was characterised by cheerful generosity of welcome rather than polite refinement. Trotter was said to have a cow killed and salted every autumn, which she and her guests would dine on through the winter 'from nose to tail'. As this story was also told of her contemporary Lord Polkemmet it is probably apocryphal, but it conveys an idealised Scotch simplicity of manners which was suggested by Trotter in her letters and nurtured by Scottish memoir writers of the later nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> However the Trotter sisters' table was not as spartan as this anecdote suggests. Blackford had its own fruit and vegetable garden, there was regular traffic between Blackford and the Mortonhall estate, and salt beef often made way for poultry or game. Jane Trotter represented the sisters' life as plain and comfortable without extravagance, and urged their friend Innes, 'Do not pity us here for we are as cauty as roaring fires and clean hearths can make us – plenty of work and plenty of books and plenty of meat much did I grudge a nice well fed Turkey to us two last Wednesday — you do us a great favour by accepting some of our good things'.<sup>26</sup> Gifts of foodstuffs played a significant role in maintaining ties between kin. It was a form of exchange which strengthened relationships while subtly marking gradations of rank. Fruit from a hothouse or game from an estate signalled wealth as well as generosity and such gestures came properly from the head of a household: Margaret Trotter sent Innes a melon from Mortonhall 'by Harry's orders', while Innes, the owner of several estates, sent pheasants to Blackford when Jane Trotter was ill.<sup>27</sup> These were returned at the recipient's request, 'that you might have it in your power to oblige some of your entertaining friends', for, as Marion observed, 'Pheasants are of mighty value to a show table [and] never was intended to be worried up in private'.<sup>28</sup> Humbler gifts bespoke the genteel virtue of good housekeeping. The jellies and vinegars which accompanied the compliment notes and invitations sent by

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<sup>25</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 60; the story also appears in Lauder's *Scottish Rivers*; see also Dean Ramsay, *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* (1<sup>st</sup> publ. 1858); M. Warrender, *Walks Near Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1890).

<sup>26</sup> Jane Trotter to Jane Innes, 22 Dec. 1815 (GD113/5/39/54).

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/39/47). Further niceties of status are evident in Margaret's gift to Innes of two chickens, with the explanation that company had failed to appear, her brother would be absent, and 'I do not chuse to feed the servants on chickens'. Same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/15).

<sup>28</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/39/41).



Marion and Jane to friends in Edinburgh subtly directed attention to the sisters as prudent household managers rather than the objects of familial largesse. Nonetheless it was no easy matter to manage these exchanges, freighted as they were with statements of familial position. Both Margaret and Marion Trotter found fault with Innes's performance of this type of patronage, and they did so in ways which reflected their personal constructions of status.<sup>29</sup> Margaret, whose letters invariably expressed the formality appropriate to her seniority as Miss Trotter of Mortonhall, chided Innes for not entering into the reciprocal nature of the relationship: 'you are really very cross in refusing any little thing that is in my power never thinking how heavy the many many favours that I have received from you lies upon my Shoulders'.<sup>30</sup> Marion, meanwhile, complained that Innes showed 'too great delicacy in addressing me with so much ceremony and appreciating my small attentions which will never cover my debt to you'.<sup>31</sup> Her status was best supported by friendly expressions of relationship, not by formal terms of address which placed her too precisely on the lower rungs of her family hierarchy. She herself saluted Innes as her 'early friend and companion', 'My dear Jeanny' and, often, as 'Dearest Cousin'.<sup>32</sup> A similar emphasis on familial intimacy is evident in her subject matter. Ignoring the polite fiction that unexpected visitors would always find a gentlewoman elegantly dressed and genteelly employed, she asked Innes to warn her in advance of any evening visits, as 'I throw of my new gown after dinner'.<sup>33</sup> Correspondence itself was a significant cost in pens and paper to a financially pinched gentlewoman, but as an essential means to maintaining sociability it could not be given up.<sup>34</sup> Smooth paper and good ink were luxuries worth commenting on, like having French wine to

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<sup>29</sup> This type of familial manoeuvring is satirised by Ferrier: 'Mrs Macshake [...] does many liberal things, but in so ungracious a manner, that people are never sure whether they are obliged or insulted by her. But the way in which she receives kindness is still worse. Could anything equal her impertinence about my roebuck?' *Marriage*, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Trotter to Jane Innes, c.1818 (GD113/5/81c/13).

<sup>31</sup> Marion Trotter to same, 12 Jan. 1829 (GD113/5/81c/28).

<sup>32</sup> E.g. same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81c/3,38,41); (GD113/5/81d/41,54). Tadmor observes of 'cousin', 'emphasis [...] is not on the actual degree of the relationship, but on its recognition'. *Family and Friends*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/39/45). Cf. Agnes Porter who, visiting an acquaintance without notice, 'found her in the *embarras* of a little household employment'. Martin, *Journals*, 183.

<sup>34</sup> In *Cranford* (30), an old gentleman turns new-fangled envelopes inside-out for re-use, shocked by this modern waste of 'cherished' paper.

drink instead of country cordials.<sup>35</sup> More often, Trotter's letters were written on the back of old ones, an economy which she passed off with 'I know it diverts you to scan other peoples manner'.<sup>36</sup> Like Innes, she used epistolary intimacy to steer relationships in the direction she wished them to take.<sup>37</sup>

Careful housekeeping at Blackford allowed hospitality to expand into patronage towards relatives or friends who found themselves in need. Two unmarried sisters were invited to stay for several months to regain health after 'a long winter of sickness'.<sup>38</sup> Once domestically settled, the Trotters and their houseguests tactfully upheld their mutual gentility by jointly practising benevolence, 'making a comfortable gown for poor Miss Lauder who poor creature has been denyd many a comfort you and us are Bless'd with'.<sup>39</sup> The cost of having the house 'full of invalids' on this and other occasions meant public charity was sometimes given up temporarily, but kin and connections had a greater claim on the Trotters' limited resources, and enhanced familial status was of more value to an unmarried gentlewoman than public recognition.<sup>40</sup> Other guests benefited from the informality of life at Blackford, unrestricted by the demands and preferences of a household master. A visiting nephew was able to transact business in Edinburgh and return when he chose, as his aunts accommodated him 'without scruple at any hour'.<sup>41</sup> At Mortonhall, Margaret Trotter complained of solitude but could neither welcome passing company properly, nor invite friends to stay for any length of time, because her brother refused to change his dinner hour for unexpected visitors and would not countenance 'strangers' in the house.<sup>42</sup> The contrast was equally evident when visits were returned. Margaret felt obliged to wait for a day when her brother was away from home, 'taking the advantage of his absence' to dine with Jane Innes in

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<sup>35</sup> 'a whole Sheet too and quite clean [...] this extravagance will Never hold'. Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. [pre-1786] (GD113/5/48a/16). Jane Austen revelled in drinking French wine and being 'above vulgar economy' while visiting her wealthy brother, noting regretfully she would have to make 'Orange Wine' at home. To Cassandra Austen, 26 Jun. 1808, Le Faye, *Letters*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/39/1).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the Innes-Carteret Scott letters, chp. 6, 182 above.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/39/62); Marion Trotter to same, 28 Jul. n.y. (GD113/5/81d/48).

<sup>39</sup> Jane Trotter to same, n.d. (GD113/5/39/62).

<sup>40</sup> Marion Trotter to Margaret Trotter, ?19 Feb. 1825 (GD113/5/81c/24). Cf. Joanna Baillie's support of David Wilkie, chp. 5, 161 above.

<sup>41</sup> Same to Jane Innes, 2 Dec. n.y. (GD113/5/39/10).

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Trotter to same, c.1833 (GD113/5/81c/37); same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/8); Marion Trotter to same, 2 Dec. n.y. (GD113/5/39/10).

Edinburgh.<sup>43</sup> Marion, meanwhile, whose time was at her own disposal—and who had no need to emphasise her domestic indispensability to a male head of household—assured Innes there were no ‘little things intervening to prevent my leaving my house full of company for they would have been happy to indulge me and Peggie [the maid] to supply all wants I [have] no compunction in that way’.<sup>44</sup> Blackford also served as a convenient refuge for out-of-favour relations whose formal reception at Mortonhall was made difficult by family quarrels.<sup>45</sup> In turn, visitors whose status demanded some show were received by the laird at the family seat, where Marion and Jane were able to enjoy the pleasures of refined society at no cost to themselves. The proximity of the two households allowed them to create a relationship which could be seen as mutually beneficial in its support of broader family networks.

Jane Trotter died in 1821, remembered for her piety and the care with which she had settled her legacies on relatives, friends, and servants.<sup>46</sup> Marion was thrown temporarily into ill health by the death of ‘my sister, my friend, my companion, not to mention my housekeeper’, but she remained alone at Blackford rather than remove to Mortonhall.<sup>47</sup> Now in her seventies, she seems to have felt more acutely the need to maintain social visibility and independence as she aged. Her relationship with Margaret was sometimes soured by the differences in their circumstances. When the latter left Blackford after Jane’s funeral, Marion thought her ‘tired of this humble abode’.<sup>48</sup> Margaret complained that she never expected to see Marion unless ‘able to go out and take her in the Carriage’; Marion pointed out that she relied on her legs to take her visiting as ‘I cannot afford carriages like her’.<sup>49</sup> When Innes acquired this public symbol of rank and wealth Marion sent congratulations, and compliment notes convey her thanks for the use of it, for visiting, going to church, and a longer trip for

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<sup>43</sup> Margaret Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/14). Cf. Marion Trotter’s assumption that the Innes sisters would dine at home unless their brother had been invited elsewhere, and Susan Ferrier’s comment that her presence at dinner was ‘as indispensable as the tablecloth or chairs’. Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81b/13/2); chp. 2, 61 above.

