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## “Fill up his Blanks”: Making Matthew Montagu

SOPHIE COULOMBEAU

This essay addresses Elizabeth Montagu’s attempt to cultivate her nephew Matthew Robinson (1762-1831), the second son of her brother Morris Robinson, to become the ideal heir to transmit her surname and values to posterity. It argues that Montagu’s cultivation of Matthew inverted conventional eighteenth-century understandings of gender and authority, ultimately with detrimental consequences for both her own reputation and that of her nephew. By offering a close analysis of their relationship, based largely on the 165 letters written between them (Huntington Library, Montagu Collection, MO3816-MO3980) but also on the assessments of contemporaries including Frances Burney and William Wilberforce, the essay aims to enrich scholarly understanding of why her contemporaries often perceived Montagu’s behavior to be formidable or tyrannical. More broadly, it aspires to provide a detailed case study of the ways in which eighteenth-century women could exert a familial, moral, discursive and material authority that had significant repercussions on the formation and construction of masculinity.

In *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth Century British Women* (2008), Betty Rizzo argued that Montagu viewed Matthew as only an “ostensible successor,” while she saw her young companion Dorothea Gregory - whom, unlike Matthew, she never adopted – as her “true” heir, at least until Dorothea’s injudicious marriage in 1783.<sup>1</sup> An important component of Rizzo’s

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The majority of the research for this article was undertaken during my residence at the Huntington Library as a W.M. Keck Research Fellow from June to August 2014. I would like to thank the Huntington for awarding me the fellowship, and the library staff for helping me

argument was the suggestion that Dorothea’s companionship enabled Montagu to conceive and enact a range of agricultural, architectural, commercial and philanthropic schemes; whereas Dorothea assisted Montagu in “buying new land and opening new enterprises,” she argues, Matthew “never inspired such projects.”<sup>2</sup> My essay builds on and extends the founding principle of Rizzo’s study; that interrogating performances of kinship and patronage by elite women over the eighteenth century can offer new perspectives on their processes of identity formation. It offers an account of Montagu’s relationship with Matthew which, in some respects, parallels Rizzo’s study of Montagu’s relationship with Dorothea and reinforces her conclusions. However, this essay seeks to problematize Rizzo’s assertion that Matthew did not act as any kind of muse to his aunt to launch new projects, by suggesting instead that he was her most *important* project. Alongside her writings and literary patronage, her business activity and her social reformism, Montagu’s adoptive and educational cultivation of her “little Man” (as she often called him) can be viewed as a form of creative labour, which she often places in a relationship of rhetorical equivalence with the improvement of her estate and her tenants. Her letters show that she educated him to achieve certain specific objectives, frequently relating to her desire to influence posterity. To enhance our understanding of how she did this, and why, is to gain a new understanding of Elizabeth Montagu herself.

The broader objective of this essay is to consider how the gendered inflection of this particular instance of adoption might contribute towards scholarship addressing models of kinship, education, gender and patronage in eighteenth-century

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make the most of the extraordinary holdings of the Elizabeth Montagu Collection. I am also very grateful to Joanne Bailey and Sarah Goldsmith for reading the article in draft form, and for providing valuable and timely suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth Century British Women* (Athens and London, 2008), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 141.

England. Since the publication of Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1977), numerous historians and literary scholars have problematized Stone's privileging of the 'nuclear family' by exploring how eighteenth-century Britons often formed affective attachments within consanguineal networks wider than the nuclear family, and sometimes formed them based on relationships that were not consanguineal at all. In Nicole Pohl's words, critics have sought to show how "affective relations *beyond* consanguinity and kinship ties formed the basis of many utopian efforts to reform the eighteenth-century family into a household based on a sentimental affective sociability."<sup>3</sup> [My italics.]

Within this movement, however, little attention has been paid to how early mechanisms of adoption, whether exercised within consanguineal networks or not, inflected ideas and performances of kinship.<sup>4</sup> The significant (and early) exception to this statement is *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (1984), in which Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone showed how, during the eighteenth century, the last surviving members of a proud dynasty were often obliged to turn to "a series of pious fictions" to perpetuate the family name, persuading surrogate heirs, both from inside and outside consanguineal networks, to change their surnames to those of their

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<sup>3</sup> Nicole Pohl, "'Relative Values': Utopian Households in Sarah Scott's Work and Correspondence", in *The Emotional Household in Europe*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Palgrave, 2008), 219-233, 219.

<sup>4</sup> For a general overview of the literature on kinship, which highlights the problematic nature of a clear distinction between 'nuclear' and 'extended' family, see Naomi Tadmor, 'Early modern English kinship in the long run: reflections on continuity and change', *Continuity and Change* 25:1 (2010), 15-48. For a useful consideration of 'shared parenting' of children by aunts and other kinds of carer after parents' death or abandonment, or for temporary periods while parents were still alive, see Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), 199-121. For an examination of the role of one aristocratic matriarch in brokering marriages for her nieces in earlier eighteenth-century Britain, see Rosemary O'Day, 'Matchmaking and moneymaking in a patronage society: the first duke and duchess of Chandos, c. 1712-45', *Economic History Review*, 66, 1 (2013), 273-296. For work on adoption in the later nineteenth century in America, see Claudia Nelson, *Little Strangers: Portrayals of Adoption and Foster Care in America, 1850-1929* (Bloomington, 2003).

benefactors.<sup>5</sup> But the Stones’ account, while providing a statistical overview of the phenomenon, did not consider the ways in which the practice of fictive kinship could shape its participants’ subjectivities, and the ways in which others perceived them as a result. A large collection of personal correspondence concerning a particular instance of formalized fictive kinship, such as that contained in the Montagu Collection, can thus enhance critical understanding of the complex variety of identificatory claims that went into its performance. Matthew was Montagu’s relation by blood, but her son by means of a formal process of bureaucracy; blurring the line between son and nephew, his adoption qualifies him in a particularly conflicted way for the title ‘fictive kin’.

As well as aunt and mother, two other roles that Montagu might be said to perform in relation to Matthew are instructor and patron. Examining the letters between them can inspire new questions about eighteenth-century pedagogy, with important implications for critical understanding of kinship and gender. For example: if, in Clare Brant’s words, “parents had pre-eminence”<sup>6</sup> in instructing the young, what tensions arise when an advisee is deemed a parent by the state but not by blood? If politeness, the stated end of much elite male education, was “constantly in danger of collapsing into effeminacy,”<sup>7</sup> with biological mothers’ influence on that education seen as particularly “pernicious,”<sup>8</sup> how does gender calibrate the tensions caused by fictive kinship when a female instructor addresses a young man? How do these roles of instructor and pupil shade, easily or with difficulty, into those of patron and

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1984), 126-127.

<sup>6</sup> Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke and New York, 2006), 63.

<sup>7</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998), 217.

<sup>8</sup> Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National identity and language in the eighteenth century* (London and New York, 1996), 57.

patronized? And what effect might this have had on public perceptions of both Elizabeth and Matthew Montagu?

The essay is divided into four parts. The first provides an account of the circumstances of Matthew’s adoption, laying particular emphasis on recent sexual scandals within the Robinson family, on Elizabeth Montagu’s apparent desire to forge a new identity and line of descent by incorporating Matthew into the Montagu line, and on the relatively unusual steps she took to achieve this aim via the bureaucratic procedure of the Royal Licence. The second provides an overview of Matthew’s formal education, showing that Montagu selected his tutors carefully, exercised substantial influence over them and even used them to restrict the amount of time Matthew could spend with his natural parents. The third part focuses on Matthew’s continued financial dependence upon his aunt as he reached adulthood, showing how certain conceptual templates were used to describe his dependence on his aunt. Most notably, both Montagu herself and her social acquaintance Frances Burney semantically link the ‘improvement’ of Matthew with the ‘improvement’ of Montagu’s estate and tenants at Sandleford. The final section builds on this argument to show that political contemporaries including Sir Nathaniel Wraxall and William Wilberforce perceived Matthew’s masculine independence to be compromised by his financial, emotional and intellectual reliance on his aunt.

