



## **Documents in Women's History**

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# Women's History

The journal of the Women's History Network

*Special issue: Documents in Women's History*



**Summer 2017**

**Articles by**

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Mélanie Grué,  
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Isabelle Leguy,  
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Laura Sims,  
Tanya Heflin*

**Plus**

*Seven book reviews  
Getting to know each  
other*

women's  
HISTORY  
NETWORK



Welcome to the Summer 2017 issue of *Women's History*, the journal of the Women's History Network. With this special issue, guest-edited by Marie Ruiz and Mélanie Grué, we consider the methodological challenges posed by the ever-increasing variety of source documents available to historians of women and of gender. It is also, perhaps, a happy coincidence that this collection of articles has an international flavour, since we are looking forward to our 2017 conference on the theme of 'Women and the Wider World' in September. If this special issue has inspired you and you would be interested in making a proposal for a similar edition, we are always happy to hear your ideas.

Editorial team: Jane Berney, Rosi Carr, Sue Hawkins, Catherine Lee, Naomi Pullin and Rachel Rich.

## Introduction

**Marie Ruiz and Mélanie Grué**

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Historians face a difficult task when dealing with historical documents – testimonials that reveal or conceal 'truth.' As objects of enquiry, documents – sometimes limited in what they can disclose – have very often resisted historians' intentions to show historical 'reality.' This is even more vivid in the context of women's history, a subjected topic that has undergone invisibility through male domination. Yet women have managed to be written, and to write themselves, into history by resorting to different media and genres, whether through the press, diaries, epistolary writings or autobiographies, to name but a few. In this instance, Barbara Kanner's work of bibliomethodology, *Women in English Social History, 1800-1914: A Guide to Research* (1988), has remarkably contributed to unveiling the existence of documents informing the presence and participation of women in all fields of British history.

As for historical documents' power to reveal the 'truth' about women's experiences, Leigh Gilmore links truth to power and authorisation and argues that the notion of truth is intertwined namely with the notion of gender. In patriarchal societies, man is a judge who has historically defined the rules and standards of truth in order to perpetuate patriarchal authority and male privilege.<sup>1</sup> As Sidonie Smith remarks, the twentieth century has revealed the fragility of the male Western subject.<sup>2</sup> Marxist analysis proved him to be caught in implacable economic structures; Freudian theories unveiled uncontrollable unconscious forces and Lacanian psychoanalysis defined a fractured, fragmented subject. History and social sciences have thus questioned the viability of the culturally dominant subject. In the same vein, critics have established the artificial, even fictional character of autobiography, following Georges Gusdorf's landmark essay, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography'<sup>3</sup> (1956). It has then become possible for subaltern groups such as women to write about themselves in the autobiographical genre, considered a potential site of contestation and resistance to the dominant ideologies. As Michel De Certeau contends, subjects may manipulate events in order to tell their own version of the truth, become agents and create new meaning whilst escaping

the nets of social constructions of identity.<sup>4</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson remark that such an assertion of agency through story-telling is particularly relevant for subjects who have not been able to exert control over their lives and identities, and who have experienced the unspeakable.<sup>5</sup> Among these subjects are women and individuals subject to domestic violence and an array of social ills. By telling their 'unrecited narratives,' they become 'cultural witnesses' demonstrating that memory is agency, and putting forth the power of subaltern testimonies. Women, as a subjugated group, have thus seized the opportunity to write their personal and collective history on their own terms, to document their lives and claim their worth against the Western patriarchal rule. They have produced a wide array of documents, from text to image and film, revealing the reality of female experience.

Female productions throughout history thus question the very definition of documentary writing. This is not only because they enter language as subaltern individuals in order to (re)write history against dominant cultural scripts but also because fiction, composition and falsification, as they allow women to avoid censorship and retaliation, are vital constituents of historical documents which paradoxically lay claim to truth. Women have elaborated narrative and rhetorical strategies allowing them to write an alternative History in various forms. When considering women, and more specifically women from social, racial, and sexual

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Christopher Michel  
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minorities whose testimony is often altered because of their subaltern position, it becomes necessary to reflect upon the characteristics of the 'historical' document. Historical documents are used to instruct, testify and identify, and are thus linked to the quest of scientism. In the light of women's participation in history, several types of works have become instruments of revelation, denunciation, and documentation, telling a certain 'truth' about women. Hence, historical writing does not necessarily deprive women's works of their documentary quality; it does not make the events any less true and verifiable.

This special issue of *Women's History* addresses the place left to women in the course of history and the subjectivity of historical documents. It brings to light historical evidence and documents revealing women's empowerment and resistance to patriarchal rule in history. It focuses on the nature of historical documentation and its gender bias, and tackles the question of reliability in women's history. The articles constituting this special issue focus on the following thorny question: is objectivity possible in women's history? They intend to determine what documents have shown about women; the role of historians, witnesses, activists and writers is also assessed, as well as issues related to 'reality' in women's history. Women as producers of documents are therefore at the core of this special issue. Indeed, the notions of revelation and concealment of female authors' identity is indicative of the social limitations undergone by women throughout history. The question of perception and reception is also of interest, as the role of the readers and male recorders of women's words is also examined, especially in the context of the transformation of writing into history and the validation of the work as truth.

This gives a fruitful insight into what documents tell us about women's ability to negotiate diverse identifications of gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality, and to find a place in history through their disruption of dominant cultural narratives. The articles included in this special issue deal with what documents can reveal about women's individual and collective history. As such, Jennifer McNabb and Isabelle Leguy resort to legal documents to determine women's place in history, whereas Peter Johnsson focuses on the status of a privileged woman to reveal how her writings conjure up her empowerment. This is followed by Laura Sims's and Tanya Heflin's works on female records of war and its consequences on their lives. The documents studied in the articles may be defined following John Beverley's distinction between 'oral history' and *testimonio*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in 'simply recorded participant narrative' the intentionality of the recorder prevails over that of a narrator whose words are transformed into data. The term *testimonio*, on the contrary, derives from *testimony* or 'the act of bearing witness in a legal and religious sense,' and puts forth the intentionality of the witness, who describes a situation involving 'an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on.' Beverley asserts that the position of a reader of *testimonio* is comparable to that of a jury member in a courtroom. The difference between 'recorded participant narrative' and *testimonio* is illustrated in the articles collected here, as subaltern individuals who seek to become masters of their own written or oral productions are either able to free themselves from constraints or maintained in their subaltern position, depending on the media used or the genre of their productions. Indeed, as the authors of the articles show,

## Membership Announcements

In response to rising costs the Women's History Network is making a move towards a digital distribution of *Women's History*. It has therefore been decided to increase membership fees for all members wishing to continue to receive *Women's History* in hardcopy. This decision has been outlined in a recent E-mail sent to all members and the new membership fees can be found on the back cover or on our website. If you have any questions or queries please email - [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org)

You can manage your WHN membership, update your details, pay your subscription, add your research interests/books and make a donation by logging into the Members' Area at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

Do you pay your subscription by standing order? If so, can you check that the payment details reflect the 2017 rates. Don't forget, we have different rates to reflect different personal circumstances, so it is worth checking that you are paying the correct rate for you. Details of the 2017 rates for all categories of members can be found on the back cover of the magazine or by logging into your account at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org).

Has your email address changed? If we don't have your current details, you may not receive the monthly e-newsletter, included in your membership fee. If you have changed email addresses since joining, or recently acquired a new email address, please update your details by logging into your account at [www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org) OR by emailing the membership secretary.

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media and genre imply either autonomy and independence or persisting submission to a dominant group: whereas the authenticity of women's courtroom testimonies analysed by McNabb and Leguy may be questioned because they are ultimately controlled and transformed by male recorders, the letter, diaries and autobiographical narratives studied by Johnsson, Sims and Heflin testify to women's liberation from the patriarchal and/or colonial yoke. As women tell their stories without intermediary and in various forms, they find their voices and control representation.

To start with, Jennifer McNabb's article on female witnesses in church courts in early modern England introduces the question of female agency in institutional contexts. She uses documents produced in the two consistory courts of north-west England's diocese of Chester between

1540 and 1641, transforming them into a lens through which to study how women talked about domestic matters. McNabb analyses the gender-specific elements pertaining to women's testimonies regarding irregular matrimonial contracts, and studies their cultural and legal values. Hence, McNabb sheds light on women's domestic-oriented testimonies, as well as their ability to influence the courts despite frequent biased reception of their words. Indeed, these archives present women as agents engaged in the definitions and discussions of social facts and interactions. The questions of objectivity and subjectivity are further tackled by Isabelle Leguy's work on the Old Bailey's Records of female voices in court. Leguy questions the value of women's mediated testimonies and studies how their transcribed narratives may be used by scholars to assess women's place in institutional contexts, as the details given by women who were called to testify had an undeniable influence on the interpretation of the situation under scrutiny. Indeed, female witnesses' and defendants' testimonies being recorded by men, the question of the actual voice and performativity of women's accounts in historical legal records raises fruitful debates. Then, Peter Johnsson offers a discussion on female empowerment in medieval archival records through the case study of St Radegund, a woman whose writings unveil her ample use of her privileged status to manipulate gendered conventions. Johnsson focuses on Radegund's letter to her cousin, *De excidio Thuringiae* ('The Fall of Thuringia') to show how Radegund was able to secure men's support through the exploitation of familial connections to men and her insistence on gendered dynamics. This is followed by Laura Sims's work on Harki daughters' memoirs that hinges on the question of female invisibility during wartime Algeria and the ensuing Harki immigration and difficult integration in France. Sims argues that Harki women's writings shed light on the gender bias underlying historical representations of war, as women were written out of Harki History. However, the texts written by Harki daughters have allowed Harki women to be written into History, as they enriched the recorded experience by breaking silences about women's specific plights and lives. Hence, Harki female testimonies of their social group's identity and hardships both document the past and the present, and they inform us on the political impact of female writings, since these texts challenge both patriarchal and (post)colonial authority. Finally, the question of female invisibility is further studied by Tanya Heflin's article on an American nurse's journal during the First World War. Heflin focuses on an individual record to document the scarcity of original historical records on the topic, as well as the difference in treatment between the perceived 'great' historical records and the silenced ones.

This special issue thus informs us on the emergence of women in the public sphere through different historical documents in diverse geographical, racial and social backgrounds. It also reveals how some women's private lives have become public information, thus symbolically overcoming the gendered barriers imposed by the society of their time. The significance of historical documents revealing collective as well as individual female memory are perfectly illustrated by the different articles that present documentary evidence of women's place in history. Whether considered subaltern documents or not, women's writing were often identity claims, writings of resistance. When recorded by men, women's transcribed voices highlight the dialectics of truth and gender bias.

## Notes

1. Leigh Gilmore, 'Policing the Truth: Confession, Gender, and Autobiographical Authority,' in *Autobiography and Postmodernism* ed. Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore and Gerald Peters (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 54-78.
2. Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993).
3. In James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980)
4. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984).
5. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds), *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
6. John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35/1, (1989), 11-28.

## BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALL FOR REVIEWERS

The following titles are available for review, so if you like to review any of the titles listed below, please email me, Jane Berney, at [bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org)

You don't have to be an expert to review, if you have a general interest and knowledge of the relevant historical period or territory then that will count for a lot. The ability to summarise a work (within the word limit!) and write interestingly about it is the most important thing. Any suggestions for books to review are also welcome - just email me as above - but please note any review may not be published for some time.

Peter Hore, *Lindell's List. Saving British and American Women at Ravensbruck* (The History Press)

Harry Stone, *That Monstrous Regiment. The Birth of Women's Political Emancipation* (Mereo Books)

Carol Dyhouse, *Heartthrobs. A History of Women and Desire* (OUP)

Anna Spurgeon, *Women and Children in the Factory. A Life of Adelaide Anderson 1863 -1936* (Aspect design)

Tim Clarke, *The Countess. The Scandalous Life of Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey* (Amberley)

Nick Holland, *In Search of Anne Bronte* (The History Press)

Deb Vanasse, *Wealth Woman. Kate Carmack and the Klondike Race for Gold* (University of Alaska Press)

Paul Chrystal, *Women at War in the Ancient World* (Amberley)

Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Ladies of the Canyon. A League of Extraordinary Women and their Adventures in the American Southwest* (University of Arizona Press)

Miriam E. David, *A Feminist Manifesto for Education* (Polity Books)

# 'That right may take place': female witnesses and their stories in early modern English church courts

Jennifer McNabb

Western Illinois University

Historians have long recognised the utility of records generated by the ecclesiastical courts in their study of early modern England's legal system as well as the social and cultural values that shaped its operation.<sup>1</sup> While procedural documents produced by church courts offer a wealth of information about their processes, costs and efficiency, testimony provided by witnesses and recorded by court clerks includes rich details about early modern life.<sup>2</sup> These documents have been of particular value to scholars of women's history. Unlike common law courts, whose regulations often prohibited women from being a party to litigation in their own names, ecclesiastical courts in the early modern period could and did serve as a popular venue of dispute resolution for women.<sup>3</sup> This article uses documents produced by litigation heard in the two consistory courts of northwest England's diocese of Chester between 1540 and 1641 as a lens through which to explore how women talked about marriage, family, household and neighbourliness within a public, institutional venue.<sup>4</sup> Archival sources describing interrupted and fractured relationships indicate that as women gave evidence, they were actively engaged in defining and problematizing the ideals and realities of their society. Women exhibited agency – the ability to influence their circumstances or the circumstances of others – in offering testimony designed to achieve legal success. This success might be for themselves or for the parties they favoured.<sup>5</sup> I argue that, while both male and female deponents from Chester structured the stories they told in court, their narratives demonstrate distinct, gender-specific elements. Taken collectively, the depositions express and acknowledge an expectation that the words and memories of women concerning sexual behaviour and domestic space had significant cultural and legal value before the courts.

To uncover the value of written depositions, one must first acknowledge the constructed nature of the evidence they provide, something scholars have been particularly careful to consider since the publication of Natalie Zemon Davis's *Fiction in the Archives*.<sup>6</sup> The ability of witnesses to shape their narratives was both extended and mediated by the typical procedures of ecclesiastical litigation.<sup>7</sup> Deponents were called before the court at the request of plaintiffs and defendants to answer a series of questions, called interrogatories, formulated by the litigants' legal representatives. The witnesses replied verbally to these previously prepared interrogatories in the presence of a court clerk; in the Archdeaconry of Chester, the court was located inside Chester Cathedral (see Fig. 1). The clerk recorded the spoken responses in written form, doubtless with varying degrees of modification and alteration, as he framed them in language useful and acceptable within the parameters of the legal setting. Those written responses were read back to deponents, who could indicate the need for correction or request the incorporation of additional evidence before signifying acceptance of the written account of their testimony with a signature or other mark.

The extant depositional evidence that historians

employ therefore represents the somewhat untidy intersection of oral and literate cultures, in which 'truth' or 'reality' exists only so far as those concepts are understood as a product of narrativity. This does not, however, diminish the value of such material. If, as Hayden White argues, 'Every narrative, however seemingly "full," is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out'.<sup>8</sup> What remains is a curated collaboration both of what the deponent sought to share through her testimony and of what the clerk decided to enter into the record of the court's proceedings. The pieces of information communicated by written depositions achieve considerable value by the very fact of their selection for inclusion in the court's official documentary account.

If the significance of recorded witness testimony in presenting perceived and negotiated realities can be thus established, an investigation of its content yields a wealth of details concerning early modern women. At a time when women's voices were routinely considered by prescriptive

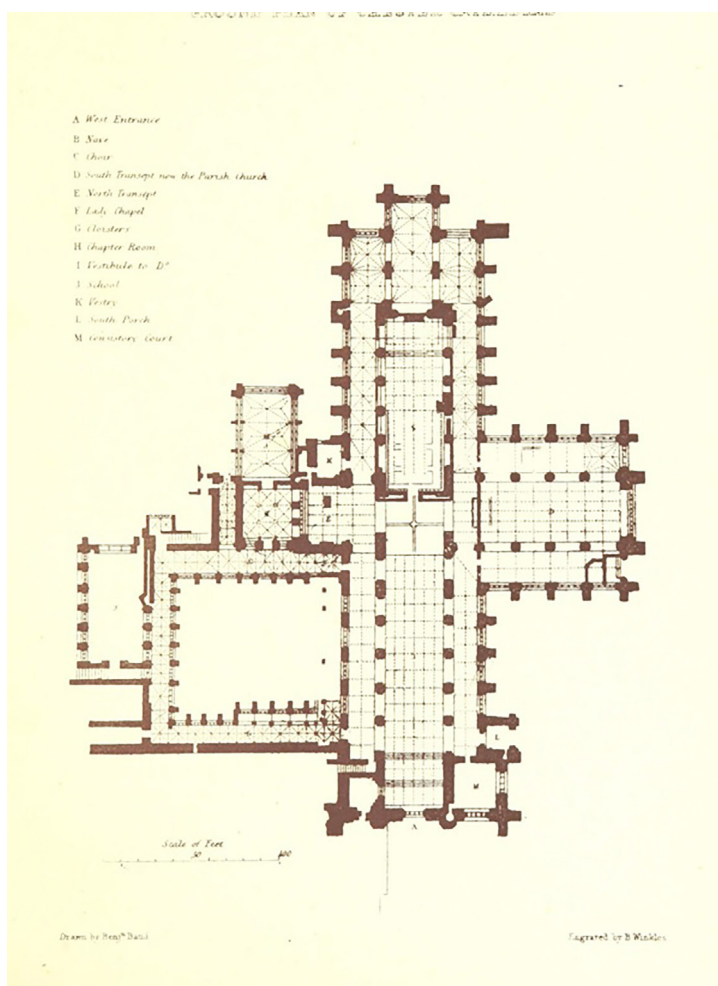


Figure 1: 'Ground Plan of Chester Cathedral', from Ward and Lock's *Illustrated Historical Handbook to Chester Cathedral, etc*, The British Library, p. 21  
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texts and various authorities and institutions to be of little value, relegated to the category of rumour or hearsay, the study of church court depositions offers an opportunity to 'hear' women expressing themselves in a forum that accorded respect to their stories.<sup>9</sup> England's early modern ecclesiastical courts, like those in Chester considered here, dealt with several forms of personal misbehaviour and interpersonal disagreements, including sexual misconduct, defamation, charges of unpaid tithes or uncertain tithe rights, contested ownership of church pews, probate disputes, breaches of faith in various church-related economic dealings, and contested marriage. Because early modern defamation suits were dominated by women, numerous scholars, including Christopher Haigh, Jim Sharpe, Laura Gowing, Elizabeth Foyster, and Martin Ingram, have analysed their records for information about women in early modern English society.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on documents produced by defamation litigation from various ecclesiastical jurisdictions, they conclude that the narratives of female witnesses reveal contemporary anxieties about the formation and fragility of female sexual reputation; defamation suits from Chester indicate similar concerns.

Female deponents appear less frequently in the relatively plentiful records generated by tithe and probate litigation in the Chester courts. The few extant records of female testimony in such suits are, however, tantalizingly suggestive of gender-specific narrative strategies: in 1564, for example, Katherine Green testified in a probate dispute, offering an assessment of the monetary worth of a testator's goods, which included livestock, crops, furnishings, and tableware.<sup>11</sup> She provided precise values for eight different items, noting that 'the nagge, as she think[es], was worth xs., the mare she think[es] was worth vs., [and] the field of wheate and rie she knowes was well better worth than xxvjs. viijd.' She also included more specific commentary on the quality of several items (she observed, for example, that 'the silv[er] spones were gild [gilt]'). At the end of her description, however, she concluded, 'but for the value of them, she cannot certenlie depose because she is but a woman & hath smale practise in such matters.' Her acknowledgment that women lacked expertise in such matters likely represents a rhetorical device on her part to temper the claim to authority implicit in her detailed deposition. Despite the possibility that, like Katherine Green, other female witnesses in probate and tithe disputes may have been negotiating the value of their testimonies through the language they employed, silences in the documentary record prohibit the formulation of more definitive theories about women's strategies in these types of legal actions.