<sup>44</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/54).

<sup>45</sup> Same to same, 2 Dec. n.y. (GD113/5/39/10).

<sup>46</sup> Same to same, 4 Mar. 1821; n.d. (GD113/5/39/23,52).

<sup>47</sup> Same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/39/41).

<sup>48</sup> Same to same, 14 Feb. 1821 (GD113/5/39/36).

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Trotter to Jane Innes, c.1829 (GD113/5/81d/23); Marion Trotter to same, 18 Feb. 1821 (GD113/5/81c/14).

which horses were hired.<sup>50</sup> But she did not like to be reliant in so essential a matter as sociability, and continued to insist on the rural pleasure she took in walking: ‘[Peggie and I] walkd home very comfortably the evening was mild and dry and we had light sufficient at 7 oClock a sweet quiet Solitary road I really pity those that fancy they cannot move without a Carriage Cowly says were I to curse the Man I hate attendance and dependance be his fate you and I have good reason for thankfulness that we are exempted from both’.<sup>51</sup> Trotter claimed an independence of spirit to match Innes’s independent wealth, and with Cowley rejected ‘gilded rooms’ in favour of ‘homely littleness’, ‘dear hours in humble visits’, and ‘fresh and beauteous fields’.<sup>52</sup> A carriage was an incontrovertible sign of rank which, like the image of the genteel cottage, was often employed to convey messages and ideas about status.<sup>53</sup> Trotter, however, showed affinity with several never-married female authors of her day (including Susan Ferrier) in depicting her simple pleasure in walking, and her readiness and ability to do so, as a sign not of vulgarity or ‘an abominable sort of conceited independence’ but of genuine sensibility.<sup>54</sup> From her youth she had characterised herself as rural by habit and inclination. Letters in which she described herself following hounds on foot, or planting trees ‘with my own hand’, indicate the literal truth of this self-representation, but her reference to Cowley shows that (later in life at least) she also used classically derived themes of rural virtue to distance herself from any taint of rustic vulgarity.<sup>55</sup> She continued to guard her independence carefully. The social relationships which she had nurtured assiduously throughout her life supported her to the end: in her eighties she regretfully turned down an invitation

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<sup>50</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81b/7). A carriage with associated expenses and upkeep cost more than many spinsters’ income. In 1823 Lady Louisa Stuart wished for one; ‘that is, I should like to have an additional three hundred pounds a year’. Home, *Letters*, 324.

<sup>51</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81d/41).

<sup>52</sup> *The Works of Abraham Cowley* (London: 1806), III, 122, via [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

<sup>53</sup> Across a range of texts, see, e.g., Ferrier, *Inheritance*, 85; J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Ltd, n.d.), 248; *Rich Old Bachelor*, 112; *Considerations On Establishing A College*, 15; J. Schaw (E.W. Andrews, ed.), *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 154.

<sup>54</sup> Ferrier, *Inheritance*, 413–14; J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Ltd, n.d.), 37–8. The Scottish conduct writer Gregory advised young gentlewomen to walk for health in *A Father’s Legacy* (48–9), first published in 1774 when Trotter was a young woman. Nonetheless, polite visiting could not be enacted in a state of ‘weather-beaten dishevelment’. Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 145.

<sup>55</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/48a/16); same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81a/11). Cf. Elizabeth Hamilton’s concerns on this score, chp. 2, 64 above.

from Innes with the explanation ‘it is impossible for me to dine three days in one week from home at my age and debility’.<sup>56</sup>

Trotter’s boasted independence rested paradoxically on the degree to which she was able to take for granted the status and financial provision she drew from her family. Nowhere in her surviving letters does she express doubt about her gentility or her ability to continue as mistress of a household which, however modest, was her own. Her brother supported the upkeep of the Blackford establishment; she did not have to squeeze an income out of the head of her family by reminding him that her mode of living reflected on him.<sup>57</sup> In her youth she had tried to avoid being drawn into the familial web of favour and obligation, congratulating herself on having ‘fully accomplished what I have been labouring at for many years – which is to disengage myself totally from the concerns of the family’. Her explanation of this thoroughly ungentle ambition was that ‘a person whose opinions for most part runs perfectly counter to those they associate with, has but a comfortless and irksome time of it’.<sup>58</sup> This is an unusually direct articulation of the tensions which often simmered under façades of family unity, but a gentlewoman whose position and circumstances were less secure would not have risked offending her friends with such opinions. As a mature unmarried woman, however, Trotter recognised that her status could not be disentangled from ‘the concerns of the family’. Her practical disengagement extended only as far as her removal the couple of miles from Mortonhall to Blackford. Her letters, notes, and compliment slips are evidence of the constant interaction between the two houses, and although she often alluded to her domestic independence, her brother Henry’s convenience affected the running of her household. When family effects were divided some years after the death of their eldest brother, furniture and other ‘incumbrances’ were stored out of the way at Blackford, where they cluttered up the ‘Lobby dining room Drawing room and all the stairs and passages’, forcing Marion and Jane to suspend sociability for a time. They were ‘kept in the fidgets by the tardiness of the Laird of Mortonhall who

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<sup>56</sup> Same to same, c.Jan. 1828 (GD113/5/81c/27).

<sup>57</sup> In 1828 she noted ‘the Laird and Mr Hume Carolside has sent me my money before due’, suggesting a regular, longstanding arrangement (GD113/5/81c/28). Carolside estate belonged to Innes, who may have contributed to this remittance. Trotter’s extant papers in the Innes of Stow deposit give limited details of her financial arrangements and management.

<sup>58</sup> Marion Trotter to Marion Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81a/12).

promises to be over every day to witness the division of Goods and Chattels, But always something of his own affairs enterferes to prevent him'.<sup>59</sup> The younger sisters also had to step into Margaret's shoes when the latter was periodically lame and reduced to supervising her household from a wheelchair. Marion spent most of February 1824 at Mortonhall, complaining in letters to Innes that she could see no 'immediate End of my duty here', but although she grumbled she complied with family expectation.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes she made efforts to conform in word as well as deed. A lapsed visit to Innes was excused with 'some of us must go to M:hall and Jeanie woud not – so I was obliged – so you see we may lay plans but while we live with a large family we cannot know if they will be executed – and I have always wished to do right'.<sup>61</sup>

Although Trotter was willing to challenge hierarchies of authority and obligation within the confines of her family (at least verbally), she upheld public structures of rank. To be known as Miss Trotter 'of the Mortonhall family' was a safeguard to position and a clear announcement of status in the wider social sphere. It removed her, for example, from any unwelcome association with a distantly related and almost equally wealthy but lower-ranking Edinburgh family of the same name whose cabinet-making business furnished many genteel and aristocratic houses.<sup>62</sup> She also made public statements of moral conservatism through her patronage choices, as Jane Innes did. Beyond her immediate and household family her patronage was directed to 'deserving' connections.<sup>63</sup> A later memoir writer recalled her pious charities, but her charity, and her sympathy, stopped short at moral boundaries appropriate to a spinster mindful of her character.<sup>64</sup> She had 'little mercy on the poor with ten Bairns', who by giving in to 'unruly passions' had brought poverty upon themselves.<sup>65</sup> Trotter compared the behaviour of the 'lower rank' unfavourably with that of her own: neither she nor Innes had selfishly married and foisted dependent offspring onto others' care. Her sympathy lay with her own kind,

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<sup>59</sup> Same to Jane Innes, ? 1812 (GD113/5/81c/2/1).

<sup>60</sup> Same to same, ? Feb. 1824 (GD113/5/39/1,4).

<sup>61</sup> Same to same, n.d. (GD113/5/81b/40).

<sup>62</sup> See William Trotter of Ballindean (1772–1833/4), lord provost of Edinburgh. Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 93, comments on contemporary usage of the formulaic phrase 'of family'.

<sup>63</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, ? 1824 (GD113/5/81c/23/1).

<sup>64</sup> Graham, *Mystifications*.

<sup>65</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, 18 Feb. ?1821 (GD113/5/81c/14).