### **Becoming Matthew Montagu: Adoption, identity and posterity**

Matthew Robinson was born in 1762, the second son of Elizabeth Montagu’s brother Morris Robinson, a solicitor in chancery, and his wife Jane, née Greenland. As a child, he became a favourite with his aunt and uncle, whose only son John (or ‘Punch’) had died in 1744, aged only sixteen months old. However, it was not until

June 1775, after her husband had died, that Elizabeth Montagu’s letters to Morris show an increasingly energetic engagement in managing the then 13-year-old Matthew’s education, as well as indicating some traces of tension between her and his natural parents. A letter from Montagu to her brother of July 1775, for example, asks why Matthew has left the house of his tutor John Burrows (whom she had personally solicited to take on her nephew as a pupil) to visit his parents, querying whether he is “not quite well, for Mrs Robinson & you seldom interrupt his studies” (MO4801, July 3 1775).<sup>9</sup> This assumption of authority over the frequency of her nephew’s visits home ruffled some feathers, judging by a subsequent letter in which she defends her concern (“He has been but a month at Hadley, if he is to be interrupted every month I fear he will make little progress”) while also protesting “certainly I did not, nor do not mean, to assume any sort of authority, nor in the least to hinder whatever you shall judge proper. I will always provide him with the best means of improvement, & there my power begins & ends” (MO4802, [July 1775]).

This letter indicates that Montagu’s early interference in Matthew’s education was not welcomed with unalloyed gratitude. But beyond a little bridling over educational minutiae, Morris Robinson knew that it would have been unwise to oppose his sister’s interest in his second son; after all, Matthew had few other financial prospects, since the Morris and Robinson estates were expected to be reserved to his elder brother. Consequently, over the next twelve months Montagu assumed greater authority over Matthew’s education, taking him on a trip to France over the summer of 1776 and becoming more intensely preoccupied with determining the principles that she wished to see applied to his education. In the early months of 1776 she decided to adopt Matthew as formally as the law would allow, by petitioning

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<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from letters in this essay are based on my own transcription of materials in the Huntington Library’s Montagu Collection, cited in the text.

for the King’s Royal Licence for him to relinquish the surname of Robinson and take the name and arms of Montagu instead.<sup>10</sup>

Records held by the College of Arms show that Elizabeth Montagu’s petition for a change of surname was relatively unusual in two respects. First, it was uncommon (only the case for 14 of 92 petitions made during the 1770s) for the petition for a Royal Licence to be made by somebody who was not the ‘name recipient’ him or herself. Usually, the petitioner asked for the King’s permission to change their own name, often in order to inherit money, but Montagu petitioned on her nephew’s behalf. Second, it was unusual (only the case in 13 of 92 petitions made over the same period) for the applicant to be a woman.<sup>11</sup> The subset of female ‘name bequeathers’ who petitioned for a Royal Licence on behalf of a male ‘name recipient’ was therefore very small indeed; aside from Montagu’s, there were only two other cases of this sort throughout the entire decade.<sup>12</sup> A far more common scenario would have been that of Montagu’s husband Edward specifying in his will that Matthew had to take the surname of Montagu in order to become his heir, and Matthew obeying his uncle’s injunction by petitioning for a Royal Licence when he came of age. However, although a codicil to Edward Montagu’s will (added in 1774 when he knew that he

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Matthew Robinson, to take the Surname and Arms of Montagu.’ Royal Licence dated 3 June 1776, Earl Marshall’s Warrant dated 8 June 1776. London, College of Arms, Earl Marshall’s Books, Series I, Vol 32, pp.168-169. For more information about the Royal Licence procedure, and other eighteenth-century mechanisms for officializing a change of surname, see Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite*; W.P.W. Phillimore and Edward Alexander Fry, *An Index to changes of name: under authority of act of Parliament or Royal License, and including irregular changes from I George III to 64 Victoria, 1760 to 1901* (Baltimore, 1968); Sophie Coulombeau “*The Knot that ties them fast together*”: *Personal proper name change and identity formation in English literature, 1779-1800*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of York, June 2014).

<sup>11</sup> My research into Royal Licences, which contributed towards my doctoral thesis, was carried out in January 2013 with the assistance of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Travel Grant. I am grateful to the AHRC for this support, and to Clive Cheesman (Richmond Herald) and Lindsey Derby (Archivist at the College of Arms) for their assistance with this project.

<sup>12</sup> Arabella Roper in 1770 (I:32, 87-88, RL 11 May 1770, EMW 28 June 1770) and Mary Marlowe in 1776 (I:32, 167, RL 26 March 1776, EMW 6 April 1776).



and his wife would have no more children) left the teenage Matthew two thousand pounds to be paid to him on his eighteenth birthday, it made no mention of his changing his name or inheriting the Montagu fortune.<sup>13</sup> Along with other evidence, such as the fact that in letters between the Montagus during the 1770s Elizabeth mentions Matthew’s prospects as a potential heir far more frequently than her husband,<sup>14</sup> this appears to indicate that the decision to adopt Matthew into the Montagu family came directly from Elizabeth herself.

In order to comprehend Montagu’s unusual initiative, it is necessary to understand the resonances that the surnames of Robinson and Montagu might have held for her at that time. In 1776, the Robinson family had incurred a series of what Montagu saw as disgraces, many of which concerned a sexual scandal or inappropriate marital union. She had strongly disapproved of Sarah Scott’s short-lived marriage to George Lewis Scott in the late 1740s,<sup>15</sup> and that of her cousin and goddaughter Lydia Sterne to Jean Baptiste Alexandre Anne de Medalle, the Catholic son of a French customs officer, in 1772.<sup>16</sup> Now, in the spring of 1776 – just a month or two before her decision to adopt Matthew – Charles Robinson (the younger brother of Elizabeth Montagu and Morris Robinson) announced that the sister of Morris’s wife, the widow Mary Dawkes, had borne him an illegitimate daughter, Sarah.<sup>17</sup> In a long letter to her sister Sarah Scott dated May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Montagu lamented this “very

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<sup>13</sup> Public Record Office, National Archives, Prob 11/1008, Last Will and Testament of Edward Montagu, Codicil dated 16 March 1774, 13. It is sometimes mistakenly reported that Edward left Matthew or his elder brother Morris *three* thousand pounds.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of heavy-handed hints on Elizabeth’s part that she would like to adopt Matthew in the future, see MO2819, Dec 17 [1773] and MO2823, June 10 [1774].

<sup>15</sup> See Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 128, and Reginald Blunt, *Mrs Montagu: “Queen of the Blues”*: Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800 (London, 1923), 2 vols, 2:66.

<sup>16</sup> See Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 1:211.

<sup>17</sup> *The Peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, John Debrett, (London, 1809), 2 vols, 2:902.

foolish affair” and prophesied that Charles would do “penance all his Life” (MO5986, May 2 1776).

Crucially, Montagu did not object to the personal character of Mary Dawkes, whom Charles intended now to marry (she was “a good sort of Woman” and her conduct in the affair had been “generous & delicate”) but rather was concerned by the blemish that his alliance had placed on the Robinson family’s reputation. “When I think of the vanity & pride with which I once used to to [sic] appear at Canterbury Races where our father & mother were ye envy of every body, & think of ye figure the family makes at present, it strikes me deeply. I thank my stars my property is not in Kent, I never desire to shew myself there to set people to tell ye Roman Comique & all ye uncommon things that have befalle our family.” Moreover, she fretted about the example that Charles had set for her nephews, and in particular for Matthew: “It is impossible to warn my Nephews against such sort of marriages & I dread ye example. They have a very improper way at Lincolns Inn Field of talking of ye beauty of Girls to my little Man, & he always comes home full of ye subject. My dear Papa used to do ye same” (MO5986, May 2 1776).

