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‘THE BOUNDS OF FEMALE REACH’
Catherine Hutton’s Fiction and her Tours in Wales

Mary-Ann Constantine



My dear Mrs Hutton, or My dear Mrs Oakwood, for you are identified in my mind as strongly by the latter name as the former. You will conclude we have read your novel of ‘Oakwood Hall’. We have, indeed, and had the double enjoyment of an agreeable fiction, and an excellent portrait of an ever dear friend. So striking is the resemblance that your visage was, during the perusal, always before me.

—Elizabeth Greathead, 16 May 1820

As I read, I was so engrossed by the subject, and the sentiments appeared so exactly your own, that I expected to see your signature, instead of Jane Oakwood. In reading the *Welsh Mountaineer* I had many such visions before my eyes, yet you were not so completely embodied as it were before one as now. You will laugh at me—but when Margaret wrote to her friend, and mentioned the comforts of your house etc, I found myself at Bennett’s Hill [...] before I recollected that the scene and the friend were imaginary.

—Mrs Lea, Henley, 22 Dec 1819

THESE ARE TWO RESPONSES by friends of Catherine Hutton to *Oakwood Hall*, the third of her three novels, published in 1819. Copied out by the author, they are preserved in the National Library of Wales in a bundle of documents which include extracts of reviews of her novels and a fair-copy of a series of letters written to her brother Thomas during various tours of Wales undertaken between 1796 and 1800.¹ The bundle also contains a transcribed page from the *Monthly Magazine* for 1821 in which, alongside the likes of Hannah More, Helen Maria Williams, Maria Graham, Elizabeth Inchbald, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth and Amelia Opie, Hutton is listed among ‘twenty four ladies of pre-eminent talents as writers in various departments of literature and philosophy’, and judged ‘[r]espectable as a novelist, powerful as a general writer, and able as a philosophical geographer, as proved by her recent work on Africa’.²

Catherine Hutton’s star does not shine so brightly these days, but she is well worth rediscovering.³ A thoughtful and perceptive writer, her work has direct relevance to current critical debates in women’s writing and ‘four nations’ literature. Her fiction in particular—three lengthy novels in all—explores the possibilities of

female autonomy, often through the topos of travel, and often through characters and landscapes derived from Hutton's own travels, most notably in Wales. Starting from those two enthusiastic and strikingly similar responses to *Oakwood Hall*, this chapter considers how different aspects of Hutton's work, both fiction and non-fiction, seem directly to test the limits of the authorial 'I', a feature which from Mandeville to Chatwin has always been one of the most unstable aspects of the travel-writing genre, but which is also, as Harriet Guest's work has recently reminded us, an endlessly contentious site for female authors of this period.⁴

Cheryl Wilson's recent article on Catherine Hutton explores her work in relation to her now better-known contemporary Jane Austen (who did not, it is worth noting, make the *Monthly's* list of 'twenty four ladies' back in 1821). Wilson is sensitive to the difficulties involved in retrospectively reading other authors of the period through that powerful Austen lens, and notes how relatively unsophisticated Hutton's narrative techniques now seem, with their 'outdated epistolary style', their often 'clunky narratives' and the 'tangential inclusion of extensive travelogues'.⁵ It may, however, be useful to look in a little more depth at these 'outdated' forms; particularly the latter. Travel literature, though one of the most popular forms of Romantic-era writing, has been a notoriously difficult genre for criticism to deal with, absorbing as it does so many discourses, continually shifting boundaries and changing tack. In an account of any journey, intimate life-writing or epistolary sociability might give way to observations on natural history, geology, economics, all interspersed with aesthetic appreciation and historical or anthropological reflection. Even within critical accounts of the genre, the British 'home tour' has received less attention than the exotic and culturally controversial explorations of the southern hemisphere or the far east; the European Grand Tour is also rather better studied.⁶

Women travel writers are, for various reasons, little discussed.⁷ Though many women went on versions of the domestic tour in the decades either side of 1800, and many wrote about their experiences, their voices form only a small proportion of the wave of accounts published at the time. As Michael Freeman has shown, the two centuries between 1700 and 1900 produced some 1200 written tours of Wales alone (both manuscript and published); approximately two hundred were written by women, but 'only 20 were published during, or very soon after, the life of the authors'.⁸ Catherine Hutton was without doubt one of the sharpest, best-informed travellers into Romantic-era Wales, and for that alone deserves our attention; the fact that she makes use of her experience in her fiction, while also choosing to publish her *Tours* in the *Monthly Magazine* raises further interesting questions. With a heightened awareness of the difficulties surrounding a female author who chooses to present herself 'before the awful tribunal of the Public',⁹ we can perhaps come closer to understanding some of the issues at stake when a first-person tour narrative is transposed into the fictional setting of a novel—when the 'I' of the traveller on the ground is shifted to a world where 'the scene and the friend' are 'imaginary'.