‘the single maiden in her old age [who] lives temperately and modestly desirous to be a burden on none’.<sup>66</sup>

*Supporting status in an employer’s family: Agnes Porter (c.1745–1814)*

Agnes Porter, the Edinburgh-born eldest daughter of an Anglican clergyman, passed her life in very different circumstances. Unlike Marion Trotter, she could not draw on the social credit of belonging to a family which itself belonged to a closely allied network of upper genteel and lower aristocratic families.<sup>67</sup> Several of Porter’s maternal connections could claim a place in this network. Her mother’s ‘nearest relation’ did well enough in the Madras civil service to buy an estate at Chesters in the Scottish borders, where in 1790 he built a new mansion comparable in size to Mortonhall.<sup>68</sup> Mrs Porter was related to the long-established border families of Elliot of Wolfelee and Ogilvie of Hartwoodmyres, whose sons were landowners, army officers, doctors, and lawyers.<sup>69</sup> However, Porter’s family was unable to take advantage of these connections, as they left Scotland while she was still a child. The family settled eventually in Wiltshire, far removed from Mrs Porter’s Scottish kin. The Revd Francis Porter’s marriage and choice of profession improved his status but not his financial prospects.<sup>70</sup> Although he inherited legacies from three aunts (two of them never-married<sup>71</sup>), including property in Great Yarmouth and shares in shipping, he remained a curate until he was presented with a parish at the age of sixty. When he died four years later in 1782 his family had to quit their home to make way for the next incumbent.<sup>72</sup> The income they received from Francis Porter’s property was not

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ferrier wrote of Edinburgh’s ‘best society’, ‘The circle is so confined, that its members are almost universally known to each other’. *Marriage*, 94. Her fictional Miss Pratt, ‘somehow or other, cousin to all families of distinction, in general, throughout Scotland’, is a mockery of the supposed national obsession with genealogy (*Inheritance*, 56); Elizabeth Hamilton was more critical (Benger, *Memoirs*, 7). Cf. Jane Innes, who eulogised her suitor Row as being ‘related (& that nearly) to many of the principal families in Scotland’ (GD113/5/409/25).

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Elliott Ogilvie of Chesters.

<sup>69</sup> One was factor to the duke of Buccleuch and a friend of Sir Walter Scott; cf. the Ferrier family’s social position. Scott, *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, n.1, c.1, stz.1, via [www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk](http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk) and [faculty.plattsburgh.edu](http://faculty.plattsburgh.edu)

<sup>70</sup> His father and grandfather were brewers; he served an apprenticeship as a woollen-draper. Martin, *Journals*, 5–6.

<sup>71</sup> One, Frances Porter, was probably his name-patron. Ibid., 9.

<sup>72</sup> This Anglican requirement often left the women of a household—whether widow, unmarried daughters, or spinster sibling—in difficult straits. See, e.g., Cassandra Austen’s spinster godmother, who kept house for a clergy brother. Jane Austen to Francis Austen, 3 Jul. 1813, Le Faye, *Letters*,

enough to support them and Agnes, then in her early thirties, became their main prop, due to her brother's early death, one sister's youth, and the unreliability of another. Her journals express the conflict of filial duty she suffered on leaving her failing parent in her younger sisters' care while she went into another family to earn a living for them all. For the next twenty years, Porter taught the daughters and granddaughters of the earl of Ilchester, living first as a member of the earl's household in Somerset and Dorset, and then with his married daughter, Lady Mary Talbot, at Penrice Castle in south Wales.<sup>73</sup> Despite her long tenure as a governess to two generations of one family, Porter remained acutely sensitive throughout her life to her lack of financial and domestic security. As her writing reveals, personal space in her employer's household was a privilege which she could not rely on. All she could truly claim as her own was her trunk, identified by her initials on the lid. It was a physical reminder of her unavoidable dependency.<sup>74</sup>

Porter's journals, however, served as both a private and public space in which she was able to examine, shape, and communicate her sense of her own position and status. For more than a decade she used them to record her hopes and fears, her opinions, and her responses to social situations, and at her death she left them to the family of her favourite pupil as her commemorative pen-portrait and moral legacy.<sup>75</sup> In the popular tradition of Joseph Addison, Porter highlighted the journals' function as an aid to feminine self-monitoring. She resolved to focus on the 'various blessings' of her situation rather than on the social isolation she felt, 'lest I should prove ungrateful to the Supreme Disposer'.<sup>76</sup> (On a less elevated plane, she reminded herself of the need for vigilance in her social relations: having twice met the family's male tutor on her evening walk, she thought it better 'to change my hours of walking, as it particularly behoved me to avoid any particularity, or the least *seeming*

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216. The never-married author Jane Collier, a clergyman's daughter, highlighted the social vulnerability of these well-educated women as governesses and companions in her 1753 satire, *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*. Rizzo, *Companions*, 45–7; I. Grundy, 'Collier, Jane (bap.1715, d.1755)' (ODNB 2004 online; online edn Jan. 2010).

<sup>73</sup> Martin, *Journals*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., plate XI. On the lodger's or servant's box, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 24, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Martin, *Journals*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> 4 Aug. 1791. Addison and Steele's often reprinted *Spectator* was among the many titles Porter owned or read. Ibid., 58, 123.



indecorum'.<sup>77</sup>) Through the journals she bequeathed, and the letters she wrote to her pupils both while they were in her care and after they had left her charge, Porter aimed to instil precepts of good conduct. Ever the governess, she did not hesitate to correct manners where she found them wanting. Two of her pupils were welcomed 'coolly' after a three-week absence because they had written only once, and although 'they have not now their dear [deceased] mother to remind them of any attention due to me [...] I can assert myself when there is occasion for it, and would do so as much for their advantage as my own'.<sup>78</sup> Visiting London in the spring of 1797, she noted that she had gone 'at the appointed hour' to keep a dinner engagement with a former pupil, now married. Unfortunately her hostess had gone to dine elsewhere, having forgotten her invitation. The rest of the page is missing. Porter, who knew her own capacity for satire, doubtless thought better of leaving to posterity comments which could be read as criticism rather than admonition.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless she was ready to correct even her employers' friends when she felt her gentility challenged. One of the longest and most detailed entries in her journal records what was clearly a deeply felt snub, and her calculated response: 'When I rose to come away Mrs Pryce [...] offered to assist me with my cloak. Her husband made her a sign of disapprobation [...] Perhaps after my departure he might hear something said to my advantage, for the next morning [...] his address to me was very polite, but I had not forgotten and answered it with a very reserved silent curtesy. I watched Mrs Pryce's movements, to assist her with her cloak, and on his eyeing us I said, half smiling, half serious, "Hail the small courtesies of life, for smooth do they make the road of it!" I looked up at Mr Pryce – he cast his eyes down – I had *my* revenge'.<sup>80</sup> As she reminded her pupils, 'life is justly observed to be made up of little things, therefore it becomes highly necessary to pay a constant regard to them'.<sup>81</sup> She monitored her own conduct no less strictly, reminding herself when she failed to write to friends 'never to offend them

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<sup>77</sup> 18 Jun. 1796; see also 10 Jul., *ibid.*, 156. Porter's employers were away; she spent the evening with the tutor, but invited her pupils to tea and supper with them and took care to be only half an hour alone with him before a servant came as arranged with her bedtime candle—and she guarded against gossip by recording these details.

<sup>78</sup> 8 Aug. 1791, *ibid.*, 124.

<sup>79</sup> 19 Feb. 1791; 23 May 1797, *ibid.*, 107, 183.

<sup>80</sup> 21 Oct. 1802, *ibid.*, 216. Porter quotes Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

<sup>81</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Fox Strangways [later Talbot], 7 Apr. 1792, *ibid.*, 133.

so again'.<sup>82</sup> On another occasion she was embarrassed when she inadvertently took her employer Lady Ilchester's seat in a carriage, and so flustered by her *faux pas* that she failed to wish goodnight to the male acquaintance who had helped her in.<sup>83</sup> Lady Ilchester laughed the matter off, but Porter 'could not pardon' herself. She wrote to her acquaintance to apologise, and was relieved to hear that by doing so she had removed his sense of being snubbed. Such minute attention to the performance of politeness shows her to have been concerned on a daily basis with how others saw her.

As these extracts show, Agnes Porter's writing gives a particularly clear insight into the daily difficulties faced by a gentlewoman living in a family in which she could not claim kinship as a support to status. A dependent kinswoman could imply a mutual relationship in which her annuity boosted her richer relatives' reputation for benevolence and family feeling; a gentlewoman who received a wage for fulfilling a domestic role in a family not her own could not claim this genteel reciprocity. Yet Agnes Porter came very close to doing so, and over many years her strategy proved effective in securing her a recognised place in her employers' families during her life, and a place in their domestic histories after her death.<sup>84</sup> The uncertain territory which a paid governess occupied between servants and family could be a route into the latter to someone of Porter's determination.<sup>85</sup>

Porter began teaching the earl of Ilchester's daughters in 1784. The first Lady Ilchester died in 1790, and from this date Porter adopted openly the maternal role of moral exemplar to her charges. She took Lady Ilchester as her model 'in all their concerns'.<sup>86</sup> In her journal she referred to her pupils as 'my children', 'my dear children', or 'my beloved children', and when one of them fell ill the same year she 'reflected at night on my situation which (though a single woman) was attended with

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<sup>82</sup> 4 Mar. 1804, *ibid.*, 237.

<sup>83</sup> 29, 30 May 1797, *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>84</sup> A letter of 1921 shows they were still being read over 100 years later. Eventually they passed into the families' public histories: Porter's papers were arranged for publication in 1998 by Joanna Martin, (x4)great-granddaughter of Porter's employer Thomas Mansel Talbot. *Journals*, 75.