The scandal of Charles’s marriage seems, therefore, to have been instrumental in Montagu’s decision to adopt Matthew. She saw the sexual transgressions of the Robinsons as a potential danger to the morals and the prospects of the young man whom she had perhaps already marked out as a prospective heir. A few weeks later, she wrote to Scott to inform her of Matthew’s adoption: “He will change a good name for a better, and as there is but one precedent in the Montagu family of such marriages as ours has produced, and my poor Cousin Wortley was only 14 years of age, and press’d by hunger as well as another ignoble passion, I hope my nephew Montagu

will not make such an alliance” (MO5987, [May] 31, 1776).<sup>18</sup> And the earliest extant letter from Montagu to her nephew, written just after she received the Royal Licence, begins with a broad injunction to “Let this Name [Montagu]... raise your mind above vulgar vices.” It quickly becomes far more specific about the kinds of vices she wishes him to eschew:

I will now tell you that I have perfect confidence you will never affront my Name and Memory so far as to give any Woman a title to be called Mrs. Montagu whose birth, education, and moral character will not justify your choice and not dishonor me by the comparison. Of all offences I should most resent it, of all the disgraces you could incur I should most deeply lament it and upon this occasion I do most solemnly adjure you never to lend the name of Montagu wantonly or fraudulently to deceive innocence or cover guilt; nor suffer any Woman to Abuse it on whom you do not confer it at the Altar. (MO3868, June 5 1776)

Having dispensed a warning against extramarital liaisons, Montagu then goes on to claim that an injudicious marital union would in fact be an even greater offence than an extramarital affair, because the reputational ramifications would be felt by all those who share the consanguineal badge of belonging, the family surname: “If a Man makes a mean and base connexion with a girl, he ought rather to Assume her Name, than debase his own; his inclinations shew his mind on a level with her birth, but he is a Traitor to his family who dresses a Tawdry Wanton in the name and style of the Ladies of his family.” Her final remarks to the thirteen-year-old – “I hope in God my

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<sup>18</sup> The reference here is to Edward Wortley Montagu, who, at the age of seventeen, allegedly married a washerwoman. There were in fact other unfortunate marriages within recent Montagu history: the marriage of the adulterous John Montagu (fourth Earl of Sandwich) to the mentally ill Dorothy Fane, for example.

dear Nephew will never get into any base connexion, but if he should, let him remember that debasing his name can neither restore innocence nor quiet the Upbraidings of conscience” – actually seem to advise him not to do as his uncle Charles had done: to attempt to make amends for an unwanted pregnancy by marrying his mistress.

In an essay investigating aristocratic eighteenth-century women’s investment in “patrilineage and male inheritance,” Ingrid Tague points out that it was not unusual for women to “feel a strong investment in the success of their lineages,” adding that “the patriarchal family was always complicated for women ... by the competing demands of their families by birth and by marriage.”<sup>19</sup> But Elizabeth Montagu’s primary interest clearly lay in perpetuating the *Montagu* line rather than that of the Robinsons. Her identification with the name she had acquired upon marriage (rather than her natal surname) provides one example of the wider tendency, as noted by Ruth Perry, to prioritise “loyalty to the new conjugal family” over “the claims of the consanguineal family.”<sup>20</sup> The dominant value that Montagu wished to transmit to Matthew was recognition of the importance of perpetuating her conjugal name, and of preserving – or avoiding - certain associations that might be made with it.

Matthew eventually performed part of this task to his aunt’s satisfaction by marrying Elizabeth Charlton (1770-1817), a young heiress who seemed to perfectly satisfy Montagu as to “birth, education, and moral character,” and by producing a large family.<sup>21</sup> When news of the first pregnancy broke in 1776, Montagu wrote to

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<sup>19</sup> Ingrid Tague, ‘Aristocratic women and ideas of family in the early eighteenth century,’ in *The Family in Early Modern England*, eds. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge, 2007), 192.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The transformation of kinship in English literature and culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge, 2004), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Charlton was the daughter of Francis Charlton Esq., (see ‘Lord Rokeby’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol 101, part 2, 1831, 370). According to Blunt, she was at this time “an orphan and a ward of Chancery of Kentish family who lived

Matthew: “Your happiness has been very long my first object, but you may suppose, that having laid the foundation for a considerable family it wd not be very interesting to me to see it is not likely to last & continue to future generations.” Her concern with posterity is underlined, and her consciousness of her unusual status as a female founder of a line is signaled, when she adds: “It has seldom been the lot of a Woman, to elevate a branch of her family as I have done; & it is a pardonable vanity, to wish to see the work permanent” (MO3873, August 6 1786).

For a woman during this period, Montagu took an unusually active role in utilizing the legal resource of the Royal Licence to perpetuate her conjugal name. It is possible, then, to read her preoccupation with perpetuating this name as evidence of identity formation through the “work,” as she described it, of creative genealogy. Her determination to dissociate herself from the Robinson clan, and to use Matthew as an instrument by which to do so, suggests that she may have valued her conjugal identity above her consanguineal position, and that she felt empowered to take an authoritative role in ensuring its maintenance and attempting to control its reputation. Securing a good alliance for Matthew, and ensuring that he provided heirs to perpetuate her name and values to posterity, were ways of achieving this. But the perpetuation of the Montagu name could not be accomplished solely by providing heirs to bear it. The behaviour of those heirs had to be cultivated in particular ways in order to increase the family’s fame. Very soon after adopting Matthew, Montagu turned to consider how this might be best achieved by means of providing him with an appropriate education.

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with her grandmother... [who] was “though rather little, of a very pleasing countenance, finely made and remarkably genteel” and who added to her other attractions a fortune of nearly £50,000.” (Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:187.) The young couple was married at Marybonne Church on July 9 1785 by Matthew’s old tutor the Rev. John Burrows, and they spent their honeymoon with Montagu herself at Sandleford. (Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:189.)

**Educating Matthew: Cheam, Hadley, Passy and Harrow**

Henry French and Mark Rothery note in their recent overview of eighteenth and nineteenth-century elite male education that "in many cases mothers assumed responsibility [for]... the 'proper' formation of male identities," but they also conclude that "to some degree... schooling remained 'men's business', and women's involvement was circumscribed within the bounds set by their husbands and male relatives."<sup>22</sup> Even during the lifetime of Matthew's father and his mother, Elizabeth Montagu flouted the notion that parents (and especially the father) should have primary authority over their children. She exercised considerable influence over her nephew's tutors, her letters to the teenage Matthew were full of moral and literary instruction, and he dutifully reported back to her about his reading. Perhaps most unusually, she also supervised his trip to France, which appears to be the closest that Matthew ever got to that eighteenth-century rite of masculine passage, the Grand Tour. As Michèle Cohen has pointed out, the Grand Tour was supposed to be expressly about getting the boy away from his female relatives,<sup>23</sup> and as the final section of this essay shows, the constant supervision of his aunt might well have raised those anxieties about effeminacy that Cohen argues were associated with overprotective biological mothers: "As long as he remains under her influence and authority he cannot 'improve' and, above all, achieve manliness."<sup>24</sup>

Montagu wrote numerous letters to her friends and siblings about the principles that she felt should underpin Matthew's schooling, which often demonstrate anxiety about precisely the issues that recent historians of education suggest were staple concerns during this period: for example, the relative benefits of

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<sup>22</sup> Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's estate: Landed gentry masculinities, c.1660-c.1900* (Oxford, 2012), 73.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 58.

public and home schooling and of the classics and the English vernacular, and an anxiety about how unbridled exposure to the “World” might stunt or pervert the young man’s moral development.<sup>25</sup> The most striking aspect of these letters is that Montagu understands the cultivation of Matthew’s polite accomplishments to be a way to facilitate the transmission of the surname they shared to posterity. In a letter to Morris, she writes: “for his own sake I wish him a distinguished character, as Eloquence in our Country gives a Man reputation, power, & every thing.” To achieve this distinguished character requires “that he shd be a good Classical scholar if possible... I wd have him of such acknowledged learning & taste that all who do write books shd desire his approbation. The distinguished sort of Men either with pencil sword or pen shd in life’s visit leave their name, [so] says Mr Prior, however if he will make others write his name & leave it to Posterity that will do” (MO4808, August 11, 1776). In this passage, Montagu envisages the fame that she desires for her nephew as depending not upon his ability to write his own name “with pencil sword or pen,” but instead to “make others write his name & leave it to Posterity.” The trope of the name is significant, given the fact that she had just engineered Matthew’s transition from Robinson to Montagu via the Royal Licence procedure; the name that Montagu wishes to see “written” is not only Matthew’s, but her husband’s and her own. Matthew himself is positioned as a passive object to be observed and recorded; his classical learning is to be worn like an accessory to garner admiration and enable display.

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<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Bygrave, *Uses of Education: Readings of Enlightenment in England* (Lewisburg, 2009), 94-122; French and Rothery, *Man’s Estate*, 87; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 57. For further examples of letters in which Montagu reflects on educational theory, see MO6438 July 18 [1774], MO4801 July 3 1775, MO4804 August 22 [1775], MO3406 25 [October] 1776, and MO6579 September 27 [1783].