As a result of both the already robust scholarship on defamation and the paucity of female voices in several other categories of litigation in Chester, this study focuses instead on matrimonial contract suits, which featured women prominently as both litigants and witnesses. Because England did not enact a comprehensive reform of its medieval matrimonial laws until Lord Hardwicke's Act in 1753, it remained possible during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to contract children under the canonical ages of consent (twelve for girls and fourteen for boys) in marriage; and for those over the ages of consent to construct an indissoluble union through the exchange of present-tense vows outside the authority of the Church of England.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence of the irregularities of these extra-ecclesiastic unions, however, disputes concerning their propriety and binding power regularly appeared before



Figure 2: Image taken from T. Crampton, *A collection of ballads printed in London* (London, 1860), 181. British Library HMNTS 11621.h.11

the church courts, particularly in northwest England, where such matches continued to be a prominent feature of regional matrimonial culture, even after they receded in significance and frequency elsewhere in the country.<sup>13</sup>

An examination of depositions from Chester's matrimonial suits reveals that prospective spouses and their supporters actively sought to prove or refute claims of matrimony through the evidence they gave in court. In his study of late medieval matrimonial suits in English and continental courts, Charles Donahue, Jr. identifies a series of distinct narrative strategies employed by witnesses, noting that deponents' stories followed certain clear patterns designed to secure desired judgments;<sup>14</sup> depositional evidence from early modern Chester likewise reveals the ways the typology of matrimonial disputes influenced witness narratives. First, litigation initiated by a party contracted in marriage under the age of consent consistently called for a judgment of nullification.<sup>15</sup> Plaintiffs and their supporters attempted in their testimony to demonstrate the rejection of a child match once the age of consent had been reached, while defendants and their witnesses, in contrast, tried to provide evidence of the union's ratification by discussing cohabitation, emotional and physical affection, as well as other signs of agreement to marriage. Second, in suits between men and women contracted over the legal age of consent, some plaintiffs sought nullification and others ratification.<sup>16</sup> In these cases, witnesses' testimony focused on words and gestures whose performance allegedly expressed matrimonial consent or, conversely, the absence of assent to marriage. Finally, a few cases were three-party suits, in which a matrimonial contract was followed with a solemnised marriage by one or both of the original parties to an alternate partner; the chief points of witnesses' commentaries in those suits concerned the chronology and formality of both relationships in an attempt to express their perceptions as to which match successfully met the legal

requirements of marriage.

Litigation involving irregular marriages offered women a chance to pass judgment on the legitimacy of their own relationships as well as those of relatives and neighbours. Women accounted for 30 percent of the deponents identified in the matrimonial litigation from Chester surveyed for this essay; a sample of eighty-five matrimonial suits from Chester with extant witness testimony contains information provided by 342 deponents, 102 of whom were women.<sup>17</sup> The evidence suggests that domestic spaces were the most popular locus for contracting irregular marriage and that the association of women with the private sphere of home and hearth positioned them to offer authoritative evidence concerning the exchange of private matrimonial vows.<sup>18</sup> Cecily Key, for example, testified in 1563 that she had witnessed the formation of a matrimonial contract between Anne Yate and George Johnson in Anne's house. Similarly, Katherine Hall described hearing John Roger and Elizabeth Robert give present-tense assent to words of marriage in the house of John David of Wrexham in 1569.<sup>19</sup> Because present-tense words of matrimony were the only legal necessity for marriage in early modern England, female deponents who witnessed marriages contracted in domestic spaces and then reported their memories of the precise language employed thus provided vital evidence concerning a match's legality.<sup>20</sup> According to Margery Browne's testimony in a suit from 1641, she was present at the house of John Bickerton in Chester when Radcliff Kelsall promised to marry Catherine Fallowes within three months' time, a verbal exchange that represented future intent but lacked the present-tense formula required for binding matrimony.<sup>21</sup> Reputed spouses in the suits from Chester also created irregular marriages in certain work spaces traditionally associated with female labour, like salt houses and alehouses, which also privileged women's testimony concerning questions of matrimonial legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> Margaret Strete and Anne Potter reported in 1554 that they had been employed in making salt one evening when asked to witness the formation of a matrimonial contract, for example. Furthermore, Blanche Houghe, who identified herself as 'keeping an alehowse,' told the court in 1590 that when she objected to finding Ellen Litler and Philip Downes together in her parlour, the couple assuaged her fears of impropriety by performing a troth-plighting ceremony in her presence.<sup>23</sup>

Women also expressed their assessment of a marriage's validity through testimony concerning a number

of other culturally significant words and behaviours that often accompanied irregular marriage. They commented at great length, for example, on the performance of consent and other actions identifiable as spousal behaviour, even though these latter circumstances did not possess strict legal relevance in suits alleging breach of matrimonial contract.<sup>24</sup> In this way, female friends, neighbours, and kin of parties at odds took the opportunity to articulate an understanding of the cultural standards that created the appearance of marriage in northwest England. Anne Brodhurst, a witness in a matrimonial suit between Helen and Thomas Gleave from 1570, commented that her position as 'one of the next neybores' of the couple allowed her to witness 'them go together in company and vse thone thother very lovinglie and familierlie,' by which gestures, Anne did 'verily think they loved one thother very well.'<sup>25</sup> In her stated opinion, and the opinion of women in other suits who offered similar testimony as to gestures and words of affection and commitment, the couple in question had created a popular perception of matrimonial consent by treating one another as spouses. When a cause of matrimony between Mabel Preston and Geoffrey Osbaldeston came before the court in 1580, five female witnesses were asked to comment at length on the location of the reputed exchange of vows, the tone of voice each party used, the clothing worn by Mabel, Geoffrey, and clerical officiant Nicholas Talbot, the exchange of courtship gifts that antedated the vows, the possibility that Geoffrey employed coercive force against Mabel at the time words of marriage were spoken, and the report of the community – often identified by the term 'common fame' – as to whether Geoffrey and Mabel were considered to be man and wife.<sup>26</sup> Witnesses in the suit answered twenty-one interrogatories in all, only one of which concerned the actual words spoken during the contract; the remaining inquiries asked women to use their perception of the propriety of the event to judge whether both parties had consented freely to marriage and whether they were truly husband and wife.

Female witnesses also testified, often in considerable detail, to displays of physical affection and the giving and receiving of gifts. Several witnesses in a suit from 1569 between Cicely Haugh and Richard Shene recounted a number of objects circulating between the pair, and female go-betweens offered first-hand evidence of the couple's material exchanges.<sup>27</sup> Servant Grace Graver delivered 'a hart of silu[er] gilt' given by Cicely to Richard as an accompaniment to Cicely's message



Figure 3: Thomas Dekker *Peasants*



that 'she will neu[er] turne from the promes she hath made you'; Grace also carried a piece of gold and a silver whistle from Richard to Cicely. Isabel Heywall testified further that after the pair exchanged present-tense vows, Richard gave Cicely 'a velvet cappe.' In a suit from 1630 Anne Arsenstall testified that she had been charged by William Clapham to communicate his continued affection for Mabel Bradshawe and his intent to 'marrie her as soone as god made him able,' citing Mabel's gift to William of a 'peece of goulde' as a signal of Mabel's own commitment.<sup>28</sup>

In a file from 1570 dominated by female deponents, it appears women sought to exert considerable influence in bringing about the consummation of irregular marriage, another key legal marker of an indissoluble union.<sup>29</sup> Three female servants gave testimony describing the physical interactions of child spouses Jane Broke and Edward Butlor during their time under the same roof, and each of the women offered significant evidence concerning a night targeted for ratification of the young couple's marriage. Joan Coppock, a servant in a neighbouring household, reported that within a year after the death of Jane's father, Edward Butlor and several companions came to the Broke residence 'of purpose, as she hard certenly reported, to lay together' with Jane. Elizabeth Gerard, a serving woman employed by the Brokes, confirmed Edward's visit but assigned its intended purpose of consummation to the machinations of Widow Broke, who 'gaue sheetes furth to this depone[n]t purposelie as she said to be laid apon a bed to be made for the pl[aintiff] and def[endant] to lye in.' Servant Anne Crosse concurred, noting that she and Elizabeth 'bie ther mist[r]es[s]s appointme[n]t made readie a bed for that purpose in a Chamber called Brok[es] Chamber.' According to these reports, when Edward demurred, choosing to bed instead with one of his traveling companions, the two Broke women considered the slight a significant breach. Jane allegedly declared, 'M[aste]r Butlo[u]r hath refused to lye wth me this night and p[er]chaunce when he wold haue me to lye wth hym, I will refuse so to do.' Her mother reportedly voiced her own frustrations: 'I praie god he liue a good lief afore I shifte of my bed for *hym* againe.' That women rather than men gave evidence on physical interactions and questions of consummation between irregularly-married couples is a pattern repeated in numerous other matrimonial suits from Chester. Elsewhere in the cause papers, men did testify in significant numbers, and frequently with considerable specificity, about sexual encounters they claimed to have witnessed, particularly in suits alleging fornication and adultery (or defamatory accusations of the same). In matrimonial suits, however, men generally ceded commentary on conjugal matters to women, suggesting a broad acknowledgement of female authority over domestic sleeping arrangements for those in irregularly-formed contracts of marriage.

In breach of contract suits, female plaintiffs themselves also offered evidence concerning various verbal and visual signs of marriage that could support their claims. Although many of the personal responses of women who sued to uphold or reject matrimonial contracts have not survived, those that have routinely demonstrate women's attempts to offer commentary on the factors they deemed significant in creating the appearance of orderly domestic life. When Anne Helyn sued Richard Bunburie for breach of contract in 1570, she recounted the story of a relationship that certainly sounded as though it met many of the cultural requirements

associated with marriage in the northwest, even though it did not meet church standards of legitimacy, as it lacked a public ceremony of solemnization.<sup>30</sup> She lived with Bunburie, managing his household and caring for his children from an earlier marriage; he even allowed Helyn to wear the clothing of his dead spouse, something she clearly considered as further validation of her argument that he treated and recognised her as a wife. In this and other cases, female plaintiffs suing for ratification of marriage argued that the performance of duties recognisable as spousal behaviour provided sufficient grounds for the church to enforce contracts for which the women possessed limited legal proof.

Just as female plaintiffs were apparently aware of the power of appearance in creating a perception of marital validity, their recorded words also indicate an awareness of the importance of gift giving as a signifier of marriage. Plaintiffs' responses regularly included evidence on the exchange of tokens, suggesting that the circulation of such objects served to demonstrate the increasing seriousness of relationships. In a suit Gilbert Prescott filed against Anne Hulle in 1572, Anne's testimony addressed the fact that Gilbert had acquired an item of her clothing; she claimed that he had paid Henry Stanley for one of her gloves and that 'she was offended' by Gilbert's improper possession of it.<sup>31</sup> As gloves were often exchanged by prospective spouses during courtship, Anne's tale of Gilbert's payment for the object is indicative of a pressing need to explain how and why it came to be in his custody in the first place, in the absence of her inability to deny his possession of the item. In a suit from 1621, Anne Whittle confessed that she accepted half of a sixpence from Ralph Cunliffe. Being further pressed 'vpon what condic[i]ons,' though, she claimed it was 'in loveinge mann[e]r and as a pledge of his the sayd Cunliff's love', not in 'confirmaci[o]n of the same contract' alleged to have accompanied the coin's breaking.<sup>32</sup> Such words indicate Anne's attempt to mitigate and negotiate the meaning of that exchange within the institutional setting of the court, although they do not necessarily shed light on her sentiments at the time of her receipt of the item.

Women like Anne Whittle, seeking nullification of marriage, constructed narratives that either exploited the problems of proof and legitimacy inherent in irregular and child marriage or professed ignorance of matrimonial law in the attempt to secure the court's favour. Joan Holgat's denial of the validity of her marriage to Henry Bybby in 1516 emphasised that 'the marriage thus alleged could not stand in law nor should stand in any way, because it was imposed and celebrated between them by force and fear of their parents, without any consent of theirs coming into it then, or in any way whatsoever then or since.'<sup>33</sup> Six decades later, Margery Withnall admitted to forming a contract with Edward Maddocke. She tried to persuade the court that the match had never been ratified because she had not 'wedded him at the church' and thus 'neu[er] did think she was his lawfull wief before god by force of anie word[es] passed at any tyme between the said Maddock & her.'<sup>34</sup> Dorothy Wright admitted to a consent-based contract with Thomas Clutton in a suit from 1608, but argued that the match was invalid by noting that it took place in a private house without a licence or reading of the banns. In 1640, Elizabeth Mather claimed that she unwittingly contracted matrimony, not understanding the consequences of her actions as the result of 'being vnskillfull in the lawes of God and man.'<sup>35</sup> The documents clearly demonstrate that

women tied their statements concerning the law of marriage to their wishes for judgment; when an expression of knowledge suited their purposes, women's responses, like that of Margery Withnall, indicated such information. Yet, when assertions of their failure to comprehend the law better served their cause, women claimed they were unschooled in the legal consequences of their actions.

In contrast, male litigants in matrimonial suits did not confess or feign such ignorance of the law in the diocese of Chester. In other contemporary legal actions, particularly those involving debt, men frequently claimed confusion on points of law, as when in 1609, Richard Walley claimed not to realise that a deed he had sealed and delivered to John Dennys and John Yate would give them legal authority to take possession of his horses; he thought the action would only safeguard the animals from seizure for debt rather than result in a transfer of ownership.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, in cases of disputed marriage before the consistory courts, male deponents often stressed the ways their familiarity with the formula of marriage shaped their reported actions and validated their request for the ratification or nullification of a reputed marriage. In 1570, for example, Robert ap Randle, married as a minor, sought to prove his departure from the household of Margaret Dekoe while still under the canonical age of consent.<sup>37</sup> Such a departure was necessary for Robert to escape the charge that his living arrangements tacitly validated his child marriage. His statement – 'If I shuld tarry in house w[i]th her till I were xiiij yeres old, they will p[ro]v[o]ke a matter on me and make me take her against my will' – thus demonstrated a clear understanding of the law, since the age of consent for boys was fourteen and any verifiable sign of consent after the attainment of that age could render a child match binding.

Female testimony in matrimonial suits reveals the ways in which women negotiated and contested stories of marriage within the ecclesiastical courts. The records from Chester demonstrate that female witnesses were familiar enough with the words, actions, and circumstances that created legal proof of binding marriage, or at least its appearance, to shape the testimony they gave before the courts concerning the legitimacy of their own and others' relationships. The documents also reveal certain gender-specific patterns. Evidence concerning domestic spaces as places of matrimony or consummation routinely came from women rather than men. When female litigants spoke of marriage, they alternately indicated clear understanding of matrimonial law or professed ignorance of it, depending on circumstances. This was a marked contrast to male litigants, who routinely stressed their expertise with regard to the legal requirements of marriage. More generally, the process of litigation apparently imbued female narratives with a certain authority often denied in other public settings and circumstances. When invited to do so by legal process, women constructed and negotiated ideals and realities concerning sex and marriage. Their words were elevated beyond the realm of gossip or private female conversation and were instead infused with legitimacy and publicity. Although female witnesses may have claimed they 'favoureth the truth' and wished only that 'righte maie take place',<sup>38</sup> the stories they told provided a subjective version of the truth that nonetheless gives us invaluable information about their agency, actions, and words.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987); Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation in the English Ecclesiastical Courts c. 1350-c. 1640', in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. R. B. Outhwaite (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1981), 35-57; Ingram, 'The Reform of Popular Culture? Sex and Marriage in Early Modern England', in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985), 129-65; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation, 1520-1570* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979); Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage in Mid-Tudor England: Evidence from Records of Matrimonial Contract Litigation', *Journal of Family History* 10 (1985), 339-52; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997); R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006).
2. See, for example, Ronald A. Marchant, *The Church under the Law: Justice, Administration, and Discipline in the Diocese of York, 1560-1640* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1969).
3. R. H. Helmholz, *Roman Canon Law in Reformation England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).
4. Records for the Chester consistory are deposited in the Cheshire Record Office: Deposition Books of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1554-74 (hereafter, EDC 2/6, 2/7, 2/8, or 2/9), Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, consisting of witness testimony and identified below by their folio or page references (following the style used in the individual deposition books), and Cause Papers of the Consistory Court of Chester, 1560-1653, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (hereafter, EDC 5), consisting of procedural papers (libels, responsions, interrogatories, depositions, articles, and sentences) and referenced below by year and file number. The cause paper materials for Richmond are found in the following record classes at West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS) Office in Leeds: RD/AC/1 (Allegations, Articles or Libels), RD/AC/2 (Responsions), RD/AC/3 (Interrogatories), RD/AC/5 (Attestations and Depositions), RD/AC/6 (Further Articles or Exceptions), and RD/AC/7 (Sentences). See also WYAS Leeds RD/A class for the Act Books of the Consistory Court of Richmond. The appeals material for both courts is housed at the Borthwick Institute: Ecclesiastical Cause Papers at York: Files Transmitted on Appeal, 1500-1883 (hereafter, Borthwick Institute Trans CP). Only appeals files at York have been examined; matrimonial suits heard by the Consistory Court of York in its own diocesan jurisdiction have not been considered here. These archival sources are supplemented by Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Child-Marriages, Divorces, and Ratifications, &c., in the Diocese of Chester, A. D. 1561-6* (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), which includes transcriptions of both child marriage suits and matrimonial contract litigation, and the small handful of suits dated after 1640 in the CRO EDC 5 collection.
5. Literature on the concept of agency for the early modern period is plentiful. Particularly useful in exploring the intersection of language and agency is Katherine R. Larson, *Early Modern Women in Conversation* (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).
6. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales*

and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987).

7. For an overview of procedures, see Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, and Charles Donahue, Jr., *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages: Arguments about Marriage in Five Courts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33-41.

8. Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form, Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 10. See also Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, Fontana, 1977), and Catherine Richardson, ed. *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650, The History of Retailing and Consumption* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004).

9. Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

10. Christopher Haigh, 'Slander and the Church Courts in the Sixteenth Century', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 78 (1975), 1-13; J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: the Church Courts at York*, Borthwick Papers, no. 58 (York, Borthwick Institute, 1984); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996); Gowing, 'Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London', *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 1-21; Gowing, 'Language, Power and the Law: Women's Slander Litigation in Early Modern London', in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 6 (1996), 225-34; Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London, Longman, 1999); Martin Ingram, 'Law, Litigants and the Construction of "Honour": Slander Suits in Early Modern England', in *The Moral World of the Law*, ed. Peter Coss (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

11. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/9, fol. 180v.

12. In addition to items in note 1, see Peter Rushton, 'Property, Power and Family Networks: The Problem of Disputed Marriage in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History* 11 (1986), 205-19; Eric Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994); Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000); Christine Peters, 'Gender, Sacrament and Ritual: The Making and Meaning of Marriage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 169 (2000): 63-96. For a discussion of Lord Hardwicke's Act, see R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England, 1500-1850* (London, Hambledon Press, 1995).

13. Jennifer McNabb, 'Ceremony versus Consent: Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Reputation in Northwest England, 1560-1610', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 37, no. 1 (2006), 59-81.

14. Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society*, 46-62.