Catherine Hutton was born to William and Sarah Hutton in Birmingham in 1756. According to her father she

[c]ame into the world before her time and was perhaps the smallest human being ever seen [...] Curiosity led me, when a month old, to shut her up for a moment in the small drawer of a bureau, with all her habiliments; nay, I should have put her in my pocket and shut the lid over her, but through fear of her sustaining some injury.¹⁰

She grew up with her brother Thomas (three other brothers died in infancy) in a comfortable town house in New Street; the family also built a country house, Bennett's Hill, just north of the city at Washwood Heath. Her father, who was originally from Derby and began life in extreme poverty and hardship, had opened a small bookshop in New Street in 1750, and soon established himself as an important bookseller and paper-manufacturer. He knew several members of the Lunar Society (though was never a member), and published across a wide variety of genres—including, in 1781, the first history of Birmingham ('it is remarkable', he notes in his preface, 'that one of the most singular places in the universe is without an historian: that she never manufactured an history of herself, who has manufactured almost every thing else').¹¹ The younger Huttons attended the Unitarian New Meeting house where Joseph Priestley preached; Catherine describes his visits to their home, and, like her father, wrote a vivid account of the 1791 Church and King riots, when not only Priestley's house, library and workshop were destroyed, but the properties of seven others—the Huttons amongst them. Both the town house and Bennett's Hill were looted; the latter was burnt to the ground.¹²

Sarah Hutton was seriously ill over a long period, and her daughter, besides caring for her, took on many of the household responsibilities. The family made visits to Buxton in attempts to improve Sarah's health; and in the summer of 1787 they undertook a journey to Aberystwyth, then a small coastal town just beginning to find itself on the tourist itineraries. They would return to Wales several times over the next two decades, notably after Sarah's death in 1796:

My daughter, whose affection and sorrow were equal to mine, lost her health. Her mother and she had been close and intimate friends. This alarmed me. For her recovery we took a journey in July to Barmouth in Wales, which in some measure answered the purpose. The excursion was but melancholy: we had lost a dear companion, who had always been of the party. (*Life*, 225)

Both father and daughter wrote accounts of their various journeys. William's were published as *Remarks Upon North Wales* (1803); Catherine's would appear as a series of 'Letters' published in the *Monthly Magazine* between 1815 and 1818. The manuscript version of the tour is very close to but does not correspond exactly with published 'Letters'—it is freer in tone, less structured and more detailed—but it, too, clearly represents a worked-up version of the original letters addressed to her brother Thomas (which, if they exist, have not yet come to light). In addition to this group of letters, which begin with the 1796 trip to Barmouth, there are three earlier letters, also to Thomas, written in 1787 from Aberystwyth; they appeared

in a later memoir compiled by her cousin Catherine Hutton Beale, and are also likely to have been revised before publication.¹³

'Enraptured at every step we took': The Welsh Tours

The Wales that emerges from these accounts is a challenging and exciting place; not surprisingly, given the poignant family circumstances of the first two visits, it is also a place capable of inducing powerful emotions. In a genre already much lampooned for its superficiality,¹⁴ Hutton's tours are remarkable for their intelligent curiosity about Welsh culture and history, and for their interest in the lives of the people she encounters: she displays an open-mindedness which may be attributed to her Dissenting upbringing and her intensive childhood reading (her father wrote of her capacity 'to take in knowledge without instruction [...] she never was taught to read'; *Life*, 392). Her subjects range from the domestic condition of rural labouring-class women—their clothing, food, and daily occupations—to a perceptive discussion of the difficulty of establishing the names of rivers; she also provides a succinct (and accurate) exposition of the rules of Welsh orthography and pronunciation, in order that the language, and particularly the place names, should appear less 'barbarous' to the eyes and ears of English readers. Thomas Pennant is a principal source of historical information, and her comments on his work form an interesting leitmotif to her travels; she is severe, for example, about his inconsistent spelling of Welsh, but acknowledges his unparalleled reach ('no tourist, except Pennant, has seen Wales').¹⁵

Reading the tours with the novels in mind imbues certain episodes with retrospective significance. Both as a travel writer and as a novelist, Hutton is fascinated by people, and can capture a great deal in a short paragraph:

The beach at Aberystwyth is covered with loose stones; the cliffs are bold, black rocks. Bad as this beach is, we are constantly upon it. Betty, the old sea guide, says we 'walk out of all reason'; but my poor mother is walking for her life. I am careless and happy; I sing to the waves; and twice I have danced at a ball at the Talbot. The first time, having no creature to go with, my mother was so kind as to accompany me. My partner was a clergyman, who would have been my partner for life, had I been so disposed.¹⁶

This is beautifully light touch: a witty, poignant miniature of time spent at one of the less fashionable coastal resorts, hinting as it does at latent stories, at potential outcomes, both droll and sad. Though stylistically quite different, Hutton shares with her contemporary Jane Austen a gift for shrewd social observation; Harriet Guest has noted her instinct for the niceties of class, the little turbulences that ripple through groups of English visitors who find themselves thrown together at Welsh boarding houses, round dining tables, in a space where normal rules do not quite apply.¹⁷ Many of these types of experiences are replayed by her fictional characters in similar settings; but other moments from the tours resurface more indirectly. Early in the 1796 tour comes a nicely observed piece describing the working practices of a large sheep-farm near Dinas Mawddwy. Hutton is intrigued by

the fact that this wide expanse of open mountain, home to some three thousand sheep, is actually criss-crossed by boundaries:

It is divided into three distinct sheep-walks. The commanding officer of the whole is a man; the acting officers are dogs, of which are kept from 15 to 20. The sheep-walks are divided, not by hedges, ditches or stone walls, but by boundaries, drawn by the eye. Such bounds as these the sheep might easily overleap, and not only trespass upon each other, but upon their neighbours. It is the business of the dogs to take care they do not.¹⁸

There follows a detailed account of the relay system used to stop the dogs from tiring, and the section concludes with a wry political comment (this is 1796, after all; Britain, and much of Europe, is at war with revolutionary France):

Invaluable would be a breed of dogs that could thus restrain head-strong man within his proper limits! That would bite the heels of every sovereign that invades his neighbour, or instigated other sovereigns to do so!¹⁹

The entire passage is interesting for its depiction of invisible, and policed, boundaries, in a landscape which evokes boundlessness (no hedges, ditches, or stone walls). The notion of limits, and an interest in methods of controlling behaviour, are characteristic Hutton themes, and will be further examined below.

Undoubtedly, however, one of Hutton's greatest strengths is her ability to describe the business of travel itself. The notorious steepness and narrowness of Welsh roads provide a constant, often amusing, source of concern: of a road in central Wales she notes with dry humour that '[in] most places a horse might have passed us if we had met any such animal; I saw one place where I thought a cat must have climbed the mountain or dived into the river to have done so'.²⁰ Elsewhere the same kind of terrain is described in more detail and certain distinctive preoccupations begin to appear:

The Clifton, our new-found river, ran in a deep bottom, between two ranges of stupendous hills, to Mallwyd, originally Maenllwyd, Greystone, where we now are. Our road was a terrace cut on the side of the northern range, generally fenced with a hedge, now and then without a fence, sometimes on bridges thrown over streams, which poured down from the mountains across our road, and sometimes through them; while, swelled by the rain into little torrents, they tumbled in cascades into the river below. The sublimity of these scenes shook my nerves. The only way in which I could contemplate these towering hills, woody glens, and rushing waters, was on my feet. We sent the servant on with the horses, and walked nearly four miles before we reached Mallwyd, chiefly in the rain, always in the mire; but enraptured at every step we took [...]²¹

This is typically precise in its careful positioning of the traveller in the landscape, with the road literally threading—sometimes under, sometimes over—the many watercourses flowing down from the hillside; typical too is the explanation of

the name Mallwyd—a thoughtful attempt at rendering transparent what would otherwise seem exotic and opaque. But the passage is above all a compelling evocation of movement through a landscape; kinetic, multi-directional, with the downward-moving water, and the forward-moving travellers, and the reader's mental eye sweeping up and down the slope. Particularly interesting here is Hutton's desire to have her feet firmly on the ground. The 1787 journey to Aberystwyth, with her invalid mother, had been made in a 'chaise'—and there too, Catherine notes that they sometimes walked the more difficult sections ('my mother and I choosing to walk over a bridge made of two planks rather than drive through the stream').²² For the 1796 journey, Hutton was more adventurously on horseback, riding pillion behind a male servant, with her father alongside her. Prefiguring a subject which would reappear in *The Welsh Mountaineer*, the opening letter in this series suggests that her brother Thomas—perhaps considering it to be either unsafe or unseemly—may not have approved of this mode of transport: 'I mounted my pillion, behind the servant, and set out on the romantic expedition of riding into Wales, you said nothing; but your looks threatened me with all sorts of misfortunes.'²³ Hutton is, however, a cautious rider, and frequently prefers to walk: that need to be 'grounded', to be in control of her own destiny, is by no means a unique moment in the tours. She has a real terror of descents, and always dismounts at the tops of hills, though invariably tending to rationalise her decision as for the benefit of the horse. A dramatic example of this occurs on their 1799 tour of Snowdonia, shortly after they leave Beddgelert, on the 'celebrated' road to Tan-y-Bwlch. This 'grand pass' from Caernarvonshire into Merionethshire is, she claims, undertaken by all types of carriages, although the Welsh generally travel on foot and prefer to go a detour along the coast if at all possible:

The summit is a gap between two rocks, and the descent, which begins immediately, made all I had ever seen appear trifling. It is native rock, in steps and ledges; huge stone, in holes and ridges; and so steep, that that it shook my whole frame to walk down, though I leaned half my weight upon my father; and I wondered, as I saw the horses led before me, that it was possible for them to keep on four legs so unequally placed.²⁴