<sup>85</sup> For the many trials of gentlewomen in this position, see Rizzo, *Companions*. Tadmor notes that, in middling trade families, boundaries between family and servants could be even looser, as domestic patronage drew in poorer kin as servants. *Family and Friends*, 29–30.

<sup>86</sup> 28 Aug. 1790, Martin, *Journals*, 85.

all the anxieties of a mother'.<sup>87</sup> She also described herself as the sixteen-year-old Lady Mary's 'most sincere and tender friend', but was careful nonetheless to maintain distinctions of status, hoping that 'in that character you will permit me at times in the absence of your female relations to hint my opinions on subjects which may concern your conduct or happiness'.<sup>88</sup> Porter confirmed her position as a respected family adviser in 1794, when Lady Mary married and her father Lord Ilchester married for the second time, to a kinswoman only a few years older than his daughter. Lady Mary did not initially welcome her father's news, and Porter sent a long letter to 'my dear Lady Mary', 'my sweet love', in which she used a blend of deference and familiar address to encourage her former charge towards reconciliation and family harmony.<sup>89</sup> She began by establishing her own authority, noting that Lord Ilchester 'acquainted me himself with his intention'. She appealed to Lady Mary's sensibility by employing idioms more commonly used of lovesick gentlewomen: Lord Ilchester had sought his single daughters' approval, as had his bride, and there had been fears for 'even his health and life, had he been finally disappointed', and left 'solitary'. She alluded to duty with a reference to 'your remaining parent', tactfully suggesting a congratulatory note addressing the new bride as '*Cousin*' rather than mother. Finally, Porter skilfully withdrew with an acknowledgement of Lady Mary's new status as a married, adult woman: 'I speak merely from conjecture, and to show my extreme confidence in you. I know you have better advice at your *right hand* than any Po can give'.<sup>90</sup> In taking up the role of mediator, Porter showed that she considered the Ilchester family's interests her own; this, and her evident skill in negotiating familial as well as household hierarchies, may have prompted Lady Mary to invite her in 1799 to take on the care of her own daughters at Penrice Castle in Wales.<sup>91</sup>

Porter spent seven years in Wales as a governess, and as a companion to Lady Mary, until ill-health forced her to retire in 1806, aged about sixty. Her familial

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<sup>87</sup> 17 Aug.; 15 Sept.; 9, 29 Oct.; 12 Dec. 1790; 30 Jul. 1791; 8 Mar. 1792, *ibid.*, 83, 87–96 *passim*, 122, 131.

<sup>88</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Fox Strangways, 18 Aug. 1792, *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>89</sup> Same to Lady Mary Talbot, 11 Sept. 1794, *ibid.*, 147–50.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* 'Po' was her pupils' childhood nickname for her.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. the fictional Miss Taylor, valued governess/companion to the motherless Emma: 'intelligent, well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in all its concerns'. Austen, *Emma*, 3.

integration at Penrice is indicated by the fact that she usually joined her employers at meals and in the evenings, and by a letter of 1807 in which she thanked Lady Mary for news of ‘*our* lovely and good children’.<sup>92</sup> A greater sign of her success, however, was a public gesture of respect from the Prices, the same friends of the Talbot family who had once mortified her by doubting her status.<sup>93</sup> On her way to visit Penrice in 1811, Porter proudly relayed to Lady Mary the news that the Prices had sent a carriage for her ‘with coachman *and* footman: the first for utility, the second to do me honour in the opinion of all observers’.<sup>94</sup> The Prices would certainly not have done so if they had not thought it would please the Talbots as well as Agnes Porter, and Porter was certainly aware of this when she continued in a tone which succeeded in being respectful while claiming a degree of familial intimacy: ‘Indeed, only a line *from yourself* could requite their kindness. I feel that my writing would be inadequate, but that a few lines from your hand would leave them my debtors. Am I not very bold to trouble you with my *obligations*?’ As in Marion Trotter’s writing, when Porter mentioned travelling by carriage, she communicated not just the fact, but her thoughts about rank and status. On another occasion she recorded in her journal that Lady Mary’s brother had ‘handed me to the carriage with the same politeness as if I had been a countess’.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, the stage or mail coach which Porter usually took when travelling on personal affairs was a social melting pot—fellow passengers might be an old grocer, an over-forward ‘Miss from school’, gentlemen still drunk from a night’s rioting, or a quiet and ‘very elegant-looking man’ who turned out to be (as she learned later) a butler in search of a place.<sup>96</sup> ‘I could not but ruminate on the deceitfulness of appearances’, she wrote.<sup>97</sup> It cannot

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<sup>92</sup> Lady Mary Talbot to Mrs Hicks Beach, 24 Jun. 1806; Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 3 Mar. 1807, Martin, *Journals*, 44, 265.

<sup>93</sup> See 219–20 above.

<sup>94</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 4 Jul. 1811. The Prices were slightly lower-ranking than the Talbots, with whom few west Glamorgan families were on an equal social footing. Martin, *Journals*, 313, 346.

<sup>95</sup> 28 Feb. 1805, *ibid.*, 249.

<sup>96</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Fox Strangways, 21 Dec. 1789; 22 Jan. 1791; 13 Apr. 1803, *ibid.*, 81, 103, 224.

<sup>97</sup> Jane Innes similarly reflected on the deceit of dress, having mistaken a well-dressed family for her equals in rank: ‘the respect which good Dress produces was never more evident [...] every Child here, from two feet high to six were of opinion that a Gingerbread Baker was the most enviable employment in the world’. To Marion Innes, 30 Jun. 1776 (GD113/5/44a/1).

have been a comforting reflection for a gentlewoman who took such consistent pains with her own presentation to the world.

Although Porter necessarily focussed much of her attention on the family in which she lived, she did not neglect to represent her own family and connections in the best possible light. In the spring of 1805 she made a month-long visit to Edinburgh, where she met many of her mother's kin, and found it 'gratifying to my pride to see them move in so respectable a sphere'.<sup>98</sup> She underlined her impression with descriptions of 'elegant' homes and entertainment and the 'agreeable' and 'sensible' company of her 'dear' countrywomen.<sup>99</sup> Social calls were listed meticulously, as were the names of all present and their connection to her. She looked forward to meeting a childhood friend, now Lady Home of the Hirsel.<sup>100</sup> She also caught up on several decades of family alliances and, meeting her mother's closest relative Mr Ogilvie, thought it worth noting that his sister had become 'Mrs *General Balfour*'.<sup>101</sup> Most of those Porter met were related to her in some degree, but she also met a niece of the 'celebrated Dr Blair', lecturer, preacher, and author of the bestselling *Sermons*. This gave her the opportunity to recall, and record, 'N.B. [...] he claimed acquaintance with me on my father's account who was, he said, his particular intimate and one of the worthiest of men'.<sup>102</sup> Porter's Edinburgh visit thus allowed her to link both sides of her family to a level of society distinguished by comfortable but unostentatious wealth, intellectual accomplishment, and patriotic and moderate religious sentiment.<sup>103</sup> But despite the evident pleasure and satisfaction she took in the respectability of her connections, this seems to have been Porter's only visit to her 'native country'. It was prompted by 'Duty to a near relation', an elderly and ill aunt who had been reduced to poverty by her husband's 'carelessness and pride', and it was probably her employer's approval of this motive which

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<sup>98</sup> 13 Mar. 1805, Martin, *Journals*, 252.

<sup>99</sup> 10, 25 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 251–5 *passim*. She stayed with Elizabeth Keir, who lived in George St in the New Town.

<sup>100</sup> Lady Home came from a wealthy Yarmouth family; Porter lived with them, possibly as a companion, before becoming a governess. *Ibid.*, 11–12, 27.

<sup>101</sup> 18 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 253.

<sup>102</sup> 23 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 254. Possibly from a condolence letter. Her father was awarded a divinity degree by Edinburgh university in 1765; his friendship with Blair presumably dated to this time.

<sup>103</sup> In 1798 Porter told Lady Mary she thought the Bible and Blair's *Sermons* offered 'a compleat system of morality and religion'. 23 Feb. 1798, *ibid.*, 191.

procured for her an extended absence from her pupils.<sup>104</sup> She described the wrench of parting from her aunt at the end of her visit and—perhaps recalling her mother—added poignantly, ‘had I been independent I would not have left her’.<sup>105</sup> But Porter could neither stay with her aunt, nor accept an invitation to stop at Mr Ogilvie’s estate on her return south. She was not mistress of her own time. Marion Trotter made the same complaint, but where Trotter chafed at familial obligations, Porter wished she were free to undertake them, a distinction which emphasises how very differently never-married women might perceive dependency according to how secure they felt their membership of a family to be. Porter’s Scottish relatives are seldom mentioned elsewhere in her journal, and she seems not to have risked disturbing her rosy view of the ‘Land of Cakes’ by ever requesting their assistance, even at times in her life when she was uncertain of her future prospects.<sup>106</sup> She never put to the test her confident assertion ‘N.B. in Scotland an old relation is seldom ever left *solitary, whether rich or poor*’.<sup>107</sup>

In the context of self-representation, a more notable omission from Porter’s journals is that of her sister Elizabeth Porter, who is mentioned only as the instigator of familial crises. Porter’s reticence, compared with her frequent references to her other sister, Frances, is a reminder that family ties benefited a never-married gentlewoman only insofar as they added lustre to her reputation.<sup>108</sup> By the 1790s both Agnes and Frances Porter were working as governesses, and Agnes at least was able to send money to their mother.<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth, unwilling or unable to support herself, was left in charge of their mother’s household, but apparently resented this filial duty. In January 1791 Agnes and Frances discussed ‘our dear mother and Betsey’s present views’, and a few months later Porter made a week-long visit to talk matters over with Elizabeth herself.<sup>110</sup> She found ‘our opinions quite different’, and

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<sup>104</sup> 9 Jan., 12 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 247, 251.