15. Seventy-two of the 210 suits consulted for this essay are child marriage suits.

16. One hundred and thirty-eight of the suits addressed claims of matrimonial contracts formed between parties over the age of consent. Of the suits for which plaintiffs and defendants could be clearly identified, 69 percent were filed by female plaintiffs,

the overwhelming majority of whom were suing for ratification; 31 percent were male plaintiffs, the majority of whom were also suing to uphold a marriage. Only two three-party suits could be conclusively identified.

17. A larger number matrimonial cause papers contain various procedural documentation and/or litigant responses but no witness testimony.

18. Jennifer McNabb, 'Fame and the Making of Marriage in Northwest England 1560-1640', *Quidditas* 26 & 27 (2005-2006): 9-33.

19. Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, 58; Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/8, fol. 293v.

20. The importance of sex in making valid marriage is particularly associated with future-tense words of marriage, as intercourse made future intent binding.

21. Furnivall, *Child-Marriages*, 58; Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1608, no. 23, and 1641, no. 13.

22. Alehouses were sites of both employment and recreation for early modern men and women; Matilda Penny testified in 1567 that her communication 'in the way of marriage' with John Toppinge involved a meeting 'together in the house of one Brokbranke', where he called for 'a cuppe of ale' to commemorate a contract (Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/7, 117v.). For women and work in alehouses, see Judith Bennett, *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

23. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/8, fols. 99v.-100v., 111v.-12r., 131r.-33r., 139v.; EDC 5 1590, no. 32.

24. For a discussion of the symbolic capital of these 'markers' of marriage, see Diana O'Hara, 'The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage', *Rural History* 3 (1992), 1-40, and Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*.

25. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/8, fols. 325r.-327r.

26. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1580, no. 21.

27. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/8, fols. 215v.-216v.

28. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1630, no. 95.

29. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/8, fols. 58r.-63v.

30. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1570, no. 24.

31. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/9, p. 249.

32. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1621, no. 55. Breaking or bending coins was frequently associated with early modern marriage. See Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England, 1660-1753* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), 19; John Addy, *Sin and Society in the Seventeenth Century* (London, Routledge, 1989), 169; Rushton, 'Testament of Gifts', 26; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 159.

33. *Life, Love and Death in North-East Lancashire 1510 to 1537: a Translation of the Act Book of the Ecclesiastical Court of Whalley*, ed. Margaret Lynch, Nigel Tringham, and John Swain, Chetham Society 46 (Manchester, Chetham Society, 2006), 78. At the time of the suit, this territory fell under the territory of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield; Lancashire later came to be incorporated with Cheshire in the newly formed bishopric of Chester in 1541.

34. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 2/9, p. 513.

35. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1608, no. 50; EDC 5 1640, no. 49.

36. The National Archives, Court of Requests, 1485-1648, REQ 2/310/16.

37. Borthwick Institute Trans CP 1572/2.

38. Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1612, no. 4.



# Women's voices: Interaction and performance in the courtroom, 1800-1810

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By the end of the eighteenth century, speeches and spoken interactions involving women had become common in novels, especially novels written by women.<sup>1</sup> Fictitious voices may have echoed the sounds of interactions in the non-fictional world, but the traces of such sounds are rare and their authenticity uncertain. Examples of women's participation in judicial dialogue might be found in legal archives, as well as reports of 'real-life' conversations. Such content might then be the basis of research into women's performance<sup>2</sup> in the public space.<sup>3</sup>

*The Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, as they are known, recording the cases tried at the Courts of Justice for the City of London and the County of Middlesex, are one possible source of female voices. Between 1674 and 1913, the accounts of court proceedings were published, first as information and entertainment for the reading public, and more and more as an official record of law cases. The trial transcripts have been available online since 2003.<sup>4</sup> Professors Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker and Clive Emsley, who developed the *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (OBP), also provided essays and bibliographies about a range of topics, including gender.<sup>5</sup> The historical value of the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* was underlined by John Brewer, who described the great store of cultural details supplied by the legal archive: 'leaving us with numerous fragments of many men's lives.'<sup>6</sup> Where women are concerned, the OBP gives access to a substantial amount of courtroom interactions involving women in different capacities: plaintiff, defendant or witness. In 1994, before the records were digitised, Margaret Doody drew attention to the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* as a source for the study of women's voices. Described as 'a contaminated medium', the archive was nevertheless deemed a valuable record of female voices. The article presented the status of women speaking in court, their reluctance to testify, and their silences (when they were not questioned).<sup>7</sup> When they did appear in court and when their words were recorded, a trace remained and was handed down. In 2003, Garthine Walker pointed out the use that could be made of that material 'to embark on a linguistic analysis of texts, to read them for their semantic content or the way in which they [were] discursively constructed in particular material circumstances.'<sup>8</sup>

By nature, the offence of 'Breaking the Peace' is a good place in the archive to find interactions. Conflicts of all types took place in houses – with neighbours, fellow servants or family as witnesses – or in the street, with passers-by who intervened or observed ('a vast concourse of people assembled'). Unencumbered by the sinister aspects of murder, the reported speeches are likely to be closer to the everyday talk of early nineteenth-century women caught up in the busy life of the streets or the domestic mayhem of home or nearby lodgings.

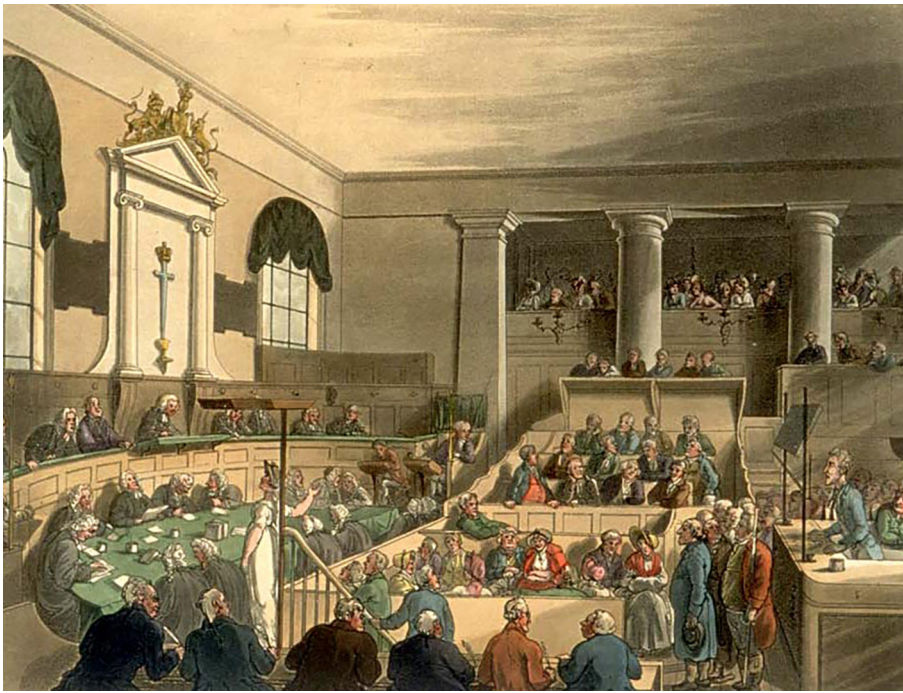
Drawing on these digitised *Proceedings*, this paper endeavours to present examples of interactions involving women between January 1800 and December 1810.<sup>10</sup> Out of

forty-five cases listed under 'Breaking the Peace' in that decade, four had female defendants and six female victims. In thirteen cases, one woman at least (other than the defendant or the victim) was called to testify. After presenting the material at hand – the characteristics of courtroom dialogue and the content of the speeches – the quality of the *verbatim* will be addressed. If not fictitious like novelistic dialogue, it certainly is a mediated record, transcribed as it was by the court's shorthand reporters. What value does it have as a document for the history of women? Then, if that source is admitted to be 'the closest thing we have to recording of the eighteenth-century common people,' how can it be used to assess the quality of women's performance in the public forum?<sup>11</sup>

## The double pragmatic context

Research into pragmatics, the speakers' use of language, lays emphasis on context and action. It relies, for the correct interpretation of utterances and for the evaluation of their action or influence, on the relation between words and the environment in which they are spoken.<sup>12</sup> The OBP, thanks to its wealth of examinations and cross-examinations, provides a double context in which to consider the speeches made by women. Every transcript of some length contains both the legal dialogue between questioner and witness and traces of conversations that took place during the investigated assault. Since conflict erupted from a situation considered as 'peace' in its normal state (whether a domestic or a street scene), the activities (work or leisure) that preceded the outburst of (verbal or physical) violence were reviewed as well. Interactions of the first order in the *Proceedings* were characterised by a codified and fairly consistent procedure. The questioner interrogated the witness, who was not allowed to stray away from the model (and start asking questions in return, for example). However constrained this type of interaction might have been, it did not stop the occasional spontaneous outburst from an exasperated witness: 'You may call as many witnesses as you like, I had nothing but a shawl over my shoulders,' Mary Kashaw retorted to the questioner who threatened to call some witnesses (First Middlesex jury, May 1807).

There was more leeway in the conversations embedded within the courtroom interrogations. This second type of interaction and context was the exchange of words that had taken place before (neighbourly talk) or during (threats or insults) the commission of the crime. It appeared within the testimonies in the form of reported conversations and fragments of dialogue, and displayed a wider range of dialogic patterns and the whole gamut of participants in dialogue: main speakers, secondary speakers, occasional interferers and the wider circle of witnesses (sometimes invisible to the principals). The environment where the conflict arose or the assault took place could be a private house, a shop, a public house or the street. Susannah Roderick was in the street when she came across the defendant, John Grant: 'I live at No. 8,



*The Old Bailey, Known Also  
as the Central Criminal Court:  
Thomas Rowlandson and  
Augustus Pugin*

*Source: Ackermann, Rudolph;  
Pyne, William Henry; Combe,  
William (1904) [1808] "Old Bailey"  
in The Microcosm of London: or,  
London in Miniature, Volume 2.  
Public Domain*

Hopkins-street, Carnaby-market; I am a milkwoman; I was serving milk the same day I saw the prisoner' (London jury, May 1803)<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, Ann Houghton described her whereabouts and intentions as she set off and met her assailant:

I ... was going to get some necessaries for the children's supper; I was on the top step, I had not been there five minutes before Mr. Pearce, or Benton, or whatever his name is, came out of No. 38, with a loose coat upon his left arm, and he passed me, and went into the road, and took a pistol out, and fired at me immediately, I had not time to say, Lord have mercy on me (First Middlesex jury, January 1802).<sup>14</sup>

Charlotte Chapman was in a public house in Chick-lane: 'I was having a pint of beer with this young man that had his throat cut, I sat by the side of him.' Her representation of herself in a place of sociability was completed by the defendant himself when he described the events that led to the assault: 'this young man sat on the side of me and that young woman on the opposite side of the box, they sung some scamping songs' (London jury, September 1809).<sup>15</sup> Hannah Boswell was in her home when Samuel Walker, who later shot at her husband, walked in:

he asked my husband if any potatoes were to be sold there; he said no; he then asked for a drink of water, which my husband gave him, and said he was sorry he had nothing better to offer him. I was getting my children's supper ready, he said you have some sprats, mistress; I said yes; I asked him if he wished to have any, and that he was very welcome to have them (First Middlesex jury, January 1810).<sup>16</sup>

So, women regularly described themselves (and were described) as pursuing their everyday work and leisure activities when the 'peace' of civil conversation (within the framework of a commercial transaction or a hospitable offer) was broken. As for the courts, they generated interactions

about acts and speeches that had taken place outside the court. Exchanges in the courtroom will be looked into more closely in the following section, with a view to assessing the possibility for the transcripts to document the oral discourse of women in the early nineteenth century.

## **Examination and cross-examination of female witnesses**

In an attempt to extract speeches that may display the features of everyday conversation, this selection sets aside the extremes of murder or infanticide (the latter being the crime mostly associated with women) and focuses instead on the more neutral terrain of 'Breaking the Peace'.<sup>17</sup> Offences that included fights or assaults were generally categorised as misdemeanours, except where the threat posed a more serious danger (by the use of sharp instruments, guns, pistols or poison). If deemed serious, the crime was tried at the Old Bailey but, if not, before a lower court.<sup>18</sup> The starting point of the disturbance, as we shall see in the cases selected for study, was often one of personal dislike, misunderstanding, provocative words or looks and, more generally, offence given or received – whether it was meant by the alleged offender was a matter to be decided before the court.

Courtroom exchanges have been examined for what language and behaviour reveals about the malevolence of intentions. Conducted by an anonymous 'Questioner' (who might be the judge, the plaintiff or prosecutor, a member of the jury or a professional lawyer), the judicial dialogue as reported in the transcripts could be very short or very long, and women's participation in it of unequal length: 'The boy put his hand in my bosom, and I took up an oyster shell [to stab him];' is the only speech by the accused, Mary Spittle, spoken in her own defence (First Middlesex jury, September 1808).<sup>19</sup> When the testimony was longer, questions and answers alternated in a search for the details of the transaction that had led to the assault, hence the 'Q' and 'A' in the cited extracts. Some questioners reviewed the facts in great detail, whether they related to words or actions. Causes and intentions were



particularly probed. The following interrogation of Matilda Bicknell is a case in point. Testifying 'for the prisoner,' William Pearce, she was questioned insistently about her relationship with him:

Q. What was your reason for going with him? A. Upon business.

Q. Had he business there? A. Yes.

Q. What was his business? A. I do not know.

Q. What was your business there? A. I had no business.

Q. You told me just now you went upon business what was the occasion of your going with him?

A. To accommodate him, to keep him company

(First Middlesex jury, January 1802).<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to the shorter, impersonal answers to the first four questions, the last one shows an amplification ('to keep him company') on the first phrase ('to accommodate him'). It seems that the witness made a special effort to clarify the 'business,' after being questioned five times on that score, and that the questioner's insistence elicited a personal response that was taken down by the court reporter, in spite of its somewhat redundant quality.

In a more complex case with two defendants, John Baptista was indicted for wounding Patrick Brown with a sharp instrument in a street scuffle, along with Matthew Bonnas as his accomplice. The trial revolved around the testimony of Brown's sister, Mary Kashaw, whose own behaviour and intentions provided the key to the scene. Her first statement, drawing attention to both men's involvement in the assault, was as follows:

as I put my foot on the pavement, Mr. Bonnas knocked me down; he made directly a bustle about his pocket, and he handed an instrument to Baptista, I saw the instrument, I cannot tell whether it was scissars [sic] or a knife; he handed the instrument to Baptista, he said, twig her, twig her; I saw Baptista take the scissars or knife, I received a blow on my head, he cut my clothes here (pointing to her waist) (First Middlesex jury, May 1807).<sup>21</sup>

Mary Kashaw clearly pointed to Bonnas as the man who encouraged and enabled the assault. When cross-examined, she admitted that she bore Bonnas an old grudge:

Q. You had no ill will towards Bonnas till this day. A. No.

Q. You had a great regard for him. A. No, I had no regard for him; I only knew him by eyesight.

Q. Of course you never quarrelled together. A. Yes.

Q. Did you ever travel to Gravesend. A. Yes, I recollect being at Gravesend, and Mr. Bonnas seemed to be a great man, and he seemed to ridicule poor women (First Middlesex jury, May 1807).

The interrogation, a rapid succession of questions and answers, led her to reveal her own ill-will towards Bonnas. Her feelings

and intentions were probed, thus documenting the meandering responses of a woman in a tense situation, that of the initial encounter 'on the pavement' and that of the courtroom interrogation – examination followed by cross-examination.<sup>22</sup> The interrogator, in the last stages of his questioning, issued a warning ('Be cautious, I shall call witnesses'), then proceeded to review Mary Kashaw's former statements:

Q. Now I ask you, have you not said that if ever you could find an opportunity you would hang him. A. No. I said if ever he insulted me again, I would try the laws of my country against him.

Q. Will you persist in swearing that Bonnas was by at the time your brother was wounded. A. He was close by when my brother was wounded, but he did not join in the scuffle (First Middlesex jury, May 1807).

The formality of the phrasing – 'Now I ask you,' 'Will you persist in swearing' – produced the expected nuance in her account, although she refused to admit that she had been looking for a chance to have Bonnas tried. That is an instance of what Margaret Doody points out about eighteenth-century women as they appear in the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*: 'in the realm of necessity, in the day-to-day struggle, women of course participate very fully.'<sup>23</sup> Here indeed, while admitting her dislike of Matthew Bonnas, Mary Kashaw disclosed a former offence ('to ridicule poor women') that had not been prosecuted. The offended woman took the law into her own hands ('I gave him a slap on the face,' she declared in her testimony) and waited for the right occasion to take revenge upon Bonnas, thus resorting to an oblique way of redressing the original wrong.

## A wealth of mediated and selected interactions

The first decade of the nineteenth century saw the increasing place taken by professionals in the courtroom.<sup>24</sup> Women being unqualified to hold such positions, their intervention in the courtroom was restricted to prosecution and testimony. Tracking the evolution of professional intervention in trials is of importance in determining whose voices were actually recorded in the *Proceedings* and, by implication, whose were left out. The presence of lawyers in courtrooms has been established, although they were not always mentioned by name or quoted in the records. Robert Shoemaker summed up the research on adversarial practice and studied the variations in the reporting of lawyers' presence, depending on the message that the regulatory body (the City of London) intended to put forward.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, 'the records are shaped by the recorders', either the press or the printers issuing the legal records.<sup>26</sup> A comparison between the two types of publications may shed light on the specificity of the *Proceedings*. Some cases were selected by newspapers as worthy of being reported, with varying emphasis, from a simple mention of a case and the attached verdict to a fuller coverage over several columns. A closer look at press articles is revealing of the space devoted to the reporting of women's speeches in both sources.<sup>27</sup> This article focuses on one example, which was recorded at length both in the *Proceedings* and in the *Morning Chronicle*.

The article on the trial of Captain Piers and Mary Johnstone began with these words of introduction: 'The



following trial, which occupied a considerable part of the day, was the only one worthy of being noticed.<sup>28</sup> With a view to entertaining as well as informing the public, the press was more selective than the *Proceedings*, choosing to leave entire cases aside. Furthermore, within a single trial, speeches were mostly reported indirectly or summed up, with a few quotes pointing (by means of inverted commas) to the actual words spoken by the witnesses: 'She ... told [the butcher's 'lads'] that she "would get a pill for them." It was after this, as described by the former witnesses, that the pistol was discharged.' That was the only utterance by Mary Johnstone placed between inverted commas in the article. The emphasis thus lay on the direct connection between her threat and the shot fired by the Captain. Comparing the *OBP* account to the newspaper report shows a considerable reduction in direct speech. Mrs. Sharp, the butcher's wife, whose testimony is recorded in the *Proceedings*, is not mentioned at all in the article. The reporter specified at one point: 'After two other witnesses were examined, whose evidence was unimportant.' Not only did the *OBP* publish Mrs. Sharp's testimony but the transcript preserved the repetitions in her discourse – repetitions of the same expressions ('it was the man,' 'three times'), first in direct speech, then indirectly and finally with an added commentary on the former, underscoring the contradictions in Mary Johnstone's assertions:

Mary Johnstone turned round, and said, it is not the boy that has insulted me, it was the man; she said, she could swear, three times, it was the man that had insulted her, and not the boy; she first said, she could swear it was the boy, and then she said, it was the man, she said it three times to the best of my knowledge (Second Middlesex jury, 20 April 1803).<sup>29</sup>

Given the strict economy of speech during the trial, and the possibility of intervention on the scripts, it is significant that the repetition was preserved. Thus, Mary Johnstone's intention in shifting the blame from the boy to the manservant was revived in court by Mrs. Sharp to serve her own purpose (that is, defend both of her husband's employees) and was given prominence by the editor's choice not to shorten this part of her speech.