The fictional Jane Oakwood, attempting to describe a steep descent from Tawtop in the Lake District, would recall 'the old Welsh road from Pont Aberglaslyn to Tan-y-Bwlch' and confess to feeling 'the same sensation here as there; fear lest the horses should not be able to keep on four legs [...] You may be assured we walked too'.²⁵ Hutton's response to landscape is intensely experiential; she registers place through her body, sometimes in terms of physical effort ('I have never toiled so hard in any five hours of my life') but also in terms of an emotional responsiveness which has an equally physical effect.²⁶ Echoing the description of the descent from Tan-y-Bwlch, she writes that 'the view from the hill above Harlech is so stupendous it shook my whole frame': here, though, it is not the walking which agitates her, but the sheer beauty of what she sees.²⁷ In Snowdonia itself she freely admits

to suffering from what we would call vertigo—a condition which, if anything, enhances the intensity of her responses:

You know I do not hope to climb mountains; for high places are as much forbidden to me now as they were to the children of Israel of old. I look at those which form a chain near this place awe, almost with reverence. There is a fatality attends my designs on the mountains, and such is the impression they have made on my mind, that I sometimes think I should not dare to look at them, if I were there.²⁸

As a travel writer, then, Hutton is a persuasive companion: her veracity is the veracity of the body in the landscape, the irresistible truth of the wet petticoat, the muddy boots. Her letters to her brother end with a sprightly diatribe against those who do the standard tour of North Wales in a hurry, muffled up inside their coaches; and who are not themselves brave enough to brave the elements:

Travellers at this rate cannot see Wales. to find out all its beauties, a man must travel on foot; or at least on a Welsh Keffil. He must be acquainted with the Welsh gentry and clergy, and travel with a pass from one of their houses to another. So might he learn what was worth seeing, and where to find it.²⁹

'A man must travel on foot'. But travelling on foot or on horseback is not so straightforward for a woman, and that for many reasons. Turning to the novels, we can see that concerns about how women travel, and why, and with whom, form a frequent counterpoint to the plot.

'The awful tribunal of the public': Wales and Travel in the Novels

All three of Hutton's novels came out between 1813 and 1819, long after her initial forays into Wales. All are characterised by the inclusion of journeys around Britain, with detailed descriptions of routes taken; there are many, often lightly satirical, scenes in shared lodgings at coastal resorts or spas, where the nuances of class and gender are played out in conversations over dinner. Add to this the fact that all the novels are epistolary, with a first-person 'I' writing long descriptive accounts of their adventures to a dear friend, and one can see why some of Hutton's readers might have had the author herself 'constantly before their eyes'.

Many of Hutton's set pieces draw on her own trips to Buxton, the Lakes and further afield; for the purposes of this chapter, I focus mainly on her depiction of Wales. Her first-published novel *The Miser Married* (1813) is set, albeit with minimal local detail, 'on the banks of the Wye', where the young heroine Charlotte 'Mereval' and her spendthrift widowed mother find themselves assuming new identities in rural exile as a result of debts incurred through an extravagant London lifestyle (the revelation of their real surname, Montgomery, is an important twist in the plot—and, incidentally, evokes the first Welsh town Hutton stayed in, on the 1787 tour). A visit to Aberystwyth is deployed to resolve certain plot issues: as Hutton had observed for herself, this minor seaside resort functions as a space where normal social boundaries may be infringed, both by the accidents of travel (a broken carriage) and by the subtle alterations in the unspoken rules of class.

Oakwood Hall (1819) was the third novel to be published, but most of it had already appeared in serialised form in *La Belle Assemblée* magazine between 1811 and 1813 under the title 'Oakwood House'; the sharp and sympathetic Jane Oakwood was thus already an established character by the time the three-volume novel appeared. It is the most discursive and 'tour-heavy' of the three, the third volume opening with a sequence of letters by Jane, describing in merciless guide-book detail a tour of South Wales via Brecon, Newport, Merthyr, Swansea and the Gower, returning via Chepstow.³⁰ Her disappointingly superficial enumeration of roads taken, views and antiquities admired is occasionally relieved by glimpses of the lives around her, from a sympathetic portrayal of a group of miners carousing in the Lamb and Flag at Newport to a telling assessment of the polluted air around Swansea's copperworks: 'I own I would rather be without copper tea-kettles, and even without copper money, and let the ore rest quietly in its bed, than raise such a poisonous effluvia and inhale it' (III, 6).

One characteristic of Hutton as a novelist is the set piece and often rather stagey 'discussion'—around a dinner table, over coffee in a drawing room—during which different characters voice their opinions on various matters, including, frequently, books. Questions of reading and authorship also form the subject matter of various letters within the novels. *The Miser Married* devotes considerable space to a consideration of the merits of various 'wholly admirable' female authors such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, with the heroine Charlotte Montgomery making an eloquent case for the 'lost' mid-eighteenth-century female poet Mary Jones; as Cheryl Wilson notes, Hutton thus self-consciously positions herself as a female writer (and, indeed, a reader) within a fragile and unpredictable literary tradition.³¹ The idea is further pursued in *Oakwood Hall* where during another such discussion Hutton's alter ego Jane offers a boldly positive (and in the context of the novel, decisive) endorsement of Mary Wollstonecraft in the face of more tremulous opposition from other women in the room; I will return to that particular episode later, but it can be noted here that Wollstonecraftian ideas of female liberty and the constraints placed by society upon the female body are openly debated by characters in all three novels.