<sup>105</sup> 17, 28 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 252, 255. Porter invariably expressed this wish when visiting her mother, who died in 1794.

<sup>106</sup> A traditional poetic name for Scotland. 30 Jan. 1805, *ibid.*, 248.

<sup>107</sup> 16 Mar. 1805, *ibid.*, 252. Cf. the never-married poet Joanna Picken: ‘I fain wad deny, but I canna, / Altho’ to confess it I grieve, / Folks seldom care muckle for grannie, / Unless she has something to leave’, in ‘An Auld Friend Wi’ A New Face’, her poem urging spinsters to contentment, in Wilson, *Poets and Poetry of Scotland*.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Jane Innes, chp. 6 above.

<sup>109</sup> 5 Nov. 1790, Martin, *Journals*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> 21 Jan. 1791; 29 Apr.–3 May 1791, *ibid.*, 102–3; 114–5.

the rest of the page was later cut out. In November, while her employer Lord Ilchester was briefly away from home, she received ‘An alarming letter from my sister Elizabeth’ about their mother.<sup>111</sup> It disturbed her so much that she did not wait for the next day’s stage coach but hired a more expensive post chaise to travel directly to Salisbury, where they lived. On the road she tried to prepare herself for ‘the worst’, only to find her mother ‘at her tea, attended only by a little girl – N.B. my sister Elizabeth from home on a tea visit’.<sup>112</sup> As Porter usually referred to her sister simply as ‘Betsey’, this formal invocation of the sibling relationship suggests that her expectations of it were not being fulfilled. She also expressed her feelings through the distancing device of quotation: ‘Were not a parent’s welfare concerned, I would take the poet’s advice: “Disgust conceal’d is oftimes prudence, when the defect is radical and past a cure”’.<sup>113</sup> While a linguistic move from intimacy to formality signified respect in the context of a successful relationship, the opposite was often true when a close familial relationship foundered.<sup>114</sup> Porter hired a nurse (emphasising the woman’s sense of duty and reliability) and returned nine days later to her employer’s house, where she asked Lord Ilchester to excuse her ‘elopement’, a word redolent of unsanctioned flight from authority.<sup>115</sup> To her relief ‘He said I should have flown to my mother, and acted quite properly in having no hesitation on the subject’. Acceptance of familial responsibility was one of the cornerstones of genteel conduct, and Porter’s judgement of her duty in this situation enhanced rather than damaged her status in her employer’s family. Another crisis arose the following summer, however, and her concern to distance herself from her sister’s ‘unnatural conduct’ is again evident in her writing.<sup>116</sup> At first matters seemed to be improving. At the end of June ‘sister Betsey’ wrote to say she had taken a position as a governess, which Porter optimistically hoped would see her provided for ‘by her own industry and prudence’.<sup>117</sup> She was soon disillusioned. A few days later she had ‘a

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<sup>111</sup> 19 Nov. 1791, *ibid.*, 126.

<sup>112</sup> 20 Nov. 1791, *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> 22 Nov. 1791, *ibid.* Porter quotes Cowper, *The Task*.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. chp. 3, 100 above. Tadmor notes the use of genteel linguistic formulae to express relationship breakdowns in *Family and Friends*, 186n.86, 190.

<sup>115</sup> 26 Nov. 1791, Martin, *Journals*, 128.

<sup>116</sup> Later note by Lady Mary Talbot, suggesting Porter’s response was approved by her employers. *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>117</sup> 30 Jun. 1792, *ibid.*, 135.

most unpleasant letter' from her mother, who was unwell, in debt, and 'not pleased with her daughter Elizabeth's conduct'.<sup>118</sup> Porter had to set off once more to put her mother's affairs in order. By the beginning of August Elizabeth had given up her position and returned to her mother's household.<sup>119</sup> In the following decade Porter mentioned her sister only twice in her journals, keeping her firmly at a distance with the elision 'B—y'. A final brief reference in 1802 suggests that she felt her duty in this quarter was discharged by sending five pounds half yearly.<sup>120</sup>

In contrast, Porter often mentioned her youngest sister, who was always Fanny rather than Frances. She was described as an ornament to the family, 'sings like a little syren, plays charmingly, draws with taste, and is most pleasing in conversation, having a talent for each person she converses with'.<sup>121</sup> More importantly, her conduct could be relied on. Frances supported herself as a governess and companion until she married a 'worthy' clergyman. Consequently she was gladly acknowledged in her sister's letters and journals, most often as 'my dear sister Fanny'. Her 'amiable' husband, the Revd Thomas Richards, was welcomed as a 'dear brother'.<sup>122</sup> Porter's flattering representations benefited both women. Frances was able to visit her sister. Porter's employers were 'all goodness to her on my account', and at Penrice she was sometimes invited to prolong her stay.<sup>123</sup> This compliment marked Porter's respected status in the household, and hinted at her being in a position to claim interest for her connections. Porter did in fact add to her sister and brother-in-law's income by getting them genteel female boarders through her employers' recommendation.<sup>124</sup> She also had a public success when, via Lady Ilchester, the physician son of one of her Edinburgh relatives secured an appointment at the Russian court.<sup>125</sup>

Porter was evidently successful in winning a degree of familial status for herself. She was treated respectfully, and on the whole considerately, by three

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<sup>118</sup> 3 Jul. 1792, *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>120</sup> 13 Jun. 1797; 15 Aug. 1802, *ibid.*, 186, 213.

<sup>121</sup> 3 Sept. 1790, *ibid.*, 85.

<sup>122</sup> 20 Jan. 1792, 12 Jun. 1796, *ibid.*, 131, 155.

<sup>123</sup> 1 Sept. 1790, *ibid.*, 85.

<sup>124</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 13 Aug. 1810; to Lady Harriot Frampton, 8 Sept. 1810, *ibid.*, 295, 297.

<sup>125</sup> James Keir. 23 May 1802, 21 Jun. 1803, *ibid.*, 208, 227.



generations of the Ilchester and Talbot families. Just as importantly, she was respected by their servants, who addressed her as ‘Madam’.<sup>126</sup> The contemporary writer Elizabeth Montagu assumed that a genteel companion would be caught between living in the ‘gossipry of that set of people’, or being ‘reckond proud and impertinent’.<sup>127</sup> Porter, sensitive to the nuances of status, showed herself capable of moving between social levels without giving offence, dining with Lord Ilchester’s family one week and with his sister’s housekeeper, ‘a worthy sensible woman’, the next.<sup>128</sup> Inevitably, though, there were times when her hard-won position was threatened. Her readiness to defend her status resulted from the knowledge that it depended not on wealth or connections, but on consistent acknowledgement from the people she associated with daily. Porter’s greatest challenge in this respect came a few years after Lord Ilchester’s second marriage. After the first Lady Ilchester’s death, she had stood *in loco parentis* to her pupils, and the respect accorded this role was signalled to the household by her being allowed a parlour for her own use in which she could receive her friends privately. By the time Lord Ilchester remarried in 1794, however, her eldest pupils were themselves married, the rest were growing up, and Porter’s contribution to the family was no longer central, although she had the advantage of knowing the household’s habits. The new, and young, Lady Ilchester wanted to assert her authority as mistress, and Porter soon found her situation ‘very different to what it had been’.<sup>129</sup> In the spring of 1797 she discovered she would not be given her usual parlour in the family’s London house when they removed there for the season.<sup>130</sup> Porter resolved this tussle for position by a tactical retreat. Her decision to leave after thirteen years was a considerable if calculated risk—she had hoped that having spent so long in the family her home was ‘permanently fixed’—but she understood that this withdrawal of privilege would quickly erode her standing with the household servants, and with her personal social circle.<sup>131</sup> Fortunately she was able to represent her move positively. An old acquaintance,

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<sup>126</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 11 Sept. 1794, *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>127</sup> Rizzo, *Companions*, 129.

<sup>128</sup> 30 Apr., 4 May 1797, Martin, *Journals*, 178–9.

<sup>129</sup> 30 Jan. 1797, *ibid.*, 172.

<sup>130</sup> 20, 28 Mar. 1797, *ibid.*, 173.

