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**'Of the Mouths (and Noses) of Babes', *The New Female Spectator* 4 (Summer) , pp. 28-29.**

**Dr Emily Cock**

In February 2017 I had the great pleasure of staying at Chawton as a fellow, watching the garden spring back to life out of the winter. I also spent time with the collections looking for material on a darker subject: children with facial difference and disfigurement in eighteenth-century Britain. I examined the threat posed to children in utero, childbirth or infancy, with additional regard to that posed to the mother, wet-nurse, or other connected women such as through contagious diseases like smallpox. Chawton holds an exceptional collection of printed advice manuals for mothers and expectant women by male and female authors, and manuscript medical recipe books, which were examined for evidence of engagement with facial disfigurement.

The experiences of people living with facial difference in historical periods is receiving increasing attention. For example, we now know a lot more about the experiences of men who returned from World War I with significant facial injuries: their treatment (in the UK, at the Queen Mary Hospital Sidcup under the care of Harold Delf Gilles and team), their employment and family life afterwards, and the broader social and cultural impact of these men both in their communities, and for countries trying to recover after the war (see for example the work of Suzannah Biernhoff and Marjorie Gehrhardt). Scholarship on medical practice has also shown that surgeons and physicians have taken particular care when treating wounds and diseases that could mark the face—such as particular stitches or adhesive mixtures to minimise scarring. Studies of non-normative-from-birth pre-modern bodies have predominantly been framed through discussion of 'monstrous' births, with emphasis on the idea of non-normative bodily expression as a divine punishment for sin: in my research at Chawton I instead looked at how facial disfigurement in children was linked to disease, injury, medical intervention or other factors.

One of the key areas of discussion was advice for practitioners about avoiding disfiguring injuries during childbirth. The midwives and informal female networks who had controlled childbirth in the medieval and early modern periods were gradually replaced by male practitioners from the

late seventeenth century (sometimes called ‘man-midwives’!). Chawton’s collection of midwifery manuals includes the frequently republished *Complete Midwife’s Practice Enlarged* (Chawton holds the 1680 edition, which still assumes female midwives). The title page promises to provide “a perfect DIRECTORY of Rules for Midwives and Nurses”, with insights from leading physicians like Sir Théodore Turquet de Mayerne and Dr Thomas Chamberlayne, popular medical writer Nicholas Culpeper, and midwife to the Queen of France, Louise Bourgeois, whose portrait appears at the front. It warns that the baby’s nose might be put “awry” by bumping the mother’s pelvis, and guides midwives to “gently stroke” it straight again. But it warns any who are confronted by “flat nosed Children, rather to let the nose alone, than by squeezing and closing it too much to render the nose obstructed; for that compressing the Gristles of the nose, renders the Child liable either to speak always in the nose, or to lose his smelling”.

The introduction of tools like the forceps exacerbated anxiety about injuries, culminating in one of the most famous fictional accidents of the period: the crushing of Tristram Shandy’s nose by the forceps of Dr Slop in Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1766). Of Tristram’s forceps delivery, the servant Trim reports: “In bringing him into the world with his vile instruments, [Dr Slop] has crush’d his nose, [the maid] *Susannah* says, as flat as a pancake to his face, and he is making a false bridge with a piece of cotton and a thin piece of whalebone out of *Susannah*’s stays to raise it up”. This method follows the principles for a nasal fracture laid down by sixteenth-century French surgeon Ambroise Paré, which were still being repeated by surgeons in Sterne’s own book collection, such as the London-based Daniel Turner. The use of whalebone and cotton would have been a realistic solution, but here the mending of the young master’s nose through the maid’s underwear is deliberately comical.

I talk about this more in my book, *Rhinoplasty and the Nose in Early Modern British Medicine and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2019), and am very grateful to Chawton House for facilitating this research.