It is in *The Welsh Mountaineer*, however, that these ideas, and Wales's part in them, are deployed with most structural and metaphorical force. In this novel, the young and spirited Dorothy Penrose travels on horseback (riding solo, but accompanied by the family servant, Jenkin) from her ancestral home in deepest Meirionethshire to London. She has come to visit her spoiled and helplessly inert cousin Lady Latimer, whose husband, appropriately enough, had himself been what Jenkin calls 'one of them towerists'—an aristocratic English visitor on a fishing holiday to the Welsh lakes. The contrast in the lives of the two women is made immediately apparent through the evocation of 'journeys' depicted on an exaggeratedly different scale:

'Dear Dorothy,' said my cousin '[...] certainly your nerves are made of hardened steel! I should have sunk under fatigue and apprehension. Indeed, my removal from my bed to my sofa, and my sofa to

my bed, is a journey that quite exhausts me. You have no idea how weak I am become.³²

Dorothy's letters home to her grandmother and her beloved cousin Owen chart the adventures of a Rousseauvian innocent abroad, whose clean Welsh ways cut through the nonsense of social mores which keep women prisoners in their own houses. Hutton here gives the familiar trope of Welsh mountain liberty a decidedly Wollstonecraftian twist; much is made of Dorothy's 'naturalness', her energy, confidence and curiosity, even her healthy appetite: "How you devour that sandwich!" exclaims Lady Latimer. "It astonishes me to see you!" (I, 96)³³ Above all, the novel depicts the young woman's freedom to move about at will, unconstrained by notions of when, where and in whose company it might be 'permitted' to do so. One memorable scene has her canter off at dawn to visit London Bridge, without telling her cousin—"who would battle me with custom, decorum, propriety, and a hundred other weapons"; the boundaries of London society are as invisible to Dorothy as those patrolled by the dogs above Mallwyd. Her wanderings through the backstreets contrast with the virtual immobility of rich women paying each other social visits in carriages jammed solid in busy London streets: "You know", says Dorothy innocently, "I never was in a carriage" (I, 8); and later on 'in Merionethshire, where the luxury of a carriage is almost unknown, you know, we are brought up on horseback' (III, 276–77).

The contrast between 'real' travellers and those who move through life boxed-up in carriages is a familiar literary trope—as we have seen, Hutton uses it herself in her criticism of other Welsh tourists, and she may even (there is an echo in Dorothy's declaration above) have known Pennant's wry comment in his *Literary Life* (1793): 'I consider the absolute resignation of one's person to the luxury of a carriage to forebode a very short interval between that, and the vehicle which is to convey us to our last stage'.³⁴ But Dorothy figured as a free-ranging life force in a world of the living dead may also reflect another literary inheritance, that of the previous generation of 1790s 'Jacobin' novelists, perhaps notably Robert Bage, author of *Hermſprung* (1796), whose unconventional eponymous hero is both a determined pedestrian and a speaker of plain truths—his 'unfashionable frankness', as Harriet Guest puts it,³⁵ can be attributed to an upbringing not in deepest Merionethshire but amongst 'aboriginal Americans' (which narratively speaking comes to much the same thing). Hutton certainly read Bage, who was a friend of the family and a business partner of William Hutton's; he was instrumental in helping the family recover from financial collapse after the Priestley riots.

Hutton's is, of course, a romantic and profoundly utopian view of Wales as a space of physical freedom for women, derived from her experiences as an educated woman of a certain social class travelling for leisure. What the travel narratives confirm is that this is not, or not only, a literary trope, and should be taken seriously; Dorothy is constantly, and teasingly, testing boundaries. One should not underestimate the relative audacity of creating such a heroine at the time. The *Monthly Review* found Dorothy Penrose too much to stomach: "The heroine also is rather too undaunted for a young country girl; and her long harangue, vol. i,

p. 194., in a mixed company who seem not to deem her worth notice, is not only bold, but unnatural.³⁶ This is a neat inversion of the entire thrust of the novel, which stresses again and again the unnaturalness of the women Dorothy meets. The wilting Bridget, described as ‘one of our mountain-plants brought into a stove’, is similarly concerned by Dorothy’s appearance in ‘mixed company’ (*WM*, I, 109), especially on her unconventional journey from Wales: ‘how did you contrive to pass the time at the inn?’ she asks her cousin, ‘I suppose you were not in a public room?’ (I, 192) Even in enlightened Dissenting circles, women self-regulated, knew when to keep quiet: ‘I took care’, wrote Hutton to a friend about attending, as a young girl, the fascinating regular meetings of her father’s circle of friends, ‘*not* to display the little knowledge I possessed’.³⁷ We should not, then, be surprised to find that the act of publishing her first novel, of exposing herself to the public, evokes a physical response not dissimilar to the effect of the view from the hill above Harlech:

To step forth at once, from the most impenetrable solitude, and present myself before the awful tribunal of the Public, is an effort so great, a transition so violent, that it agitates all my nerves, and, for the present, ‘murders sleep’ (*MM*, ix).