Although it appeared to give a more thorough account than the press, the *OBP* carried out a selection, in order to pursue its own purposes as a quasi-official record of trials. Thus, the testimonies that *were* made public had survived a first selection and were possibly altered. One indication that the *verbatim* was not the exact transcription of the speeches uttered in court was the use of specific terms in otherwise fairly simple utterances. 'I parted with the last witness about half past eight o'clock in the evening,' said Elizabeth Marra in her testimony at William Pearce's trial (First Middlesex jury, January 1802).<sup>30</sup> Although it was transcribed as direct speech, 'the last witness' sounds like a set phrase and signals a different standpoint. The reporter's preoccupation with the clarity of his discourse collided with the witness's experience, given in the first person, about a man whom she certainly did not think of as 'the last witness'. Similarly, other participants in the trials were referred to by their status. Testifying at Joza Sponza's trial (First Middlesex jury, November 1810), Mary Roe described the events that preceded the assault: 'On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March the prisoner and the prosecutrix were together in my house.'<sup>31</sup> Such

specific terms as 'prisoner' and 'prosecutrix' were certainly added by the recorder to help the reader identify the persons in question.

Considering that signs of mediation were included into the transcripts, they cannot be considered *verbatim* accounts, but they can cautiously be said to provide substantial material for the analysis of a variety of interactions involving women in the 'public forum'.<sup>32</sup>

## Publicity and performance

Performance in the linguistic sense – and in the line of research first started by John Austin and taken further by linguists and philosophers in the twentieth century – refers to the capacity for speakers to act upon their environment through the use of language.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of the Old Bailey, women's voices were heard because women made the decision to speak out or intervene in a conflict. Depending on the case, they were drawn unwillingly into the action, they reacted to a perceived insult or threat, or they participated in the crime. The content of the testimonies, where assault was concerned, often showed that the sex of the witness, victim or defendant was a significant fact in the events that led to the trial. Mary York, accused of firing a gun at two passing men, was quoted by two witnesses as declaring: 'she would take the liberty of firing at [the plaintiff]' (Second Middlesex jury, June 1809). The plaintiff himself, when urged by his companion to walk on and ignore the woman waving a gun, had answered: 'I would sooner lose my life than be frightened by a woman.'<sup>34</sup> By having her words repeated in court testimonies, Mary York was given prominence as a woman ready to exert violence against men, one of whom clearly identified her as a woman in a position of power (with the gun).

Reporting speeches entails both transporting and advertising: transporting from the scene of the crime to the courtroom or from the reporter's notes to the published record, the latter in turn making the utterances public (along with speaker, content, tone, and choice of words, among others). When Mary Sharp, the butcher's wife called to testify in court, stepped out of her parlour into her husband's shop, she first shared in the publicity of the conflictual encounter (opposing Captain Piers and Miss Mary Johnstone to the butcher's servants), and later of the courtroom. Her appearance was noted in the two different locations: first by the other protagonists who, according to the transcript, exchanged words with her at the scene, and then in court where she went over the events for the benefit of the jury:

as I was sitting in my parlour, I heard a noise; I went out, and saw my apprentice standing in the passage; then I saw the prisoner, Piers, walking forwards towards the parlour door, and immediately asked, what was the matter? the prisoner, Piers, gave me no answer; the prisoner, Mary Johnstone, immediately said, that is the boy that has insulted me, (pointing to Mawbey;) I immediately said, I was extremely sorry, if either had given any offence, but I wished to know what insult was given ... I immediately begged him to leave the boy alone, as his master was not in the way to take his part, that I would make any recompence in my power to the lady ...

. (Second Middlesex jury, 20 April 1803)<sup>35</sup>

Thus did Mary Sharp relay her own and Mary Johnstone's words, mixing indirect and direct speech, respectively 'I said, I was extremely sorry' and '[she] said, that is the boy that has insulted me.' In her husband's absence, she stepped up and offered apologies and compensation for the alleged insult. She was a minor agent in the brawl (hence her absence from the article in the *Morning Chronicle*), but a prominent enough participant in the verbal transactions that occupied a total of thirteen people (two women and eleven men), who either took an active part in the action, or observed the scene from their various standpoints and later described it in court. Ironically, the shop-owner – the common point of reference to all the witnesses – was absent from the scene and, therefore, not recorded in the *OBP*. His name or function ('butcher,' 'master,' Mr. Sharp) served as a reference to all the observers: 'apprentice to Mr. Sharp,' 'your master's house,' 'at their master's door,' 'at Mr. Sharp's door,' 'next door to Mr. Sharp,' 'the house opposite Mr. Sharp's shop,' 'the fishmonger's that joins Mr. Sharp's shop.' Yet, it was Mrs. Sharp that the questioner persisted in placing with a degree of precision at the scene: 'Was Mrs. Sharp there at the time?', 'Did she say no more than that?', 'Who was in the shop when Mrs. Sharp came in?' The relative insignificance of the butcher's wife in her own neighbours' set of references found compensation in the relative importance she was given by the court. Although she certainly had little direct power over her own life and environment, she came to be at the centre of a series of narratives in the public space of a major institution.

In the trial of John Conway, charged with attacking his neighbour Martin Carrol with 'a sharp instrument,' two women besides Carrol's wife testified, and described the part they actively played in the different steps of the conflict. Both women intervened, using persuasion (in vain) and deception (successfully) to prevent the fight. Mary Welch first tried to deter the defendant, Conway, from using his sword against his neighbour Carrol: 'I begged of him to go up stairs with his sword; he went to Slater's passage, and stood with the sword at his back; I begged him to drop the sword, he said he would not ... then I went to call the watchmen' (Second Middlesex jury, July 1807).<sup>36</sup> She resorted to 'begging' to alter the situation she was faced with and, failing to influence Conway, she took action ('fetching the watch'). She appeared, through her testimony, not only as a witness but also as a participant in the dangerous confrontation that occurred outside her door. Mary Welch's account was complemented by Esther Fisher's: 'On the 14th of June I was in bed when the prisoner [Conway] came up to me and asked me to let him in to save his life.' She then lied to protect him: 'Carrol came to me, he asked me if Conway was in my room, I told him no; he said he had better not let him lay hold of him, if he did he would murder him' (Second Middlesex jury, July 1807). Her description of the plaintiff breaking a window to get into the house and threatening to kill the defendant was certainly responsible for the 'Not guilty' verdict delivered by the court. Thus, John Conway was saved twice by her use of words, once when she misdirected Carrol as he came up to her in search of Conway, and again before the court when her testimony showed the latter being threatened by a sword-wielding Carrol.

In another instance, Elizabeth Earl described, as a witness, the fray that led to the arrest of John Wragg for attempted murder. Interrogating the other participants in the scene as she reported it in court, she assumed the role of

'questioner.' The court reporter sketched the context himself ('the girl came to [her mother], to complain of the prisoner having threatened to shoot her, and behaved improperly to her, and of what he had attempted') before writing down the witness's direct testimony:

I asked the cook and house-maid how it was; they said, they could not tell, but he behaved very indifferent; I asked, did he court her; they said, they did not know, but he was a very comical fellow, and had attempted her life, and wished her mother and I to talk to him ... her mother and I went into the pantry to him with the girl. (First Middlesex jury, trial of John Wragg)<sup>37</sup>

In her first-person account, the witness presented herself as an agent that combined movement in space ('her mother asked me to go with them to her place, which I did') and active participation through questioning and probing ('I asked him what he meant by using the girl ill, and whether he wished to have her for his wife'). Elizabeth Earl's neighbourly attention to the safety of others led her to take on similar functions as the court authorities. When reiterating her previous speeches in court, she enacted the interrogator (in both the legal and theatrical senses) and publicised her show of authority in the pantry.

Thus, women's speeches, from their initial occurrence to their final appearance in print (in the *OBP* or the press), were repeated, transported and given publicity. Although the questioners had control over the beginning and the end of the interactions, decided on the number of questions asked, and set the pace and pattern of the interrogation, the content and tone of the answers could not be absolutely controlled. Often stichomythic, the question and answer pattern occasionally allowed witnesses to launch into ampler developments. Therefore, provided they were not interrupted in court or silenced by the publisher, their words were recorded and publicised. Consequently, the impact of speech went beyond the immediate need for facts and testimonies to be gathered in a particular court case. Interpersonal and social patterns of interactions were registered as much as the chain of events that led to law-breaking.

By providing a common ground on which to pursue a common goal (establishing facts, recording testimonies, etc.), the court situation allowed female witnesses to engage with the professionals surrounding them and to play a part, however limited, in the courtroom theatre. By detailing the circumstances of their involvement in conflict, they had the minutiae of their lives recorded and advertised, thus pushing back the boundaries of their everyday interactions. In such a context, they represented to the court and questioners aspects of their everyday lives and interactions with the wider world.

In a world where their legal power was very much limited, they could use language to act on their environment, even in dangerous or tense situations and thus influence the outcomes. In everyday situations, when conflicts arose, they managed to carry out functions of mediation and emergency intervention, to prevent an assault or minimise the damage, to alert the authorities and testify when the time came. The latter stage gave them a chance to have their words, acts and skills publicised within the institutional framework of the court, the summons to testify thus 'run[ning] the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech.'

## Notes

1. The novels of Hannah More, Ann Radcliffe, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, to name only a few of the female novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
2. Although courtroom scenes are often compared with the theatre, performance here refers to pragmatic studies (within the larger domain of linguistics) and to the power of speech to act on the speaker's environment.
3. 'Public space' is here a reference to Habermas's study of the private (that is, intimate and commercial) and public (civic and political) spheres – Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1962), trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1989).
4. Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, *et al.*, *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674-1913, [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org) version 7.0, accessed 4 Feb. 2017]. Information on the history of the *Proceedings* come from the website, which supplies background details on all aspects of the trials and their recording. In this article, quotations from the *OBP* will be followed by the place and date of the trial. Other details, including the reference number, will be provided in the endnotes.
5. Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, 'Gender in the *Proceedings*', *OBP*, [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
6. 'John Brewer, 'An Ungovernable People? Law and Disorder in Stuart and Hanoverian England'', *History Today*, 30/1 (1980), 20.
7. Margaret Anne Doody, 'Voices of Record: Women as Witnesses and Defendants in the Old Bailey Sessions Papers', in Susan Sage Heinzelman and Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman (eds), *Representing Women: Law, Literature and Feminism* ed. Susan Sage Heinzelman and Zipporah Batshaw Wiseman (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1994), 302.
8. Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 5-6.
9. *OBP*, April 1803, trial of William Piers and Mary Johnstone (t-18030420-1) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
10. Peter King described the period as the final stage of 'Old Regime' criminal justice, before the repeal of the 'Bloody code,' and as a time of 'extensive discretionary powers' to counteract the weight of the capital penalty. *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England, 1740-1820* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), 4, 238.
11. Doody, 'Voices of Record', 289.
12. According to Jean-Jacques Lecercle: 'Pragmatics lies at the centre of language, language is as much, if not more, about action as it is about reflection and communication.' *The Force of Language* (London, Macmillan, 2004), 128.
13. *OBP*, May 1803, trial of John Grant (t-18030525-19) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
14. Trial of William Pearce, alias Benton.
15. *OBP*, September 1809, trial of John Briant (t-18090920-92) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, 4 Feb. 2017].
16. *OBP*, October 1810, trial of Samuel Walker (t-18100110-1) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
17. About women's crimes, 'witchcraft, infanticide and scolding', see Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 4; also Deirdre Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion, 1780-1830* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 2006), 21.
18. The *OBP* provides explanations of every category of crime that appears in the archive. See Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, 'Crime and Justice – Crimes tried at the Old Bailey' [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.0, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
19. *OBP*, September 1808, trial of Mary Spittle (t-18080914-106) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
20. *OBP*, January 1802, trial of William Pearce, alias Benton (t-18020113-1) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
21. *OBP*, May 1807, trial of John Baptista and Mathew Bonnas (t18070513-36) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
22. The adversarial system, which developed during the eighteenth century, resulted in longer and more detailed transcripts. On the development of the adversary procedure, see King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England*, 228, and John H. Langbein, *The Origins of Adversary Criminal Trial* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 291-6.
23. Doody, 'Voices of Record', 295.
24. On the rise of lawyers in the courtroom which progressively silenced lay voices, see David Lemmings, ed., *Crime, Courtrooms and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1700-1850* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2012), 3.
25. Andrea McKenzie, 'Representing the Adversary Criminal Trial: Lawyers in the Old Bailey Proceedings, 1770-1800', in Lemmings, *Crime, Courtrooms and the Public Sphere*, 71-91.
26. Doody, 'Voices of Record', 288.
27. The Court reports started as press reports themselves but by the mid-eighteenth century they had become a specific medium, relied on for the reviewing of court cases as much as for the information of the public.
28. *Morning Chronicle*, 21 Apr. 1803, for this and subsequent quotations from the same article and the same case.
29. Trial of William Piers and Mary Johnstone.
30. Trial of William Pearce, alias Benton.
31. *OBP*, trial of Joza Sponza (t18100411-45) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
32. Doody, 'Voices of Record', 291.
33. John Austin, *How to Do Thing with Words* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962).
34. *OBP*, June 1809, trial of Mary York (t18090626-49) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].
35. Trial of William Piers and Mary Johnstone.
36. *OBP*, July 1807, trial of John Conway, alias Connaway (t18070701-21) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017]. This, and all quotes relating to the same case.
37. *OBP*, September 1803, trial of John Wragg (t18030914-97) [[www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 7.2, accessed 4 Feb. 2017].



# 'Your Radegund': Locating an empowered female voice in the verse epistle *De excidio Thuringiae* of St. Radegund

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The story of Radegund is a unique example of a woman's trajectory from powerlessness to empowerment. It was widely described after her death, both by Gregory of Tours, who discussed her at length in his histories and his *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, as well as in two saintly biographies, ('vitae'), written by Venantius Fortunatus and Baudonivia, a nun from Radegund's convent in Poitiers.<sup>1</sup> In Radegund's youth, her uncle, Hermanfrid, had killed her father with the aid of the Merovingian kings Theodric and Clothar. He then raised her as his own daughter. When Hermanfrid reneged on the bounty that he had promised Theodric and Clothar, they invaded Thuringia in 531 and killed him. Clothar claimed Radegund – still only a girl – as his bride-to-be. Radegund converted to Christianity and lived at the royal villa in Athies for five years while awaiting the marriage. According to the two 'vitae', Radegund resorted to harsh asceticism in order to dissuade Clothar from marrying her but her efforts failed and they were eventually married. She became the second of Clothar's eventual wives. Radegund remained with Clothar for fifteen years in a childless marriage, which was seemingly so lacking in lustre that it led people to comment that the king had married a nun rather than a queen.<sup>2</sup> Upon hearing of Clothar's murder of her sole surviving brother, Radegund fled to Tours, where Clothar followed her. It was only with the support of powerful bishops – most notably St. Germaine of Paris – that she was able to convince Clothar to leave her alone and grant her permission to found a convent in Poitiers. Thus, Radegund was able to free herself from her forced marriage and acquire some degree of autonomy through her entry into a religious life. Once freed, Radegund soon began to demonstrate her ability to manipulate religious conventions to further her own empowerment. She gained both authority and notoriety by acquiring a relic of the True Cross for her convent, thereby separating herself from existing religious power structures and placing her on an equal footing vis-à-vis other religious authorities. Radegund also strove to establish a religious following of her own, beyond the fame her abbey had garnered through the acquisition of the relic. She accomplished this feat by securing the support of her stepsons, including the Frankish King Sigebert, through the exploitation of their familial connection. One of her letters – now known as *De excidio Thuringiae*, 'The Fall of Thuringia' – sent to her cousin, Hamalfred, offers a rare glimpse into how Radegund was able to do this.<sup>3</sup>

*De excidio Thuringiae* serves as one of the few sources for how an early medieval woman was able to achieve empowerment by manipulating both the gendered conventions of her own status together with those of the men surrounding her. This article provides a brief overview of the historiography of Radegund's life before turning to a macro-historical view of her ability to manipulate religious conventions in order to distance herself from the control of male bishops. It then focuses on the specific case of the letter, *De excidio Thuringiae*, in a micro-historical example of the ways that Radegund was able to manipulate gendered conventions in a non-religious

context. In particular, through the letter Radegund played on her role as a female family member to force Sigebert and Hamalfred to act their part as male protectors. In so doing, she placed herself in an unparalleled position of power. The article ends with connecting Radegund's letters with other examples of how conventions regarding family and gender allowed women in the early Middle Ages to achieve a degree of empowerment, which, although seemingly limited by modern standards, nevertheless formed a formidable achievement in their own time.

In many ways, it is hard not to make a feminist reading of Radegund's life. Abducted, married and then forced to flee from the man who murdered her family, Radegund's struggle is one to which, tragically, some modern readers can relate. A recurring theme throughout Radegund's life was empowerment through securing the support of others in order to minimise the control of powerful men over her. Radegund's rise from marriage to Clothar as a symbol of military victory to the carefully curated establishment of her own place in the cult of saints demonstrates clear gendered agency. In Radegund's reclamation of the narrative of her life, she transitions from a state of powerlessness to empowerment in a period when such movement was largely suppressed. Empowerment can be defined as a process in which women come to believe in their ability 'to construct, and take responsibility for, [their] gendered identity, [their] politics and [their] choices'.<sup>4</sup> Powerlessness, in contrast, is the continuing subordination of women to men in public and private spheres, supported by cultural messages of devaluation internalised by women. Empowerment theory assumes that empowerment takes on different forms for different people and that social and historical characteristics shape individual desire for empowerment.<sup>5</sup> As such, looking for resistance against a patriarchal system in a pre-modern society is difficult, if not impossible. Instead, historians of this period are more often tasked with looking for resistance *within* the existent gender systems through acts of subversion and manipulation. As a result, the approach towards identifying female empowerment is perhaps more subtle than in a modern context but none the less crucial for its significance for greater sex equality as well as for recognising the self-actualisation of the historical subject. Radegund achieved empowerment through propagating her own image as a holy woman, *mulier sancta*, the closest approximation of sainthood a living person could achieve, and thereby claimed the religious authority and relative autonomy that this position offered.

Scholarly attention directed toward Radegund has been predominantly focused on her religious life and her authoritative role derived from her position as a holy woman. The work of Raymond Van Dam is a prime example of how scholars have focused on Radegund's influence as a saint but with little regard to the obstacles that she faced by being a woman.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, with the growing influence of gender theory on medieval studies, some scholars have begun to view her in a different light. John Kitchen's *Saint's Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, examines how Radegund's



'Radegund retires to the monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary'

hagiographers, Baudonivia and Fortunatus, emphasised different interpretations of her female sanctity depending on their own sex.<sup>7</sup> Taking this approach even further, Julia Smith argues that Radegund's image as a saintly virgin flourished after her death and says more about her biographers' historical context than about Radegund herself.<sup>8</sup> Smith argues that the saintly image of Radegund was in fact one of her own devising, and that she 'effectively manipulated traditions of regal female piety and spirituality' to secure her position as a religious authority by appealing to contemporary connections between female chastity and sanctity.<sup>9</sup> Smith also points to Radegund's *Exemplar Epistolae*, 'Letter of Foundation' as evidence of Radegund's mastery of rhetorical *topoi* and language in which she positions herself as persecuted because of her faith, but also in need of protection because of her sex, in order to convince the recipient bishops to support her convent. In this way, Smith's argument highlights Radegund's artifice in manipulating her own image as a virginal saint, despite her previous marriage to Clothar.