<sup>131</sup> She noted that instead of receiving an old friend, as previously, they would have to converse by letter. 16, 23 Apr. 1797, *ibid.*, 174, 177.

recently widowed, had asked Porter to join her ‘as her sister and friend’ on the ‘liberal terms’ of £100 annually ‘as long as she lives’, and Porter gladly accepted an offer made on such explicit terms of equality.<sup>132</sup> ‘May God Almighty preserve her life and bless our union!’ she added, echoing the marital idiom of other non-married couples who took up housekeeping together.<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately her friend died just two years later, and Porter found herself homeless, reliant on a £30 annuity previously promised by Lord Ilchester plus income drawn from her occasional investments in navy stock. She was soon invited to Wales by Lady Mary Talbot, also at £100 annually, but money worries intruded increasingly into her journal over the next few years as she contemplated the difficulties of finding a long-term home appropriate to both her income and her gentility. Lord Ilchester left her a well-intentioned and generous legacy of 100 guineas a year on his death in 1802, but as he died in debt she could not expect it to be paid for several years, if at all.<sup>134</sup> Like many another gentlewoman who felt herself in doubtful financial straits, Porter used familial reputation as leverage, telling the late Lord Ilchester’s brother, ‘should I from ill health be obliged to give up my profession and be reduced to want, I thought it would be a reflection on his noble family. He seemed to think what I said was *une façon de parler*—but he knows not me.’<sup>135</sup>

Porter’s use here of the phrase ‘my profession’ indicates a secondary but important strand to her self-representation, one which was particularly important at times when she felt unable to rely on others’ acknowledgement of her status. Profession was a carefully chosen word which claimed recognition and respect at least on a level with the tutors employed to give a formal classical education to the family’s sons. She felt herself the equal of men like the Revd Sydney Smith, twenty-five years her junior, who met her in Wales in 1799 when he was only a curate and a tutor, and who dismissed her as ‘a very ordinary article’, ‘instructed in books she may be, but infinitely vulgar she certainly is’.<sup>136</sup> Porter took her educational

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<sup>132</sup> Feb., 16 Apr. 1797, *ibid.*, 172–4. Such explicit practical agreements were also made by wealthier women; Rizzo cites one who in 1776 offered £100p.a. and £4,000 at her death. *Companions*, 334n.7.

<sup>133</sup> 19 Apr. 1797, Martin, *Journals*, 175.

<sup>134</sup> Her £30 annuity ceased on his death, but the Talbots gave her the same when she retired.

<sup>135</sup> 26 Aug. 1803, Martin, *Journals*, 231.

<sup>136</sup> Smith tutored the Hicks Beaches, Talbot cousins who knew Jane Austen’s family. To Mrs Hicks Beach, 17 Sept. 1799; to Michael Hicks Beach, 2 Oct. 1799, *ibid.*, 40; Le Faye, *Letters*, 495. Smith was perhaps defensive about his own status and low income; about the same time he tactfully referred

responsibilities seriously, and wanted this to be recognised. As Smith would later do, she read theoretical texts on education, specifically by writers on female education such as the Edgeworths, Hannah More, Sarah Trimmer, and her fellow Scotswoman Elizabeth Hamilton, in the hope that ‘Between theory at night and practice all day I should do *something*’.<sup>137</sup> In her free time she also read in French and Italian, tried to improve her command of German and geometry, and sat in on Latin lessons given to her employer’s sons.<sup>138</sup> She took every opportunity to enhance her reputation, presenting her copy of *Walker’s Dictionary* to a new subscription library in Swansea as an appropriate gesture of patronage from a gentlewoman concerned with education.<sup>139</sup> Living in retirement in Somerset, she sent her letters and two of her journals to Lady Mary Talbot, and pointed out with some pride that they were ‘peculiar in the circumstance of adverting to the education of both the *mother* and *her children*’.<sup>140</sup> In forming the moral and intellectual characters of two generations of women who were destined to advance their families through marriage, she could claim to have fulfilled some of the most important social and familial responsibilities of a gentlewoman.<sup>141</sup>

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Vickery argues that, for single women, ‘independence at family expence was a fantastic request’.<sup>142</sup> This is true in the broadest sense—that is, very few of those who called themselves genteel, whether women or men, could look for independence ‘at family expence’. If younger siblings and elderly dependants were often reliant on annuities, heirs and heads of families were usually required to provide them; very few people had unfettered use of family capital. The concept of genteel independence

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to another governess ‘who has still all the feelings, and had once the situation, of a woman of independent fortune’. Lady Holland and Mrs Austin (eds), *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 43.

<sup>137</sup> 7 Jun. 1802, Martin, *Journals*, 210.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 68.

<sup>139</sup> She also recorded receipt of a letter of thanks from ‘the gentlemen of the library committee’. 18 Apr., 20 May 1804, *ibid.*, 238, 240.

<sup>140</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 7 Nov. 1812, *ibid.*, 322.

<sup>141</sup> In 1785 she had copied from Hannah More the injunction that well-bred women should be educated ‘to make them good daughters, good wives, good Christians’. *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 192.

also encompassed much more than ideas of sufficient income. The case studies considered in this chapter illustrate some of the different ways in which never-married gentlewomen might interpret and express independence according to their positions relative to their families and the social circles in which they moved. Marion Trotter was not wealthy, but she was financially secure and able to rely on her brothers throughout her life. In her extensive correspondence she only once likened herself directly to a poorer gentlewoman of her acquaintance. Excusing her inability to make an accustomed annual charity donation, she explained that she still had civic taxes and poor rates to pay, ‘and I will not be turnd to the street for any of these claims like Miss Henny Dallas’—an unlikely fate for a Miss Trotter of Mortonhall.<sup>143</sup> Familial income was taken as a right by Trotter, for whom independence suggested freedom from familial obligation, arguably an equally ‘fantastic’ wish for the genteel whose personal status (as Trotter’s case illustrates) was so bound up with that of their families. Agnes Porter, meanwhile, understood independence not as income she could rely on from her own efforts, but as inherited capital sufficient to allow family members to support each other, as the wealthier Trotters did. In purely monetary terms, Porter’s income was comfortable for a woman in her position, and by her death in 1814 she had amassed personal capital of £2,000 through careful saving and investment. She could not be objectively described as poor, even if entry to the fictional female sanctuary of *Millenium Hall* had been set at that level fifty years previously by the author Sarah Scott, ‘the expensive turn of the world now being such, that no gentlewoman can live genteelly on the interest of that sum’.<sup>144</sup> This too was a subjective assessment of what was required for gentility. Margaret Adam’s niece Susanna Clerk hoped to manage in London in 1822 on an allowance of £220 and £2,000 capital.<sup>145</sup> In 1817, a fictional and not rich but nonetheless ‘respectable old maid’ thought herself ‘in every respect independent’ on an income of less than £60 a year, £20 of which was an allowance from her nephew.<sup>146</sup> Independence, then, was not simply about income; it was also a complex expression of familial attachment.

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<sup>143</sup> Marion Trotter to Margaret Trotter, ?19 Feb. 1825 (GD113/5/81c/24).

<sup>144</sup> In Rizzo, *Companions*, 35.

<sup>145</sup> Chp. 3, 108 above.

<sup>146</sup> Ross, *Balance of Comfort*, I, 199.

Marion Trotter and Agnes Porter differed greatly in the circumstances of their lives, but like other women whose relationship strategies have been examined in this thesis, they coincided in their determination to be acknowledged by those around them as respected members of families. Agnes Porter chose to direct her energies to recognition in her employers' families, in which she could build on daily interactions, rather than among her maternal kin who knew her only at second-hand through letters. She drew into these families' orbit her own closest relative, her sister Frances, confident that she too would benefit from the connection. Porter, who had no male relative to whom she could turn as head of her family, did not want to find in old age that she was 'the property of no-one'.<sup>147</sup> The extant papers of the Ilchester and Talbot families show that, like many other never-married women, she won respect and affection by taking up familial responsibilities of care, although there is no evidence they offered her a home after she left their employ.<sup>148</sup> In her last years she moved to lodgings near the Ilchester's home in Somerset, news which Lord Ilchester's sister sent to her niece (one of Porter's former pupils) with the comment 'I am glad of her determination, as she will be within reach of us all, and is a very valuable friend on many occasions, and one who we all love and esteem'.<sup>149</sup> In the idiom of cherished family correspondence, Porter's final letter to Lady Mary Talbot was annotated by the recipient as 'The last I ever received', and after her death a sum of money was sent to the friends who had arranged for her burial in their own family plot.<sup>150</sup> As she had hoped, Agnes Porter was acknowledged in her last days as a connection of the families in which she had spent most of her life.

Marion Trotter was remembered after her death as one of a 'singular set of excellent Scotch old ladies' who were noted for being 'strong-headed, warm-hearted, and high-spirited'.<sup>151</sup> According to the memoirist Lord Cockburn, they were 'indifferent about the modes and habits of the modern world; and adhering to their own ways, so as to stand out, like primitive rocks, above ordinary society'.<sup>152</sup> This

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<sup>147</sup> 26 May 1791, Martin, *Journals*, 117.

<sup>148</sup> Visitors to Penrice thought it 'scarcely large enough' for the Talbots, *ibid.*, 43–4.

<sup>149</sup> Lady Susan O'Brien to Lady Elizabeth Feilding, 19 Jul. 1812, *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>150</sup> Agnes Porter to Lady Mary Talbot, 26 Jan. 1814; Lucy Lloyd to Lady Harriot Frampton, 24 Mar. 1814, *ibid.*, 330n.1, 332. Cf. Jane Innes's annotation on a letter to her suitor John Row, chp. 6, 184 above.