On one level, as Wilson suggests, this is a strategic piece of authorial self-presentation; but I suspect there may be more to it than that. This is a vertiginous moment. To publish is to step across a boundary, a threshold; it is a ‘boldness’ akin to offering an opinion in a room full of men; to riding off into the hills at will. It is not a liberty that can be taken lightly; publication can unsettle and even compromise reputations in ways which mimic (and often tangle with) social responses to sexual impropriety. It is no surprise, then, that Dorothy, wandering unchaperoned in public streets in an undesirable part of town, should end up getting herself arrested and briefly confined to prison. Hutton has created a heroine who exaggeratedly—and often amusingly, since the tone throughout the novel is witty rather than sentimental—embodies Wollstonecraftian qualities of female liberty in a world criss-crossed by the invisible boundaries of society.

One further way to explore the notion of boundaries in Hutton’s writings is through her depiction of relationships between men and women. All three novels are striking for their representation of marriage as a struggle for control, from the miserly Mr Winterdale and Charlotte’s scheming mother, to Lord Latimer and Bridget, locked in a kind of mutual degeneration; even Jane Oakwood’s visit to South Wales throws up the brutal little cameo of a local landowner who replaces his wives with prostitutes as the mood takes him, until one of them rebels (*OH*, III, 28–29). Owen’s fitness to be Dorothy’s mate is demonstrated *not* by his loyally accompanying her and protecting her on her travels, but by allowing her the freedom to ride off (effectively) alone and encounter various kinds of danger—emotional (unsuitable suitors, false female friends), physical (wandering through London) or social (Dorothy’s *faux pas* are, inevitably, legion). Should the reader be in any danger of missing this generosity of spirit it is further emphasised in a lengthy coda: after an emotional reunion at the conclusion of her London adventures,

Owen encourages Dorothy to make another—and narratively speaking, strictly unnecessary—journey, this time to Yorkshire, to help Bridget and her husband resolve their marital differences. The novels also pay close attention to pairings of men and women in interestingly non-sexual ways: the middle-aged sister and brother of Oakwood Hall allow each other to breathe and flourish; Jane Oakwood heads up to the Lakes with the younger, just-betrothed, absentminded and desexualized Millichamp; Dorothy and her trusty servant, in close physical proximity, ride safely together all the way from Wales. Absent from this list is the father–daughter relationship which seems to have sustained Hutton herself.

As we have seen, the Huttons produced separate accounts of their many journeys into Wales; in them, almost always, they write as if they were independent travellers. A closer comparison of the two Huttons as travel writers is beyond the scope of this essay; but I would like to suggest that what Catherine got from her relationship with her father, and what she clearly feared to lose in marriage (there were plenty of offers along the way), was the freedom to think and act for herself. An unexpected paragraph in one of the manuscript letters to her brother takes us back to the problem of the authorial 'I', and sheds some light on Hutton's own concerns about her right to express her own experiences in her own words:

Possibly you may wonder at the word *I* and think that I should say *we*, if not *he*: knowing I have a companion whose wish ought to go before my own. If I were to speak in common terms, I should say, my father's only wish is to oblige me. But he has no wish. It is an innate principle of his mind, which operates invariably, before he has time to form a wish. In return, I hope I have another innate principle, which would teach me, without reflection, to avoid everything that might be really disagreeable to him.³⁸

This—though far from straightforward—seems to imply an almost utopian version of an affective relationship based on a form of instinctive mutual trust which operates 'invariably' and 'without reflection' (it might even be imagined as a benign, ideal version of those assiduously-policed invisible boundaries above Mallwyd). It adds a ring of truth to the words with which she opens her first published novel, expressing gratitude to her father 'to whose Industry I am indebted for the means of Leisure' and dedicating the book to him 'as I have dedicated my life' (*MM*, vi). Though his first act as a father may have been to briefly shut her up in a drawer, William Hutton appears to have enabled his daughter to expand her own horizons.


Boundaries and Limits: 'a city not made with hands'

The apotheosis of Catherine Hutton's fascination with mountains comes in a letter dated September 1800, addressed to her brother from Capel Curig. It begins with the extraordinary line: 'I have fancied Snowdonia a city not made with hands, whose Builder and Maker is God'.³⁹ The entire letter then is devoted to explaining the layout of this city's 'streets', with the westerly coast conceived as a thirty-three-mile stretch of 'Grand Parade', and Snowdon itself as a 'magnificent temple' in the centre: 'I have bounded my fancied city', she writes, 'by the district of Arfon'; an

‘imaginary line’ delimits the space described, and a hand-drawn map accompanies the letter, marking the Huttons’ route. The piece finishes, rather movingly, with a description of the ‘crooked mountain Moel Siabod’:

The summit of this last seems easy of access; and, if I could scale mountains, it should be my first. From its top a great part of the city I have been describing; a city beyond the work of mortal hands, and almost beyond the reach of human imagination, would strike the eye at once.⁴⁰