It would have been a step too far, however, for Montagu to have directly supervised Matthew’s schooling herself. His formal education was conducted – as was conventional - in several different institutions and by several different male instructors.<sup>26</sup> From at least 1772 until 1775 he was educated at Cheam School for Boys in Surrey, under the care of the artist and aesthetic theorist the Rev. William Gilpin (1724-1804).<sup>27</sup> In 1775, Montagu arranged for him to move from Gilpin’s care into the private household of her closer acquaintance the Rev. John Burrows (1733-1786) at Hadley, Essex.<sup>28</sup> Matthew remained in Burrows’s household until the trip to France in June 1776 (apparently to the great satisfaction of all concerned), but for the French expedition he required a tutor who could travel with Montagu’s party, and Burrows was not sufficiently at leisure from other duties to do so. For the duration of the French expedition, therefore, Montagu arranged for Matthew to receive lessons from a Mr. Blondel, whom Montagu told Morris “speaks French well” and was “strongly recommended to me, by Persons whose judgment & integrity I can depend upon” (MO4804, August 22 [1775]).<sup>29</sup>

Although Montagu initially “approve[d] all Mr. Blondel’s ideas of education” (MO5008, August 29 1775), she was ultimately disappointed in her choice, remarking

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<sup>26</sup> For overviews of elite male education in the eighteenth century, including the implications of classical, French and vernacular curricula and the role of tutors, parents and schoolmasters, see Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*; Bygrave, *Uses of Education*; French and Rothery, *Man’s Estate*.

<sup>27</sup> For information about Gilpin’s years as a schoolmaster, see C. P. Barbier, *William Gilpin: his drawings, teachings, and theory of the picturesque* (London, 1963), 27.

<sup>28</sup> The reason for her decision is unknown; it may be that in an establishment of at least 66 boys Montagu felt that Matthew was not getting enough attention, or that Gilpin’s frequent absences to make tours of rural landscapes made for a lack of discipline (see Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 27 and 52-53.) Perhaps it is most likely that she simply wished to bring him under the influence of a tutor who was better known to her, and more amenable to receiving and implementing her instructions.

<sup>29</sup> Blondel has proved something of a mystery. Aside from the brief references to him in Montagu’s correspondence, reported even more briefly in Blunt’s *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues* (1:305), I have not been able to locate him in any newspapers, periodicals, letters and journals, or in *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, ed. John Ingamells (New Haven and London, 1997).



acidly in a letter to Burrows as the French trip progressed, “You know the only thing ever said of Shakespear which can be applied to Mr. Blondel, is, that he had small latin, and no Greek.” As she “could not find anyone to put life into the dead languages,” she determined to “make the best of the most lively of living languages” by sending Matthew to a French school in Passy. She was equally as frustrated, though, with the “ignorance, and the idleness, and the stupidity of French school masters.” Exasperated with “the extream insufficiency of these Teachers,” Montagu appealed to Burrows to find her a “Person in holy Orders” to attend Matthew at Harrow upon his return to England, where she had decided to send him because he appeared to possess “so little disposition to apply, that a private education will not do for him” (MO671 September 8 1776, MO3406 25 [October] 1776).

Burrows recommended the Rev. William Gilbank, who had previously educated Sir Edward Deering’s family, for the post (MO666 September 25 1776). Previously A.M. to the Rectory of St. Ethelburga in Bishopsgate Street and the future author of several sermons and religious poems,<sup>30</sup> Gilbank had one condition: “that I accept [the post] in the hope of accompanying the young Gentleman to the University; For it would not be eligible to enter into an engagement, which is to close on my Pupil’s quitting school; as it would prevent me from forming any other connexion of the same kind, which might prove of longer duration” (MO1056, October 28 1776). Montagu agreed to his terms; Gilbank joined Matthew at Harrow in 1777 and also accompanied him Trinity College, Cambridge in 1780.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For notice of Gilbank’s preferment, see *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), January 11, 1776 - January 13, 1776; issue 2327. Gilbank’s theological publications include *The day of Pentecost, or man restored. A poem, in twelve books* (London, 1789) and *The duties of man: A Sermon, preached on occasion of the public fast, April 19, 1793* (London, 1793).

<sup>31</sup> John Venn, *Alumni cantabrigienses; a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900*. (Cambridge, 1951), vol 4, part 2, 444. Matthew won a University prize for an English

Despite the presence of so many tutors, it is striking that during this entire period – even before his father’s death in 1777 and throughout the long life of his mother, who did not die until 1810 – Matthew’s aunt was the sole *constant* director of his education.<sup>32</sup> Although she did not personally teach Matthew, she appears to have devised his curriculum and exerted significant control over his carefully selected tutors. Montagu’s correspondence with Gilpin and Blondel does not survive, and her correspondence with Gilbank is limited. A rich body of correspondence exists, however, between Montagu and Burrows, which can shed further light on the dynamics of their relationship and thus on Montagu’s indirect influence over Matthew.

Burrows had been introduced to Montagu by Elizabeth Carter around 1773, and was a friend of many other women in her circle of acquaintance including Hester Chapone – William McCarthy has described him as “a social lynchpin among the Bluestockings.”<sup>33</sup> In a forthcoming article ‘John Burrows: A Bluestocking Boswell?’ McCarthy reproduces the only surviving excerpt of a series of ‘Bluestocking

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declamation in the autumn of 1780, much to Montagu’s satisfaction. (Blunt, *Mrs Montagu: Queen of the Blues*, 2:103, 104). Gilbank appears to have left Matthew by July 1781, when he was appointed as domestic chaplain to the Duke of Gloucester. See *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England), Monday, July 16, 1781; issue 3795.

<sup>32</sup> Morris Robinson died in the autumn of 1777 (see Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:37). Despite Blunt’s suggestion that Montagu “frankly detested” Morris’s wife Jane, Matthew’s mother (see Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:198), the correspondence suggests a distant but reasonably cordial relationship in subsequent years. Perhaps the most interesting reference in the Huntington correspondence exists in a letter from Montagu to Matthew soon after the birth of his (apparently rather sturdy) son Edward in 1787, when she informs him, “Mrs Robinson was so kind as to call on me yesterday morning, you may believe our conversation was not the less agreeable and interesting for our having a Grandson to talk of. She feels, as I do, great pleasure & pride in being Grandmother to a Giant.” Montagu never refers to Matthew as her son, but she frequently calls Edward her grandson, even signing some letters ‘Grandam Montagu’ (MO3877, July 8 [1787]). MO3877 appears to imply that she sees no incongruity in herself and Jane Robinson both being “Grandmother” to Edward, and therefore assumedly occupying similar roles in relation to Matthew.

<sup>33</sup> For information about Burrows, see William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008), 225, and ‘John Burrows, Bluestocking Boswell’, in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, ed. Deborah Heller (Farnham, 2015). I am very grateful to Bill McCarthy for sharing a pre-publication copy of the latter essay with me.

dialogues’ written by Burrows from the 1770s onward. The alleged transcript of a conversation that took place between Burrows, Montagu and the headmaster and literary critic Joseph Warton (1722-1800) in 1777, the dialogue opens with Burrows advising Montagu to encourage Matthew (now at Harrow, of course, with Gilbank), to send her some proof of his progress in his studies, potentially a *theme* (a set essay upon a given subject). The remainder of the dialogue involves a debate about whether *themes* benefit the pupil most when written in English or Latin. Throughout the exchange, Montagu argues forcefully in favour of Latin, drawing upon her personal experience to challenge the opinions of Warton – who, as headmaster of Winchester, was an acknowledged expert on elite male education.<sup>34</sup> The character of ‘Anon’, however, (presumably supposed to be Burrows himself) describes himself as a mere “dabbler in education,” and appeals equally to both Warton and Montagu for their presumably more authoritative opinions. Though the circulation and audience intended for this Dialogue and its lost fellows is uncertain, these portraits indicate a marked deference on Burrows’s part, thus signaling Montagu’s established authority in discussion between them about educational matters.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Blunt records that in 1777 Warton gave Montagu a tour of Winchester School, with which she reported herself “much pleased”. (See Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:32.) It is also worth noting that Montagu’s strong views on education may well have derived from her own unusual education, described by Matthew in his introduction to the first edition of Montagu’s *Letters*: “During her residence in Cambridgeshire she derived great assistance in her education from Dr. Middleton, the author of the life of Cicero, whom her grandmother had taken as a second husband. Her uncommon sensibility and acuteness of understanding, as well as her extraordinary beauty as a child, rendered her an object of great notice and admiration in the University, and Dr. Middleton was in the habit of requiring from her an account of the learned conversations at which, in his society, she was frequently present; not admitting of the excuse of her tender age as a disqualification, but insisting that although at the present time she could but imperfectly understand their meaning, she would in future derive great benefit from the habit of attention inculcated by this practice.” Matthew Montagu (ed.), *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with some of the letters of her correspondents. Part the First, containing her Letters from an early age to the age of twenty-three. Published by Matthew Montagu, Esq. MP, Her Nephew and Executor* (London, 1810).