Radegund repeatedly demonstrated her skill at leveraging her position to gain political and religious capital. This allowed her to rise to new heights that would otherwise be inaccessible for her sex. It was not an easy process, particularly since Radegund preferred to rely on the aid of bishops and saints outside of Poitiers to found her convent. This put her in opposition to local religious authorities. By acquiring a relic of the True Cross, Radegund's convent, now named Sainte-Croix, became a centre of worship that was in contention with the local cult of St. Hilary and its leader, Maroveus, the Bishop of Poitiers. Maroveus was particularly disinclined towards allowing Radegund's convent to collect relics that would place it in a superior position to the cult of Hilary. Radegund found a way around Maroveus' obstructions by instead appealing for the support of Clothar's son, King Sigebert I, her stepson. He sent a delegation to the East in search of a relic, the True Cross, which his stepmother gratefully received. After the return of the relic of the True Cross from the Levant, Maroveus displayed his anger by refusing the request to celebrate the *translatio* of the relic and instead 'rejected her [Radegund's] request, mounted his horse, and rode to his villa'.<sup>10</sup> Radegund again appealed to Sigebert, and with the help of the soon-to-be-bishop Gregory of Tours, the relic was installed in the convent. It should be noted that Radegund later reinforced her relationship with these two men by using her new position as abbess and head of the new

cult of the True Cross to support publicly Gregory's election as Bishop and Sigebert's acquisition of Poitiers in 573.

In what was arguably a further attempt to distance herself and Sainte-Croix from Maroveus, Radegund adopted the monastic rule, *regula*, of Caesarius of Arles. This was the first specifically written for women and insisted, uniquely, on a convent's autonomy against episcopal interference, placing the nuns under the protection of the local king.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, her casual disregard for the Rule on several instances indicates that her adoption thereof may have been nothing more than an additional ploy in order to gain autonomy for her convent. Furthermore, as Jo Ann McNamara has suggested, like the relic of the True Cross, Radegund used Caesarius' rule 'in some way to tie Sainte-Croix [her convent] to the diocese of Arles in view of her poor relationship with the see of Poitiers'.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in regards to the Caesarian rule, Radegund demonstrated a remarkable ability to manipulate religious conventions as a means to gain authority. She used the rule as she apparently did as 'an enabling device for a highly individual, austere regimen of her own devising'.<sup>13</sup> In order to claim greater sanctity, Radegund was known to have over-extended the rules in terms of her diet, which drew the criticism of Caesarius' niece Caesaria II, who likewise was the abbess of a monastery under the Caesarius Rule. On the other hand, Radegund 'seems to have not adhered to the permanent claustration enjoined by the Rule'.<sup>14</sup> She preferred a looser interpretation in this instance, which could have had negative implications for her bid of holy recognition. Perhaps the more egregious indiscretion was a controversy involving nuns openly disregarding the very practice of virginity that arose after her death. Though this was not directly linked to Radegund, it suggests that perhaps even fundamental ideology of chastity might have been more of a propaganda tool for Radegund, rather than a sincere practice.<sup>15</sup> With the relative autonomy granted to her by her new *regula*, the monastic rules of conduct governing her convent, and her uniquely powerful cult of the True Cross, Radegund had then become a powerful patron and authority in the centre of Merovingian Gaul. This was despite her humility and renowned asceticism.<sup>16</sup> It was at some point in the midst of these events that Radegund composed and sent her verse letter, *De excidio Thuringiae*, 'The Fall of Thuringia' to her estranged cousin Hamalfred in Constantinople, forcing him to grant her his aid.

This article turns to an examination of Radegund's manipulation of gendered assumption to secure her own



empowerment. It employs an intersectional approach, looking beyond her status as a religious authority. Although Radegund became a powerful woman, building and keeping charge over her own convent, she was, nevertheless, a woman in a world dominated by powerful men. Applying an intersectional reading of Radegund takes into account all the various identities that she embodied both as a holy person but also as a woman. Intersectionality theorists argue that oppression is produced through the interaction of multiple, decentred, and co-constitutive axes. The intersectional approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and examines complexity within a social group. Such groups, located 'at neglected points of intersection' of axes of oppression, are studied through an intracategorical lens in order to reveal the complexity of the lived experience of their members.<sup>17</sup> Through this approach, this article seeks to offer a more nuanced view of Radegund, not only as a royal saint, but also as a woman and therefore still contending with conceptions of gender in the world she lived in. To this end, it will focus on Radegund's letter to her cousin Hamalfred, entitled *De excidio Thuringiae*, 'The Fall of Thuringia', because it captures her identity as a woman in a familial context removed to some extent from her religious status. However, the study of this letter, as well as her other letters, has been problematic due to the uncertainty of its authorship.

Despite being one of the most studied women from the early medieval period, very little of St. Radegund's own writing remains. Only her letter to the bishops – the *Exemplar Epistolae* or 'Letter of Foundation' (c. 561-567) – included by Gregory of Tours in his *Ten Books of History*, and the three letters: *De excidio Thuringiae* (c. 570), *Ad Iustinum et Sophiam Augustos* 'To Emperors Justin and Sophia' (c. 568-569) and *Ad Artachis* 'To Artachis' (c. 571) are believed to be hers. The three letters, *De excidio*, *Ad Iustinum* and *Ad Artachis* were included among the *Opera poetica* of the contemporary poet, and later bishop, Venantius Fortunatus. They appear to be in his style, making their authorship difficult to ascertain. In claiming Fortunatus as author, several scholars – most notably J. M. Wallace-Hadrill – have pointed to the similarity in language and style between *De excidio* and Fortunatus' eulogy for the Visigoth princess Galsvinth. Yet, other scholars – including Karen Cherewatuk and Marcelle Thiébaux – have argued for Radegund's authorship, due to it being written in the feminine voice, and the appeal to gender conventions such as motherhood, mourning widow, and female lover in these letters.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, the issue remains unsolved and the consensus now views the letters as a collaborative effort between both Fortunatus and Radegund. With regard to Radegund's letters to her relatives in Constantinople, *De excidio* and *Ad Artachos*, the most substantial work has been that of Karen Cherewatuk. In her article, 'Radegund and the Epistolary Tradition' Cherewatuk finds that Radegund employed examples from Classical epic, specifically the 'exaggerated rhetoric' of Ovid's *Heroides*, as well as a style of *epicedium*, the Roman genre of funeral lament and the plaintive tone of Germanic lament, *Querella*. Yet, in discussing the letters' place in the *epicedium* tradition, Cherewatuk struggles to make Radegund's lamenting tone fit the genre. She undercuts the attempt by admitting that Radegund 'inverts the genre's message of consolation'.<sup>19</sup> Other scholars, such as Jane E. Jeffrey in her 'Radegund and the Letter of Foundation' agree that *De excidio Thuringiae* was intended

to offer consolation.<sup>20</sup> When considered alongside Radegund's manipulation of religious convention – both in her acquisition of the Rule of Caesarius and the creation of her own cult of the Holy Cross – Cherewatuk's literary framework reveals Radegund's capacity to employ literary conventions (the use and subversion of specific genres) for her own ends. By framing her own woman's suffering and weakness within a literary context as well as making the direct familial connection with her audience, her cousin Hamalfred, Radegund forced him to act according to his gendered role as male representative of the family. She used this as a tool to ingratiate herself with the Merovingian royal family.

The dominant theme of *De excidio Thuringiae* is that of family and familial responsibility. At the beginning of the letter, Radegund establishes her position in the Thuringian family and her familial duties by depicting herself as the quintessential mourning female, in this case lamenting Clothar's murder of her family and people. Radegund does not mention either herself or her cousin until some thirty lines into the epistle. Instead, the letter begins impersonally with a description of the destruction of Thuringia with clear analogies to the *Aeneid*<sup>21</sup>. In so doing, she emphasises the shared familial bond between herself and Hamalfred as the last surviving members of the Thuringian royal family. On line 21, she uses specific examples of women suffering from the loss of men:

Hence a bound matron with torn hair is taken, she was not able to say a sad goodbye to her household gods, not allowed to give a kiss to the threshold, nor to turn back her face to see that place. A naked wife tramples the husband's blood under foot, a gentle sister steps over her dead brother. A boy seized from a mother's embrace with a funeral plaint [*planctu*] hanging from her mouth, nor did she give any tears.<sup>22</sup>

Though Radegund does not explicitly identify herself in this section, the use of the funeral plaint, *planctus*, reserved for female mourners, which appears again while describing her own mourning of her brother on line 122, links her to the suffering of a wife, sister and mother. Radegund thus becomes the embodiment of all the suffering women of the Thuringian people, even claiming that 'each have their own tears, but only I have them all: that private sorrow is public for me ... I, the sole survivor must weep for all'.<sup>23</sup> In this way, Radegund establishes her responsibility as preserving the family memory, and she claims the right to do so as the sole surviving Thuringian woman. She is at once wife, sister, and mother for Hamalfred, and indeed a representative of all of Thuringia. Having thus established how she successfully carried out her responsibilities as the female member of their family, Radegund then highlights the contrasting image of how Hamalfred had failed to fulfil his own responsibilities as the male protector of their family.

In similar fashion, Radegund establishes Hamalfred's familial role through her description of him. In addressing him, Radegund began by describing their close relationship in the past:

Oh Hamalfred how I was your Radegund then, how as an infant you loved me once. Oh son of my father's brother, kind kinsman, what my dead father could have been, what my mother was, what only a sister or brother could be, you were



for me .... Then there was scarcely a moment less than an hour in which you did not come to me; now ages pass without a single word from you.<sup>24</sup>

Although they were not immediate family, through her words, Hamalfred emerges as close as her father, mother, brother or sister. The appeal to familial roles is attributable to the fact that Hamalfred was a member of the laity. In his handbooks for Christian living, Paulinus of Aquileia (c.795) also drew on familial imagery to appeal to the values of the laity. When describing hell to a lay aristocrat, he specifically employed familial relationships to describe the diabolical horrors: 'there is not any honour, or recognition of closest kin ... where there is no esteem for the older man or king, nor is the lord above the servant, nor does the mother love son or daughter, nor does the son honour the father.'<sup>25</sup> Radegund appears to have drawn on this theme in order to create a stronger connection with her kinsman. The emphasis on family clearly carried more weight in her interactions with Hamalfred than the appeals to her femininity or religious ties. Yet, after she establishes the importance of these familial bonds, Radegund cleverly turns them against Hamalfred in order to reprimand him for his neglect of masculine familial duty.

In using exaggerated classical examples, Radegund threatens Hamalfred's masculinity, suggesting that they exchange their gendered roles if he has no intention to fulfil his obligation as the protector and avenger of their family line. As the sole surviving male member of Radegund's family following the attacks from Clothar, it would fall to Hamalfred to take up the reins of familial protection, not the least of which would be the support and defence of his cousin. In beginning her main attack against Hamalfred's neglect, Radegund asked, 'if others seek their servants [*famulos*] by the law of piety [*pietatis*], why, I ask, should I be abandoned by a kinsman close in blood?'.<sup>26</sup> Though the appeal to piety may strike the modern reader as explicitly religious, it should be noted that the classical use of *pietas* often described familial piety rather than religious devotion.<sup>27</sup> The use of such a value-laden concept therefore further demonstrates how Hamalfred, her blood kinsman, had failed her by not acting according to his position as a male protector of their family. This use of familial piety is taken up throughout the letter when describing family members fulfilling their proper familial duty. Radegund further pushed her analogies after having given several examples of masters and lovers facing dangers, when she stated:

If the monastery's sacred cloister did not restrain me, I would come unannounced to the region where you live, I would swiftly cross by ship through stormy waters, I would gladly move through gales of winter winds, loving you, I would press harder through shifting tides, I would not fear what sailors dread .... Yet if a final fate would have taken my lamenting life and I received a sandy tomb from your hands, I would come as an eyeless corpse before your pious eyes, so that you would carry out my funeral rites, you, who spurn my living tears, would weep at my funeral, and give my plaint [*planctus*], you who deny me a word now.<sup>28</sup>

The use of the formal funeral plaint, *planctus*, further emphasises Radegund's claim that if Hamalfred were

unwilling to perform the role of the classical lord/lover, she would be happy to assume that mantle. In return, she offers him the feminine role of the mourner, emphasised through the reference to his pious eyes. As the woman in this reversed relationship, his duty would only be to mourn the dead from afar rather than directly participating in their vengeance. The first-century classical writer, Tacitus, claimed that Germanic men would dismiss 'tears and lamentations,' thinking it fitting that 'women bewail,' while men 'remember the dead'.<sup>29</sup> Radegund's inversion of this classical characterisation can therefore be seen as a deliberate attempt to shame Hamalfred into taking action. Before the end of the work, Radegund had one last goad to employ against Hamalfred, again feminising herself as a mourning woman and this time issuing a lament – *querela* – in the model of *epicedium*, the classical elegiac genre.

Radegund moves her lament to a climax by launching into a formal *querela* for her dead brother, to further heighten the need for Hamalfred to provide the *consolatio*—the consolation traditionally provided by a male figure to a grieving woman. In the last fifty lines of the letter, Radegund adopts a different strategy, this time underscoring her own feminine role in her relationship with Hamalfred. In describing the death of her brother, Radegund expressed her guilt over not mourning him properly:

An absent sister, I did not attend his funeral, not only was I absent, I could not close his pious eyes, nor did I, lying on over of him, give a final farewell, nor could my hot tears warm his cold innards, I planted no kiss on the dying flesh ... Brother, I salute you, I am impiously guilty of your charge: I gave no grave to you who only died because of me.<sup>30</sup>

Radegund's admission of her own failing not only emphasised, again, the importance of familial roles, but it also likened her to a lamenting woman of an *epicedium* – a classical eulogy.

A similar example of this trope appears in Venantius Fortunatus' eulogy for the Visigothic princess Galsvinth. In his *carmina* for Galsvinth, Fortunatus echoes language similar to Radegund's letter by describing the pains of Galsvinth's separation from her family in Spain and the torment of being a stranger without family in Gaul. The overarching theme of Fortunatus' *epicedium*, like Radegund's letter, was that of a woman's pain of losing familial support. Especially similar to Radegund's *querela* is that of Galsvinth's sister Brunhild, in which she states 'Why, as a foreigner did I not close your sweet eyes or drink in your last words with eager ears? I myself performed no sorrowful duty for my sister ... I was not allowed to pour forth my tears nor swallow them back from my face, nor do I wash your chill flesh with warm tears'.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of the *querela* seems to be a particular form of rhetoric aimed at eliciting an emotional response, which in the nascent Christian era was increasingly seen as decadent, and hence feminine. Yet the effect of this appeal is undeniable. This is suggested by Fortunatus' description of her family's reaction to the *querelae*: 'The nobles and servants, horse and city, the king himself echoed the cries, and a single bitter voice lamented wheresoever she sought to go ... Germany hears the sister's loud lamentations and beats against the stars with wailing, wheresoever the path runs'.<sup>32</sup> The emotional response to a *querela* was not only to mourn with the lamenting woman, but also to accompany her wherever she went. Fortunatus, after

having utilised the full power of the emotional language of the *querelae*, provides the *consolatio* at the end of the eulogy in his own voice, which seeks to provide a resolution for the mourning family, and thereby places the consoler in an empowered position vis-à-vis the mourners. Radegund, on the other hand, does not give Hamalfred any resolution; he is left with the full emotional impact of her *querela*. Radegund instead reminds him that he is responsible for providing the *consolation*, stating 'I beg you, serene kinsman, rush now with your page, so that a kind word may soothe a raging sorrow'.<sup>33</sup> In this way, Radegund places herself in the position of a suffering female in need of male support, perhaps offering a way for Hamalfred to redeem his previously impinged masculinity in failing to care for the suffering of his family. Radegund's emphasis on familial ties may also provide some indication as to her purpose in writing.

Towards the end of the *De excidio Thuringiae*, Radegund finally makes clear her intent in writing to Hamalfred, namely to commend her to the Merovingian kings. As has already been seen, it is likely that the letter dates from 570, when Radegund's position with regard to Bishop Maroveus was critical. It was only through the support of King Sigebert that she was able to circumvent Maroveus' actions and establish her own cult centre. Therefore, it is curious that she ended the letter, which coincides with her conflict with Maroveus, by asking 'I pray that you commend me to the kings of the Franks, who piously honor me as a mother'.<sup>34</sup> The kings in question would have been Sigebert and Chilperic, who succeeded Clothar after his death in 561. Radegund appeals to Hamalfred to strengthen her ties to the kings, while also making clear her maternal relationship to them as their stepmother. The role of women in preserving family bonds and memories was a means of gaining considerable power and influence, as it enabled the shaping of 'others' knowledge and impression of particular kinship groups'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in *De excidio*, Radegund succeeds in positioning herself as superior to Hamalfred because of his neglect. She also reinforces her position as matriarch over Sigebert and Chilperic through Hamalfred's commendation of her. In this instance, Radegund moves into a position of empowerment by manipulating the theme of powerlessness in the *querela* of her letter in order to gain the sympathies as well as the respect of her male relations.

The case of Ingitrude and her daughter Berthe Gund provides a notable parallel that sheds additional light on Radegund's actions. Like Radegund, the noble Merovingian woman Ingitrude was the founder of a convent and, in typical early medieval fashion, she chose her daughter as her successor. Controversy soon arose, however, as her daughter Berthe Gund was at the time married and therefore could not enter a religious order without her husband's consent. Berthe Gund's response to her husband's refusal was to flee to her brother Bertram, bishop of Bordeaux. While the controversy grew as the husband sought to restore his wife, Bertram acted as Berthe Gund's protector. It is made clear in the records that Bertram offered his protection not on account of his position as a religious superior, which would have been the local bishop – in this case Gregory of Tours – but rather as her brother. He stated that 'it was out of brotherly love and affection that I kept her with me as long as she wished to stay'. Later, when King Guntram joined the fray, his participation was also attributed to his familial connection with Berthe Gund's husband. He claimed that 'she is a relation of mine, if she has done anything wrong in her husband's home it is for me to punish her'.<sup>36</sup> Guntram's claim further underlines that Bertram acted out of familial obligation and that, since Guntram was head of the

family group, Bertram ought to have recognised his authority in this matter. However, while Guntram and Gregory took the side of her husband, ultimately Bertram continued to support his sister. He sent her to take her vows, risking the animosity of both the king and the highly influential bishop. What this episode reveals is the extent to which close familial ties could be used to supersede even political and religious hierarchies, thereby providing women with the means of controlling their own fates by means of manipulating such relations.

The importance of familial relations, even within monastic contexts, is reinforced by the repeated attempts to curtail the influence of family members once their relations had taken monastic vows. Despite the scripturally based monastic renunciation of family ties (Luke, 14:26, Matthew, 20:37), this was never truly enforced in early medieval Gaul. So essential were familial ties that 'a total renunciation was seldom attempted by western monks, and the women seem to have rejected the idea of even making the attempt'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, this would not have been possible since familial ties were the primary means of influence for all *mulier sancta* in the early Middle Ages, as even 'sanctity was accessed through worldly influence and power was expressed through family connections. Therefore, this provided aristocratic women with access to power through acceptable channels'.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the fact that clerics in the Carolingian era would rail so much against religious women's actions outside of the cloister, demanding stricter enforcement of claustration to sever the continuing familial bonds, speaks to the enduring impact of this influence.<sup>39</sup> In this way, maintaining her connection to, and even more importantly, her empowered role within the familial network would have been essential to Radegund, as it was her primary means of influencing the world outside of the cloister. Little wonder, then, that Radegund's letter to her cousin focused so much on highlighting and enforcing familial responsibilities.