Writing of his daughter in his autobiography, William Hutton noted proudly: ‘Whatever lies within the bounds of female reach, she ventures to undertake, and whatever she undertakes is well done.’ (*Life*, 392) In her own travels, and in the fiction which draws so heavily upon them, Catherine Hutton seems more precisely to be exploring a place not so much ‘within’ as right *at* those ‘bounds of female reach’, and with a fierce curiosity for what might be on the other side—it is hard, in the passage just cited, to ignore that repeated word ‘beyond’. And it is here that we return to Mary Wollstonecraft, whose life appeared to many of her readers to epitomise ‘the romance of unbounded attachment’.⁴¹ As I noted earlier, Hutton allows the eminently sensible Jane Oakwood to speak admiringly of Wollstonecraft (a move which in itself can be read as testing limits, since the author’s reputation, in the wake of Godwin’s 1799 *Memoir*, had long been the subject of bitter and anxious controversy). ‘Her daring and ardent soul’, she declares, ‘entertained ideas, and formed a plan, unthought of, unattempted by woman’ (*OH*, 1, 154). Hutton, both as author and traveller, clearly belongs with those writers for whom Wollstonecraft became a model of ‘feminine strength of feeling endowed with the physicality of sensibility and imbued with its implications of utopian projection or desire’;⁴² and these are all qualities which can be found in Hutton’s writing at its best.

In 1799, the twenty-three-year-old J. M. W. Turner, on one of several walking tours in Wales, produced a series of remarkable watercolours, many of them looking across and down from elevated perspectives in the Snowdonian range—they capture much of the vertiginous excitement of Hutton’s descriptions of the same territory.⁴³ Her mental map of Snowdonia, passionately reconfigured as something akin to the City of Jerusalem from the *Book of Revelation*, speaks volumes about prospects she can imagine, but cannot hope to attain. That the tops of mountains were denied her is deeply poignant. 

NOTES

Versions of this chapter were given at conferences in Gregynog, Chawton House and Ceredigion Museum, Aberystwyth; I’m grateful to all who shared ideas and information in response, but particular thanks are due to Michael Freeman and Elizabeth Edwards. As will be evident, this piece owes much to the illuminating work of Harriet Guest, whose *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 2013) offers a subtle and in-depth exploration of the ‘bounds of female reach’ in 1790s literary culture.

1. NLW MS 19079C. Most of this manuscript comprises the fair-copy letters of Hutton's Welsh tours (hereafter 'MS Letters'); the two opening extracts come from a separate and incomplete manuscript booklet with pages numbered 17–32 (hereafter 'MS Booklet'), at p. 27 and p. 19.
2. MS Booklet, p. 32; the passage is transcribed from a piece by 'Impartialis' in the *Monthly Magazine, or British Register*, 51 (May 1821), 406–07.
3. There are signs that a literary recovery is underway. Her fiction is briefly discussed in Peter Garside and Karen O'Brien (eds), *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 2: English and British Fiction 1750–1820* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 464, 472–75; and more fully by Cheryl A. Wilson in "'Something like mine': Catherine Hutton, Jane Austen, and Feminist Recovery Work", *The Eighteenth Century*, 56.2 (Summer 2015), 151–64 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2015.0010>>. For her wide-ranging correspondence, see Bridget Hill, 'Catherine Hutton (1756–1846): A Forgotten Letter-Writer', *Women's Writing*, 1.1 (1994), 35–50 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0969908940010104>>. Hutton's *Tour of Africa* (1819–21), a compilation of travel narratives by other writers, has been recently reissued in the series *Women's Travel Writings in North Africa and the Middle East, Part II* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015); her tours of Wales are currently being prepared for online publication as part of the 'Curious Travellers' project: <www.curioustravellers.ac.uk>.
4. See e.g. Guest's discussion of how Amelia Alderson and Elizabeth Inchbald each managed their public authorial image—*Unbounded Attachment*, pp. 146–54.
5. Wilson, "'Something like mine'", p. 153.
6. This point is made more fully both by Zoe Kinsley in *Women Writing the Home Tour 1682–1812* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 1; and by Benjamin Colbert in the introduction to *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
7. Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 171–73.
8. Statistics from Michael Freeman <<https://sublimewales.wordpress.com>>; for published accounts by women in Britain as a whole, see Benjamin Colbert, *A Database of Women's Travel Writing 1780–1840* <www4.wlv.ac.uk/btw>.
9. Preface to Catherine Hutton, *The Miser Married* (London: Longman, 1813), p. ix. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text, with the abbreviation *MM*.
10. William Hutton, *The Life of William Hutton F.A.S.S., including a Particular Account of the Riots at Birmingham in 1791, to Which Is Subjoined the History of his Family, Written by Himself and Published by his Daughter Catherine Hutton*, 2nd edn (London and Birmingham: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1816), p. 139. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.
11. William Hutton, *An History of Birmingham, to the End of the Year 1780* (Birmingham: Pearson & Rollason, 1781), p. vi; the New Street house is at present a Waterstones. For Hutton's wide-ranging literary output see Susan Whyman, "'The pleasure of writing is inconceivable": William Hutton (1723–1815) as an Author', *Authorship*, 4.1 (2015) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.21825/aj.v4i1.1107>>. Whyman is currently working on a biography of William Hutton; I am very grateful to her for correcting some factual details in this piece.
12. According to Whyman (personal communication), there is no evidence that William Hutton (who was sceptical about religion in general) ever officially joined the Unitarians, although the family moved in Unitarian circles. Catherine Hutton's