<sup>35</sup> See McCarthy, ‘John Burrows, Bluestocking Boswell’, forthcoming.

A similar deference is observable in the correspondence between them. When Matthew joined him in 1775, for example, Burrows sent Montagu a letter suggesting that she purchase certain copies of Greek and Latin Testaments, grammars and literature, but also requested that Montagu specify “the English books you think proper for him to read, together with the Course in which you would have them read,” and asks, “Would you have him learn to write, dance &c” (MO663, May 25 1775). Several letters survive that reveal the detailed reports Burrows sent to Montagu of Matthew’s educational progress, in which he praises Matthew in terms likely to please her. In a letter of November 1776, for example, just as Burrows was about to part with Matthew to Gilbank, he sent Montagu “an ample and honourable Testimony to his domestic Character”: “...for attention Observation, for affectionate Civility, that for all, in the most extensive use of the word, is meant by, or comprehended in Good Manners, in such good Manners as make a Man, tis impossible for any to exceed him.... and then for application to his studies, you have in him at present, all the Industry... the most anxious Tutor or the fondest Parent could wish” (MO667, November 12 1776). Montagu proudly passed on this report to Elizabeth Carter: “I have been made very happy by ye accounts Mr Burrows has given of Montagu’s application & industry” (MO3408, November 18 [& 20] 1776).<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, it appears that in the above-mentioned struggle of wills between Morris Robinson and Montagu over Matthew’s holidays in 1775, Burrows actually acted as Montagu’s agent in repeating her preferences to Matthew’s biological parents, but framing them as his own. A letter from Burrows to Montagu of June 30

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<sup>36</sup> Montagu appears to have sought a similar relationship with the Scottish minister and rhetorician Hugh Blair, who educated her elder nephew Morris in Edinburgh from 1774 to 1775. Two letters from Blair to Montagu (MO487 November 8 1774, and MO488 April 1 1775) discuss Morris’s academic performance in some detail. They are not so complimentary as those of Burrows concerning Matthew.

1775 reveals a surprise twist to the saga. “Inclosed I send a note this day received from the father of my pupil; I took the liberty to refuse the request contained in it, as you, Madam, must remember the strong dislike you express’d to the young mans holiday making from Hadley – I likewise send my answer, in which you will see I take all the Odium of the refusal on myself – I beg to receive your explicit commands for my conduct on any future request of the same kind” (MO664, June 30 1775). Montagu had painted herself to Morris as a disinterested patron who, in interfering, only wished to accommodate Burrows’ stern disciplinarian regime. But it was in fact he who was acting upon *her* precise instructions to forbid Matthew’s holidays, thus restricting the amount of time he was able to spend with his parents. Burrows was clearly quite used and amenable to acting on Montagu’s “explicit commands”, and we might extrapolate from his correspondence with his employer that she expected to wield considerable influence over those tutors who were allegedly acting as Matthew’s masculine role models.

### **Matthew at Sandleford: Improvement and dependence**

Matthew relinquished his tutors as he approached adulthood, but his aunt’s influence only strengthened. The Huntington correspondence shows that as he achieved his majority he was trained by his aunt to act as her agent and successor in numerous ways, and that he embraced these roles with apparent enthusiasm. He writes to her, for example, from the Denton collieries where he is making decisions about drilling new seams on her behalf (MO3841, October 17 1789 and MO3845, September 1790), and from London, where he oversees improvements to her house at Portman Square (MO3842, August 15 1790) and inspects new machinery that might be of use in the colliery (MO 3828, June 22, [1786]).

Crucially, these later letters indicate that Matthew was financially dependent on his aunt, to some extent, until her death in 1800.<sup>37</sup> When he incurred debts he submitted receipts to her for reimbursement, as in 1785 when he bought a post-chaise: “I am afraid I must trouble you to lend me £100, which I will repay you on the marriage [to Elizabeth Charlton], as this payment has drain’d me of the money you were so kind as to give me” (MO3825, [June 1785]). Even by the time he was in his thirties (when he had received Elizabeth Charlton’s marriage portion, as well as the aforementioned inheritance of two thousand pounds from his uncle), his aunt still held the purse strings in the matter of large financial favours, such as the thousand pounds that he persuaded her to advance his debt-ridden brother Morris in 1794 (MO3853, [June 17 1794]).<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, from the earliest in 1777 to the last in 1799 Matthew’s letters to his aunt are overwhelmingly dominated by expressions of

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<sup>37</sup> See also Blunt, *Mrs Montagu: Queen of the Blues*, 2:344.

<sup>38</sup> Morris had apparently got himself in debt, and appealed to Matthew to help him. Matthew in turn appealed to Montagu, writing to her on June 17 1794 “I cannot return you sufficient thanks for your kindness in advancing the thousand pound on my Brother’s bond; I consider the obligation as entirely my own: and the less convenient or agreeable it may be to afford it, so much the more sensibly do I feel the generosity and goodness which induce you to supply it.” (MO3853). I have not been able to establish the nature of the debt, or the creditor.

Morris Robinson the younger, Matthew’s elder brother and later the third Lord Rokeby, appears to have been a singularly unfortunate young man with possible mental health problems. He was wild and uncontrolled as a boy; after the teenage Morris threw himself down a flight of stairs in 1775, Montagu wrote to Sarah Scott, “he has good dispositions but poor little fellow he has an unhappy temper & an unsettled mind” (MO5981 [August] 27 [1775]). Morris’s adult life, after his father’s death, was governed by the expectation that he would receive a substantial inheritance upon the death of his second cousin Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh, the first Baron Rokeby. Unfortunately, Richard Robinson (commonly called “the Primate” in the correspondence) loathed Morris according to Matthew, who refers to his “disgust” and “anger” with his brother. (MO3860, [October] 1794). Morris was elected to Parliament for Boroughbridge from 1790 to 1796, but the campaign increased his debts further. After the shock of the Primate leaving him barely enough money to satisfy his creditors when he died in 1794, Matthew remarks cryptically to Montagu, “He is an unfortunate & unhappy young Man and I dread the effect of this shock upon his mind.” (MO3860, [October] 1794. Montagu herself suspected that the source of the Primate’s displeasure was a “disagreement of opinion in regard to Morris voting in Parliament.” (Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:312). Morris succeeded his uncle Matthew Robinson to the Barony in 1800, and died, unmarried, in 1829.

gratitude. Clare Brant has, of course, reminded us that children writing to parents in the eighteenth century were expected to shroud their communications in “a rhetoric of obligation,”<sup>39</sup> but Matthew’s gratitude persists beyond the refrain of signing himself ‘Your most obliged’ or ‘your most truly grateful.’ He appeared to realize this himself. “There is one subject,” he wrote in 1795, “which naturally takes the lead in all my letters to you; It is that of gratitude. A repetition of thanks for new benefits, and an acknowledgment of long experienced kindness is the tenor of what they contain. I am sorry if they appear to want variety” (MO3861, July 20 1795).

Matthew McCormack and others have shown that the idea of ‘independence’ was crucial to the construction of masculinity in late eighteenth-century Britain: “Anyone who was subject to an influence or obligation that compromised their individual autonomy... was accused of being ‘dependent’ – a term with considerable force, connoting a degrading lack of manliness, virtue and free will.”<sup>40</sup> Financial obligation - especially to a female relative - might complicate this construction, since “freedoms of movement, consumption, and presentation” were “central tenets of elite male adulthood.”<sup>41</sup> It was not unheard of for women to control the finances of their biological sons - Tague has shown, for example, that some aristocratic women exercised stringent controls over the distribution of money to children of both sexes.<sup>42</sup> But the fact that the relationship between Elizabeth and Matthew had its genesis in the performance of fictive kinship may have meant that it was overwhelmingly interpreted by outsiders as defined by the interplay of authoritarian patronage and servile dependence, rather than by mutual affection.

