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Huntington Library Quarterly, Volume 81, Number 4, Winter 2018, pp. 537-571
(Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2018.0027>



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“Fill up His Blanks”: Making Matthew Montagu

Sophie Coulombeau

ABSTRACT This essay provides the first detailed examination of Elizabeth Montagu’s adoption of her nephew Matthew Robinson, and of her subsequent attempts to cultivate him as the ideal heir. It considers, in turn, Matthew’s adoption, his education, his training in estate paternalism, and his political career in the House of Commons. It provides a case study of the ways in which eighteenth-century women could exert a familial, moral, discursive, and material authority that had significant repercussions for the formation and construction of masculinity. It also examines the discomfort that the exertion of such authority might generate within the social and professional circles of such women and their male subordinates—especially when their relationship was an instance of “fictive kinship.” In “‘The Commerce of Life’: Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800),” ed. Nicole Pohl, special issue, <http://muse.jhu.edu/issue/39838/print> **KEYWORDS:** Elizabeth Montagu; Matthew Montagu; Frances Burney; Wil-liam Wilberforce; Nathaniel Wraxall; gender; education; kinship; adoption

☞ ON JUNE 11, 1776, at the age of fifty-seven, Elizabeth Montagu writes to her friend Elizabeth Carter, announcing a somewhat surprising event. She has “brought forth a fine boy of 13 years of age, in a few years more he wd have had a beard.”¹ She goes on to express her hope that this adolescent newborn “will not disgrace a great name” and to note with approval that his “heart seems deeply impressed with my kindness on this occasion, & indeed he has ever shewn a great deal of gratitude. I think he will enter the World with uncommon Advantages, & he has just the manners one wd wish in one destined to the high & elegant walk of life.”

Montagu did not perform a medical miracle but rather initiated the closest procedure to a legal adoption that eighteenth-century English law could offer. The adoptee was her nephew Matthew Robinson, second son of her brother Morris Robinson.

1. Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, 1688–1800, MO 3393, Huntington Library. The Montagu papers at the Huntington are cited henceforward with the abbreviation MO. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from letters in this essay are based on my own transcription of materials in the Huntington’s Montagu papers.

The “br[inging] forth” was the expensive formality of surname change by Royal Licence, by which she had just given him the name Montagu. This name change was a crucial milestone in a relationship that would be of great affective, reputational, and material importance to both of them over the rest of their lives.

This essay addresses Montagu’s attempt to cultivate her nephew Matthew to become the ideal heir to transmit her surname and values to posterity. It argues that Montagu’s cultivation of Matthew inverted conventional eighteenth-century understandings of gender and authority, ultimately with detrimental consequences for both parties’ reputations. By offering a close analysis of their relationship, based largely on the 165 letters written between them but also on the assessments of contemporaries including Frances Burney, William Wilberforce, and Nathaniel Wraxall, the essay aims to enrich scholarly understanding of why their contemporaries often perceived Matthew as emasculated, and his aunt as formidable. More broadly, it aspires to provide a detailed case study of the ways in which eighteenth-century women could exert a familial, moral, discursive, and material authority that had significant repercussions for the formation and construction of masculinity. It also examines the profound discomfort that the exertion of such authority might generate within the social and professional circles of such women and their male subordinates—especially when their relationship was an instance of “fictive kinship.”²

The essay’s first objective is to draw attention to little-known archival material that encourages us to see Elizabeth Montagu in a new and important light. In *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth Century British Women* (2008), Betty Rizzo argues that Montagu viewed Matthew as only an “ostensible successor,” while she saw her young companion Dorothea Gregory (1754–1830)—whom, unlike Matthew, she did not adopt—as her “true” heir, at least until Gregory’s injudicious marriage in 1783.³ A key component of Rizzo’s argument is the suggestion that Gregory’s companionship enabled Montagu to conceive and enact a range of agricultural, architectural, commercial, and philanthropic schemes; whereas Gregory assisted Montagu in “buying new land and opening new enterprises,” she argues, Matthew “never inspired such projects.”⁴

This essay builds on and extends the founding principle of Rizzo’s study: that interrogating performances of kinship and patronage by elite women over the eigh-

2. “Fictive kinship” is a term largely used by anthropologists and ethnographers to describe forms of kinship that are based on neither blood nor marriage. In this essay I use it in a slightly different sense, to describe the process whereby legal or legitimating instruments are used to create a new kinship relationship between two subjects, whether or not they were already related. (See Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540–1880* [Oxford, 1984], 130.) In the case of Elizabeth Montagu, the instrument of “fictive kinship” (the Royal Licence) works to recast Matthew, her nephew, as her son.

3. Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens, Ga., 2008), 113.

4. Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, 141.

teenth century can offer new perspectives on their processes of identity formation. It provides an account of Montagu's relationship with Matthew that in some respects parallels Rizzo's and reinforces her conclusions. However, I seek to problematize Rizzo's assertion that Matthew did not act as a muse to his aunt's projects by suggesting instead that he was himself her most *important* project. Alongside her writings and literary patronage, her business activity and her social reformism, Montagu's adoptive and educational cultivation of her "little Man" (as she often called him) can be viewed as a form of creative labor, which she often equated rhetorically with the improvement of her estate and her tenants. The correspondence between Montagu and Matthew—the vast majority of which has never before been published—shows that she educated him to achieve certain specific objectives, frequently relating to her desire to influence posterity.⁵ To enhance our understanding of how she did this, and why, is to gain a new understanding of Elizabeth Montagu herself. The broader objective of the essay, however, is to consider how the gendered inflection of this particular instance of adoption might contribute toward scholarship addressing models of kinship, education, gender, and patronage in eighteenth-century England.

The essay is divided into five parts. The first surveys the current state of scholarly understanding of "fictive kinship" and particularly the mechanisms for what we now call adoption. The second describes the circumstances of Matthew's adoption, laying particular emphasis on recent sexual scandals within the Robinson family, on Elizabeth Montagu's apparent desire to forge a new identity and line of descent by incorporating Matthew into the Montagu line, and on the relatively unusual steps she took to achieve this aim via the bureaucratic procedure of the Royal Licence. The third provides an overview of Matthew's formal education, showing that his aunt selected his tutors carefully, exercised substantial influence over them, and even used

5. No comprehensive published edition of Montagu's correspondence currently exists, either in print or digital form. The first selected edition of her letters, edited by Matthew Montagu himself, was Elizabeth Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents, Published by Matthew Montagu*, 4 vols. (London, 1809–13). The most useful published editions to date—though neither reproduces Montagu's own correspondence in its entirety, let alone that of her correspondents—are still Elizabeth Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Blue-Stockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761 by . . . Emily J. Climenson*, 2 vols. (New York, 1906); and Elizabeth Montagu, *Mrs. Montagu, "Queen of the Blues": Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, ed. Reginald Blunt, 2 vols. (London, 1923), both of which build upon Matthew Montagu's efforts. In 1999, Elizabeth Eger edited a selection of Montagu's letters for the first volume of the Pickering & Chatto series *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738–1785*, gen. ed. Gary Kelly, 6 vols. (London, 1999). In 2017, Anni Sairio published a digital edition of 243 of Montagu's letters (*The Bluestocking Corpus: Letters by Elizabeth Montagu, 1730s–1780s*, ed. Sairio, XML encoding by Ville Marttila, Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki, 2017, <http://bluestocking.ling.helsinki.fi/>). The Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online project (led by Elizabeth Eger, Caroline Franklin, Michael Franklin, and Nicole Pohl) has been preparing a complete online edition of Montagu's letters (but not those of her correspondents) since 2011 (<http://www.elizabethmontagunetwork.co.uk/>).

them to restrict the time Matthew could spend with his natural parents. The fourth part focuses on Matthew's continued financial dependence upon his aunt as he reached adulthood, showing how certain conceptual templates were used to describe his dependence on her. Most notably, both Elizabeth Montagu herself and her social acquaintance Frances Burney semantically link the "improvement" of Matthew with the "improvement" of Montagu's estate and tenants at Sandleford. The final section builds on this argument to show that political contemporaries including Sir Nathaniel Wraxall and William Wilberforce perceived Matthew's masculine independence to be compromised by his financial, emotional, and intellectual reliance on his aunt.

The Historiography of Fictive Kinship and Adoption in Eighteenth-Century England

Since the publication of Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (1977), numerous historians and literary scholars have problematized Stone's privileging of the "nuclear family" by exploring how eighteenth-century Britons often formed affective attachments within consanguineal networks wider than the nuclear family, and sometimes formed them based on relationships defined by neither blood nor marriage. In Nicole Pohl's words, critics have sought to show how "affective relations *beyond* consanguinity and kinship ties formed the basis of many utopian efforts to reform the eighteenth-century family into a household based on a sentimental affective sociability."⁶

Within this movement, however, very little attention has been paid to how early mechanisms of adoption, whether exercised within consanguineal networks or not, inflected ideas and performances of kinship. This is partly because "adoption," as we understand it today, did not exist in eighteenth-century England.⁷ In the twenty-first century, most people understand adoption—as opposed to foster care—to involve "the complete legal transference of parental responsibility from one set of persons to another," providing for the child "full legal membership of a family other than the one into which he or she was born."⁸ But no such legal process—or

6. Nicole Pohl, "Relative Values': Utopian Households in Sarah Scott's Work and Correspondence," in *Emotions in the Household, 1200–1900*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke, U.K., 2008), 219–33 at 219. The italics are mine. See also Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), 1–17; and Tadmor, "Early Modern English Kinship in the Long Run: Reflections on Continuity and Change," *Continuity and Change* 25, no. 1 (2010): 15–48.

7. In his *Commentaries*, William Blackstone distinguishes firmly between the rights of "Parent and Child" and of "Guardian and Ward"; Blackstone, *Commentaries of the Laws of England*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1770), 1:16, 17. Blackstone divides "children" into "legitimate" and "spurious" issue, but in both cases a biological relationship is the essential criterion. A "guardian" is understood to be "only a temporary parent; that is, for so long time as the ward is an infant, or under age," who "performs the office both of the *tutor* [teacher] and *curator* [guardian] of the Roman laws."

8. Caroline Bridge and Heather Swindells, *Adoption: The Modern Law* (Bristol, U.K., 2003), 1. Bridge and Swindells provide a brief but useful overview of the history of adoption

even procedure of formal registration—existed for the vast majority of English people until 1926.⁹ Consequently, although most scholars of the family in eighteenth-century England would agree that the relocation of children from one household or family structure to another was “a familiar social, albeit informal, phenomenon,”¹⁰ quantitative documentary evidence about its scale and nature remains extremely thin on the ground. Some scholars have recently produced excellent work exploring instances of “pro-parenthood,”¹¹ “shared parenting,”¹² and “guardianship,”¹³ which provides useful evidence of affective attachments when a child was transferred from one family unit or household-family to another. But the lack of documentary formalities in such cases means that we currently have very little understanding of how children incorporated into a new family were perceived to fit into—or sit outside—that family’s permanent lines of legal descent and (relatedly) material inheritance.¹⁴

A significant (and early) exception to this lacuna in our understanding is *An Open Elite? England, 1540–1880* (1984), in which Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone show how, during the eighteenth century, the last surviving members of an elite dynasty were often obliged to turn to “a series of pious fictions” to perpetuate the family name. They persuaded surrogate heirs to take their benefactors’ surnames through bureaucratic procedures such as the King’s Sign Manual, or Royal Licence.¹⁵ It is important to note that the Royal Licence procedure was neither strictly a legal

in England, which attributes the pre-Edwardian lack of legal regulation to the inalienability of parental rights and duties under common law (1–5).

9. See Bridge and Swindells, *Adoption: The Modern Law*, 4–5; and Nigel Lowe, “English Adoption Law: Past, Present and Future,” in *Cross Currents: Family Law and Policy in the United States and England*, ed. Sanford N. Katz, John Eekelaar, and Mavis Mclean (Oxford, 2000), 307–40.