- account of the riots, written to her friend Mrs André in July and August 1791, appears in Catherine Hutton Beale, *Reminiscences of a Gentlewoman of the Last Century: Letters of Catherine Hutton* (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, 1891), pp. 71–91. Her father's account appears in the *Life*, pp. 157–217. Felicity James stresses the deliberately anti-Dissent motivation behind the attacks, in 'A Life of Dissent: Harriet Martineau and Unitarianism', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 26 (2010), 80–112.
13. Beale, *Reminiscences*, pp. 43–54. As Michael Freeman has noted (personal communication), Beale's versions of the later letters (for which we have manuscript copies) are quite heavily edited.
 14. For Welsh writers' attacks on the 'Welsh tour', see Hywel Davies, 'Wales in English Travel Writing, 1791–8: The Welsh Critique of Theophilus Jones', *Welsh History Review*, 23.3 (2007), 65–93 <<https://doi.org/10.16922/whr.23.3.3>>.
 15. 'Shrewsbury, Sept 21st, 1800': MS Letters, p. 137.
 16. 'Aberystwith August 1787': Beale, *Reminiscences*, p. 51.
 17. Harriet Guest, 'The Welsh Seaside before the Railways', lecture given at the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies (Nov 2013).
 18. 'Mallwyd, July 2nd 1796': MS Letters, pp 7–8.
 19. *Ibid*, p. 8.
 20. 'Aberystwith July 1787': Beale, *Reminiscences*, p. 40.
 21. 'Mallwyd, July 1796': MS Letters, p. 5.
 22. 'Aberystwith July 1787': Beale, *Reminiscences*, p. 47.
 23. 'Mallwyd, July 26th, 1796': MS Letters, p. 1.
 24. 'Bala, Sept 16th, 1799': MS Letters, p. 100. The dangers of this road are commemorated in a dramatic watercolour by John 'Warwick' Smith: 'Actual occurrence on the steepest ascent of the mountain road between Pont Aberglaslyn & Tan y Bwlch during violent thunder storms which terrified the horses that in consequence they here refused collar' (PD09317), which may be viewed on the National Library of Wales website <www.llgc.org.uk/discover/digital-gallery/pictures/john-warwick-smith/>.
 25. Catherine Hutton, *Oakwood Hall*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1819), I, 266. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text, with the abbreviation *OH*.
 26. 'Bala, Sept 16th, 1799': MS Letters, p. 102.
 27. 'Barmouth, Aug 7th 1796': MS Letters, p. 20.
 28. 'Caernarvon, Sept 13th 1797': MS Letters, p. 53.
 29. 'Shrewsbury, Sept 21st, 1800': MS Letters, p. 138.
 30. I have not been able to establish if Catherine Hutton actually made a tour of South Wales.
 31. Wilson, "Something like mine", p. 161.
 32. Catherine Hutton, *The Welsh Mountaineer*, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1817), I, 92. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text, with the abbreviation *WM*.
 33. This moment is nicely prefigured in the tours. After visiting Harlech castle (riding either alone or with the family servant up the coast from Barmouth in 1796), Hutton notes: 'I sat down on a rock, and ate my sandwich; regretting nothing in this world, but that I could not see Snowdon, here called y Widdfa, or The Conspicuous, whose head was hidden in the clouds.'—'Barmouth Aug 12th 1796': MS Letters, p. 21.
 34. Thomas Pennant, *The Literary Life of the Late Thomas Pennant, Esq., by Himself* (London: White, 1793), p. 19.

35. Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, p. 162. Bage was effectively rediscovered as a novelist by Marilyn Butler, who offers a close reading of *Hermesprong* in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); he appears in Kenneth R. Johnston's *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), and is currently the focus of a PhD being undertaken by Grace Harvey at the University of Lincoln. There is real scope for a much closer comparison of the novels of Hutton and Bage read in the broader context of their social, political and geographical networks.
36. Extract from the *Monthly Review* (1818), copied by Hutton, MS Booklet, p. 26.
37. Beale, *Reminiscences*, p. 8 (my italics); cf. Guest on Mary Robinson: 'when she imagined a mixed society, it was as an unattainable ideal'—*Unbounded Attachment*, p. 86.
38. 'Capel Cerig [*sic*], Sept 18th 1800': MS Letters, p. 123.
39. 'Capel Cerig [*sic*], Sept 19th, 1800': MS Letters, pp. 126–27.
40. *Ibid*, p. 129.
41. The words are those of William Godwin in his *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; discussed by Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, p. 5; see also the chapter on 'Remembering Mary Wollstonecraft', pp. 88–122.
42. Guest, *Unbounded Attachment*, p. 96.
43. See e.g. <www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snowdon-and-dinas-emrys-from-above-beddgelert-d03651>.

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