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<sup>39</sup> Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester and New York, 2005), 13.

<sup>41</sup> French and Rothery, *Man’s Estate*, 115.

<sup>42</sup> Tague, ‘Aristocratic women and ideas of family’, 203.

In *Companions Without Vows*, Rizzo draws attention to negative perceptions of Montagu’s benevolence, such as Charles Pigott’s critique of her famous May Day fêtes for chimney sweeps, and James Woodhouse’s bitter and biting exposé of her literary patronage.<sup>43</sup> She also hints – but does no more than hint - that criticism of Montagu’s largesse was fed partly by a public perception that she “tyranniz[ed]” over the young Matthew Montagu. An anecdote from 1779, preserved in Hester Thrale’s *Thraliana*, recounts the disapproval of William Seward and Frances Burney upon hearing that “when Matthew knocked too hard at a door, Montagu sent him a reproving message by a servant bidding him stay till he had a door of his own to knock at so.”<sup>44</sup> The remainder of this essay considers more fully the ways in which Elizabeth’s patronage of Matthew could be rhetorically equated, by themselves and by other people, with the forms of patronage she exercised over other different dependents. I start by examining how Sandleford Priory is used as a spatial site upon which certain projects – emparkment, social reformism, and the cultivation of Matthew himself - are performed and brought to fruition.

In a recent article examining Montagu’s remodeling of the Sandleford estate, Steve Hindle suggests that her “attitudes to rural labor could only find genuine expression in the independent state of mind that came with widowhood.”<sup>45</sup> Edward Montagu had been dead only two weeks when his wife decided to improve Sandleford (MO 3361, 5 June 1775), commissioning improvements from Capability Brown that included the removal of outbuildings, the demolition of walls and hedges, and the

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<sup>43</sup> Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 117, 128.

<sup>44</sup> Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows*, 129. See Hester Thrale’s report of Burney’s disapproval of Montagu’s authoritarian attitude towards Matthew, in *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*, ed. Katharine C. Balderston, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1951), 1:381.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Hindle, ‘Representing Rural Society: Labor, Leisure and the Landscape in an Eighteenth-Century Conversation Piece,’ *Critical Enquiry*, forthcoming Spring 2015. I am grateful to Steve Hindle for sharing a draft of this essay with me pre-publication.



construction of “vast, informal lawns” and “artificial lakes.”<sup>46</sup> Around the same time, she began a “program of subsidized potato sales and livestock purchases... almost as if she sensed that the laboring poor would suffer collateral damage as a consequence of emparkment.” Improvement of the landscape and of the tenants apparently went hand in hand. And it was at about this time, too, that Montagu’s determination to adopt Matthew appears to have intensified.

The simultaneity of Montagu’s projects appears more significant in light of rhetorical parallels between her treatments of Matthew and of the prospect and tenants at Sandford, and of the affective pleasures that she derives from all three. In August 1777, for example, Montagu writes to Elizabeth Carter that she wishes Matthew “to look upon ye verdure of the meadow, & ye waving of a field of Corn, the Haymakers & reapers... with sympathy & tenderness, & always with a reference to his fellow Creatures.” She expresses the hope that “I have effected something of this by having made him partake of ye business of the field in his infancy, when a rake & a fork were playthings, & ye labourers were a sort of playfellows, & then indulging him in being Master of ye harvest home feast & doing ye honours to the Rural guests” (MO3424, 15 August 1777). This representation of the infantile Matthew might be seen as an instance of the fashion for sensibility in the 1770s, in which the man of feeling’s sympathies with the rural poor act as an indicator of gentleness and gentility. But this demand can also be seen to complicate Matthew’s training in estate paternalism. As the “Master of ye harvest home feast,” he is presented as the heir to Montagu herself, who would preside over the feasts for her workers for which she was renowned. But perhaps more surprisingly, in “having [been] made [to] partake of ye business of the field,” he performs an analogous role to the labourers, to whom he is “a sort of

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<sup>46</sup> Hindle, ‘Representing Rural Society’.

playfellow.” John Barrell and others have noted the relegation of labourers to the ‘dark side of the landscape’ in paintings of the eighteenth century, showing how distance and shade are used to mark out “the differences in status and fortune between rich and poor” and thus excusing “social and economic distinctions” as natural.<sup>47</sup> But the positioning of Matthew working alongside the labourers in Montagu’s imagined landscape, and the “sympathy” he is expected to bear towards them (his “fellow Creatures”) seem to rhetorically posit him as equivalent to them – which in one respect, as a recipient of her patronage, he was.<sup>48</sup>

The conceptually loaded term “improvement” can be seen as one more way in which Montagu insistently links her estate, her tenants and her heir within her correspondence.<sup>49</sup> The recurrence of this word, and the apparent interchangeability of its referents, suggests that there were marked similarities between the ways in which Montagu viewed Matthew and her other projects. When applied to Matthew, it also raises questions about how his cultivation fulfilled – or alternatively subverted – late eighteenth-century masculine ideals. The term “improvement,” as Bailey points out, had strikingly gendered implications during this period when applied to parenting and education. “The goal for genteel boys was ‘independence’; for their female counterparts it was ‘improvement.’”<sup>50</sup> Montagu’s insistence upon seeing Matthew as a project that required improvement was, in fact, perceived by many of her contemporaries to prove counteractive to his independence, with significant implications for his masculinity.

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<sup>47</sup> John Barrell, *The dark side of the landscape: The rural poor in English painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1980), 22.

<sup>48</sup> For other letters in which Montagu ‘places’ Matthew in the Sandleford landscape and raises the possibility of parallels between her projects of emparkment and social reformism, see for example MO4799 Oct. 23 1774 and MO3877, July 8 [1787].

<sup>49</sup> For Montagu’s references to “improving” her estates and properties, see MO3361, June 5 1775; MO3879, Oct 1 [1787]; MO4076, July 28 1782. For references to “improving” Matthew, see MO4802 [July] 5 [1775], MO4808 Aug 11 1776 and MO4809 Aug 23 1776.

<sup>50</sup> Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830*, 75.

Frances Burney, always one of Montagu’s most perceptive critics, was certainly attuned to the fact that Matthew’s “improvement” could be framed as analogous to that of the tenants at Sandleford. Burney’s comedy *The Witlings* was suppressed by her father in 1779, partly because it was feared the fictional relationship between Lady Smatter and her adopted nephew Beaufort bore an “unlucky resemblance” to that of “our Female Pride of Literature”<sup>51</sup> with Matthew. The play can be read as a moral parable against exactly the kind of financial dependence that Montagu’s patronage impressed upon Matthew, with Beaufort lamenting “the corroding servility of discontented Dependance”<sup>52</sup> and contrasting his situation unfavourably to that of a “toiling Husbandman... [one of those] who to their own industry owe their subsistence, and to their own fatigue and hardships their succeeding rest, and rewarding affluence!”<sup>53</sup> Beaufort’s friend Censor, however, in reminding him that he has “served a ten years’ Apprenticeship to her caprices” and that it would be a shame not to reap the financial rewards by incurring her wrath, metaphorically links him to a “Farmer” who after “sowing a Field,” will not “wait to reap the Harvest,”<sup>54</sup> puncturing Beaufort’s idealization of pastoral labour by showing that his relationship with his aunt is broadly equivalent to that between tenant and landowner. Smatter exploits Beaufort’s courtly labour, but Beaufort, as the recipient of her patronage, will ultimately “reap the Harvest” from the ground she leases him.

Burney had not met Matthew at this point, but *The Witlings* seems to attest that the “servility” of his “Dependance” was a subject that struck her as

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<sup>51</sup> Burney to Samuel Crisp, August 1779. See, among others, Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill, ‘Introduction’, in *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*, eds. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill (Peterborough, Ormskirk and Sydney, 2002), 12-15 and Margaret Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life In The Works* (New Brunswick, 1988), 91-98.

<sup>52</sup> Frances Burney, *The Witlings* 3:236-245 and 262-264, in *The Witlings and The Woman Hater*, ed. Sabor and Sill, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Burney, *The Witlings* 3:294-300, 95-6.