10. Bridge and Swindells, *Adoption: The Modern Law*, 1.

11. Alexandra Shepard, drawing on E. N. Goody’s work, describes “pro-parenting” as a phenomenon whereby “some or even all of a series of parental obligations are performed by proxy.” See Alexandra Shepard, “Brokering Fatherhood: Illegitimacy and Paternal Rights and Responsibilities in Early Modern England,” in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter (Woodbridge, U.K., 2013), 41–64 at 42, 48. For the status of and transfer of responsibility for orphans, see Cheryl Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood, and Body* (Farnham, U.K., 2011), chap. 1; and Wendy Moore, *How to Create the Perfect Wife* (London, 2014), chap. 3.

12. See Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760–1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), 199–21. See also Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 166–67.

13. See Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature*, chap. 2. Nixon’s is the most useful of a number of studies of the eighteenth-century novel that touch on adoption as a narrative trope.

14. English law was relatively unusual in this respect. See *Adoption: The Modern Law*, 2.

15. The Royal Licence essentially conferred the monarch’s permission to take a new name and coat of arms. It was widely but incorrectly thought to be legally necessary in order to change a name or take new arms (see W. P. W. Phillimore and Edward Alexander Fry, *An Index to Changes of Name: Under Authority of Act of Parliament or Royal Licence, and Including Irregular Changes from I George III to 64 Victoria, 1760 to 1901* [Baltimore, 1968], xxiii). It was by far the most commonly used mechanism by which name changes were carried out in the

process nor one always applied to minors; in fact, it was usually designed to facilitate the continuation of a family name rather than to transfer parental responsibility and was often applied to adults rather than children. But in certain cases—including the one explored in this essay—the Royal Licence procedure *was* applied to children, *was* thought by all participants to be necessary to making the name change legal, and *was*, to a certain extent, understood to transfer parental responsibility.¹⁶

The Stones' account of surname change is therefore valuable when considering how processes of adoption intersected with kinship-orientated systems of descent and inheritance, but it is far from comprehensive. Leaving its methodological flaws aside,¹⁷ its exclusively statistical overview of the surname change phenomenon does not consider substantively the ways in which the practice of fictive kinship could shape its participants' subjectivities as well as alter others' perceptions of them. This is the challenge I take up in this essay. A large collection of personal correspondence concerning a particular instance of formalized fictive kinship, such as that contained in the Montagu collection, can enhance critical understanding of the complex variety of identificatory claims that went into its performance. Matthew was Montagu's relation by blood but her son by means of a formal bureaucratic process. On the one hand, she always calls him "Nephew" rather than "Son"; but on the other, she tells him that he was "*adopted* into a noble family [the Montagus]" (June 5, 1776, MO 3868), and frequently calls herself the "Grandmother" to his own son (July 8, [1787], MO 3877).¹⁸ Blurring the line between son and nephew, Matthew's adoption qualifies him in a particularly conflicted way for the title "fictive kin."

Moreover, I aim to show that Matthew's adoption had important ramifications for many other aspects of his life: his education, his marriage and fatherhood, and his political career. As well as aunt and mother, two other roles that Montagu might be said to have performed in relation to Matthew are those of instructor and patron. Examining the letters between them can therefore inspire new questions

eighteenth century, though Private Act of Parliament and "gazetting" were also used, and the Stones' statistics conflate these three practices. See Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite*, 126–27.

16. Consider, for example, the words of Hester Thrale Piozzi, who used the Royal Licence procedure to adopt her husband's nephew in 1813; Piozzi wrote, "he is my Son at last—in true Earnest; my Son by Adoption, inserted into the Pedigree of my Descent, and registered in the Herald's College"; Hester Piozzi to Harriet Maria Pemberton, December 23, 1813, in *The Piozzi Letters, Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784–1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, 6 vols. (London, 1989–2002), 5:227. For more granular information about the Royal Licence procedure, see Phillimore and Fry, *An Index to Changes of Name*; and Sophie Coulombeau, "The Knot, That Ties Them Fast Together": Personal Proper Name Change and Identity Formation in English Literature, 1779–1800" (PhD thesis, University of York, 2014).

17. The Stones appear to have based their calculations upon a 25 percent sample of the (incomplete) list of surname changes contained in Phillimore and Fry's *An Index to Changes of Name*, which, as I note above, amalgamates several different procedures. See *An Open Elite*, 131, 139.

18. The italics are mine.

about eighteenth-century pedagogy and patronage, with important implications for the critical understanding of kinship and gender. For example: if, in Clare Brant's words, "parents had pre-eminence"¹⁹ in instructing the young, what tensions arise when an adviser is deemed a parent by the state but not by blood? If politeness, the stated end of much elite male education, was "constantly in danger of collapsing into effeminacy,"²⁰ with biological mothers' influence on that education seen as particularly "pernicious,"²¹ how does gender calibrate the tensions caused by fictive kinship when a female instructor addresses a young man? How do these roles of instructor and pupil shade, easily or with difficulty, into those of patron and patronized? And what effect might this have had on public perceptions of both Elizabeth and Matthew Montagu?

☞ **Becoming Matthew Montagu: Adoption, Identity, and Posterity**

On August 5, 1742, the twenty-four-year-old Elizabeth Robinson married Edward Montagu (1692–1775), who was twenty-six years her senior. The following year they had a son, John, who was known informally in their correspondence as "Punch." Sadly, Punch died in 1744, aged only sixteen months.²² Shortly after her son's death, Elizabeth Montagu wrote to her friend the Duchess of Portland (1715–1785): "I am patient, and hope that the same Providence that snatched this sweetest blessing from me, may give me others, if not I will endeavour to be content, if I may not be happy."²³ But, although they were to enjoy thirty years more of marriage before Edward Montagu's death in May 1775, the Montagus would never again conceive a child.

Edward Montagu was the grandson of Edward Montagu, the first Earl of Sandwich; but, as the son of a younger brother, he did not stand to inherit any substantial property or title from the Montagu line. His wife was in a similar situation, since her eldest brother, Matthew, inherited the Drake and Morris estates, which devolved through her mother. (Two selective family trees, showing Matthew's biological and adoptive ancestries, are appended to this essay. The reader may wish to consult these diagrams in order to aid their understanding of the personal dynamics, and the

19. Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2006), 63.

20. Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 217.

21. Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1996), 57.

22. For the so-called "demographic crisis" among the English landed elite in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see *An Open Elite*, 100–103. Stone and Stone show that "between the cohort of owners born in the last half of the sixteenth century and that born in the first half of the eighteenth, the proportion who died leaving no sons to succeed them rose from 26 per cent to the extraordinary figure of 52 per cent" (101). For an overview of the Montagus' fondness for Punch and their bereavement, see *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climenson, 1:148–94.

23. September 16, 1744, *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climenson, 1:194.

descent of property, within the Robinson and Montagu families.) Nonetheless, in 1759 Edward Montagu came into wealth when he inherited a great deal of property, including the Denton collieries, from his maternal cousin, John Rogers.²⁴ From this point, therefore, the Montagus were extremely rich; they continued to accumulate property throughout the 1760s. We must assume, therefore, that at some point between Punch's death in 1744 and Edward's death in 1775, they contemplated the thorny problem of naming an heir to their property, since they had no natural children. Since the property Edward Montagu had inherited from Rogers was unencumbered by any sort of entail, he was free to dispose of it entirely as he wished. In a succession of codicils to his will, made throughout the 1760s and 1770s, Edward named "my dear wife Elizabeth and her heirs" as the sole inheritors of his estate; he assumed, correctly, that he would die before her.²⁵ She finally inherited when she was fifty-seven years old and unlikely to bear any children by a subsequent marriage. When Edward Montagu conferred his estate upon his wife and her "heirs," then, whom did he—and she—have in mind?

The Montagus, like the vast majority of landowners in the eighteenth century, were naturally inclined to favor a young male heir who was reasonably likely to produce his own male heir, since "the prime preoccupation of a wealthy English landed squire was somehow to contrive to preserve his family inheritance intact and to pass it on to the next generation according to the principle of primogeniture in tail male."²⁶ In the absence of living male children, the Montagus looked to their close male kin. At various points between Punch's death and Edward's, they had several options on Edward's side of the family. John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich, the grandson of Edward's cousin, was twenty-six years younger than Edward and the same age as Elizabeth. His son, John Montagu, fifth Earl of Sandwich, was born in the same year as Punch but lived until 1814. His son, George John Montagu, sixth Earl of Sandwich, was two years old when Edward Montagu died. The final candidate, in another branch of the Montagu family, was Edward Wortley Montagu, the son of Edward Montagu's cousin, who was a little older than Elizabeth. Nonetheless, despite

24. Will of John Rogers of Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland, codicil dated April 2, 1759, PROB 11/845/227, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA).

25. Edward Montagu was meticulous about updating his will with every new acquisition of property throughout the 1760s. In each case, he leaves his entire estate to "my dear wife Elizabeth Montagu and her heirs." Will of Edward Montagu of Allerthorpe, Yorkshire, dated May 26, 1775, PROB 11/1008/149, TNA.

26. Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite*, 70. For an introduction to eighteenth-century inheritance law, see J. P. Cooper, "Patterns of Inheritance and Settlement by Great Landowners from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *Family and Inheritance*, ed. J. Goody, Joan Thirsk, and E. P. Thompson (Cambridge, 1976); and Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite*, 69–104. For an important revisionist view, see Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993). For a useful summary, see Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge, 2004), 46–50.

the fact that each of these four relations could have used the money,²⁷ neither Edward nor Elizabeth Montagu ever made a will leaving the Denton estates to any of them. When Edward died in 1775, the entirety of his estate went to his wife, as he had always planned, and it became hers to dispose of as she wished.²⁸

The task of naming heirs to the Montagu estate did not take Elizabeth Montagu by surprise, however, since it seems that for many years she had been considering possible heirs on her own side of the family. Since at least the early 1770s, her sights had been firmly trained on Matthew Robinson, the second son of her own elder brother Morris Robinson, a solicitor in chancery, and his wife Jane, née Greenland. As a child, Matthew had become a favorite with his aunt and uncle Montagu; several of Montagu's letters from the early 1770s refer to "my dear Matt" (December 17, [1773], MO 2819), and by 1774 she was expressing fervent fondness for the young boy, writing to his father, "I was rejoiced at hearing of my Matthew & from my Matthew, for I had been haunted with apprehensions he might be ill, & that you conceal'd it for fear of alarming me. I do not like to have £6000 in jeopardy, but am more easy at that than if ye little finger, or little toe, of little Matthew was in hazard. Land & collieries produce thousands, but they will never produce Matthew, who is more to my taste than any thing money can buy" (September 14, 1774, MO 4798).

However, it was not until June 1775, just after her husband had died, that Montagu's letters to Morris show an increasingly energetic engagement in managing the thirteen-year-old Matthew's education, as well as indicating some traces of tension between her and his natural parents. A letter of July 1775 to her brother, for example, asks why Matthew has left the house of his tutor John Burrows (whom she had personally solicited to teach her nephew) to visit his parents, querying whether he is "not quite well, for Mrs Robinson & you seldom interrupt his studies" (July 3, 1775, MO 4801). This assumption of authority over the frequency of her nephew's visits home ruffled some feathers, judging by a subsequent letter in which she defends her concern ("He has been but a month at Hadley, if he is to be interrupted every month I fear he will make little progress") while also protesting "certainly I did not, nor do not mean, to assume any sort of authority, nor in the least to hinder whatever you shall judge proper. I will always provide him with the best means of improvement, & there my power begins & ends" ([July 1775], MO 4802).

27. For the financial difficulties of the fourth Earl of Sandwich, see Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Queen of the Blues, the Bluestocking Queen and Bluestocking Masculinity," in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance, and Patronage, 1730–1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge, 2013), 233–53 at 236. For Edward Wortley Montagu's disinheritance and subsequent financial difficulties, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter ODNB], "Montagu, Edward Wortley (1713–1776)," by Isobel Grundy, last modified January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19013>. My acquaintance with Edward Wortley Montagu was enriched by discussions with Chris Brooke, Josephine Quinn, and their family.