Writing letters allowed Radegund to maintain her image as a cloistered woman while still influencing the outside world. This influence included supporting King Sigebert's seizure of Poitiers in 573 and the act of acquiring the relic of the True Cross. That Radegund had not abandoned all ties with the external world was made clear in a letter from Caesaria II, niece of Caesarius, in which she warns that 'a woman who does not avoid a familiar relationship with men will rapidly destroy either herself or another'.<sup>40</sup> Radegund also cultivated links with men not bound to her by kinship ties, especially with bishops and abbots, many of whom were famous like Avitus of Clermont, Aredius of Limoges, Felix of Nantes, Domitianus of Angers and Martin of Braga.<sup>41</sup> As was the case with the letters addressed to her kin, Radegund used the epistolary format, which lent itself to a more personal appeal. Radegund's verse letter to Hamalfred, then, should be seen in this context: working within acceptable channels of influence to elicit his aid in worldly affairs.

The example of Radegund thus demonstrates both the importance of familial connections for women in Late Antique Gaul and how such women, even in a monastic context, could work within this framework to secure their own position. Radegund's position required external support in order to allow her to circumvent the opposition she faced from her local bishop. *De excidio Thuringia* demonstrates how Radegund was able to utilise a specifically familial feminine role in order to cement this support. Furthermore, since

Radegund makes no mention of her role as a holy woman, and instead emphasised her familial relationship to her audience, the nature of her request and voice should be viewed in this context. In so doing, the multiple layers in which Radegund manipulates and reprimands Hamalfred by evoking familial responsibilities connected to gender becomes clear. Working within the context of familial roles and employing a lamenting voice, a *querela*, Radegund was able to highlight and manipulate both her own gender role, as well as that of Hamalfred, in order to force him to act according to the gendered expectations placed on him as her male relative. Indeed, reading the letter as an effort to gain support of her sole remaining male relative coincided with the struggle for independence that formed a constant theme throughout Radegund's life. Furthermore, Radegund's focus on employing Classical pagan and Germanic traditions through the *querela* and *epicedium* in addressing her relatives – who most likely had no connection with Merovingian culture or even western Christianity – provides an interesting example of the malleability and performative aspect of identity in the early Middle Ages. Radegund's image among scholars today remains remarkably entrenched in her biographers' depiction of a saintly-queen, spurning all things worldly. Such a legacy is a testament to the remarkable effort of those biographers, but not necessarily of Radegund herself. Accepting such an image means overlooking Radegund's careful achievements in her curation of her texts, and her persistence in cultivating political relationships. This would be doing her a disservice by denying Radegund her own voice.

## Notes

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# Empowerment through Postcolonial Critique: Harki Daughters in France<sup>1</sup>

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The Harkis are Algerians of North African origin who supported the French during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). During the war, the label 'Harki' had a specific meaning: the term designated the largest of four groups of auxiliary soldiers, each of which performed a variety of functions for the French army. These duties included providing information on the activities of the Algerian independence movement – the National Liberation Front (FLN) – and helping the army maintain order in rural areas. It also involved acting as translators and implementing social assistance measures, such as the creation of schools and hospitals, aimed at 'demonstrating France's benevolence.'<sup>2</sup> Over time, 'Harki' came to be applied to any Algerian, civilian or combatant who was seen as having been complicit with the French regime.

The Harkis became a social group as a result of their shared experiences of persecution and exclusion after the war.<sup>3</sup> Following Algerian independence, the French army withdrew from Algeria, leaving the unarmed Harkis vulnerable to reprisal violence from the victorious independence nationalists as a consequence of their allegiance during the war. French officials, either unaware of or unconcerned with the threat facing the Harkis, implemented a highly restrictive repatriation plan and ordered that auxiliaries who arrived in France through unofficial channels should be returned to Algeria.<sup>4</sup> Between 25,000 and 150,000 Harkis were killed in Algeria while 60,000 to 88,000 Harkis and their families were able to escape to France. Upon their arrival, approximately 25,000 of these Harki families were interned in transit camps and reception centres spread throughout southern France. While some of the camps were constructed to manage the Harki population, others had previously housed refugees from the Spanish Civil War and then French Jews during WWII. Many Harkis and their families remained in these camps until 1975, when protests by second-generation Harkis caused the state to close them. In France, the Harkis have experienced double rejection.<sup>5</sup> The term 'Harki' became synonymous with 'traitor', so the Harkis were often ostracised among Algerian immigrants. At the same time, the Harkis were subject to racism and discrimination in French society for their North African origins. For its part, the French state ignored the Harkis because their existence raised difficult questions about France's colonial past.

'Harki' is a male-coded term, rooted as it is in the context of a specific military conflict. Yet the fates of the wives and children have been inextricably tied to the Harkis' actions during the war and its geo-political consequences. Through a process of semantic displacement the Harki label, and the stigma attached to it, have come to encompass their spouses and descendants.<sup>6</sup> By association, they too faced persecution in Algeria and exclusion in France. Harki wives, however, are virtually invisible in the historical record, and the narrative of Harki history was, for many decades, decidedly male-centric. The role of women in the Harki past thus remained unknown until Harki daughters began speaking out through memoirs, novels, and collections of testimonies in the early

2000s. Four daughters paved the way with their works in 2003: Dalila Kerchouche (*Mon père, ce harki*), Fatima Besnaci-Lancou (*Fille de harki*), Zahia Rahmani (*Moze*) and Hadjila Kemoum (*Mohand le harki*).<sup>7</sup> These women, along with two other daughters of Harkis, ultimately published a dozen texts over the course of a decade. Kerchouche went on to release a collection of individual accounts by Harkis and their children, *Destins de harkis: aux racines d'un exil*,<sup>8</sup> as well as a novel based on her sister's life in 2006, *Leïla: avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis*,<sup>9</sup> that was made into a TV film, *Harkis*.<sup>10</sup> Besnaci-Lancou published additional three collections of Harki life stories in 2006 and 2010 with *Nos mères, paroles blessées: une autre histoire de harkis*; *Treize chibanis harkis*, and *Des vies: 62 enfants de harkis racontent*.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Rahmani released her own memoir, *France, récit d'une enfance*, in 2006.<sup>12</sup> Following in their footsteps, Saliha Telali and Malika Meddah published their respective memoirs, *Les enfants des harkis: entre silence et assimilation subie* (2009),<sup>13</sup> and *Une famille de Harkis: des oliviers de Kabylie aux camps français de forestage* (2012).<sup>14</sup>

The texts these Harki daughters have produced serve as valuable resources for historians and have allowed women to be written into the history of the Harkis. By breaking silences and challenging taboos about the Harkis, they enrich our understanding of the Harki past and experiences. Their works also highlight the gender bias in historical representations of war. There has been no place for Harki women in Algerian War narratives even though their sufferings and sacrifices were no less significant than those of their husbands. Harki daughters have managed to draw attention to the plight of their mothers and other Harki wives by documenting their lives and giving them a voice. Finally, these women find themselves at the intersection of patriarchal and (post-) colonial power structures. Their acts of self-expression enable them to challenge the authority of their fathers and empower themselves in their community through a critique of France's colonial past.

## Shattering Silences

The silences of and surrounding the Harkis have been well documented.<sup>15</sup> For many years following the end of the Algerian War, Harkis and their wives did not speak about their past, neither in the public sphere nor at home among their families.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have suggested that the Harkis' silence can be traced back to the trauma of the conflict and a sense of guilt over how it impacted their families. The Harkis may also have realised that discussing their experiences in public could make it more difficult for them to assimilate into the French society, as the war was a taboo subject in France. Furthermore, many Harkis, and particularly their wives, did not have the education and language skills necessary to tell their stories in French, even if they had wanted to. Lastly, as Nina Sutherland has noted, first generation Harki women 'may not have felt that they had the right to express their views. In



Figure 1: "Femme Puissance,"  
panty-painting event,  
picture representing female  
empowerment and resistance  
to patriarchal domination  
taken in Alger on January  
21st, 2017.

the majority they came from traditional, male-dominated, rural communities in which women did not regularly take part in wider community life or have a voice, even in the domestic sphere.<sup>17</sup> Most children of Harkis, then, grew up without an understanding of their family's experiences during the war and their significance. According to Vincent Crapanzano, only a rhetoric of pain and a sense of melancholy were passed on to the second generation of Harkis.<sup>18</sup>

Through their texts, daughters of Harkis seek to understand what occurred during the war, why their parents ended up in France and why they often grew up feeling rejected and ashamed. These daughters have become family historians, reconstructing the past from what traces they could find, and they have generally framed their work as a reaction to the silence of their fathers. In her memoir, Rahmani asks, '[w]hy are we here? My father doesn't answer. Only this question disarms him.'<sup>19</sup> When Kerchouche raises questions about why her father fought with the French, she bemoans, 'I don't understand. He has never spoken to me about it.'<sup>20</sup> These Harki daughters have thus chosen to speak where their fathers could not or would not. Indeed, many declare a fundamental compulsion to finally talk about this past. In *Moze*, Rahmani proclaims the need to 'Talk to no longer be ashamed, talk to be able to look at oneself, talk to no longer be afraid, talk to no longer be alone, to no longer suffer.'<sup>21</sup> As the narrator explains in Kerchouche's novel, *Leïla*, 'an ancient force compels me to fight, to speak out and not to let myself be interrupted. I am bringing back to life a forgotten voice that emerges from a buried past.'<sup>22</sup> Telali echoes this sentiment in her memoir, declaring, 'I have to know, I have to talk, I have to make my modest contribution to break the silence and this unjust and destructive amnesia.'<sup>23</sup>

These women are not only shattering the paternal silence but they are also responding to what Keith Moser has called 'the nefarious effects of institutional silence.'<sup>24</sup> For the first three decades after the Algerian War, the French followed a policy of 'active forgetting' with regard to this devastating conflict.<sup>25</sup> Their amnesia extended to the Harkis, whose history was particularly problematic to narrate. The state's refusal to engage with the subject of the Harkis produced silences at critical moments in the process of historical production: 'the making of *sources*, the making of *archives*, the making of *narratives*, and the making of *history* in the final instance.'<sup>26</sup>

Due to these paternal and institutional silences, then, there are many gaps in our knowledge of what the Harkis did, where they came from, and what happened to them. In the absence of historical sources and the invisibility of Harkis – especially their wives – in the archives, historians must rely on testimonies, such as those offered by daughters of Harkis, in order to address many questions about the Harki past. An important precedent for employing testimony to 'foil the erasure of history' lies in accounts of women's experiences of the Holocaust.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, of course, it is important to acknowledge the limits of memory as a historical source. Memory narratives are always constructed based on the concerns of the present.<sup>28</sup> This can be problematic if we are looking for evidence of what occurred during a specific historical event.<sup>29</sup> Harki daughters' accounts of their mother's or sister's experiences during the war may be particularly unreliable in this regard, as 'testimony in this case is at one degree of remove, a bearing witness for the witness.'<sup>30</sup> At the same time, their memoirs and novels are of undisputed value as evidence of how the past was *experienced* by these women.

Harki daughters explore the Harki past by voicing individual experiences.<sup>31</sup> As such, they enrich our understanding of Harki history not by constructing simplified narratives, but rather by revealing the diversity of Harki experiences.<sup>32</sup> For these authors, a single story, with all its complexities, is as important as a collective narrative. The stories wives and daughters of Harkis tell include moments that are central to Harki collective memory: abandonment by the French, threat of massacre, flight from Algeria, life in internment camps, and continuing discrimination. Yet these women only include the moments that touched them, or a loved one, personally. The result is that the accounts are as unique as the experiences themselves.

Contradicting ideologies and perspectives on the Harki past coexist harmoniously within the same text. Besnaci-Lancou's collection of testimonies from Harki wives, *Nos mères, paroles blessées*, reveals attitudes towards the French ranging from gratitude to hatred. One woman asserts that she and her family have fully assimilated in France. Others avoid criticising the way France treated the Harkis and their families because they are thankful to have escaped the violence in Algeria and to have access to education for their children. Some of the

testimonies, however, present more ambivalent attitudes toward the French state. One Harki wife admits that although the French looked after her and her family in the camps, they certainly did not care for them well. Another declares that the French and the FLN were equally to blame for her misfortune. During the Algerian War, many civilians suffered at the hands of the French army and the FLN, both of which used terror and violence as means of exercising control.<sup>33</sup> Finally, two of the women hold the French completely responsible for the tragic turns their lives have taken and for their current unhappiness. Kerchouche's collection, *Destins de harkis*, presents a variety of experiences and conflicting points of view as well. In this work, there are Harki wives who regret their husbands' actions during the war, who did not have a say in their decision to support the French, and who were forced to follow them to France after the war. Alongside their stories are accounts of women who declare they are proud of their husbands. Akila Bouremel explains that she and her husband made the choice for him to help the French together. She explains: 'My husband asked my opinion and I told him: "Go ahead". Today, I don't regret it, even if we have suffered a lot.'<sup>34</sup> Another Harki wife, Madame Kerchaoui, proclaims, 'I would have enlisted with him, if I could have. I too would have become a Harkie.'<sup>35</sup> The overall effect of these works is a very heterogeneous understanding of the Harkis and their families.

## Representing War

War is generally considered a masculine domain. Lynne Hanley has argued that 'women are robbed of the authority to express themselves on the subject of war because they are assumed not to be in war.'<sup>36</sup> In examining women's narratives of war, sociologists James Fentress and Chris Wickham likewise found that women can feel marginalised by the standard run of war stories.<sup>37</sup> The gender bias in representations of war is particularly apparent in the case of the Harkis because during the Algerian War, the lines between civilian and combatant were exceptionally fluid. Women's lives were affected by the ramifications of the war to the same degree as men. Women also directly participated in the conflict. There were Algerian female independence fighters, including the '*poseuses de bombes*' [women who planted bombs] made famous in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*.<sup>38</sup> Photographic evidence has emerged that suggests a small group of women served as auxiliaries in support of France as well. These women were nicknamed 'Harkette', a diminutive of the term 'Harki' that at once feminises and trivialises their contributions. The actions of the 'Harkettes' have remained an absence in our memory of the war, since they do not fit neatly into the male-centred narratives of the war.<sup>39</sup>

On the whole, then, official memories of the Algerian war have remained focused on the contributions of men, with women's experiences marginalised in the public sphere. Before Harki daughters drew attention to the situation of their mothers, little was done to document their stories of the war and its aftermath. Thanks to their texts, we have learnt that women and children experienced the same reprisal violence as the Harkis themselves. In *France, récit d'une enfance*, Rahmani describes trying, and failing, to comprehend what her sister had witnessed in Algeria during the war. She explains: 'I cannot understand her violence, I know nothing about her terrible years in Algeria and her butchered childhood. It's only much

later that I will learn about it. The horror of what she has lived through, I cannot fathom it as a child.'<sup>40</sup> Kerchouche offers stories from three Harki wives who faced the threat of violence in *Destins de harkis*. Madame Khelfoun describes being condemned to death with her family, chased from her home, insulted, and called 'Harkia.'<sup>41</sup> The use of this term to refer to the wife of a Harki suggests that the semantic slippage between Harkis and their relatives began during, or immediately after, the war. Another woman, Aljia Degamena, explains, '[w]e, the wives of Harkis, were very afraid of the *fellagas* [Algerian independence fighters], who were lashing out against us as well.'<sup>42</sup> These fighters imprisoned her husband and killed her daughter, sister, and two brothers. Madame Haffi declares, 'I too have suffered from the war like my husband. I too was hit with stones when we left Algeria, I too was insulted, I too was locked up in camps. But today my life and my suffering do not exist to anyone.'<sup>43</sup>

These texts also reveal that the post-war period was especially difficult for Harki wives. It has occurred in other historical contexts that 'the hardships of postwar fell disproportionately on women ... because tradition assigned them the role of caring for their families, regardless of the circumstances.'<sup>44</sup> Harki wives were particularly vulnerable following the Algerian War because of the Harkis' informal status in the army. Even though the auxiliaries had served under the structure of the military, they had technically remained civilians. The Harkis were not awarded official veteran status, with its concomitant rights and benefits, until 1974. As a result, widows were not eligible for social protection if their Harki husbands were killed.

The testimonies collected by Harki daughters reveal that many Harkis were wounded not only physically, but also psychologically, during and after the war. One Harki daughter, Akila, explains in *Destins de harkis* that her father never told her what he went through in Algeria, yet he drank and was 'disoriented' because of how the war and his subsequent imprisonment had changed him.<sup>45</sup> This is also the case for Rahmani, whose father, broken by the war, tyrannised her family. The responsibilities of caring for these troubled Harkis lay with their wives. In *Destins de harkis*, Khatidja declares that the wives 'paid for what their husbands did during the war,' since some Harkis, including her own husband, would drink and beat them.<sup>46</sup> Many of these wives, however, feared they would not be eligible for financial benefits from the state if they got divorced. Indeed, the 1987 and 1994 laws that offered indemnities to the Harkis did not make specific provisions for widows or ex-wives of Harkis.<sup>47</sup> Madame Betha explains that when her husband was released from prison in 1968, he was a changed man, who drank and beat her and their children. Yet she states that when she divorced him, she no longer had access to the financial compensation he received. Betha laments, '[t]he wives of harkis have no rights. They exist for no one.'<sup>48</sup> Madame Haffi adds, '[w]e, the wives of harkis, were humiliated,' and explains how difficult it was to live with a man who was 'wounded and scarred by war.' She concludes: 'Our men were broken and it was we who bore the family burden. For what thanks? None. The harkis were the ones who got pensions and compensation, while us, we didn't have the right to anything.'<sup>49</sup>



## The Empowering Act of Writing

For Harki daughters, the act of writing can be one that challenges the authority of their fathers. In their works, they often question their fathers' decision to support the French and consider whether they were in fact traitors for their actions. In *Destins de harkis*, one Harki daughter, Kheira Hamidat, explains, '[s]ometimes I am not proud of my father. I ask myself, Why was he with France, when France didn't do anything for us? But I didn't know him, I can't ask him this question.'<sup>50</sup> Kerchouche echoes these questions in the novel *Leïla*: 'Why did he fight with the French who despise us? Why did he become a Harki? Was he in favour of a French Algeria? What compels him to accept his fate?'<sup>51</sup> Telali declares that as a child, she never heard her father talk about the past and she blamed him for their family's isolation. Her seven-year-old self-wondered, '[w]asn't he responsible for this choice? Wasn't he a traitor to his nation? Why this silence about the war?'<sup>52</sup>

Writing also constitutes an act of empowerment within their families because most of the authors end up exonerating their fathers of the 'traitor' charge and, by extension, removing the stigma for their whole family. The narrator in Kerchouche's *Leïla* declares her intention to 'restore her father's honour' through writing.<sup>53</sup> She and the other writers do so by demonstrating that their fathers had no agency in the context of the war and that they were forced to support France in order to protect their families. In her memoir, *Les enfants des harkis*, Telali refers to her father's decision to support the French as a 'non-choice.' She blames the colonial system for constructing a situation that restricted her father's agency.<sup>54</sup> Kerchouche explains in *Mon père*, '[b]ecause he "chose" France, my father has since been considered a traitor by the Algerians, and has been suspected of becoming one by the French ... Now, in hindsight, I realise [that he] perhaps didn't have a choice.'<sup>55</sup>

Harki daughters also restore the family's honour by holding France accountable for its mistreatment of the Harkis. They do so first by identifying the state's indifference toward the fate of the Harkis.<sup>56</sup> In Kemoum's novel, *Mohand le harki*, when a Harki confronts a fictitious former French minister about having abandoned the Harkis in Algeria after the war, the minister appears 'unfazed by these charges' and 'expresses no regrets.'<sup>57</sup> Rahmani highlights this cold indifference in her novel as well. She writes that Moze, a Harki, 'didn't speak. He stopped talking. He will no longer speak ... What his tongue was unable to say is that the system allowed the French state to create an army of dead soldiers without caring that they were men.'<sup>58</sup> In her memoir, Meddah explains that the children of Harkis experienced the effects of this disregard by extension. She writes, 'we children of Harkis have felt abandoned in a way by this country that our fathers had chosen. In spite of what our fathers did for France, it often seemed as if we were not really France's children.'<sup>59</sup>

The implied accusation, of course, is that the French callousness is a product of racism. In their works, Harki daughters touch on the fundamental contradictions between France's principles of republican universalism and its colonial practices. Republican ideology dictates that the state must treat each citizen as an abstract individual and remain blind to differences of gender, race or religion. In French Algeria, however, the state used a language of religion to institutionalise social and political hierarchies between the coloniser and the colonised. In a similar vein, while the state claimed the Harkis

were patriotically defending France during the Algerian War, its actions clearly showed that they were never considered to be fully French. In Rahmani's novel, *Moze*, the narrator observes, '[i]sn't it right that colonialism feeds off of human residue and incomplete citizenship?'<sup>60</sup> Telali describes 'the suffering of a people that lives under the domination of another country' and comments on the insincerity of France's main justification for colonisation, its duty to civilise.<sup>61</sup> Imperialists argued that Western nations, with their civilised white populations, had a moral obligation to rule over non-white populations in order to help them develop economically, culturally, and socially. Telali declares, however, that 'if there was a "civilising mission" in Algeria, "it was not apparent in the living conditions of families in the countryside."<sup>62</sup> Harki daughters also condemn the prolongation of the colonial mentality through racism. The ideological inconsistencies of the colonial era, after all, remain unresolved in postcolonial France. Telali observes, '[t]hrough our family's history, I am the *child* of a Harki. I am the product of immigration. The way I am perceived remains stained by the colonial history despite the years that have elapsed.'<sup>63</sup> Kerchouche explains that her parents clung to their Algerian identity in the face of rejection and discrimination in France. She asserts that the 'certainty of being Algerians never left them. Algerians who were humiliated and detested, but Algerians nonetheless. Better that than nothing at all.'<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, publishing these texts has also empowered Harki daughters in the Harki community. This process began during the protests of Harki children in 1991, when daughters took on leadership roles for the first time. They became increasingly involved in associations and, as historian Abderahmen Moumen observes, started drawing attention to

'their mother's suffering and the fact that their journey was just as chaotic as that of their male counterparts. Through the voices of Harki daughters, the social demands of this population evolved, specifically with respect to the appearance of Harki women as beneficiaries of new indemnity measures.'<sup>65</sup>

For example, a law passed in 2005 made the Harkis' pensions and other financial compensation explicitly accessible to their widows.