<sup>54</sup> Burney, *The Witlings*, 3:236-245 and 262-264, 94.

metaphorically forceful.<sup>55</sup> When she finally encountered Matthew in early 1783, her verdict was that although he “seems extremely well formed in his mind, both with respect to literature & to principle,” he “affects, however, talking French rather too much, & has a something finical in his manners that, with me, much lessens their power of pleasing.”<sup>56</sup> The word “finical” could be used to describe persons as “over-nice or particular, affectedly fastidious, excessively punctilious or precise,” or else to describe objects as “overscrupulously finished, excessively or affectedly fine or delicate in workmanship.”<sup>57</sup> By using this term to describe his manners, Burney hints that Matthew has been “overscrupulously finished” by a feminine excess of attention and delicacy, which ultimately compromises his masculinity and his “power of pleasing.” Her emphasis on his “affect[ation]” of French suggests that she sees him as an example of the “fop,” whose “voluble tongue” reflected both a Frenchified education and an excessive association with women, whose conversation had rendered him effeminate.<sup>58</sup>

Burney’s criticisms of Matthew, then, while replicating the terminology that Montagu uses in her own correspondence when describing her hopes and ambitions for him, suggest that Montagu’s influence over his education and his expenditure meant that he was perceived as effeminate or even, in the language used to describe his fictional counterpart Beaufort, “servile”. But the drawing-rooms of polite London,

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<sup>55</sup> This subject recurs in Burney’s conversation as well as her drama, as evidenced by the aforementioned ‘knocking at the door’ anecdote in *Thraliana*.

<sup>56</sup> Frances Burney, ‘Journal for 6 January, 1783’, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, eds. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke (Montreal, Kingston, Ithaca and London, 2012), Vol 5, 1782-1783, 266. For Burney’s other verdict on Matthew’s conversation as “tiresome” and “prosing,” see the Journal for late December 1783, *Early Journals and Letters* 5:455-6. However, later in life Burney became rather friendly with both Matthew and his wife Elizabeth (see Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:297).

<sup>57</sup> “finical, adj.”. OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.york.ac.uk/view/Entry/70431?rskey=6H2yLq&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 18, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 9, 104.

in which feminine influence could be applauded rather than critiqued, were not the fora in which these anxieties would take their most marked form. Matthew’s perceived dependence upon his aunt would prove even more problematic for him within the masculine sphere *par excellence* of elite eighteenth-century society: the House of Commons.

### **Matthew in Parliament: Oratory, supplication, and masculinity**

Of Matthew’s many activities during adulthood, the one arena in which he was emphatically *not* supposed to be acting as his aunt’s agent was the House of Commons, to which he was returned in 1786 for the Cornish constituency of Bossiney. Building on work addressing eighteenth-century masculinities that has seen language as a key component of masculine self-fashioning,<sup>59</sup> Christopher Reid has recently shown how in the period “the business of Parliament is inseparable from the business of speaking,”<sup>60</sup> laying particular weight upon the contemporary perception of the importance of “elegant and effective speech” as the “single key to success” in a political career.<sup>61</sup> Reid hints that these instructions were not only valuable in themselves, but also that “in the intimate space of the Chamber...the influence of ‘family connexions’ was pervasive”; in other words, that who had instructed you in oratorical skill was almost as important as how they had done so.<sup>62</sup>

The almost universal contemporary verdict on Matthew Montagu as a political speaker was that his speech was not statesmanlike; it was too obsequious, too inept,

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<sup>59</sup> Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 1-3; McCormack, *The Independent Man*, 40-44.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Reid, *Imprison’d Wranglers: The rhetorical culture of the House of Commons, 1760-1800* (Oxford, 2012), 18.

<sup>61</sup> Reid, *Imprison’d Wranglers*, 113 – 115.

<sup>62</sup> Reid, *Imprison’d Wranglers*, 160.

too hesitant or too indirect.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, surviving accounts often locate the source of his inefficacy in the fact that he was adopted and educated by his aunt. The most famous eulogy on poor Matthew probably remains either the throwaway remark in the memoirs of Sir Egerton Brydges - “Some one asking about her nephew, a noble lord of some wit answered: “He! – why, he is only fit to darn his aunt’s blue stockings!”<sup>64</sup> – or that contained within the letters of William Beckford: “[Montagu] represents in Parliament the interest of the Blue Stocking Society.”<sup>65</sup>

In her work on elite women in politics, which stresses the roles of patron, adviser and political mother among others, Elaine Chalus has argued that “even extensive female political participation could be rationalized as non-threatening to the polity and conveniently subsumed into male politics if it could be interpreted in the light of women’s traditional roles and placed in a familial paradigm.”<sup>66</sup> My concern here is to suggest, in light of the pithy judgments of Brydges and Beckford and two more substantial critiques by Nathaniel Wraxall and William Wilberforce, that Matthew was seen as feminized, and therefore rendered politically inefficacious, by his well-known association with his aunt. The specific aspect of their relationship that prevented it from fitting into Chalus’s model of “traditional roles” and “familial paradigms” was Matthew’s dependence on Montagu, which was variously construed as intellectual, financial and emotional.

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<sup>63</sup> For other contemporary accounts of Matthew’s parliamentary gaffes than those discussed in this essay, see R.G.Thorne, ‘Montagu, Matthew [1762-1831], of Sandleford Priory, nr. Newbury, Berks. and Montagu House, Portman Square, Mdx,’ in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1790-1820* (Boydell and Brewer, 1986). Accessed online at [http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/montagu-matthew-1762-1831#footnote7\\_iqir0h2](http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/montagu-matthew-1762-1831#footnote7_iqir0h2), July 23 2014.

<sup>64</sup> *The Autobiography, Times, Opinions and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges* (London, 1834), 4 vols, 2:8. See also Blunt, *Mrs. Montagu: Queen of the Blues*, 2:10.

<sup>65</sup> R.G.Thorne, ‘Montagu, Matthew [1762-1831]’.

<sup>66</sup> Elaine Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005), 26.

In his *Memoirs*, Sir Nathaniel Wraxall gives a detailed account of a speech that Matthew made in the House of Commons on 23 January 1787, on “the treaty of commerce recently concluded by Eden.” According to Wraxall, Matthew “eulogiz[ed]” the Treaty “in animated language” before praising William Pitt, “the Minister whose genius had effected so beneficial a work.” Wraxall digresses from his account to inform the reader of Matthew’s personal circumstances: “Mr. Montagu’s paternal name was Robinson, but the celebrated Mrs. Montagu, his aunt, who so long occupied the first place among the *gens de lettres* in London, having adopted him as her heir, he received her husband’s name. At her feet he was brought up, a school more adapted to form a man of taste and improvement than a statesman or a man of the world.”<sup>67</sup> Having drawn attention to Matthew’s indebtedness to his aunt for his “name” – stressing the fictive aspect of their kinship – and speculated that his “school,” subserviently positioned at “her feet,” disqualifies him for public office, Wraxall then turns back to the speech: “Regardless of the embarrassment which his own praises, however merited they might be, must excite in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who sat just below him, Montagu dilated on his resplendent public services.” Wraxall sees Matthew’s obsequiousness as a failure in polite decorum, and attributes the “panegyric” that he delivers to Pitt as a ham-fisted application for a peerage. Yet he notes that “his efforts have hitherto failed of success... the doors of the British House of Peers seem to be closed against him.” As a final epitaph on Matthew’s personal and political supplications, Wraxall compares him to Pope’s Curio in the satire ‘Verses Occasion’d by Mr. Addison’s Treatise of Medals’ (1722), an antiquarian who neglects his sexual duties in order to hanker after rare coins: “Curio, restless by the fair one’s side, / Sighs for an Otho, and neglects his bride.” In

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<sup>67</sup> Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, *The historical and the posthumous memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall 1772-1784*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 5 vols. (New York, 1884), 4: 377-379.

Wraxall’s analogy, Matthew/Curio’s lust for honours and wealth compromises his ability to perform the masculine functions of husbandly affection and procreation. He is emasculated, almost metaphorically castrated, by his desire for patronage.

Reid’s study, however, shows that extensive compliments to Members of Parliament who were present in the Chamber were not unusual, and could – as in an example of Pitt praising Charles Pratt, Lord Camden in a debate of 1784 – be effective rather than embarrassing.<sup>68</sup> Wraxall seems to apply a different standard to Matthew than to other speakers, and I think its source can be located in the biographical musings that punctuate his account of Matthew’s speech. The parallel positioning of Matthew’s feminized education and his oratorical insufficiency suggests that Wraxall sees Matthew as attempting, in a masculine public forum, to replicate the relationship with his aunt whereby fulsome and obsequious praise is exchanged for patronage. The pains he takes to point out that Matthew’s efforts have been fruitless indicate the inappropriacy, in Wraxall’s view, of the application.