<sup>151</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 52.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

accorded with Trotter's own lifelong identification with tradition: 'I prefer Marion to Mariana there is a simplicity [...] attended with a Mixture of that antient purity of Manners that is to me inexpressibly delightful'.<sup>153</sup> As a younger daughter, she claimed a patrimony not founded on wealth. Her friends upheld this representation of her circumstances, one imagining her in old age walking at Mortonhall under the shade of her 'paternal trees'.<sup>154</sup> In Cockburn's idiom, singularity was transformed from a negative to a positive. Most of the gentlewomen he described were indeed spinsters or widows but they were socially secure, neither self-effacing stereotypes nor vulgarly forward caricatures of women alone, 'for they all dressed, and spoke, and did, exactly as they chose; their language, like their habits, entirely Scotch, but without any other vulgarity than what perfect naturalness is sometimes mistaken for'.<sup>155</sup> To Cockburn, reflecting on the past century from the mid-point of the nineteenth, Trotter kept company with other eccentric gentlewomen such as Sophia Johnstone 'of the Hilton family', who was welcomed 'in any drawing-room, and at any table, amidst all the fashion and aristocracy of the land, respected and liked' for her 'intelligent and racy' talk, 'rich both in old anecdote, and in shrewd modern observation, [...] her understanding powerful; all her opinions free, and very freely expressed'.<sup>156</sup> The language of old-maidism was explicitly rejected in his recollection that 'neither loneliness, nor very slender means, ever brought sourness or melancholy to her face or her heart'. Of Trotter he recalled, 'Her pleasures lay in the fields and long country walks [...] Her attire accorded. But her understanding was fully as masculine'.<sup>157</sup> In Cockburn's writing, the independently minded maiden gentlewoman became emblematic of an admirable and peculiarly Scottish female character which was fading into the insipidity of modern manners.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Marion Trotter to Jane Innes, n.d. (GD113/5/81a/16). Cf. the excessive sensibility of the fictional Marianne in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.

<sup>154</sup> E. Philips to Marion Trotter, 3 Jun. 1833 (GD113/5/81g/13).

<sup>155</sup> Cockburn, *Memorials*, 52–3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–6.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>158</sup> See Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society*, 106, for Scottish gentlewomen's fluent alternation of vernacular and polite linguistic registers. Although Trotter was remembered speaking Scots, her correspondence was in standard English with occasional use of Scots to emphasise informality.



## Conclusion

In 1785, when she was still living with her elderly uncle on a Stirlingshire farm, Elizabeth Hamilton wrote a poem which she titled 'Anticipation': 'With expectation beating high, / Myself I now desire to spy, / And strait I in the glass surveyed / An antique maiden much decayed, / Whose languid eye, and pallid cheek, / The conquering power of time bespeak. / But though deprived of youthful bloom, / Free was my brow from peevish gloom. / [...] / No more I fashion's livery wear, / But cleanly neatness all my care. / Whoe'er had seen me must have said, / There goes one cheerful, pleased, old maid.' Hamilton was nearly thirty when she wrote these lines, the age at which spinsterhood would have begun to seem like her inevitable life-course. Her brother showed no sign of returning from India, and the writing career which would later give her a purpose and a role in life was not yet begun. Her prospects may have appeared bleak. Yet despite her apprehensions Hamilton looked the popular caricature of her future self squarely in the face and, by laying claim to it, defused it of its potential fears. She rejected the vocabulary of old-maidism; she would not be 'peevish', but 'cheerful'. She defended her gentility by her use of language, as she had done when describing her socially circumscribed life to her brother. The vulgarity implicit in the figure of the old maid was countered by her description of her appearance as 'neat', a word associated with unostentatious gentility. The magnitude of Hamilton's claim to social recognition in this short poem is evident in the penultimate line: even strangers would have to acknowledge the old maid as a respectable figure.

As a manuscript work which appeared later in print, the poem lies on a continuum of private/public writing by educated gentlewomen.<sup>1</sup> Unmarried gentlewomen were able to claim public roles and voices by degrees, by the circulation of memoirs among kin and acquaintance, through coterie readings of manuscript works, to appearance in print for a public readership. Publication not only gave single women a route into public life, but created an engagement in print culture

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<sup>1</sup> It appeared in the posthumous biography approved by her sister. Benger, *Memoirs*, 95.



with their circumstances and opinions.<sup>2</sup> Hamilton went on to portray unmarried women in her published works. Many of her peers did likewise, as is shown by works cited in chapter one. Never-married gentlewomen, among them several of the women whose lives have been considered in the preceding chapters, were prominent among the increasing numbers of published women writers in the early nineteenth century. From Samuel Johnson's mid-eighteenth-century description of female authors as 'Amazons of the pen', still outwith feminine norms and somewhat threatening, to Lady Louisa Stuart's remark in 1830 that 'Authoresses are [...] become too abundant to be either worshipped as divinities on one side, or ranked with learned pigs and bullfinches on the other', single women made up a significant proportion of the numbers.<sup>3</sup> By the closing years of the eighteenth century readers were expected to be familiar with (if not necessarily approving of) a broad range of unmarried female writers, as indicated by the anonymous pamphleteer who suggested in 1790 that a 'college for old maids' would be not just a charitable but a socially beneficial establishment, as 'valuable accessions [might] be occasionally made to the stock of polite literature [...] within this pale of female virtue—a Carter—a Montague—a Moore—a Williams—a Brooke—or a Seward—might arise'.<sup>4</sup> This cohort of examples, from the socially conservative Hannah More to the radical Helen Maria Williams, is evidence that single women made their mark among the periodical and tract writers, the novelists and the educationalists who helped to shape debate on issues of the day. Hamilton, whose treatises on education were cited by Agnes Porter, was credited with improving the living conditions of the Scottish peasantry through the influence of her popular novel, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808).<sup>5</sup> The narrative outline of this work is simply the search by a respectable elderly spinster for a suitable place of retirement, a device which allowed Hamilton to encourage her readers to think about what constituted gentility, and where, and

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., educational texts published by women like Agnes Porter were not just a means of professional self-expression and a way to boost income; they also drew attention to single women's roles as educators.

<sup>3</sup> *The Adventurer*, no. 115 (11 Dec. 1753); J.A. Home (ed.), *Lady Louisa Stuart: Selections From Her Manuscripts* (David Douglas: Edinburgh, 1899), 155.

<sup>4</sup> *Considerations*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> P. Perkins (ed.), intro., E. Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie and other educational writing* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2010), 3–6. Porter herself published a book of educational fables for girls, hoping to 'put a little money in my purse'. 5 Oct. 1790, Martin, *Journals*, 70, 89.

how, unmarried women fitted into society. The familial parameters of the present study mean that consideration of never-married women's published representations of spinsters, and of themselves to a public at large, is beyond the range of this thesis, but the extensive body of work produced by never-married women authors underlines the fundamental importance of writing as a means to genteel female self-definition and self-expression.

Within these parameters, never-married gentlewomen have been shown to be a visible and acknowledged presence, not only present but active at the heart of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century family life. Their historic presence in archival collections has often been obscured by the foregrounding of male family representatives for family as well as public record, and by the culturally normative classifications of civic record. Nonetheless they can be found, and portraits of their lives built up, by attention to references and documents scattered through family papers. While chapters two, six, and seven make use of material from less well known and comparatively underused archival sources, the example of the Adam/Clerk kin network in chapters three and five illustrates the fruitful results of revisiting archives previously considered from historiographic perspectives of mainly masculine public activity.<sup>6</sup>

On the one hand, the decision to focus this study on never-married gentlewomen was made because contemporary printed texts suggest single women of this rank were particularly sensitive to the failures of female social and religious duty implicit in the figure of the old maid. In marriage and maternity gentlewomen fulfilled their responsibilities to family and state, an opinion voiced across a spectrum of social, religious, and political commentators as well as conduct writers. The old maid of popular representation was a female embodiment of vanity, inappropriately expressed sexuality, and selfish individuality. Print culture disseminated the caricatures and maintained their currency, and the availability of the stereotype was a pervasive challenge to unmarried women's status. Gentlewomen were not 'placed so high as to have their actions above the Reach of Scandal', nor 'altogether so independent, as not to have it in their Interest to be thought well of by

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<sup>6</sup> Glover demonstrates the value of revisiting this particular archive from the perspective of Scottish women's history in *Elite Women and Polite Society* (2011).

the World', and, as highlighted in chapter seven, this was especially true for mature unmarried gentlewomen, whose social position depended to a considerable degree on the consistent acknowledgement of their rank by those with whom they associated.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, it seemed likely that never-married gentlewomen's direct or indirect responses to negative social stereotyping would be found in their correspondence; correspondence was itself a representation of gentility which they made efforts to maintain even in financially pinched circumstances. Gentlewomen were equipped by their education to counter the negative vocabulary of old-maidism with the language of gentility, and to subvert the stereotype by rewriting their lives as narratives of duty, piety, and familial connection. A gentlewoman who received a polite education (even a rudimentary one) understood that her self-representation in society was of value to her family; the lesson was one which was easily transferred to a personal level.<sup>8</sup> The proposition that in their personal writing never-married gentlewomen situated themselves *vis à vis* the negative social stereotype of the old maid has been borne out by this thesis. Self-representations by the gentlewomen studied here offer insights into how unmarried women constructed familial and social personae which upheld their status. The narrative frameworks which enabled them to express their singlehood in terms of gentility have been identified by drawing out reiterated themes and idioms in their writing. Their correspondence, journals, and domestic records elucidate genteel family life beyond the prescriptive primacy of normative family structures and household formation. The letters of Susan Ferrier, Elizabeth Hamilton, Margaret Adam, and Jane Innes show that they wrote themselves fluently into webs of family relationship. As historians pay greater attention to the language and contexts of single women's writing, it becomes more evident that the caricature marginal old maid cannot be read historiographically as a characterisation of the never-married woman in society.