Their memoirs, novels, and collections of testimonies allowed Harki daughters to share the stories of Harki women with a wider audience. Géraldine Enjelvin has rightly argued that '[w]riting is empowering for it enables contestation, rejection, (re-)appropriation, and the forging of a new identity, not only for themselves ... but also for their identificational community.'<sup>66</sup> Through their works, daughters of Harkis have managed to rehabilitate the Harki identity and these texts have become popular ways of learning about the Harki past. They received significant media coverage as well as literary acclaim in France, as Besnaci-Lancou and Rahmani respectively won awards for *Fille de harki* and *Moze*.<sup>67</sup> They have also attracted the attention of scholars, with Harki literature emerging as a field of study.<sup>68</sup> To a certain extent, these Harki daughters, then, have become influential public representatives of the Harki community.

Starting with their first publications in 2003, their status as authors has served as a springboard for further activism. In 2004, the *Groupe Femmes et Filles de Harkis* was created, and this association led the first protest by wives and daughters

of Harkis that same year. Billed as a 'peaceful march,' these women demanded that the French state acknowledge the fact that it had abandoned the Harkis following the Algerian War. Later that year, the group became the *Association Harkis et Droits de l'Homme*, with Fatima Besnaci-Lancou serving as president. Besnaci-Lancou has gone on to organise conferences and edit scholarly works on the Harkis and her association has continued to lead the charge in holding France accountable for its actions towards the Harkis. In 2013 she led a protest in Paris aimed at reminding President François Hollande of the promise he made during his electoral campaign to officially recognise France's responsibility not only for the abandonment of the Harkis, but also for the subsequent Harki massacres in Algeria and the conditions of the Harki camps in France. France's President eventually did so on September 26, 2016.

## Conclusion

The success of Harki daughters, as reflected in the popularity of their works as well as their growing influence in the Harki community, may be a result of their particular relationship to the Harki identity. Harki daughters are invested in the Harki history, yet these young women are visibly not Harkis themselves, and they cannot reasonably be held responsible for their fathers' actions during the war. Their right to speak on behalf of the community, however, has not remained uncontested. Some Harki sons have expressed frustration over the feminisation of the Harki cause.<sup>69</sup>

Their success may also stem from the fact that these women chose the right historical moment to publish their texts. The public taboo about the Algerian War was broken in the late 1990s and the colonial legacy is now openly debated in France. This context has provided a more receptive environment for works detailing the Harki past. Indeed, as Enjelvin has observed, when their first novels and memoirs appeared 'in 2003, France seemed ready to listen carefully to these Harki daughters and willing to take Harki literature seriously.'<sup>70</sup> There are certainly many people in France who do not agree with their interpretations of the colonial period, the Algerian War, and the 'choice' made by the Harkis. Still, through their works these women have managed both to address a gap in our historical knowledge and to raise awareness about the plight of the Harkis and the equally important sufferings of their wives.

## Notes

1. All English translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.
2. Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis* (Fayard, 1993), 117-118; Fatima Besnaci-Lancou and Abderahmen Moumen, *Les harkis* (Editions Le Cavalier Bleu, 'Idées reçues,' 2008), 15.
3. Giulia Fabbiano, 'Writing As Performance: Literary Production and the Stakes of Memory', in *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature*, ed. Keith Moser (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014), 17-35, 18.
4. Besnaci-Lancou and Moumen, *Les harkis*, 33.
5. Régis Pierret, *Les filles et fils de harkis: Entre double rejet et triple appartenance* (L'Harmattan, 2001).
6. Kenneth Olsson, 'In the Name of the Father: In the Voice of the Other', in *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature*, ed.

- Keith Moser (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014), 145-67, 145.
7. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, *Fille de harki: Le bouleversant témoignage d'une enfant de la guerre d'Algérie* (Editions de l'Atelier, 2003); Hadjila Kemoum, *Mohand le harki* (Anne Carrière, 2003); Dalila Kerchouche, *Mon père, ce harki* (Seuil, 2003); Zahia Rahmani, *Moze* (Paris, Sabine Wespieser, 2003).
8. Dalila Kerchouche and Stéphan Gladieu, *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil* (Paris, Autrement, 2003).
9. Dalila Kerchouche, *Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis* (Paris, Seuil, 2006).
10. Harkis was shown on 10 October 2006 on France2 and has been released on DVD, Alain Tasma, *Harkis* (France Télévisions Distribution, 2007).
11. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, *Nos mères, paroles blessées: Une autre histoire de harkis* (Léchele, Emina soleil, 2006); Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, *Treize chibanis harkis* (Paris, Tirésias, 2006); Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, *Des vies: 62 enfants de harkis racontent* (Paris, Editions de l'Atelier, 2010).
12. Zahia Rahmani, *France, récit d'une enfance* (Paris, Sabine Wespieser, 2006).
13. Saliha Telali, *Les enfants des harkis: Entre silence et assimilation subie* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009).
14. Malika Meddah, *Une famille de Harkis: Des oliviers de Kabylie aux camps français de forestage* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012).
15. Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis*; Laurent Muller, *Le silence des harkis* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999), 199; Jean-Jacques Jordi and Mohand Hamoumou, *Les harkis: Une mémoire enfouie* (Paris, Autrement, 1999); William B. Cohen, 'The Harkis: History and Memory', in *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. Patricia M. E. Lorcin (Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 2006), 164-180, 172; Jo McCormack, *Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2007); Vincent Crapanzano, *The Harkis: The Wound That Never Heals* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011).
16. Saïd Ferdi and Brahim Sadouni are the most notable exceptions, publishing memoirs in the 1980s. Saïd Ferdi, *Un enfant dans la guerre* (Seuil, 1981); Brahim Sadouni, *Français sans patrie: Premier témoignage écrit par un harki* (B. Sadouni, 1985).
17. Nina Sutherland, 'Harki Autobiographies or Collecto-Biographies? Mothers Speak Through Their Daughters,' *Romance Studies*, 24/3 (2006), 193-201, 196.
18. Vincent Crapanzano, 'The dead but living father, the living but dead father,' in *The Dead Father: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, ed. Kanlinich, Lila J. and Stuart W. Taylor (New York, Routledge, 2009), 163-173.
19. Rahmani, *France*, 91.
20. Kerchouche, *Mon père*, 13.
21. Rahmani, *Moze*, 136. Translation by Géraldine Enjelvin, 'Harki Daughters' "Righting" Narratives: Resistance Identity and *Littérature Naturelle*?' in *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature*, ed. Keith Moser (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014), 83-99, 91.
22. Kerchouche, *Leïla*, 10. Translation by Olsson, 'In the Name of the Father,' 149.
23. Telali, *Les enfants des harkis*, 13. Translation by Fabbiano, 'Writing As Performance,' 27.
24. Keith Moser, 'Two Literary Texts That Concretize the Goals of the "Harki Spring": Taking Aim at the Nefarious Effects of Institutional Silence,' in *A Practical Guide to French*

*Harki Literature*, ed. Keith Moser (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014), 169–85.

25. Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Editions La Découverte, 1991).

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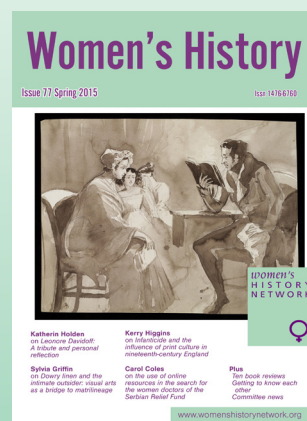
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# 'Some Job!' The Private Diary of World War II Combat Nurse Beulah Johns

Tanya Heflin

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*'Some job! Such is life in the Army!'*

Beulah Johns, diary entry November 1943<sup>1</sup>

*'The experience of sympathy, empathy, of listening to the voices in . . . diaries is difficult to convey in writing.'*

Philippe Lejeune<sup>2</sup>

Moved by the events of Pearl Harbor, in July 1942, thirty-six-year-old nurse Beulah Johns left her position in a rural hospital in western Pennsylvania to join the ranks of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Having enlisted fewer than 1000 nurses prior to Pearl Harbor, the Army Nurse Corps reached more than 59,000 enlisted women between 1941 and the end of the Second World War. This astonishing expansion in the skilled-labour workforce altered both the global perspective of women at work and the lived day-to-day experience of military service for women – yet the stories of these women workers have been little studied and even less well understood. In this article, I examine the previously untold story of Beulah Johns, whose unpublished manuscript diary recounts the first two years of her seven-year career in the Army Nurse Corps. My aim is to show that her 'everyday' narrative may be seen as a case study for a large group of women nurses thrust suddenly into wartime work. In addition, I argue that diaries like Johns's illustrate why greater archival priority needs to be given to the 'everyday' writing of women writers, a group whose idiosyncratic one-off pieces comprise a body that is scattered across archives and at continual risk of being undervalued and culled for space.

## U.S. Women during World War II

On the one hand, U.S. women's shifting work roles during wartime is familiar. To this day, feminists have embraced the icon of Rosie the Riveter – drawn from Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* cover and popularised by J. Howard Miller's 1942 poster. These images have resonated because the Second World War drained labour pools to the degree that the former social structure, which had discouraged many middle-class women from working outside the home, needed an immediate revamp in order to keep up with wartime demand. Women were invited into heavy industry and production, though systems were kept firmly in place to limit women's work only to wartime in order to keep most of those positions open for returning male soldiers after the war.

Nursing, however, provided different kinds of opportunities for women. Already a feminised field, nursing was already viewed as an acceptable job for single women, and the visible role women nurses played throughout the Second World War further legitimised the job as a profession. Founded in 1901, the Army Nurse Corps remained relatively small and it would be recognised merely as an auxiliary unit until the middle of the Second World War when its nurses' extraordinary work was rewarded with full military status in

1944. This was a dramatic shift in status and salary that opened doors for women, including Beulah Johns, to build entire careers as military nurses.<sup>3</sup> In her history of the Army Nurses Corps, Judith A. Bellafaire explains:

The tremendous manpower needs faced by the United States during World War II created numerous new social and economic opportunities for American women. ... The Army reflected this changing attitude in June 1944 when it granted its nurses officers' commissions and full retirement privileges, dependents' allowances, and equal pay. Moreover, the government provided free education to nursing students between 1943 and 1948. Military service took men and women from small towns and large cities across America and transported them around the world.<sup>4</sup>

In an extensive poster campaign featuring glamorised images of proud nurses in the field and slogans proclaiming 'Nurses Are Needed Now!' the Army Nurse Corps widely advertised to capture the spirit of the age and thereby attracted thousands of skilled nurses to the cause.

When looking at the massive numbers involved – growing sixty-fold over four years – several questions emerge: how would the military organise and train a new labour force made up of civilians who were highly skilled but who had no experience in combat zones? What strategies would these nurses use to adapt to the demands of military regimentation, to the challenges of nursing on islands with unfamiliar climates and diseases, and to the extreme stress of nursing in high-volume combat zones? While some records exist regarding the military perspective on training, the direct experiences from the voices of nurses themselves are harder to find. Historian Sue Bruley hints as to why this is the case: 'Public memory of women's contribution to the war effort quickly faded in the post war years. It was not until the late 1960s, with the revival of a mass feminist movement and the emergence of a new social history, that women workers of both world wars began to be claimed for historical discourse.'<sup>5</sup> After the war ended, citizens were eager to return to a pre-war image of home and family. As part of the nostalgia that swept the U.S.A., women were expected to return to a reinvigorated domesticity and to care for the family with even greater fervour than before. Soon after peace resumed, women's options for working in heavy industry and taking on overseas positions were shut down and seen as an exception to be tolerated during wartime only.

In addition, women's perspectives on their military service were not originally valued as highly as those of men who had faced combat. Examining the intricacies of the 'gaze' of witness that war narratives adopt, Carol Acton makes a key point about the challenges to validity faced by women writing their experiences:

While male writers may explore the problems inherent in finding a language that can reveal the images of war to the gaze of the viewer/reader, they rarely question the validity of their position as observers of and hence witnesses to war. Women writers on the contrary, and particularly frontline nurses, are hyperconscious of their presence in *The Forbidden Zone* where their 'seeing' is complicated by their ongoing struggle to establish the legitimacy of their non-combatant perspective as well as by cultural constraint on what and how they see and what they reveal.<sup>6</sup>

Feminist interest in recent years has, however, motivated the search for women's narratives from this period. For example, in Britain, Penny Summerfield sought oral testimony from women war workers before they died.<sup>7</sup> Because of the time that had passed between the events and their telling, these testimonies necessarily included mainly women who were relatively young during the war. Bruley expanded this effort by representing older women via the joint diary of upper-class British women who volunteered for munitions factory work between 1942 and 1944. These fascinating projects usefully expand our understanding of British women's work experiences during the war. In this study, I endeavour to deepen our understanding of similar U.S. women, particularly the nurses who were swept up in this considerable cultural shift.

### Beulah Johns's Diary in Context

As the grant-funded pilot for a larger national digital repository for manuscript diaries, the Women's Diary Digital Archive of the Stapleton Library at Indiana University of Pennsylvania focuses on identifying and exhibiting the everyday life-writing and diary records of women across the northern Appalachian and western Pennsylvania regions. Among these archived testimonies, Beulah Johns's diary cover immediately strikes its viewer as remarkable.

Within the broad boundaries of literature, diary is an admittedly idiosyncratic form, and I posit that for understanding women's wartime work, diary is a distinct genre for four reasons: 1) it accepts the mantle of Philippe Lejeune's much-lauded 'autobiographical pact,' in which the author, narrator, and subject of the story are all assumed by the reader to be one person; 2) it is written in close proximity to the moment of lived experience rather than filtered through memory in later years; 3) it allows for dailiness and repetition, rather than conforming to a more overtly shaped narrative form, so that we readers can directly see the passage of time

and absorb the minutia, trivia, and even boredom attending long passages of time; and finally, 4) especially significant during wartime, it is narrated without foreknowledge of the 'end' of the 'story' insofar as diarists do not know at the time of their writing the eventual outcome of their 'protagonist's' life story.<sup>8</sup> These features, shared by most diaries, are particularly important to women's wartime diaries due to the long stretches of time and the inherent material risks of active duty in combat regions.

Beulah Johns's diary exists as just one object within a robust collection that includes detailed military records, photographs, scrapbooks, letters, medals, souvenirs, and ephemera. Measuring 4.5 x 6 inches with 'My Life in the Service' stamped in red and gold on the hardback navy cover and printed in three-colour ink, these blank volumes were printed by Consolidated Book Publishers in 1941. They were widely given as gifts by family and friends as their soldiers left for service. Johns's diary was given to her by her friend Alma Lewis, whose name appears on the dedication page, and to whom Johns posted the volume just as she sailed for New Guinea in December 1943. After a page identifying the diary's author, the first two pages of the volume provide the publisher's lengthy and impassioned rationale for the importance of military soldiers keeping a detailed diary:

Your experiences in the armed forces of your country are your part of living history. By all means KEEP A DIARY. Times without number, historians and writers have found more information of real human interest in the diaries of enlisted men than in the studied account of generals and admirals. This book conscientiously kept, may prove to be the living record of your destiny five hundred years from now!