Even Matthew’s most successful political relationship was strained by his perceived dependence on his aunt, and coloured by a sense that his language reflected this dependence. From 1787, he developed a friendship with William Wilberforce, Member of Parliament for Yorkshire; and in 1789, when Wilberforce determined to go to Paris to lobby for agreement to an international abolition of the slave trade, he asked Matthew to accompany him. Matthew intimated that he might be unable to oblige because he had committed to spend the summer with his aunt at Sandleford. Frustrated, Wilberforce demanded that Matthew write to his aunt to ask her permission. He also wrote his own letter to Montagu. Her nephew was “much

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<sup>68</sup> Reid, *Imprison’d Wranglers*, 39.



interested” in his scheme, he complains, but “I have a Notion his letter will hardly possess you with the real state of his Mind”:

You perhaps are so well able to fill up his Blanks, & understand his Hints, &c &c that I am taking an unnecessary Liberty with you; Occasions must before have occur'd when from Motives of Respect & Regard <sup>to you</sup> he has been unwilling to give up his own Schemes both Pleasure & Improvement, & that in such a way as not to let it appear that he is making a Sacrifice; & therefore you may know his Style & read him accordingly... (MO6763, July 3 1789)

According to Wilberforce, Matthew’s “Blanks” and “Hints” when requesting a favour constitute a failure of directness. It is possible to read his critique of Matthew’s “Style” as an instance of the end-of-century tendency to celebrate the ideal English masculine language as one of taciturnity, which Cohen sees as “the emblem of [the Englishman’s] self-discipline, and his strength – in other words, his manliness.”<sup>69</sup> Offering Matthew a chance to act as an English representative to the French, Wilberforce deplors his friend’s inability to display his national virtue. But his language is viewed within the wider context of his dependence upon his aunt: he has, Wilberforce tactlessly asserts, surely passed up opportunities of “Pleasure” and “Improvement” in favour of the rhetorically balanced “Respect” and “Regard” which, Wilberforce takes care to insert, is “to you.”

The judgment, though brusque, is not unfair. It is amusing to read Matthew’s simultaneously written and very long letter to his aunt<sup>70</sup> in light of Wilberforce’s

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 104.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew’s letter is produced, though not in its entirety, in Blunt, *Mrs Montagu, Queen of the Blues*, 2:234.

commentary on his stylistic skills. The proposal is framed as "that of my friend Wilberforce," and Matthew casts himself as a reluctant recipient who "cannot give him a refusal, till I have communicated it to you." Like Wilberforce, though, Matthew frames his two prospective courses of action in a relation of symmetrical balance: the potential political and sociable gains he might make from the trip are balanced against the "fortunate intercourse of friendship" that he gains from his aunt. Both men's letters are, therefore, underlaid by an implicit recognition that Matthew's relationship with his aunt works to detract from his political influence. But this recognition is cushioned, in Matthew's case, by the use of the passive voice, the infinitive tense, and numerous qualifiers to articulate both the reasons why the trip to Paris is desirable and those why he would prefer to stay at Sandleford. He concludes the letter by finally "beg[ging]" his aunt to "give your most free judgment," twisting himself into tautologies in his anxiety not to express a preference: "[Do] not in the least imagine I have proposed it to you except on account of its importance in many respects."

After such rhetorical and thematic contortions, Montagu's reply to Matthew, giving her "immediate assent, consent & approbation" (having apparently received both letters simultaneously) is refreshingly direct. She does not appear to have been offended by Wilberforce's letter, though she does add a dry postscript: "I had a most extraordinary letter from Mr Wilberforce to solicit my assent to yr going abroad. He addresses me as he would the most morose, selfish, tyrannical being, that ever existed. Pray has he any Cross Selfish old Aunt? or does he draw his opinion from books?" (MO3917, July 5 [1789]). In the final letter of the exchange between them, she explains her "surprise" by drawing a telling analogy. "I attributed his supposition, that you had often sacrificed opportunities of improvement & pleasure to regard to me, to have arisen from having seen some Maiden Aunt of his afraid Miss Wilberforce shd

go to a ball on account of ye danger she apprehended from ye behavior of forward Misses & imprudent young fellows” (MO3918, [July 7 1789]). Like the trope of Matthew as dependent labourer that punctuates both Montagu’s correspondence and Burney’s satire, here the notion that he has been feminized pervades not only the assessments of his parliamentary critics but also the correspondence of his aunt herself. Although she is satirizing Wilberforce’s suppositions rather than describing her own moral qualms, Montagu herself participates in the rhetoric of effeminacy that Matthew’s language appeared to provoke in drawing rooms and parliamentary chambers alike.

### Conclusions

Elizabeth Montagu’s exercise of patronage has been the subject of several recent reconsiderations of her identity formation and public status. Not all have focused, like Rizzo, on negative responses to her largesse. Elizabeth Eger, for example, has drawn attention to the pleasures Montagu derived from the exercise of literary patronage, describing it as “a luxury to be indulged”<sup>71</sup> while Harriet Guest has shown how her “patronage and benevolence” towards poor tenants enabled her to “approximate most nearly to public status through the way she spends her money.”<sup>72</sup> Guest also notes, however, that even as Montagu gained approbation as “a national monument,” her power and influence gives rise to accounts that also perceive her as “freakish” and of “ambiguous” gender.<sup>73</sup> Even the most admiring accounts of Montagu’s patronage, where it “remove[s] men from their political context” through her assemblies, are

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Eger, ‘The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage and Learning’, in *Brilliant Women: Eighteenth-Century Bluestockings*, eds. Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (London, 2008), 43.

<sup>72</sup> Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810* (Chicago and London, 2000), 96.

<sup>73</sup> Guest, *Small Change*, 99-100.

punctuated with anxieties about how her influence might feminize or corrupt contemporary notions of masculinity.<sup>74</sup>

This essay has suggested that in a context in which Montagu was seen to train a young man in her own image through the exercise of fictive kinship, and then to insert him into the most intensely masculinized and politicized space available, these anxieties are even more pronounced. The ways in which Matthew Montagu's adoption and educational system subverted gender norms, which transgressions are magnified by the 'fictive' nature of Montagu's parentage, have powerful rhetorical echoes in the verdicts of his contemporaries on his language and forms of expression. Wilberforce's invitation to Elizabeth Montagu to "fill up [Matthew's] Blanks" has, therefore, a double resonance. Her determination to cultivate Matthew in her own image, filling up the "blanks" of his learning and politeness with the values and accomplishments that might gratify her own ambition to transmit various inheritances to posterity, is seen to create further "blanks" in his ability to express himself appropriately, and thereby to exercise influence within a masculinized political sphere.

Much recent work in eighteenth-century studies has challenged the foundational terms of Jürgen Habermas's account of the structural transformation of the public sphere, arguing that "that the relation between public and private may be permeable, may be fluid."<sup>75</sup> The case of Elizabeth and Matthew Montagu suggests that perceptions of the public roles of powerful women and men in late eighteenth-

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<sup>74</sup> Guest, *Small Change*, 101-102, 104-107.

<sup>75</sup> Guest, *Small Change*, 11. For other important contributions to this movement, see Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (eds.) *Shifting the Boundaries - Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century* (Exeter, 1995); Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1992); Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton, (eds.), *Women Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge, 2001); Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, eds. *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge, 2002).

century Britain could be emphatically coloured by that same public’s understanding of their private, domestic circumstances. The Montagus’ ‘fictive kinship’ inverted a number of conventional assumptions about the relationship between gender, kinship, education and patronage, and this inversion had a substantial impact on public perceptions of both individuals. The legitimating procedure of the Royal Licence, in which a public authority transforms a private relationship, may have sharpened critics’ sense that the effects of such inversion might prove nocuous: a critic like Burney or Wraxall could place emphasis on Matthew’s “obligation” or his position “at the feet of” his aunt in a way that would seem strange when describing a filial bond. Re-calibrating our understanding of affective bonds between individuals and of the construction of identities and power dynamics, there should be an important place for the ‘fictive’ in studies of eighteenth-century kinship.