28. Elizabeth is charged in the final codicil with making several small bequests, including one of 2,000 pounds to Matthew when he reached eighteen years of age. Will of Edward Montagu, PROB 11/1008/149, TNA.

This letter indicates that Montagu's early interference in Matthew's education was perhaps not welcomed with unalloyed gratitude. But beyond a little bridling over educational minutiae, Morris Robinson knew that it would have been unwise to oppose his sister's interest in his second son; after all, Matthew had few other financial prospects, since the Morris and Drake estates (which had come into the family through his paternal grandmother) and any Robinson wealth (currently held by a distant cousin, Richard Robinson, archbishop of Armagh, the first Baron Rokeby) were expected to be reserved to his elder brother, Morris. Consequently, over the next twelve months Montagu assumed greater authority over Matthew's education, taking him on a trip to France over the summer of 1776 and becoming more intensely preoccupied with determining the principles that she wished to see applied to his education. In the early months of 1776 she decided to adopt Matthew as formally as the law would allow. This involved petitioning for a Royal Licence for him to relinquish the surname of Robinson and take the name and arms of Montagu instead.²⁹

As the Stones note, it was far from unusual for elite dynasties to attempt to preserve a family name in danger of extinction by means of the Royal Licence procedure. In fact, there were precedents close to home, since Elizabeth Montagu's own eldest brother Matthew Robinson had, several decades earlier, been compelled to add the surname "Morris" to his signature as a condition of inheriting the Morris and Drake estates; Edward Montagu's cousin, also called Edward Montagu, had also been obliged to take the name "Wortley" in order to inherit the estate of his wife's father, Sir Francis Wortley (1591–1652).³⁰ However, records held by the College of Arms show that Elizabeth Montagu's petition for a change of surname was relatively unusual in three respects. First, the Montagu name was not actually in danger of extinction. As I note above, the Earls of Sandwich were already doing a fine job of propagating it, with three living generations of heirs and plenty of "spares." Second, it was uncommon (only the case for fourteen of ninety-two petitions made during the 1770s) for the petition for a Royal Licence to be made by somebody who was not the name recipient him- or herself. Usually, petitioners asked for the king's permission to change their own names, often in order to inherit money, but Montagu petitioned

29. "Matthew Robinson, to take the Surname and Arms of Montagu," Royal Licence dated June 3, 1776, Earl Marshal's Warrant dated June 8, 1776, Earl Marshal's Books, ser. 1, vol. 32, 168–69, College of Arms, London. I have not been able to ascertain whether Elizabeth Montagu also made a will at this time, naming Matthew as her heir. Her only will reproduced in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury Will Register (which left everything to Matthew, aside from several small bequests) was made on January 29, 1800, and proved on August 29, 1800 (Will of Elizabeth Montagu, Widow of Saint Marylebone, Middlesex, PROB11/1346/348, TNA). No previous wills exist in the Montagu collection. This means either that this was the only will Montagu ever made—and it seems quite incredible that she would have left Matthew in legal limbo for almost a quarter of a century and risked her property reverting to somebody else—or that her previous wills were lost or destroyed, since they were considered useless after the last one was proved. I am very grateful to Ruth Selman for helping me to clarify this situation.

30. See *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climensson, 1:73, 194.

on her nephew's behalf. Third, it was unusual (only the case in thirteen of ninety-two petitions made over the same period) for the applicant to be a woman.³¹ The subset of female name bequeathers who petitioned for a Royal Licence on behalf of a male name recipient was therefore very small indeed; aside from Montagu's, there were only two other cases of this sort throughout the entire decade.³² A far more common scenario would have been for Montagu's husband, Edward, to have specified in his will that Matthew had to take his surname in order to become his heir, and for Matthew himself to have obeyed his uncle's injunction by petitioning for a Royal Licence when he came of age. However, although a codicil to Edward Montagu's will (added in 1774 when he knew that he and his wife would have no more children) left the teenage Matthew 2,000 pounds to be paid to him on his eighteenth birthday, it made no mention of his changing his name or inheriting the Montagu fortune.³³ Along with other evidence, such as the fact that in letters between the Montagus during the 1770s Elizabeth mentions Matthew's prospects as a potential heir far more frequently than her husband,³⁴ this appears to indicate that the decision to adopt Matthew into the Montagu family came directly from Elizabeth herself. Moreover, since the Montagu name was not in danger of dying out, she seems to have made her decision for personal reasons, rather than from a sense of duty exercised on behalf of a faltering dynasty.

In order to comprehend Montagu's unusual initiative, it is necessary to understand the resonances that the surnames of Robinson and Montagu might have held for her at that time. In 1776, the Robinson family had incurred a series of what Montagu saw as disgraces, many of which concerned a sexual scandal or inappropriate marital union. She had strongly disapproved of the short-lived marriage of her sister, Sarah Scott, to George Lewis Scott in the late 1740s³⁵ and that of her cousin and goddaughter Lydia Sterne to Jean Baptiste Alexandre Anne de Medalle, the Roman

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

32. Arabella Roper in 1770 (Royal Licence May 11, 1770, Earl Marshal's Warrant June 28, 1770) and Mary Marlowe in 1776 (Royal Licence March 26, 1776, Earl Marshal's Warrant April 6, 1776); Earl Marshal's Books, ser. 1, vol. 32, 87–88 and 167.

33. Will of Edward Montagu, codicil dated March 16, 1774, 13, PROB 11/1008/149, TNA. It is sometimes mistakenly reported that Edward left Matthew or his elder brother Morris *three* thousand pounds.

34. For examples of heavy-handed hints on Elizabeth's part that she would like to adopt Matthew in the future, see December 17, [1773], MO 2819; and June 10, [1774], MO 2823. The first, addressed to her husband, is particularly unsubtle: "Matt laments sadly that you are not in town. I believe he loves you with great tenderness & gratitude, & I believe he thinks too you wd relieve him when he is a Pauper."

35. See Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, 128; *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climen-son, 1:270; and "Queen of the Blues," ed. Blunt, 2:66.

Catholic son of a French customs officer, in 1772.³⁶ Then, in the spring of 1776—just a month or two before her decision to adopt Matthew—Charles Robinson (the younger brother of Elizabeth Montagu and Morris Robinson) admitted that the sister of Morris’s wife, the widow Mary Dawkes, had borne him an illegitimate daughter, Sarah.³⁷ In a long letter to her sister, Sarah Scott, Montagu laments this “very foolish affair” and prophesizes that Charles would do “penance all his Life” (May 2, 1776, MO 5986).

Crucially, Montagu does not object to the personal character of Mary Dawkes, whom Charles intended to marry (she was “a good sort of Woman” and her conduct in the affair had been “generous & delicate”) but rather is concerned by the blemish that his alliance has placed on the Robinson family’s reputation: “When I think of the vanity & pride with which I once used to to [*sic*] appear at Canterbury Races where our father & mother were ye envy of every body, & think of ye figure the family makes at present, it strikes me deeply. I thank my stars my property is not in Kent, I never desire to shew myself there to set people to tell ye Roman Comique & all ye uncommon things that have befall our family.” Moreover, she frets about the example that Charles has set for her nephews, and in particular for Matthew: “It is impossible to warn my Nephews against such sort of marriages & I dread ye example. They have a very improper way at Lincolns Inn Field of talking of ye beauty of Girls to my little Man, & he always comes home full of ye subject. My dear Papa used to do ye same” (May 2, 1776, MO 5986).

The scandal of Charles’s marriage seems, therefore, to have been instrumental in Montagu’s decision to adopt Matthew. She saw the sexual transgressions of the Robinsons as a potential danger to the morals and prospects of the young man whom she had already marked out as a prospective heir, and presumably thought that a change of name might encourage him to dissociate himself from the Robinsons’ less admirable moral traits. A few weeks later, she writes to Scott again, to inform her of Matthew’s adoption: “He will change a good name for a better, and as there is but one precedent in the Montagu family of such marriages as ours has produced, and my poor Cousin Wortley was only 14 years of age, and press’d by hunger as well as another ignoble passion, I hope my nephew Montagu will not make such an alliance” ([May] 31, 1776, MO 598).

At this point, we should briefly re-interrogate Montagu’s selection of *Matthew* to fulfill her hopes. As I noted above, there were four living Montagu candidates to whom Elizabeth could have left her fortune in 1775–76, if her only priority had been to keep it within the Montagu clan. However, despite her assertion in this letter that the Montagu family was less prone to sexual scandal than the Robinsons, there were also good reasons why she might not have wished to enrich these men and make them the bearers of her legacy. Edward Wortley Montagu, who is named in this letter to

36. See “*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 1:211.

37. John Debrett, *The Peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols. (London, 1809), 2:902.

Sarah Scott as the sole example of an unfortunate Montagu marriage, was widely considered to be eccentric and immoral (this was due only in part to his early marriage to “Sally, an Industrious Washerwoman” and numerous subsequent bigamous unions).³⁸ The fourth Earl of Sandwich, though not named in Montagu’s letter, was also famed for his infidelities. The same was not true of his son or grandson (the latter of whom was only three years old at the time Montagu wrote this letter), but in their case Elizabeth Montagu was possibly worried about a history of hereditary mental illness, since the fourth earl’s wife, Dorothy Fane, had been widely regarded as insane since 1755.³⁹ It is possible, too, that she felt she would not have the opportunity to influence these young men, who were already surrounded by a host of advisers and subject to numerous obligations, as much as she would a more humbly born candidate to whom she was more closely related.

If we accept this reasoning, then it made sense for Elizabeth Montagu to snub the Montagus and instead create a fictive Montagu from Robinson stock. But even then, Elizabeth did not decide to leave her wealth to her eldest nephew Morris Robinson (later the third Baron Rokeby), who, as Matthew’s elder brother and already the heir to the Morris and Drake estates, might have been the more obvious choice. In this case, it seems to have been partly Morris’s temperament that gave her pause. Montagu had expressed fondness for him when he was a very young child,⁴⁰ but from his adolescence onward, her letters suggest a singularly unfortunate young man with possible mental health issues. After the teenage Morris threw himself down a flight of stairs in 1775, for example, Montagu writes to Sarah Scott, “he has good dispositions but poor little fellow he has an unhappy temper & an unsettled mind” ([August] 27, [1775], MO 5981).⁴¹ Morris’s erratic behavior was likely one reason why Montagu decided to settle on his younger brother as her chosen heir.

However, it is probably also significant that, as the heir to the Morris and Robinson estates, Morris Robinson was already under obligations to bear certain names and coats of arms. Given Montagu’s focus in her letter of May 31 on the superiority of

38. See *ODNB*, s.v. “Montagu, Edward Wortley”; and J. A. Cannon, “Wortley-Montagu, Edward (1713–76), of Borehamwood, Herts.,” *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, ed. Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, 3 vols. (New York, 1964), available at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/wortley-montagu-edward-1713-76>.

39. See Campbell Orr, “The Queen of the Blues and Bluestocking Masculinity,” 238; and *ODNB*, s.v. “Montagu, John, fourth earl of Sandwich (1718–1792),” by N. A. M. Rodger, last modified January 3, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19026>.

40. *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climensen, 2:152, 191.

41. It also appears that Morris was not as talented as his brother Matthew at buttering up his wealthy elderly relatives. His adult life, after his father’s death, was shaped by the confident expectation that he would receive a substantial inheritance upon the death of his distant cousin Richard Robinson. Unfortunately, Robinson (commonly called “the Primate” in the correspondence) loathed Morris, according to Matthew, who refers to his “disgust” and “anger” with his brother (MO 3860, [October 1794]), and, when he died, only left him enough money to clear his debts.

the Montagu family's pedigree over that of the Robinsons, she probably wanted an heir who could accept the Montagu identity—whatever that meant to her—squarely and without challenge. In short, in the early 1770s Elizabeth Montagu seemed to have been looking for a young male heir with a promising character, genetic good health, an unblemished moral record, and few titular or affective obligations to compete with the identity she wished to create for him. Other candidates each fell short in at least one respect. Matthew, however, was the perfect fit.