The degree to which never-married gentlewomen's social personae rested on their adoption of key family roles is indicated by the fact that the gentlewomen studied invariably defined themselves against such roles (whether positively or negatively), notwithstanding the widely differing circumstances in which they spent

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<sup>7</sup> Eliza Haywood, in Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> See Glover, *op. cit.*, chp. 2.

their lives. Whether they had limited personal means or were financially independent, whether they had few relatives to rely on, or were fortunate enough to have extensive social connections, the majority situated themselves in terms of the contributions they made to the welfare and advancement of their families, as domestic managers, as patrons, as the props of their elders, and as the educators or sponsors of future generations. Several contributed money as well as skills, through payment of board, investment in family enterprises, or by providing funds to set up junior relatives. Examination of domestic and estate records, as well as 'Letters [...] mainly on personal, family and social matters', has uncovered not just the detail of such activity, but its reach; the potential knock-on benefits to wider kin could be considerable, whether by lifting burdens of care from relatives' shoulders, or by easing the over-stretched resources of a connected family or household.<sup>9</sup> However, as the example of Susannah Clerk demonstrates, recognition of a never-married woman's contribution to the family economy depended not just on her actions, but on her successful representation of her actions to relatives and friends. Crucially, in representation lay the transformation from familial dependency to familial reciprocity. In the case of Clerk's aunt, Margaret Adam, and in other families whose relationship dynamics have been scrutinised, epistolary evidence of respect accorded to spinsters who took up these roles can be read as a measure of their ability to express themselves in terms which supported rather than challenged the familial and social status quo. By doing so they did not necessarily gain personal agency, but greater agency to act within the roles which society deemed appropriate to gentlewomen. Agnes Porter's pseudo-familial status in her employers' households speaks of her determination and application in this respect. Jane Innes won kin support for her decision to break up the household she shared with her brother by the consistency of her positive self-representation in the role of domestic manager: the record of her managerial decade at St Andrew Square is one of duty, responsibility, and probity.

Conclusively, never-married women were not supernumerary figures who took up the domestic slack in normative marital households, but, as the central chapters illustrate, pivotal figures in a broad range of domestic contexts: the parent-

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<sup>9</sup> GD18/4961.

child household (or the home of an ageing male relative run by a younger kinswoman); the 'family of friends'; the female-headed household, and sibling households. The number of variations on the latter found among less than half a dozen Lowland families show them to have been normal if not normative domestic/familial units which prompted passing reference rather than particular notice from contemporaries. The correspondence cited in chapters six and seven suggests that among genteel families (especially those trying to maintain a home which demonstrated lineage), the household headed by an established sister-brother couple is likely to have been more common than is implied by Davidoff's statement that only 'in a minority of cases' did these relationships attain a degree of permanency.<sup>10</sup> The decade which Jane and Gilbert Innes spent in ill-assorted domestic union can be compared with the duration of many contemporary marriages cut short by a wife's death in childbirth. Practical acceptance and ready adoption of the sibling household as a domestic arrangement which supported prevailing familial and social structures emerges strongly from this thesis, as does contemporaries' use of conjugal language in this context, which Davidoff notes in passing.<sup>11</sup> The frequency with which never-married women took up the responsibilities of household management and claimed the status accorded wives is a notable but arguably not anomalous feature of kinship dynamics. Never-married women's assumption of this role can be placed in the context of more generalised role substitution in kin networks, a practice which allowed available relatives to step in where necessary to fill any vacant role which was key to a family's practical wellbeing, social standing, or both.<sup>12</sup>

While never-married gentlewomen's writing shows most were overwhelmingly concerned with situating themselves in a familial framework, it is also clear that this did not necessarily confine their social relationships within the limits of near kin. By focussing on a number of families linked by ties of blood, marriage, or social connection, it has been possible to show that the social networks of several of the Scottish gentlewomen studied here reached beyond their close family circles into the hinterlands of cousinage. The correspondence networks of the

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<sup>10</sup> Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water*, 141.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 138, 141, 328.

<sup>12</sup> See especially chp. 6.

Innes of Stow, Trotter of Mortonhall, and Scott of Mallyen families shed light on kin relationships and interactions among the lowland Scottish landed gentry who lived in and around Edinburgh during this period. Elyza Fraser's choice of a companion with whom to retire to the eastern Highlands demonstrates that unmarried gentlewomen's social connections were potentially wide-ranging. Fraser's journals, and those of Christian Dalrymple, show how friends chosen from extended kinship networks could be drawn into close familial relationship. The prescriptive propriety which equated a gentlewoman's social connections with her family connections might, in practice, offer never-married women opportunities to forge relationships beyond their immediate kin, as they took advantage of their blood relatives' marital ties to extend their domestic and social horizons.

Never-married gentlewomen also extended their networks by judicious exercise of patronage, often under the genteel female guises of benevolence and charity. The meticulous record of patronage activities found in their letters and journals (and the inclusion of such letters in family memoirs and published biographies) is evidence of the value they set on it in terms of positive self-representation. The language of gratitude and obligation in which patronage, benevolence, and charity were historically cast demonstrates close conceptual links, as well as the extension of patronage activities into areas in which single women could act without opening themselves to accusations of vanity or masculinised behaviour. Both manuscript and published sources read for this study make it clear that in most cases unmarried women's patronage was exercised not only through, but on behalf of, kin. Never-married gentlewomen enhanced their personal reputations in semi-public or even public contexts by advancing the interests of their relatives and connections. This was a means by which women at all levels of gentility could publicly signal rank, from those on relatively narrow incomes who kept up small acts of charity, to the independently wealthy who supported the education or advancement of an intended heir. Archival collections relating to Scottish landowning families record not only instances of never-married women's inheritance but details of their management of, and investment in, estates over many years. In the family record, these never-married heiresses were acknowledged links in the chain of inheritance and lineage.

This study spotlights the presence of never-married women in genteel households and kin networks. In doing so it also draws attention to the presence of never-married men, the bachelor brothers who kept up the social positions expected of their gender and rank with the help of spinster sisters. Other never-married men, obliged by the economies of genteel family life or lured by opportunities for advancement to spend decades of their life far from their natal families and homes, have been alluded to in passing. Yet the life-choices of these well travelled single men often had considerable impact on the lives of their nearest relatives, and if they chose to make their way in institutions such as the army, the navy, or the East Indian service, their status and opportunities continued to be defined by familial connection.<sup>13</sup> Never-married gentlemen were familiar figures in the social landscape during this period, as impecunious younger brothers, as heirs who felt unable to maintain both their patrimony and a wife, or as men whose peripatetic lives seemed to preclude social interaction with suitable marriage partners. Works cited in chapter one show that the figure of the old bachelor, like his counterpart the old maid, served as a social scapegoat. This contemporary stereotyping points to the value of extending research into this area. As a historiographically defined social group, never-married men have arguably been ignored to a greater extent than never-married women, perhaps on the assumption that single status imposed few constraints on masculine public life. Yet male non-marriage was publicly caricatured and ridiculed, and failure to address how far this affected genteel men's self-representation leaves a gap in historiographical understanding of their familial and public roles. When advancement depended on the goodwill and interest of connections, only the most powerful could isolate public reputation from private behaviour. Gilbert Innes's reputation as a wealthy connoisseur and artistic patron was apparently untarnished by his prolific sexual activity; whether other doors were discreetly closed against this prominent Scottish banker, or whether his ambitions and influence were unchecked, can only be gauged by further research. The turn of public feeling against the once-successful Adam brothers, fuelled by their financial unreliability and a pinch of anti-Scottish prejudice, was expressed popularly in the image of the rakish old bachelor whose money was squandered on sterile self-

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<sup>13</sup> See Nenadic, 'Impact of the Military Profession'.

indulgence ('Four Scotchmen, by the names of Adams, / Who keep their coaches, and their madams'<sup>14</sup>). In this case at least, the public stereotype informed the public reputation. James Adam's concealment of his second domestic establishment from his sisters shows male public reputation reverberating again into a familial context. The effects of the Adam household's dynamics, successes and failures on kin families in Scotland, including the next, never-married generation of the Clerks, and the relationships and interactions between the Inneses, Trotters, and Scotts which maintained both sibling harmony and an appropriate public face, suggest that consideration of never-married men in their families would expand present knowledge of how genteel families of this period functioned at both individual and collective levels. The study which ends here has uncovered single men in these and other Scottish gentry families in numbers proportionate to never-married women, and it is likely that further exploration in this area would enrich scholarly understanding of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century family from the perspectives of both women's and men's history.

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<sup>14</sup> *New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, IV, 189.





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