Of the eighty-plus line drawings throughout – all feature male soldiers (not infrequently flirting with civilian women) – this gift book would have been assumed to be received by male soldiers. Despite our widely-held contemporary association of diary-writing with women – particularly young women and overwrought teenage girls – most diaries that have been valued enough to maintain in library archives were written by men. This is because diary and autobiography were historically forms meant to be written by 'great men' to record significant perspectives for posterity. This diary tradition is evident in the rhetorical flourish with which Consolidate Publishing's 'Service' diary exhorted its owner: 'DON'T STOP MAKING ENTRIES! ... Resolve to make an entry, however short, EVERY SINGLE DAY!' (All capitalization and punctuation are as found in the original). Beulah Johns's usage of this particular diary



Cover and first pages of Beulah Johns's manuscript diary 'My Life in the Service,' 1942-43.

format – not to mention Alma's foresight in giving it to her before she left – is indicative of the rapidly changing status for women via the WWII Army Nurse Corps. That is to say that many of these 'My Life in the Service' diaries have survived and can be found in private family holdings, formal archives, and most famously, in the facsimile version written by twenty-two year-old B-54 pilot George McGovern (who would later serve as a U.S. Democratic Senator and presidential nominee). Most interestingly, with the singular exception of Beulah Johns's diary, all versions of this popular printed diary discovered to date were written by male soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

### **'My Life in the Service': The Diary of Lieut. Beulah M. Johns, ANC**

Beginning on the first day of her enlistment, Johns's diary narrates her transition from naïve civilian with blisters on her heels to self-styled 'veteran' as she helped to train incoming nurses for their Pacific Campaign experiences. Serving in New Guinea until the end of the war, Johns was ultimately promoted through the ranks to First Lieutenant and she continued her service until late 1949. Johns's daily entries – at times telegraphic and at times impassioned and haunting – are not recollections from later years but were written in the moment to recount her lived experience of this crucial period in world history. Moreover, by illustrating the gradual inculcation of one woman into military service, her diary suggests the untold story of a vast group of working women whose stories have not yet been heard. Through attending closely to her diary, I argue that Johns's day-by-day rendering of her life in the service reveals something that would be difficult to discern by any other artefact. This is that newly minted women officers survived the stresses of wartime military service by creating networks of women who supported each other and who developed a fascinating sub-culture within what was arguably one of the 'most deliberately masculine institutions' in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Centred in literary diary scholarship, which explores a quiet, frequently overlooked subset of historical literary study, I approach Johns's diary with an overriding orientation toward the 'sympathy, empathy ... listening' that Philippe Lejeune suggests in the above epigraph. A common theme found within much contemporary diary criticism is a deep respect for the 'subject-in-process'.<sup>11</sup> The key tenet of my approach is to embrace the aspects of diary that some readers view as tedious, fragmentary, or trivial, thus recognising that the repetitions themselves reveal treasures to the patient reader. In her evocative study of Martha Ballard, an eighteenth-century midwife who kept a copious decades-long diary, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich draws her richest interpretation from her close focus specifically upon what she remarks is the 'trivia that so annoyed earlier [male] readers' of Ballard's diary.<sup>12</sup> This discounting of the 'trivial' nature of the work—a claim frequently made even by diarists themselves, who call their work 'scribblings,' 'nothings,' and famously by Virginia Woolf, 'night-writings' – is typically strongly gendered, as diary itself is frequently gendered. Representative of the nearly sixty thousand women who swelled the rolls of the military over a six-month period in 1942, Johns's painstakingly kept diary and scrapbook are valuable documents that provide insight into the working lives of the brand new class of women officers that was created through the challenges of the Second World

War. Yet because they are little-read documents from all-but-forgotten shelves in the archive, their precarious existence illustrates the vulnerability of women's private manuscripts in many archive collections.

### **Reading Beulah Johns's Diary**

Peeking over Johns's shoulder as she writes in this diary, the reader (at least this reader) feels immediacy in witnessing her challenging adventure in the moment that she lived it. So many theorists of the diary describe this sense of immediacy that it has become a part of the standard literary practice for interpreting diary. Helen Buss refers to this engagement by critics as an 'ethics of love' while Jeanne Braham terms it a 'lens of empathy' and Paul John Eakin frets compassionately over the sticky 'ethics of life writing'.<sup>13</sup> As with many diarists, Johns frequently repeats herself and hers is an idiosyncratic shorthand. For example, she frequently telegraphed major events with a cryptic message that her intended readers (that is, Alma and other civilians back home) would have picked up instantly, but that decades-distant readers, unsurprisingly, would struggle to understand. One prime example of this tendency to telegraph significant events is Beulah's wedding day: '10-11-43. Mon[day]. Pittsburgh this a.m. Ring, Rev, Judge, Mrs., etc, at 5:30pm. Called Dorothy. Wilksburg Hotel tonight.' Succinctly illustrating Johns's characteristic understatement and dry humour, the fact that this oblique two-line passage referred to her wedding may actually escape the attention of readers going through a nearly illegible passage several times without recognising its full import.

In telling contrast to the amusing brevity with which she recorded this significant life event of a mid-war marriage at the age of thirty-five, Johns recalled her first day of arrival at Ft Lewis with direct precise physical detail:

**July 18, 42.** Arrived at Ft Lewis today at 3pm. 9 hours late. ... Busy getting unpacked. Had first meal in mess hall here. Very good. Transported from station by ambulances. Couldn't see much along the way. We are 16 mile from Tacoma. 60 mile from Seattle. Can see Mt Ranier from our barracks window. 32 of us are housed in one ward in two rows, some fun so far. No bed lamps, one bathroom, 1 tub, 1 shower, 1 bedside table, 1 chair.

The specificity in this passage and those that follow suggest a clear sense of her audience, most directly embodied by Alma, as she relates what would be for women readers the unfamiliarity of life on an army barracks some 2500 miles away from home. In addition, from the very beginning, long-distance readers bear witness to this volume as a constructed text. In her influential study of early American women's diaries, Margo Culley notes the constructed nature of diaries as texts:

As invaluable as women's life-records are as historical sources containing a kind of 'truth' about women's lives not found in other places, we must remember that diaries and journals are texts, that is, verbal constructs. The process of selection and arrangement of detail in the text raises an array of concerns appropriately 'literary,' including questions of audience (real



or imagined), narrative, shape and structure, persona, voice, imagistic and thematic repetition, and what James Olney calls 'metaphors of self'.<sup>14</sup>

In Johns's diary, her direct address to Alma, who here serves simultaneously as her historical 'real' self and as stand-in for other readers back home, effectively allows Johns to position her narrative voice as that of the naïve informant who relays an unfamiliar world back to those at home.

For this back-home audience of women, Johns goes on to relate one of her first interactions with enlisted male soldiers, whose frequent pranking not only illustrates the masculinised culture with which these newly arrived women were met, but likewise gestures toward the underlying resentments that lower-ranking male soldiers were widely reported to have displayed toward the newly arrived female nurses. Indeed, these women automatically received the ranking of officers due to their positions of authority over enlisted men working on the medical wards. Johns wrote,

**Sunday July 19, 42.** What a Sunday. ... Went to the lake swimming. Poor Charlotte fell over the hill and skinned her rump. ... Walked all over creation to find Officer's Beach. Were directed the wrong way by enlisted men because they thought we were being smart by asking them where the Officer's Beach was. We can't help it that we can't swim at the enlisted men's beach. We learn the hard way here I can see now.<sup>15</sup>

This tension, which was relatively mild while nurses were still in training stateside, anticipated the more overt resentment that nurses would experience when they were ultimately shipped to the Pacific theatre, as Bellafaire explains:

Medical corpsmen who had served in place of nurses in combat zones sometimes resented the nurses' arrival. 'Once the nurses arrive, the morale of the corpsmen plummets,' said one observer. The nurses took over skilled direct-care tasks and relegated the corpsmen to lesser duties and scrub work. Nurses commanded corpsmen in the chain of command because the nurses were trained professionals while corpsmen usually had only minimal training.<sup>16</sup>

Particularly palpable at many of the Pacific theatres where medical facilities were fenced off and heavily guarded, this gendered tension reflected the similar tension that was being felt stateside as women stepped into the industrial manufacturing workforce.

With respect to the intensive training that the nurses received as they began their inculcation into military life, Johns diligently recorded the extensive training of drills and lecture that she experienced for the first several weeks, for which readers see the repeated lines of 'Drill, Lecture' at the beginning of many dozens of entries – frequently with little added detail beyond Johns's notation of feeling exhausted. Within diary as a form, repetition can be a key feature, whether manipulated formally or as a by-product of diary's periodic structure. Likewise, the day-to-day experience of military personnel, including combat nurses, has been described by many as long periods of dullness and boredom punctuated by intense activity. Johns's diary form relates these lived experiences with exceptional economy. In order to illustrate Johns's usage of

repetition to convey the exhaustion of military training, I will quote one week's collection of brief entries in full:

**Thurs. July 30, 1942.** 1<sup>st</sup> day of drill. This consists of marching like a soldier 1-2-3-4 cadence. Lft flank. March. Rt flank march. Present arms (hand salute) Order arms (hands down). Single file march. Oblique march, etc. 1<sup>st</sup> tragedy. Helen Conor's brother was killed at home in auto accident, we wanted to pay her way home. But she can just have 5 days leave.

**Friday July 31, 1942.** Two weeks spent here, having a busy time now. Drill every day and lecture after drill.

**Saturday Aug. 1, 1942.** Drill reviewed by Col Myll this morning. Gas masks issue today. Cute articles of war.

**Sunday Aug. 2, 1942.** Went to church this morning. Rev. Flynn preaching. Went to show tonight on [unclear]. Writing letters tonight.

**Monday Aug 3, 1942.** Had pictures taken today at studio in borrowed uniform. Drill this morning and lecture. Stiff after a day's rest.

**Tuesday, August 4, 1942.** Drill, lectures. Blue cotton seersucker uniforms issued today. Looks like a tropical destination now. Had 3<sup>rd</sup> typhoid shot. Saw movie tonight. Bing Crosby...

**Wednesday, August 5, 1942.** Drill, lecture. Letters from Lydia and Irene. JWS and Jim. Feel shots of yesterday.<sup>17</sup>

In this week of consistent yet abbreviated entries, Johns appears to write with her audience in mind, that is to say Alma and others back home, especially women. Indeed, she relates the training she undergoes to begin 'marching like a soldier' and makes light of the required gas masks – symbolic representations of the danger she will face – by feminising them as 'cute articles of war.' A mere few months later, in stark contrast to her training phase, Johns telegraphed extraordinary content with extreme brevity at the end of long, difficult days. Every day during this period, multitudes of horrifically war-wounded soldiers arrived in her compound. Despite her exhaustion at the paucity of the conditions, Johns faithfully followed Consolidated Publishing's exhortations by daily relating events:

**5-22-43 Sat.** Work on duty. Temp 101 feel lousy. ... Went to look in Barrack 3 Sec 2. What a [place] like Jungle Nursing. No toilets or water. Patients are to be discharged from the army and are a mess.

**5-23-43 Sun.** Worked on sec 4, wards 14 and 15 today. ... Wrote 40 passes for patients. 18 didn't come back.

**5-24-43 Mon.** On Sec 4 yesterday. Patients AWOL.

**5-25-43 Tues.** Went back to Barracks 2 today. Sure would appreciate a good case of pneumonia or measles to take care of. One can never find

these problems here.

**5-27-43 Thurs.** Birthday. Off at 2pm. Had lunch in room ... gifts, bedpillow from Kitty. Powder from Bernice and Candles & slip from Charlotte. Had a nice day. Kitty looks terrible her foot is swollen tonight but she went on duty.

**Fri. 5-28-43** Kitty taken off duty to hospital with acute rheumatic fever, I fear. Still working on barracks.

**5-29-43 Sat.** worked long day.

**5-30-43** Transferred to Ward 2, serious ill ward and bad pneumonia. Have two very bad ones, McMillen and Spears, but I like it better.

**6-1-43 Tues.** Letters

**6-2-43** Busy day

**6-3-43** Thurs Went through infiltration course today, crawled 150 yards with live bullets whipping over heads.

**6-4-43** C's birthday. Gave her perfume. Casualties on infiltration course. No more nurses allowed to go through. Took pictures of room.

**6-5-43** Busy long day.

**6-6-43** worked long again.

**6-7-43** visiting Kitty every day.

**6-9-43** Irene from 79<sup>th</sup> Gen Hospital flew in from Oregon today to see Kitty. ...

**6-12-43 Sat.** Writing letters for Kitty.

**6-20-43** Wrote Mrs. F tonight. Kitty not so good.<sup>18</sup>

Several features are telling about these diligent and progressively more telegraphed entries. Firstly, reading them in full replicates as closely as possible the experience of reading this one-off text as a physical document, with its rising anxiety about the deteriorating situation of her friend Kitty. It also correlates Johns's record of work life with the extreme stresses of combat nursing that Bellafaire and others describe as being utterly 'ghastly'.<sup>19</sup> The profoundly disabling injuries that wartime nurses were called upon to treat were horrifying, as Johns remarks in characteristic understatement, 'Sure would appreciate a good case of pneumonia or measles to take care of. One can never find these problems here'.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, by quietly relating the soldiers' astonishing rate of nearly 40 percent Absent Without Official Leave (AWOL), Johns simultaneously provides a telling account of returning soldiers' experience. Secondly, the elliptical nature of the entries, the apparent address to Alma (representing the civilian women back home as rapt audience) and the consistency with which Johns recorded her days suggest her own sense of significance about witnessing and participating in this profound experience. Miss Beulah Mabel Johns from the close-knit rural borough of Kittanning, Pennsylvania, was living an adventurous life – and this life was worthy of being recorded for others to read about. In comparison with the long history of diary serving primarily to record the lives of significant men, this close emphasis on her own life and especially on her heroic caretaking role suggests a significant shift in the function of diary for mid-twentieth-

century women. Thirdly, when one sets out to read the entire diary – refusing to trivialise its frequent repetitions but instead embracing them as the very means to recognise the themes of trauma and quiet witness that this diary exudes – the most striking observations are twofold. Johns's unrelentingly dry sense of humour in the face of real fear (for example calling her gas mask 'cute') is completed by Johns's reliance on and nurturing of the other women who joined her in this adventure (gifts recorded as being given and received, and especially, her close attention to her ailing friend Kitty in the passage above). These pages of her diary overflow with careful recording of the kind gestures that other women did to help her, as well as her own efforts at looking out for the well-being of her fellow nurses and new friends. Indeed, throughout this diary, dozens upon dozens of women's name are listed with their hometowns and other significant details captured for memory. Historian Mary Sarnecky has pointedly termed the military as 'one of our most deliberately masculine institutions,' and for women entering this deliberately non-feminised environment in order to answer a wartime call, one of the most crucial strategies for survival was to forge strong and lasting networks with other women as they made their way through together.<sup>21</sup>

## Witness to Trauma

Serving in critical care units in the same Army Nurse Corps over thirty years later, a Vietnam War nurse, who wrote poetry under the pen name 'Dusty', penned the following lines about what combat nurses do and do not tell about the traumas they witness:

I will check your vitals

Every 15 minutes.

I will document

Inevitability.

I will write your mother

And tell her you were brave.

What I will not tell her

Is that you were wasted.<sup>22</sup>

As these lines suggest, the physical and emotional damage witnessed by combat nurses during wartime is nearly impossible for civilians to fathom, and it took its toll on nurses. Beulah Johns wrote her military diary *My Life in the Service* while still stationed in the United States. On the morning she sailed to New Guinea, she quickly posted it back home to Pennsylvania to her trusted reader Alma, quipping, '5am, Well, diary – ... I hope you pass the censors to get to Alma for confidential peeping'.<sup>23</sup> That final send-off marks the last words of this diary and therefore the end of Johns's written narrative in the above-mentioned Special Collections archive.

However, Johns also left us with photographic scrapbooks of her tour of duty in 'New Hollandia' and throughout the Pacific Islands. Represented among the dozens of photos that make up this haunting scrapbook are soldiers suffering acute combat injuries, amputations, and chronic tropical fever conditions. The outdoor medical tent compound is visibly rustic, and the scrapbook is organised largely by ward numbers, indicating a working nurse's perspective in creating the book. Embedded throughout are images of Johns and her

fellow nurses caring for monkeys and the island's stray cats, as well as joyful photos of nurses playing with local children who visited the compound. While Johns's written notations throughout the scrapbook rarely comprise more than a ward number or perhaps a name, her careful selection and arrangement are very telling about nurses' experience of war in the Pacific theatre. In her painstaking recording of these wartime events, through both her stateside life-writing and her later photographs, Beulah Johns bore witness to the clear-sighted perspective that she shared with 59,000 other combat nurses, lending significant insight into the working lives of a new class of working women that was created through the experience of the Second World War.

Tucked away in these yellowing diaries and scrapbooks – which since their donation upon Johns's death in 2004 have rarely been called upon by scholars – Johns's diary and scrapbooks tell little-known, yet extraordinary and significant, stories about women's experience of entering the institution of the military in large numbers for the first time during the Second World War. While these particular volumes are currently extremely well-cared-for by dedicated archivists, they are nonetheless only very rarely accessed, a circumstance that typically puts documents like these at risk of periodic culling efforts.<sup>24</sup> Documents recording women's history continue to be vulnerable and the unpublished 'everyday' writing by unknown women may be undervalued when in competition with the diaries of more famous figures. Yet, as Lieutenant Beulah M. Johns's extraordinary little volume quietly attests, an 'everyday' writer who writes with candour, depth, and humour about what she came to describe as 'Some job!', may leave behind a narrative that tells one view of the story of entire groups of people who are in danger of having their stories lost to time.

## Notes

1. Indiana University of Pennsylvania Special Collections and University Archives, Stapleton Library (hereafter IUPSCA) Manuscript Group 128: Beulah Johns Brennen Collection, Box 1 Folder 10 Beulah Johns, *My Life in the Service*, diary, 1942-1943.
2. Philippe Lejeune, 'The "Journal de Jeune Fille" in Nineteenth-Century France' trans. Martine Breillac in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, eds Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia Huff (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 107-122.
3. See Laurie Scrivener, 'U.S. Military Women in World War II: The SPAR, WAC, WAVES, WASP, and Women Marines in U.S. Government Publications,' *Journal of Government Information* 26 (1999), 4 and 361-383; Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*, (New York, Presidio Press, 1993) 9-15.
4. Judith Bellafaire, *The Army Nurse Corps: A Commemoration of World War II* (Washington, DC, Center of Military History Publication 72-15 [www.history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM, accessed 1 November 2015].
5. Sue Bruley, 'A New Perspective on Women Workers in the Second World War: The Industrial Diary of Kathleen Church-Blish and Elsie Whiteman', *Labour History Review*, 68/2 (2003), 217-234, 217.
6. Carol Acton, 'Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing', *College Literature*, Spring 31/2 (2004), 53-79, 57.
7. Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998).
8. See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
9. For examples, see the *My Life in the Service* manuscript diary of Lee W. Mayo (Special Collections Library of California State University Northridge, [library.csun.edu/SCA/Peek-in-the-Stacks/Mayo] and facsimile copies contained in George McGovern, *My Life in the Service: The World War II Diary of George McGovern* (New York, Franklin Square Press, 2016).
10. I borrow this phrase from Mary Sarnecky in *A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).
11. I borrow Julia Kristeva's term describing the actual experience of the subject as individual vis-à-vis the dynamism inherent to the signifying process. Julia Kristeva, 'The Subject in Process,' in *The Tel Quel Reader*, eds Patrick French and Roland-Francois Lack (New York, Routledge, 1998), 133-178.
12. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York, Knopf, 1990), 33.
13. Helen Buss, 'A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing,' in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, eds Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998); Jeanne Braham, 'A Lens of Empathy,' in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, eds Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 56-71; Paul John Eakin, *The Ethics of Life Writing* (Cornell, Cornell University Press, 2004).
14. Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: Diary Literature of American Women, from 1764 to 1985* (New York, The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1993), 3.
15. IUPSCA Manuscript Group 128: Beulah Johns Brennen Collection, Box 1 Folder 10, 19 Jul. 1942.
16. Bellafaire, *The Army Nurse Corps*, 17.
17. IUPSCA Manuscript Group 128: Beulah Johns Brennen Collection, Box 1 Folder 10, 30 Jul.-5 Aug. 1942.
18. *Ibid.*, 22 May-20 Jun. 1943.
19. Bellafaire, *The Army Nurse Corps*, 6.
20. IUPSCA Manuscript Group 128: Beulah Johns Brennen Collection, Box 1 Folder 10, 25 May 1943.
21. See Sarnecky *History*.
22. Dusty, 'Hello David,' (1969) in *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace: Writings of Women in the Vietnam War*, eds Lynda Van Devanter and Joan A. Furey (New York, Warner Books, 1991), 43-44.
23. IUPSCA Manuscript Group 128: Beulah Johns Brennen Collection, Box 1 Folder 10, 8 Dec. 1943.
24. I wish to thank the dedicated Special Collections archivists of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Mr. Harrison Wick and Dr. Theresa McDevitt, for generously allowing me to access their volumes and for their supreme commitment to preserving women's history at the university. In addition, graduate students Meghan Hurley, Sheila Farr, and Adam Colton have provided invaluable assistance with scanning, categorising, digitising, and generally helping to make sense of our discoveries in our library's Special Collections.