The earliest extant letter from Montagu to Matthew, written just after she received the Royal Licence, lends weight to the assumption that pliability was an important part of the heir's role. It begins with a broad injunction to "Let this Name [Montagu] . . . raise your mind above vulgar vices." It quickly becomes far more specific about the kinds of vices she wishes him to eschew:

I will now tell you that I have perfect confidence you will never affront my Name and Memory so far as to give any Woman a title to be called Mrs. Montagu whose birth, education, and moral character will not justify your choice and not dishonor me by the comparison. Of all offences I should most resent it, of all the disgraces you could incur I should most deeply lament it and upon this occasion I do most solemnly adjure you never to lend the name of Montagu wantonly or fraudulently to deceive innocence or cover guilt; nor suffer any Woman to Abuse it on whom you do not confer it at the Altar. (June 5, 1776, MO 3868)

Having dispensed a warning against extramarital liaisons, Montagu goes on to claim that an injudicious marital union would in fact be an even greater offence because the reputational ramifications would be felt by all those who share the family surname: "If a Man makes a mean and base connexion with a girl, he ought rather to Assume her Name, than debase his own; his inclinations shew his mind on a level with her birth, but he is a Traitor to his family who dresses a Tawdry Wanton in the name and style of the Ladies of his family." Her final remarks to the thirteen-year-old—"I hope in God my dear Nephew will never get into any base connexion, but if he should, let him remember that debasing his name can neither restore innocence nor quiet the Upbraidings of conscience"—actually seem to advise him not to do as his uncle Charles has done: to attempt to make amends for an unwanted pregnancy by marrying his mistress.

In an essay investigating aristocratic eighteenth-century women's investment in "patrilineage and male inheritance," Ingrid Tague points out that it was not unusual for women to "feel a strong investment in the success of their lineages," adding that "the patriarchal family was always complicated for women . . . by the

competing demands of their families by birth and by marriage.”⁴² But Elizabeth Montagu’s primary interest clearly lay in perpetuating the *Montagu* rather than the *Robinson* line. Her identification with her married name (rather than her birth name) provides one example of the wider tendency, noted by Ruth Perry, to prioritize “loyalty to the new conjugal family” over “the claims of the consanguineal family.”⁴³ The dominant value that Montagu wished to transmit to Matthew was the importance of perpetuating her conjugal name, and of preserving—or avoiding—certain associations that might be made with it.

Matthew eventually performed part of this task to his aunt’s satisfaction by marrying Elizabeth Charlton (d. 1817), a young heiress who seemed to perfectly satisfy Montagu as to “birth, education, and moral character,” and by producing an extremely large family.⁴⁴ When news of the first pregnancy broke in 1786, Montagu writes to Matthew: “Your happiness has been very long my first object, but you may suppose, that having laid the foundation for a considerable family it wd not be very interesting to me to see it is not likely to last & continue to future generations.” Her concern with posterity is underlined and her consciousness of her unusual status as a female founder of a line is signaled when she adds: “It has seldom been the lot of a Woman, to elevate a branch of her family as I have done; & it is a pardonable vanity, to wish to see the work permanent” (August 6, [1786], MO 3873).⁴⁵

For a woman of this period, Montagu took an unusually active role in utilizing the legal resource of the Royal Licence to perpetuate her conjugal name. It is possible, then, to read her preoccupation as evidence of identity formation through the “work,” as she described it, of creative genealogy. But the perpetuation of the Montagu name could not be accomplished solely by providing heirs to bear it. As I hint above, the behavior of those heirs had to be cultivated in particular ways in order to increase the

42. Ingrid Tague, “Aristocratic Women and Ideas of Family in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge, 2007), 192.

43. Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

44. Elizabeth Charlton was the daughter of Francis Charlton Esq. (see “Lord Rokeby,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 101, part 2 [October 1831]: 370). According to Blunt, she was at this time “an orphan and a ward of Chancery of Kentish family who lived with her grandmother . . . [who] was “though rather little, of a very pleasing countenance, finely made and remarkably genteel” and who added to her other attractions a fortune of nearly £50,000” (“*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:187). The young couple was married at Marybonne Church on July 9, 1785, by Matthew’s old tutor, the Reverend John Burrows, and they spent their honeymoon with Montagu herself at Sandleford (“*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:189). The couple would eventually have thirteen children.

45. Montagu’s work was indeed in one sense “permanent,” since in later years Matthew would acknowledge that his own child-rearing strategy was based upon his aunt’s. In 1793, he writes to Montagu at the birth of his sixth child, “I shall bid them [future children] welcome with joy, and like a true Patriarch shall give my little People laws; They will have example from you” (July 22, 1793, MO 3849).

family's fame. Very soon after adopting Matthew, Montagu turned to consider how this might be best achieved by providing him with an appropriate education.

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

Henry French and Mark Rothery note in an overview of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elite male education that “in many cases mothers assumed responsibility [for] . . . the ‘proper’ formation of male identities,” but they also conclude that “to some degree . . . schooling remained ‘men’s business,’ and women’s involvement was circumscribed within the bounds set by their husbands and male relatives.”⁴⁶ Even during the lifetime of Matthew’s parents, Elizabeth Montagu flouted the notion that parents (and especially the father) should have primary authority over their children. She exercised considerable influence over her nephew’s tutors, her letters to the teenage Matthew were full of moral and literary instruction, and he dutifully reported back to her about his reading.⁴⁷ Perhaps most unusually, she also supervised his trip to France, which appears to be the closest that Matthew ever got to that eighteenth-century rite of masculine passage, the Grand Tour. As Michèle Cohen has pointed out, the Grand Tour was supposed to be expressly about getting the boy away from his female relatives,⁴⁸ and as the final section of this essay shows, the constant supervision of his aunt might well have raised those anxieties about effeminacy that Cohen argues were associated with overprotective biological mothers: “As long as he remains under her influence and authority he cannot ‘improve’ and, above all, achieve manliness.”⁴⁹

Montagu wrote numerous letters to her friends and siblings about the principles that she felt should underpin Matthew’s schooling, often demonstrating anxiety about precisely the issues that recent historians of education suggest were staple concerns during this period: for example, the relative benefits of public and home schooling and of the classics and the English vernacular, and whether unbridled exposure to the “World” might stunt or pervert the young man’s moral development.⁵⁰ The most striking aspect of these letters is that Montagu understands the cultivation of Matthew’s polite accomplishments to be a way to facilitate the transmission of the surname they shared to posterity. In a letter to Morris, she writes, “for his own sake I wish him a distinguished character, as Eloquence in our Country gives a Man reputation,

46. Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man’s Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, c.1660–c.1900* (Oxford, 2012), 73.

47. See, for example, February 2, 1777, MO 3816, and October [19] and 22, 1777, MO 3818.

48. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 58.

49. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 58.

50. See Stephen Bygrave, *Uses of Education: Readings in Enlightenment in England* (Lewisburg, Pa., 2009), 94–122; French and Rothery, *Man’s Estate*, 87; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 57. For further examples of letters in which Montagu reflects on educational theory, see July 18, [1774], MO 6438; July 3, 1775, MO 4801; August 22 [1775], MO 4804; [October] 25, 1776, MO 3406; and September 27, [1783], MO 6579.

power, & every thing.” To achieve this distinguished character requires “that he shd be a good Classical scholar if possible. . . . I wd have him of such acknowledged learning & taste that all who do write books shd desire his approbation. The distinguished sort of Men either with pencil sword or pen shd in life’s visit leave their name, [so] says Mr Prior, however if he will make others write his name & leave it to Posterity that will do” (August 11, 1776, MO 4808). In this passage, Montagu envisages the fame that she desires for her nephew as depending not upon his ability to write his own name “with pencil sword or pen” but instead on others being made to “write his name & leave it to Posterity.” The trope of the name is significant, given the fact that she has just engineered Matthew’s name change; the name that Montagu wishes to see “written” is not only Matthew’s but also her husband’s and her own. Matthew himself is positioned as a passive object to be observed and recorded; his classical learning is to be worn like an accessory to garner admiration and enable display.

It would have been a step too far, however, for Montagu to have directly supervised Matthew’s schooling. His formal education was conducted—as was conventional—in several different institutions and by several different male instructors.⁵¹ From at least 1772 until 1775 he was educated at Cheam School for Boys in Surrey, under the care of the artist and aesthetic theorist the Reverend William Gilpin (1724–1804).⁵² In 1775, Montagu arranged for Matthew to move from Gilpin’s care into the private household of her closer acquaintance the Reverend John Burrows (1733–1786) at Hadley, Essex.⁵³ Matthew remained in Burrows’s household until the trip to France in June 1776 (apparently to the satisfaction of all concerned), but for the French expedition he required a tutor who could travel with Montagu’s party, and Burrows’s other duties kept him from doing so. Montagu therefore arranged for Matthew to receive lessons during the trip from a Mr. Blondel, who, Montagu tells Morris, “speaks French well” and is “strongly recommended to me, by Persons whose judgment & integrity I can depend upon” (August 22, [1775], MO 4804).⁵⁴

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

52. For information about Gilpin’s years as a schoolmaster, see C. P. Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teachings, and Theory of the Picturesque* (London, 1963), 27.

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

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

Although Montagu initially “approve[d] all Mr. Blondel’s ideas of education” (August 29, 1775, MO 5008), she was ultimately disappointed in her choice, remarking acidly in a letter to Burrows as the French trip progressed, “You know the only thing ever said of Shakespear which can be applied to Mr. Blondel, is, that he had small latin, and no Greek.” As she “could not find anyone to put life into the dead languages,” she determined to “make the best of the most lively of living languages” by sending Matthew to a French school in Passy. She was equally frustrated, though, with the “ignorance, and the idleness, and the stupidity of French school masters.” Exasperated with “the extream insufficiency of these Teachers,” Montagu appeals to Burrows to find her a “Person in holy Orders” to attend Matthew at Harrow upon his return to England (September 8, 1776, MO 671). She had decided to send him to Harrow because he appeared to possess “so little disposition to apply, that a private education will not do for him” ([October] 25, 1776, MO 3406).

Burrows recommended for the post the Reverend William Gilbank, who had previously educated Sir Edward Deering’s family (September 25, 1776, MO 666). Gilbank—rector of St. Ethelburga in Bishopsgate Street and the future author of several sermons and religious poems⁵⁵—had only one condition: “that I accept [the post] in the hope of accompanying the young Gentleman to the University; For it would not be eligible to enter into an engagement, which is to close on my Pupil’s quitting school; as it would prevent me from forming any other connexion of the same kind, which might prove of longer duration” (October 28, 1776, MO 1056). Montagu agreed to his terms; Gilbank joined Matthew at Harrow in 1777 and also accompanied him to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1780.⁵⁶

Despite the presence of so many tutors, it is striking that during this entire period—from before his father’s death in 1777 and throughout the long life of his mother, who died in 1810—Matthew’s aunt was the sole *constant* director of his education.⁵⁷ Although she did not personally teach Matthew, she appears to have devised

55. For notice of Gilbank’s preferment, see *St. James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, no. 2327 (January 11–13, 1776). Gilbank’s theological publications include *The Day of Pentecost, Or Man Restored. A Poem, in Twelve Books* (London, 1789); and *The Duties of Man, A Sermon, Preached on Occasion of the Public Fast, April 19, 1793* (London, 1793).

56. John Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses; a Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900* (Cambridge, 1951), part 2, vol. 4, 444. Matthew won a University prize for an English declamation in the autumn of 1780, much to Montagu’s satisfaction (“*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:103, 104). Gilbank appears to have left Matthew by July 1781, when he was appointed as domestic chaplain to the Duke of Gloucester. See *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, no. 3795 (Monday, July 16, 1781).

57. Morris Robinson, Matthew’s father, died in the autumn of 1777 (see “*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:37). Despite Blunt’s suggestion that Montagu “frankly detested” Morris’s wife Jane, Matthew’s mother (see “*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:198), the correspondence suggests a distant but reasonably cordial relationship in subsequent years. Perhaps the most interesting reference in the Huntington correspondence exists in a letter from Montagu to Matthew soon after the birth of his (apparently rather sturdy) son Edward in 1787, when she informs him,

his curriculum and exerted significant control over his carefully selected tutors. Montagu's correspondence with Gilpin and Blondel does not survive, and her correspondence with Gilbank is limited. A rich body of correspondence exists, however, between Montagu and Burrows, which can shed further light on the dynamics of their relationship and thus on Montagu's indirect influence over Matthew.

Burrows had been introduced to Montagu by Elizabeth Carter around 1773 and was a friend of many other women in her circle of acquaintance, including Hester Chapone; William McCarthy has described him as "a social lynchpin among the Bluestockings."⁵⁸ In a recent essay, "John Burrows, Bluestocking Boswell," McCarthy reproduces the only surviving excerpt of a series of "Bluestocking dialogues" written by Burrows from the 1770s onward. Allegedly a transcript of a conversation that took place between Burrows, Montagu, and the headmaster and literary critic Joseph Warton (1722–1800) in 1777, the dialogue opens with Burrows advising Montagu to encourage Matthew (now at Harrow, of course, with Gilbank), to send her some proof of his progress in his studies, potentially a *theme* (a set essay upon a given subject). The remainder of the dialogue involves a debate about whether *themes* benefit the pupil most when written in English or Latin. Throughout the exchange, Montagu argues forcefully in favor of Latin, drawing upon her personal experience to challenge the opinions of Warton—who, as headmaster of Winchester, was an acknowledged expert on elite male education.⁵⁹ The character of "Anon" (presumably

"Mrs Robinson was so kind as to call on me yesterday morning, you may believe our conversation was not the less agreeable and interesting for our having a Grandson to talk of. She feels, as I do, great pleasure & pride in being Grandmother to a Giant." As noted above, Montagu never refers to Matthew as her son, but she frequently calls Edward her grandson, even signing some letters "Grandam Montagu" (July 8, [1787], MO 3877). MO 3877 appears to imply that she sees no incongruity in herself and Jane Robinson both being "Grandmother" to Edward, and therefore assumedly occupying similar roles in relation to Matthew.

58. For information about Burrows, see William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 2008), 225; and McCarthy, "John Burrows, Bluestocking Boswell," in *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, ed. Deborah Heller (Farnham, U.K., 2015), 110–20. I am very grateful to William McCarthy for sharing a pre-publication copy of the latter essay with me.

59. Blunt records that in 1777 Warton gave Montagu a tour of Winchester School, with which she reported herself "much pleased." (See "Queen of the Blues," ed. Blunt, 2:32.) It is also worth noting that Montagu's strong views on education may well have derived from her own unusual education, described by Matthew in his introduction to the first edition of Montagu's *Letters*: "During her residence in Cambridgeshire she derived great assistance in her education from Dr. Middleton, the author of the life of Cicero, whom her grandmother had taken as a second husband. Her uncommon sensibility and acuteness of understanding, as well as her extraordinary beauty as a child, rendered her an object of great notice and admiration in the University, and Dr. Middleton was in the habit of requiring from her an account of the learned conversations at which, in his society, she was frequently present; not admitting of the excuse of her tender age as a disqualification, but insisting that although at the present time she could but imperfectly understand their meaning, she would in future derive great benefit from the habit of attention inculcated by this practice"; *Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. M. Montagu, 1:3–4.

Burrows himself), however, describes himself as a mere “dabbler in education” and appeals equally to both Warton and Montagu for their presumably more authoritative opinions. Though the circulation and audience intended for this dialogue and its lost fellows is uncertain, these portraits indicate a marked deference on Burrows’s part, thus signaling Montagu’s established authority in their discussions of educational matters.⁶⁰

He also deferred to her, in a similar manner, in their letters. When Matthew joined him in 1775, for example, Burrows writes to suggest that Montagu purchase certain copies of Greek and Latin Testaments, grammars and literature, but also requests that Montagu specify “the English books you think proper for him to read, together with the Course in which you would have them read,” and asks, “Would you have him learn to write, dance &c” (May 25, 1775, MO 663). Several surviving letters reveal the detailed reports Burrows sent to Montagu on Matthew’s educational progress, in which he praises Matthew in terms likely to please her. In a letter of November 1776, for example, just as Burrows was about to part with Matthew to Gilbank, he sends Montagu “an ample and honourable Testimony to his domestic Character”:

for attention Observation, for affectionate Civility, that for all, in the most extensive use of the word, is meant by, or comprehended in Good Manners, in such good Manners as make a Man, tis impossible for any to exceed him . . . and then for application to his studies, you have in him at present, all the Industry . . . the most anxious Tutor or the fondest Parent could wish. (November 12, 1776, MO 667)

Montagu proudly passed on this report to Elizabeth Carter: “I have been made very happy by ye accounts Mr Burrows has given of Montagu’s application & industry” (November 18 [and 20] 1776, MO 3408).⁶¹

Moreover, it appears that in the above-mentioned struggle of wills between Morris Robinson and Montagu over Matthew’s holidays in 1775, Burrows actually acted as Montagu’s agent by repeating her preferences to Matthew’s parents but framing them as his own. A letter from Burrows to Montagu of June 30, 1775, reveals a surprising twist to the saga: “Inclosed I send a note this day received from the father of my pupil; I took the liberty to refuse the request contained in it, as you, Madam, must remember the strong dislike you express’d to the young mans holiday making from Hadley—I likewise send my answer, in which you will see I take all the Odium of the refusal on myself—I beg to receive your explicit commands for my conduct on

60. See McCarthy, “John Burrows, Bluestocking Boswell,” 116–19.

61. Montagu appears to have sought a similar relationship with the Scottish minister and rhetorician Hugh Blair, who educated her elder nephew Morris in Edinburgh from 1774 to 1775. Two letters from Blair to Montagu (November 8, 1774, MO 487, and April 1, 1775, MO 488) discuss Morris’s academic performance in some detail. They are not as complimentary as those of Burrows concerning Matthew.

any future request of the same kind” (June 30, 1775, MO 664). Montagu had painted herself to Morris as a disinterested patron who, in interfering, only wished to accommodate Burrows’s stern disciplinarian regime. But he was acting upon *her* precise instructions to forbid Matthew’s holidays, thus restricting the amount of time he was able to spend with his parents. Burrows was clearly quite used and amenable to acting on Montagu’s “explicit commands,” and we might extrapolate from their correspondence that Montagu expected to wield considerable influence over those tutors who were allegedly acting as Matthew’s masculine role models.

Matthew at Sandleford: Improvement and Dependence

Matthew relinquished his tutors as he approached adulthood, but his aunt’s influence only strengthened. The Huntington correspondence shows that as he achieved his majority he was trained to act as her agent and successor in numerous ways, and that he embraced these roles with apparent enthusiasm. He wrote to her, for example, from the Denton collieries, where he made decisions about drilling new seams on her behalf (October 17, 1789, MO 3841; [September 1790], MO 3845) and from London, where he oversaw improvements to her house at Portman Square (August 15, 1790, MO 3842) and inspected new machinery that might be of use in the colliery (June 22, [1786], MO 3828).

Crucially, these later letters indicate that Matthew was financially dependent on his aunt, to some extent, until her death in 1800.⁶² When he incurred debts he submitted receipts to her for reimbursement, as in 1785, when he bought a post chaise: “I am afraid I must trouble you to lend me £100, which I will repay you on the marriage [to Elizabeth Charlton], as this payment has drain’d me of the money you were so kind as to give me” ([June 1785], MO 3825). Even as late as his thirties (by which time he had received Elizabeth Charlton’s marriage portion and inherited the 2,000 pounds from his uncle), his aunt still held the purse strings in the case of large financial favors, such as the 1,000 pounds that she advanced his debt-ridden brother Morris in 1794 ([June 17, 1794], MO 3853).⁶³

62. See also “*Queen of the Blues*,” ed. Blunt, 2:344. I am indebted to Ruth Selman for pointing out to me that Montagu’s will was proved unusually quickly after her death. (She died on or between August 25 [ODNB] and August 28 [Debretts], the will was proved on August 29, and she was buried on September 3): “[That is] startlingly quick. Matthew must have been keen to get his hands on his inheritance!” (Ruth Selman, email message to author, June 29, 2017).

63. Morris had apparently got himself in debt, and appealed to Matthew to help him. Matthew in turn appealed to Montagu, writing to her on [June 17, 1794], “I cannot return you sufficient thanks for your kindness in advancing the thousand pound on my Brother’s bond; I consider the obligation as entirely my own: and the less convenient or agreeable it may be to afford it, so much the more sensibly do I feel the generosity and goodness which induce you to supply it” (MO 3853). I have not been able to establish the nature of the debt, or the creditor.

Morris was elected to Parliament for Boroughbridge from 1790 to 1796, but the campaign increased his debts further. After the shock of Richard “the Primate” Robinson leaving him barely enough money to satisfy his creditors when he died in 1794 (he left £5,000

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, from the earliest in 1777 to the last in 1799, Matthew's letters to his aunt are overwhelmingly dominated by expressions of gratitude. Clare Brant has, of course, reminded us that children writing to parents in the eighteenth century were expected to shroud their communications in "a rhetoric of obligation,"⁶⁴ but Matthew's gratitude persists beyond the refrain of signing himself "Your most obliged" or "your most truly grateful." He appeared to realize this himself. "There is one subject," he writes in 1795, "which naturally takes the lead in all my letters to you; It is that of gratitude. A repetition of thanks for new benefits, and an acknowledgment of long experienced kindness is the tenor of what they contain. I am sorry if they appear to want variety" (July 20, 1795, MO 3861).

Matthew McCormack and others have shown that the idea of "independence" was crucial to the construction of masculinity in late eighteenth-century Britain: "Anyone who was subject to an influence or obligation that compromised their individual autonomy . . . was accused of being 'dependent'—a term with considerable force, connoting a degrading lack of manliness, virtue and free will."⁶⁵ Financial obligation—especially to a female relative—might complicate this construction, since "freedoms of movement, consumption, and presentation" were "central tenets of elite male adulthood."⁶⁶ It was not unheard of for women to control the finances of their biological sons—Tague has shown, for example, that some aristocratic women exercised stringent controls over the distribution of money to children of both sexes.⁶⁷ But the fact that the relationship between Montagu and Matthew had its genesis in the performance of fictive kinship may have meant that it was overwhelmingly interpreted by outsiders as defined by the interplay of authoritarian patronage and servile dependence, rather than by mutual affection.

In *Companions without Vows*, Rizzo draws attention to negative perceptions of Montagu's benevolence, such as Charles Pigott's critique of her famous May Day fêtes for chimney sweeps, and James Woodhouse's bitter and biting exposé of her literary patronage.⁶⁸ She also hints—but does no more than hint—that criticism of Montagu's largesse was fed partly by a public perception that she tyrannized over the young Matthew Montagu. An anecdote from 1779, preserved in Hester Thrale's

for the founding of a university in Ulster instead, and his title passed to the eldest of Elizabeth Montagu's brothers, Matthew Robinson), Matthew remarks cryptically to Montagu of Morris, "He is an unfortunate & unhappy young Man and I dread the effect of this shock upon his mind" ([October] 1794, MO 3860). Montagu herself suspected that the source of the Primate's displeasure was a "disagreement of opinion in regard to Morris voting in Parliament" ("*Queen of the Blues*," ed. Blunt, 2:312). Morris succeeded his uncle Matthew Robinson to the barony in 1800, and died, unmarried, in 1829.

64. Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, 35.

65. Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005), 13.

66. French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 115.

67. Tague, "Aristocratic Women and Ideas of Family," 203.

68. Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, 117, 128.

Thraliana, recounts the disapproval of William Seward and Frances Burney upon hearing that “when Matthew knocked too hard at a door, Montagu sent him a reproofing message by a servant bidding him stay till he had a door of his own to knock at so.”⁶⁹ The remainder of this essay considers more fully the ways in which Montagu’s patronage of Matthew was rhetorically equated, by themselves and by others, with the patronage she exercised over other dependents. I start by examining how Sandlford Priory, the estate owned by Edward Montagu and later by Elizabeth, became a stage for realizing certain projects: emparkment, social reformism, and the cultivation of Matthew himself. In a recent essay examining Montagu’s remodeling of the Sandlford estate, Steve Hindle suggests that her “attitudes toward rural labor could only find genuine expression in the independent state of mind that came with widowhood.”⁷⁰ Edward Montagu had been dead only two weeks when his wife decided to improve Sandlford (June 5, 1775, MO 3361), commissioning plans from Capability Brown that included the removal of outbuildings, the demolition of walls and hedges, and the construction of “vast, informal lawns” and “artificial lakes.”⁷¹ Around the same time, she began a “program of subsidized potato sales and livestock purchases . . . almost as if she sensed that the laboring poor would suffer collateral damage as a consequence of emparkment.”⁷² Improvement of the landscape and of the tenants apparently went hand in hand. And it was at about this time that Montagu’s determination to adopt Matthew appears to have intensified.

The simultaneity of Montagu’s projects appears more significant in light of rhetorical parallels she draws between her treatment of Matthew and of the prospect and tenants at Sandlford, and of the affective pleasures that she derives from all three. In August 1777, for example, Montagu writes to Elizabeth Carter that she wishes Matthew “to look upon ye verdure of the meadow, & ye waving of a field of Corn, the Haymakers & reapers . . . with sympathy & tenderness, & always with a reference to his fellow Creatures.” She expresses the hope that “I have effected something of this by having made him partake of ye business of the field in his infancy, when a rake & a fork were playthings, & ye labourers were a sort of playfellows, & then indulging him in being Master of ye harvest home feast & doing ye honours to the Rural guests” (August 15, 1777, MO 3424). This representation of the infantile Matthew might exemplify the fashion for sensibility in the 1770s, in which the man of feeling’s sympathies with the rural poor were thought to indicate his gentleness

69. Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, 129. See Hester Thrale’s report of Burney’s disapproval of Montagu’s authoritarian attitude toward Matthew in *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776–1809*, ed. Katharine C. Balderston, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1951), 1:381.

70. Steve Hindle, “Representing Rural Society: Labor, Leisure, and the Landscape in an Eighteenth-Century Conversation Piece,” *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 614–54 at 645. I am grateful to Steve Hindle for sharing a draft of this essay with me.

71. Hindle, “Representing Rural Society,” 646.

72. Hindle, “Representing Rural Society,” 646.

and gentility. But her demand that he work alongside the laborers can also be seen to complicate Matthew's training in estate paternalism. As the "Master of ye harvest home feast," he is presented as the heir to Montagu herself, who would preside over the feasts for her workers for which she was renowned. But perhaps more surprisingly, in having been made to "partake of ye business of the field," he performs an analogous role to the laborers, who are his "playfellows." John Barrell and others have noted the relegation of laborers to the "dark side of the landscape" in paintings of the eighteenth century, showing how distance and shade are used to mark out "the differences in status and fortune between rich and poor" and thus excusing "social and economic distinctions" as natural.⁷³ But the positioning of Matthew alongside the laborers in Montagu's imagined landscape and the "sympathy" he is expected to bear toward them as "fellow Creatures" seem to rhetorically posit him as equivalent to them—which, as a recipient of her patronage, he was.⁷⁴

Montagu also used the conceptually loaded term *improvement* to insistently link her estate, her tenants, and her heir within her correspondence.⁷⁵ The recurrence of this word and the apparent interchangeability of its beneficiaries suggests that Montagu viewed Matthew as similar to her other projects. For Montagu to write of Matthew's improvement raises questions about how his cultivation fulfilled—or alternatively subverted—late eighteenth-century masculine ideals. The term, as Bailey points out, had strikingly gendered implications during this period when applied to parenting and education. "The goal for genteel boys was 'independence'; for their female counterparts it was 'improvement.'"⁷⁶ Montagu's insistence upon seeing Matthew as a project that required improvement was, in fact, perceived by many of her

73. John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (Cambridge, 1980), 22.

74. For other letters in which Montagu "places" Matthew in the Sandleford landscape and raises the possibility of parallels between her projects of emparkment and social reformism, see, for example, October 23, 1774, MO 4799, and July 8, [1787], MO 3877. It is interesting to note that, at the birth of Matthew's first son Edward, she also envisaged *him* in the Sandleford setting. In the July 8, [1787] letter, addressed to "My dear Love, & Father of my Grandson," she wrote to Matthew: "All the energies of the great Browns genius will not embellish Sandleford, & render it so pleasing to my eyes as ye little man in Mamas or Papas arms & my Imagination has already set him on a Poney, & put him to ride in the ride Brown had sketch'd out, & I hear him call Grandmama from one end of ye Wood to ye other. I hope Sandleford air will increase his strength, & agree with him, as it did with his Papa, as for any instructions I can give him, the best will be, if I can teach him to make his Parents as happy as you have ever made me, & amongst ye articles I shall insist that he marry, as you have done, ye most amiable of Women, & make you a Grandfather, & yr cara sposa a Grandmother."

75. For Montagu's references to "improving" her estates and properties, see June 5, 1775, MO 3361; October 1, [1787], MO 3879; and July 28, 1782, MO 4076. For references to "improving" Matthew, see [July] 5, [1775], MO 4802; August 11, 1776, MO 4808; and August 23, [1776], MO 4809.

76. Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760–1830*, 75.

contemporaries as counteracting his independence, with significant implications for his masculinity.

The novelist and dramatist Frances Burney, always one of Montagu's most perceptive critics, was certainly attuned to the fact that Matthew's improvement could be framed as analogous to that of the tenants at Sandleford. Burney's comedy *The Witlings* was suppressed by her father in 1779, partly because it was feared that the fictional relationship between Lady Smatter and her adopted nephew Beaufort bore an "unlucky resemblance" to that of "our Female Pride of Literature"⁷⁷ with Matthew. The play can be read as a moral parable against exactly the kind of financial dependence that Montagu's patronage impressed upon Matthew, with Beaufort lamenting "the corroding servility of discontented Dependance"⁷⁸ and contrasting his situation unfavorably to that of a "toiling Husbandman," one of "[t]hose who to their own industry owe their subsistence, and to their own fatigue and hardships their succeeding rest, and rewarding affluence!"⁷⁹ Beaufort's friend Censor, however, in reminding him that he has "served a ten years' Apprenticeship to her caprices" and that it would be a shame to forfeit the financial rewards by incurring her wrath, metaphorically links him to a "Farmer" who, after "sewing a Field," will not "wait to reap the Harvest,"⁸⁰ puncturing Beaufort's idealization of pastoral labor by showing that his relationship with his aunt is broadly equivalent to that between tenant and landowner. Smatter exploits Beaufort's courtly labor, but Beaufort, as the recipient of her patronage, will ultimately "reap the Harvest" from the ground she leases him.

Burney had not met Matthew at this point, but *The Witlings* seems to attest that the "servility" of his "Dependance" was a subject that struck her as metaphorically forceful.⁸¹ When she finally encounters Matthew in early 1783, her verdict is that, although he "seems extremely well formed in his mind, both with respect to literature & to principle," he "affects, however, talking French rather too much, & has a something finical in his manners that, with me, much lessens their power of pleasing."⁸² The word *finical* could be used to describe persons as "over-nice or

77. Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, January 22, [1780], *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. 4, *The Streatham Years Part II, 1780–1781*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Oxford, 2014), 6.

78. Frances Burney, *The Witlings*, act 3, lines 244–45, in *The Witlings; and, The Woman Hater*, ed. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill (Peterborough, Canada, 2002), 94.

79. Burney, *The Witlings*, act 3, lines 299 and 295–98, in *The Witlings; and, The Woman Hater*, ed. Sabor and Sill, 96, 95.

80. Burney, *The Witlings*, act 3, lines 262–64, in *The Witlings; and, The Woman Hater*, ed. Sabor and Sill, 94.

81. This subject recurs in Burney's conversation as well as her drama, as evidenced by the aforementioned anecdote, in *Thraliana*, about his "knocking at the door."

82. Frances Burney, "Journal for 6 January, 1783," *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, vol. 5, 1782–1783, ed. Lars E. Troidt (Montreal, 2012), 266. For Burney's other verdict on Matthew's conversation as "tiresome" and "prosing," see the "Journal for late December 1783," *Early Journals and Letters*, 455–56. However, later in life Burney became rather friendly with both Matthew and his wife, Elizabeth (see "*Queen of the Blues*," ed. Blunt, 2:297).

particular, affectedly fastidious, excessively punctilious or precise,” or else to describe objects as “overscrupulously finished; excessively or affectedly fine or delicate in workmanship.”⁸³ By using this term to describe his manners, Burney hints that Matthew has been “overscrupulously finished” by a feminine excess of attention and delicacy, which ultimately compromises his masculinity and his “power of pleasing.” Her emphasis on his affectation of French suggests that she sees him as an example of the fop, whose “voluble tongue” reflected both a Frenchified education and an excessive association with women, whose conversation rendered him effeminate.⁸⁴

Burney’s criticisms of Matthew, then, while replicating the terminology that Montagu uses in her own correspondence when describing her hopes and ambitions for him, suggest that Montagu’s influence over his education and his expenditure meant that he was perceived as effeminate or even, as Burney described his fictional counterpart Beaufort, “servile.” But the drawing rooms of polite London, in which feminine influence could be applauded rather than critiqued, were not the forums in which these anxieties would become most prominent. Matthew’s perceived dependence upon his aunt would prove even more problematic for him within the masculine sphere *par excellence* of elite eighteenth-century society: the House of Commons.

Matthew in Parliament: Oratory, Supplication, and Masculinity

In a recent essay considering the Montagu family as a political dynasty, Clarissa Campbell Orr suggests that “[Elizabeth Montagu] was of no direct use in increasing the dynastic spread of this ambitious clan” since “young ‘Punch,’ Elizabeth and Edward’s only child, died in 1748.”⁸⁵ She later asserts that “by the end of the 1740s, Mrs. Montagu’s potential as a political networker had therefore been curtailed.” These assertions, of course, depend entirely on an assumption that only biological children can facilitate “the dynastic spread” of a family. This section of my essay suggests that if we factor fictive kinship into our understanding of political dynasties, we might conclude instead that Elizabeth Montagu made considerable efforts to perpetuate the Montagus’ political influence right up until her death in 1800. Whether these attempts were successful is another question entirely. In fact, as I shall show, her determination to manage Matthew’s career was, in a sense, the reason why it never reached its wished-for heights.

Matthew was returned to the House of Commons in 1786 at the age of twenty-four, sitting for the Cornish constituency of Bossiney. Over the fourteen years between his maiden speech and his aunt’s death, he regularly sent her detailed accounts of debates in the Commons, with a particular focus on his own contributions. Moreover,

83. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “finical, *adj.*,” last modified 1989, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/70431>.

84. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 9, 104.

85. Campbell Orr, “The Queen of the Blues and Bluestocking Masculinity,” 237.

she responded fully to these accounts, praising his reported contributions, soliciting further information, and offering her personal opinions on foreign and domestic policy.⁸⁶ It seems clear, reading this cache of correspondence, that Montagu exercised a formative influence on Matthew's political opinions.

Yet it is crucial to note that, of Matthew's many activities during adulthood, his service in the House of Commons was one in which he was emphatically *not* supposed to be acting as his aunt's agent, surrogate, or protégé. Building on work on language as a key component of masculine self-fashioning in the eighteenth century,⁸⁷ Christopher Reid has recently shown how "the business of Parliament is inseparable from the business of speaking,"⁸⁸ laying particular weight upon the contemporary understanding that "elegant and effective speech" was the "single key to success" in a political career.⁸⁹ Reid hints not only that these instructions were valuable in themselves but also that "in the intimate space of the Chamber . . . the influence of 'family connexions' was pervasive"; *who* had instructed you in oratory was almost as important as the quality of their instruction.⁹⁰ The almost universal contemporary verdict on Matthew Montagu as a political speaker was that his speech was not statesmanlike; it was too obsequious, too inept, too hesitant, or too indirect.⁹¹ Moreover, surviving accounts often locate the source of his inefficacy in the fact that he was adopted and educated by his aunt. The most famous eulogy on poor Matthew probably remains either the throwaway remark in the memoirs of his cousin Mary's husband Samuel Egerton Brydges—"Some one asking about her nephew, a noble lord of some wit answered: "He!—why, he is only fit to darn his aunt's blue stockings!"⁹²—

86. A selective overview of the topics discussed provides a sense of their range. In MO 3826, MO 3827, and MO 3871, Montagu and Matthew discuss his maiden speech. In MO 3830 and MO 3871, they discuss Matthew's endorsement of his friend Grey for a parliamentary seat. MO 3831 contains a detailed report of the Hastings trial. In MO 3872 Montagu discusses the rumored destruction of certain treasonous letters, and in MO 3881 and MO 3883, she discusses foreign affairs in Amsterdam and Paris. In MO 3884 she discusses the new French ambassador. In MO 3837 Matthew discusses the ongoing attempts to abolish the slave trade, and in MO 3840 he discusses the French Revolution and excise bill. In MO 3852 and MO 3853, he discusses military encounters in France. MO 3854 discusses popular uprisings in the northeast of England. MO 3859 discusses a disagreement between William Pitt and Lord Fitzwilliam. MO 3862 discusses peace with Spain and the secession of Saint-Domingue.

87. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 1–3; McCormack, *The Independent Man*, 40–44.

88. Christopher Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers: The Rhetorical Culture of the House of Commons, 1760–1800* (Oxford, 2012), 18.

89. Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers*, 113–15.

90. Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers*, 160.

91. For other contemporary accounts of Matthew's parliamentary gaffes than those discussed in this essay, see R. G. Thorne, "Montagu, Matthew [1762–1831], of Sandleford Priory, nr. Newbury, Berks. and Montagu House, Portman Square, Mdx.," in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1790–1820*, ed. R. G. Thorne (London, 1986), <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/montagu-matthew-1762-1831>.

92. *The Autobiography, Times, Opinions and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges*, 4 vols. (London, 1834), 2:8. See also "Queen of the Blues," ed. Blunt, 2:10.

or that contained within the letters of William Beckford (1760–1844): “[Montagu] represents in Parliament the interest of the Blue Stocking Society.”⁹³

In her work on elite women in politics, which stresses the roles of patron, adviser, and political mother, among others, Elaine Chalus has argued that “even extensive female political participation could be rationalized as non-threatening to the polity and conveniently subsumed into male politics if it could be interpreted in the light of women’s traditional roles and placed in a familial paradigm.”⁹⁴ My concern here is to suggest, in light of the pithy judgments of Brydges and Beckford and two more substantial critiques by Nathaniel Wraxall and William Wilberforce, that Matthew was seen as feminized, and therefore rendered politically inefficacious, by his well-known association with his aunt and particularly by the fictive nature of their kinship. The specific aspect of their relationship that prevented it from fitting into Chalus’s model of “traditional roles” and “familial paradigms” was Matthew’s dependence on Montagu, which was variously construed as intellectual, financial, and emotional.

In his *Memoirs*, Nathaniel Wraxall (1751–1831) gives a detailed account of a speech that Matthew made in the House of Commons on January 23, 1787, on “the treaty of commerce recently concluded by Eden.” According to Wraxall, after “eulogising” the treaty “in animated language,” Matthew praised William Pitt, “the Minister whose genius had effected so beneficial a work.” Wraxall digresses from his account to inform the reader of Matthew’s personal circumstances:

Mr. Montagu’s paternal name was Robinson, but the celebrated Mrs. Montagu, his aunt, who so long occupied the first place among the *gens de lettres* in London, having adopted him as her heir, he received her husband’s name. At her feet he was brought up, a school more adapted to form a man of taste and improvement than a statesman or a man of the world.

Having drawn attention to Matthew’s indebtedness to his aunt for his “name”—stressing the fictive aspect of their kinship—and speculated that his “school,” subserviently positioned at “her feet,” disqualifies him for public office, Wraxall then turns back to the speech: “Regardless of the embarrassment which his own praises, however merited they might be, must excite in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who sat just below him, Montagu dilated on his resplendent public services.” Wraxall sees Matthew’s obsequiousness as a failure in polite decorum, and attributes the “panegyric” that he delivers to Pitt as a ham-fisted application for a peerage. Yet he notes that “his efforts have hitherto failed of success . . . the doors of the British House of Peers seem to be closed against him.” As a final epitaph on Matthew’s personal and political

93. Thorne, “Montagu, Matthew [1762–1831].”

94. Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754–1790* (Oxford, 2005), 26.

supplications, Wraxall compares him to Pope's Curio in the satire "Verses Occasion'd by Mr. Addison's Treatise of Medals" (1722), an antiquarian who neglects his sexual duties in order to hanker after rare coins: "Curio, restless by the fair one's side, / Sighs for an Otho, and neglects his bride."⁹⁵ In Wraxall's analogy, Matthew's/Curio's lust for honors and wealth compromises his ability to perform the masculine functions of husbandly affection and procreation. He is emasculated, almost metaphorically castrated, by his desire for patronage.

Reid's study shows that extensive compliments to members of Parliament who were present in the Chamber were not, however, unusual, and could—as when Pitt praised Charles Pratt, Lord Camden, in a debate of 1784—be effective rather than embarrassing.⁹⁶ Wraxall seems to apply a different standard to Matthew than to other speakers, and I think its source is in the biographical musings that punctuate his account. The parallel positioning of Matthew's feminized education and his oratorical insufficiency suggests that Wraxall sees Matthew as attempting, in a masculine public forum, to replicate the relationship with his aunt, wherein fulsome and obsequious praise is exchanged for patronage. The pains he takes to point out that Matthew's efforts have been fruitless indicate the inappropriateness, in Wraxall's view, of the application.

Even Matthew's most successful political relationship was strained by his perceived dependence on his aunt and colored by a sense that his language reflected this dependence. From 1787, he developed a close friendship with William Wilberforce, member of Parliament for Yorkshire; and in 1789, when Wilberforce determined to go to Paris to lobby for an international abolition of the slave trade, he asked Matthew to accompany him. Matthew intimated that he might be unable to oblige because he had committed to spend the summer with his aunt at Sandford. Frustrated, Wilberforce demanded that Matthew write to ask his aunt's permission. He also wrote to Montagu. Her nephew was "much interested" in his scheme, he complains, but "I have a Notion his letter will hardly possess you with the real state of his Mind":

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

95. Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall 1772–1784*, ed. Henry B. Wheatley, 5 vols. (New York, 1884), 4:377–79.

96. Reid, *Imprison'd Wranglers*, 39.

According to Wilberforce, Matthew's "Blanks" and "Hints" when requesting a favor constitute a failure of directness. It is possible to read his critique of Matthew's "Style" as an instance of the end-of-century tendency to celebrate the ideal English masculine language as one of taciturnity, which Cohen sees as "the emblem of [the Englishman's] self-discipline, and his strength—in other words, his manliness."⁹⁷ Offering Matthew a chance to act as an English representative to the French, Wilberforce deplores his friend's inability to display his national virtue. But Matthew's language is viewed within the wider context of his dependence upon his aunt: he has, Wilberforce tactlessly asserts, surely passed up opportunities of "Pleasure" and "Improvement" in favor of the rhetorically balanced "Respect" and "Regard," which, Wilberforce takes care to insert in superscript, is "to you."

The judgment, though brusque, is not unfair. It is amusing to read Matthew's simultaneous very long letter to his aunt in light of Wilberforce's commentary on his stylistic skills. The proposal is framed as that of "that of my friend Wilberforce," and Matthew casts himself as a reluctant recipient who "cannot give him a refusal, till I have communicated it to you." Like Wilberforce, though, Matthew frames his two prospective courses of action in a relation of symmetrical balance: the potential political and sociable gains he might make from the trip are balanced against the "fortunate intercourse of friendship" that he gains from his aunt. Both men's letters are, therefore, underlaid by an implicit recognition that Matthew's relationship with his aunt works to detract from his political influence. But this recognition is cushioned, in Matthew's case, by the use of the passive voice, the infinitive tense, and numerous qualifiers to articulate both the reasons why the trip to Paris is desirable and those why he would prefer to stay at Sandeford. He concludes the letter by twisting himself into absurdities in his anxiety not to express a preference: "let me beg you to give your most free judgment, and not in the least imagine I have proposed it to you except on account of its importance in many respects" ([July] [1789], MO 3838).⁹⁸

After such rhetorical and thematic contortions, Montagu's reply to Matthew, giving her "immediate assent, consent & approbation" (having apparently received both letters simultaneously) is refreshingly direct. She does not appear to have been offended by Wilberforce's letter, though she does add a dry postscript: "I had a most extraordinary letter from Mr Wilberforce to solicit my assent to yr going abroad. He addresses me as he would the most morose, selfish, tyrannical being, that ever existed. Pray has he any Cross Selfish old Aunt? or does he draw his opinion from books?" (July 5, [1789], MO 3917). In the final letter of the exchange between them, she explains her "surprise" by drawing a telling analogy: "I attributed his supposition, that you had often sacrificed opportunities of improvement & pleasure to regard to me, to have arisen from having seen some Maiden Aunt of his afraid Miss

97. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 104.

98. Matthew's letter is reproduced, though not in its entirety, in "Queen of the Blues," ed. Blunt, 2:234.

Wilberforce shd go to a ball on account of ye danger she apprehended from ye behavior of forward Misses & imprudent young fellows" ([July 7, 1789], MO 3918). Like the trope of Matthew as dependent laborer that punctuates both Montagu's correspondence and Burney's satire, here the notion that he has been feminized pervades not only the assessments of his parliamentary critics but also the correspondence of his aunt herself. Although she is satirizing Wilberforce's suppositions rather than describing her own moral qualms, Montagu herself participates in the mockery of effeminacy that Matthew's language appeared to provoke in drawing rooms and parliamentary chambers alike.

Conclusions

Elizabeth Montagu's exercise of patronage has been the subject of several recent reconsiderations of her identity formation and public status. Not all have focused, like Rizzo's, on negative responses to her largesse. Elizabeth Eger, for example, has drawn attention to the pleasures Montagu derived from the exercise of literary patronage, describing it as "a luxury to be indulged,"⁹⁹ while Harriet Guest has shown how her "patronage and benevolence" toward poor tenants enabled her to "approximate most nearly to public status through the way she spends her money."¹⁰⁰ Guest also notes, however, that even as Montagu gained approbation as "a national monument," her power and influence gave rise to perceptions of her as "freakish" and of "ambiguous" gender.¹⁰¹ Even the most admiring accounts of Montagu's patronage are punctuated with anxieties about how she might feminize or corrupt contemporary notions of masculinity, where she "remove[s] men from their political context" by including them in her assemblies.¹⁰²

The final section of this essay suggests that, when Montagu trained a young man in her own image through the exercise of fictive kinship and then inserted him into the most intensely masculinized and politicized space available, these anxieties were even more pronounced. Matthew Montagu's adoption and education subverted gender norms, transgressions magnified by the fictive nature of Montagu's parentage, and this produced powerful rhetorical echoes in his contemporaries' verdicts on his language and forms of expression. Wilberforce's invitation to Elizabeth Montagu to "fill up [Matthew's] Blanks" has, therefore, a double resonance. Her determination to cultivate Matthew in her own image, filling up the "blanks" of his learning and politeness with values and accomplishments that might gratify her own ambition to transmit various inheritances to posterity, is seen to create further "blanks" in his

99. Elizabeth Eger, "The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage and Learning," in *Brilliant Women: Eighteenth-Century Bluestockings*, ed. Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (London, 2008), 43.

100. Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago, 2000), 96.

101. Guest, *Small Change*, 99-100.

102. Guest, *Small Change*, 101-2, 104-7.

ability to express himself appropriately and thereby to exercise influence within a masculinized political sphere.

The case of Elizabeth and Matthew Montagu suggests that perceptions of powerful women and men in late eighteenth-century Britain could be emphatically colored by public understanding of their private, domestic circumstances. The Montagus' fictive kinship contested a number of conventional assumptions about the relationship between gender, authority, education, and patronage, and this contestation had a substantial impact on public perceptions of them. The legitimating procedure of the Royal Licence, in which a public authority transforms a private relationship, may have sharpened critics' sense that the effects of such contestation might prove noxious. A critic like Burney or Wraxall could mockingly emphasize Matthew's "obligation" or his position "at the feet of" his aunt, whereas they would find obligation or submission to a biological parent unremarkable or even laudable.

This essay has sought to offer the first detailed account of Elizabeth Montagu's "work" of creative genealogy. More broadly, it has suggested that a renewed focus on fictive kinship—exemplified by the Royal Licence procedure—might enable a more rigorous theorization of mechanisms of adoption in England during the eighteenth century. This, in turn, could enable significant advances in scholarly understanding of how gender, family, social, and political histories overlap and intersect during this period. The Royal Licence procedure—the records for which still lie, largely neglected, in the College of Arms—gives us a rare opportunity to interrogate formalized instances of adoption. The Montagus are only one family; but the archives contain the petitions of hundreds of others, often those with rich, voluminous and well-preserved personal archives similar to the Huntington's Montagu Papers.¹⁰³ There is vast potential here, then, by uniting legitimating documentation with life writing, to recalibrate our understanding of affective bonds between individuals and of the construction of identities and power dynamics. There should be a central place for the "fictive" in studies of eighteenth-century kinship, gender, pedagogy, and patronage. It can help us to "fill up" the "blanks" in our own understanding across numerous fields of inquiry.

The majority of the research for this essay was undertaken during my residence at the Huntington Library as a W. M. Keck Research Fellow from June to August 2014. I would like to thank the Huntington for awarding me the fellowship, and the library staff for helping me make the most of the extraordinary holdings of the Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers. I am also very grateful to Joanne Begiato (previously Bailey) and Sarah Goldsmith for reading the essay in draft form, and for providing valuable and timely suggestions. The revised version of the essay was

103. As the Stones indicate, most of the important English dynasties needed to make use of the Royal Licence procedure at some point or other over the course of the eighteenth century. Important literary figures with relatives who underwent the procedure include not only Elizabeth Montagu and Laurence Sterne but also Frances Burney, Hester Thrale Piozzi, and Jane Austen. These figures receive more attention in my monograph, currently in preparation.

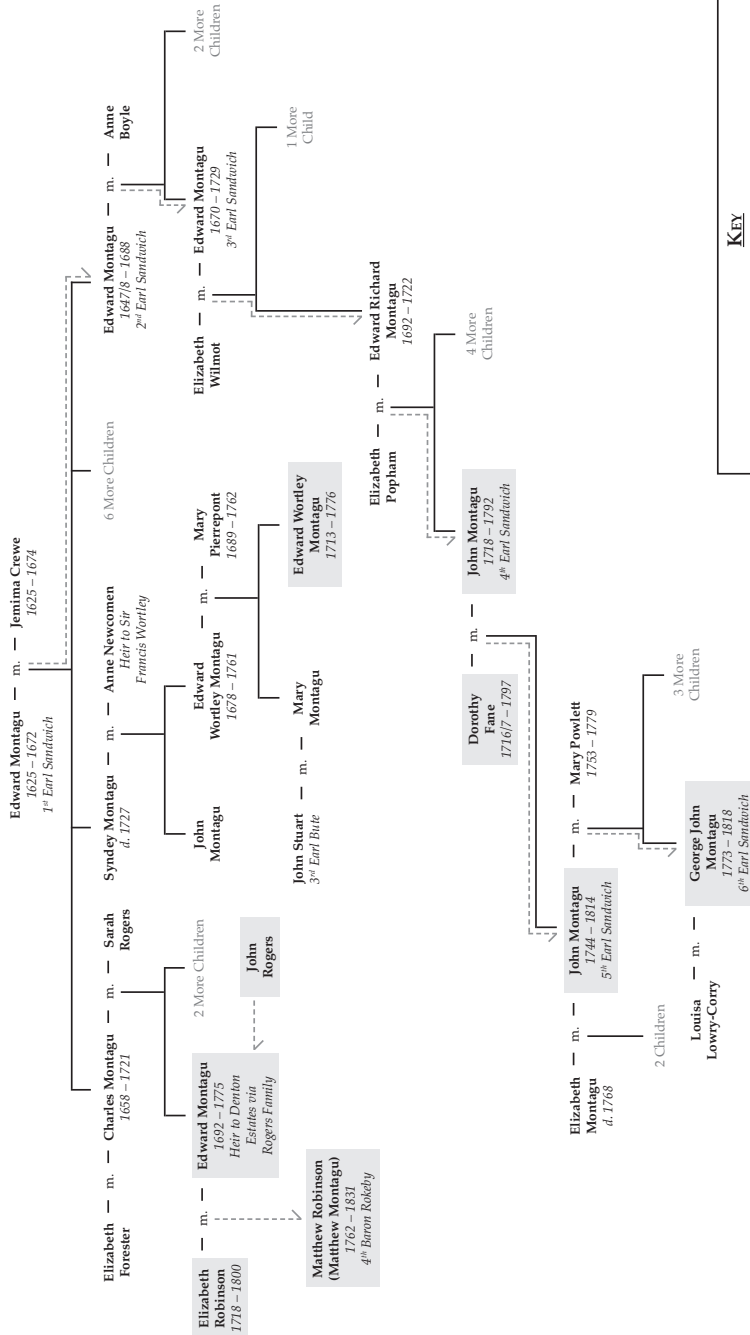
further strengthened by the helpful remarks of two anonymous readers, and of Sara K. Austin, Elizabeth Eger, Ann Heilmann, Ruth Selman, Kate Gibson, Jack Orchard, and Anya Barton.

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appendix overleaf

Appendix: Montagu and Robinson Family Trees

MONTAGU FAMILY TREE

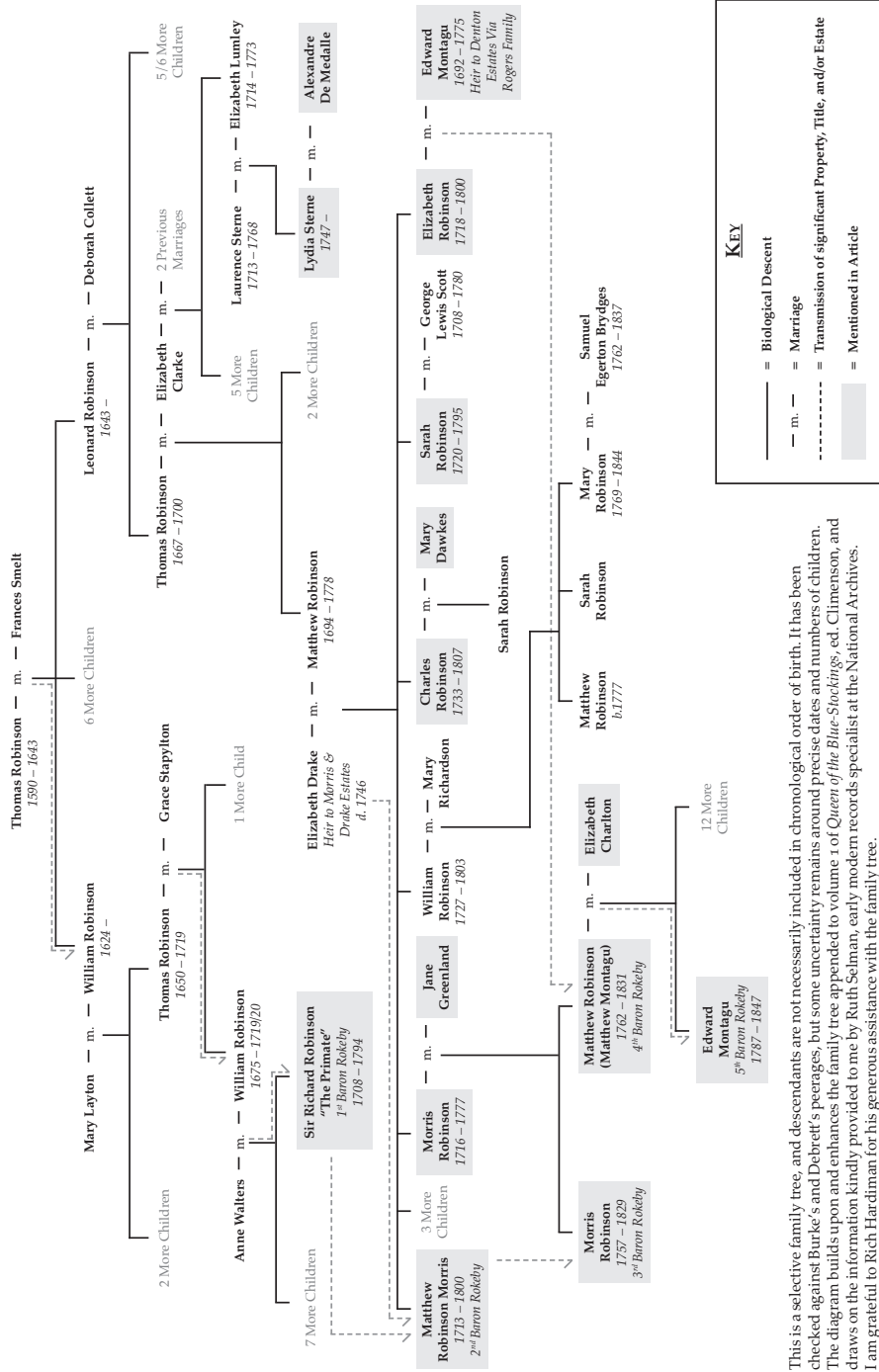


KEY

- = Biological Descent
- m. — = Marriage
- = Transmission of significant Property, Title, and/or Estate
- = Mentioned in Article

This is a selective family tree, and descendants are not necessarily included in chronological order of birth. It has been checked against Burke's and Debrett's peerages, but some uncertainty remains around precise dates and numbers of children. The diagram extends the family tree included in Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Queen of the Blues, the Bluestocking Queen and Bluestocking Masculinity," in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge, 2013), 233-53. I am grateful to Rich Hardiman for his generous assistance with the family tree.

ROBINSON FAMILY TREE



This is a selective family tree, and descendants are not necessarily included in chronological order of birth. It has been checked against Burke's and Debrett's peerages, but some uncertainty remains around precise dates and numbers of children. The diagram builds upon and enhances the family tree appended to volume 1 of *Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, ed. Climenson, and draws on the information kindly provided to me by Ruth Selman, early modern records specialist at the National Archives. I am grateful to Rich Hardiman for his generous assistance with the family tree.