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THE TURBULENT SEAS OF CULTURAL SISTERHOOD: FRENCH CONNECTIONS IN
MARY HAYS'S *FEMALE BIOGRAPHY* (1803)

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When radical dissenter Mary Hays (1759-1843), the great disciple and demonised admirer of Mary Wollstonecraft,¹ published her *Female Biography* in 1803,² she demonstrated that “mind was of no sex” (MH, VI, 69). One striking feature of Hays’s pan-European compilation of female achievements from Antiquity to the 1790s is its broad range of “French” connections (literary, social, political and religious). Out of Hays’s 302 entries, there are sixty-three French women, from queens and princesses to authors of fiction, poetry, plays, devotional, but also philosophical, scientific and feminist writings, alongside Huguenot, missionary and revolutionary figures.³ The focus of this article will be more specifically on those “French connections” at a peritextual level, namely the secondary sources which Hays consulted for her historiographical enterprise. These include Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) – a milestone dictionary in the shaping of cultural memory at the turn of the seventeenth century.⁴ By and large, it has overshadowed the importance of the still relatively neglected work of Ann Thickett (1737-1824), *Sketches of the Lives and Writings of the Ladies of France* (1778; 1780-1).⁵ Hays’s critical and scholarly engagement with this second major source for her French entries yields a complex map of cross-cultural transactions through its embedded layers of gendered peritextuality. There emerges, in *Female Biography*, a lively picture of cultural sisterhood: many of the women included in this work lived in turbulent times, and were strong women, unafraid of speaking out, and of challenging societal conventions, often at their own risk. Beyond the specificities of the national context in which they arose as political or literary agents (or both), they were caught up in an ideological war, the war of the sexes, known as the *Querelle des femmes*. As a result, their own rhetoric was imbued with the ambiguities of a philogynous discourse which advocated woman’s education, and yet resisted radical change. And this is the story that Hays’s *Female Biography* recounts, not only through its diegetic

and intradiegetic narratives teeming with “French connections”, but also through these extradiegetic conversations which Hays had with Thicknesse’s work.

Hays’s feminist enterprise would have been encouraged, at least indirectly, by Thicknesse’s out-of-the-ordinary career. Thicknesse was an atypical woman of letters whose name had made a sensation: she was a talented guitarist, composer and singer, whose gift was sacralised in a lavish portrait by Thomas Gainsborough.⁶ More importantly, her debut as a professional musician at the age of twenty-three was marked by her outspoken assertion of her right to acquire economic independence and to perform in public.⁷ When Thicknesse began to write her *Sketches*, and her semi-autobiographical novel *The School of fashion* (1800), both of which encapsulate her commitment to women’s intellectual and moral education, her reputation as an accomplished musician was therefore well established. She had also married travel writer Philip Thicknesse; and in 1775 during their journey to France she had had first-hand experience of French pre-revolutionary culture. Still a controversial subject, female authorship had drawn the attention of literary historians.⁸ In the 1770s, France saw a sudden surge in the publication of anthologies dedicated to French women, most notably Joseph La Porte’s *Histoire littéraire des femmes françoises* (1769), comprising of approximately 280 entries, varying in length.⁹ Republished in 1776, it was “plagiarised”¹⁰ by Thicknesse in her abridged dictionary containing 149 entries, totalling over 190 women’s names.¹¹ Thicknesse probably also knew *Biographium Faeminum* (1766), which contains eleven eclectic entries dedicated to French women from the Renaissance to late seventeenth century, an improvement upon *Biographia gallica* (1752) which included only three seventeenth-century salon writers La Comtesse de Suze, the mother and daughter Deshoulières and Madeleine de Scudéry, universally and repeatedly commemorated as France’s muses. Furthermore, Thicknesse’s decision to publish the first English dictionary of French women writers was perhaps motivated by the rise of English-authored histories dedicated to women with a paternalistic, if not xenophobic, hinge to them, such as John Andrews, *An Account of the manners of the French* (1770) and William Alexander, *A History of Women* (1779).¹² In short, her purpose was to make these “fashionable women” visible to the English readership, and to set forth a positive model, which, she argued, was indebted to the French “art de plaire”, characteristic of the *ethos* of seventeenth-century French gallantry which promoted intellectual parity between men and women.¹³

Thicknesse paved the way for Hays’s broader historiographic *oeuvre*. To fully understand the extent to which Thicknesse’s and Hays’s agendas converge and diverge, it is

important to re-assess Thicknesse's own stance as both a reader and interpreter of La Porte's anthology, which had the great merit of introducing the works of French women writers to his readers in a methodical manner. His work is similar to a portable library, presented as a series of letters addressed to an unnamed female dedicatee. Each of these letters is structured similarly and, in most cases, gives a biography of the author, a summary of her works, and extracts supplemented by La Porte's comments. La Porte compiled his history of French women with the explicit aim of creating a space for them in French literary history, and of reminding his male peers that women's role in the literary sphere should not be undermined (LP, I, vii). Thus, while La Porte describes his enterprise as purely historiographical, designed to rectify the literary prejudices against women, Thicknesse overtly invests her editorial principles with a pedagogical and moral function. Concerned that some extracts could be dangerous to the preservation of a lady's moral integrity (III, 47-8; 232), Thicknesse also often revises his anthology by abridging passages cited by La Porte, and through frequent digressions.¹⁴ On closer inspection a highly complex agenda emerges, as a comparison between the liminary pieces of her work and those by La Porte and Hays will reveal.

Embedded peritextuality and its ideological subtexts

Thicknesse's nationalistic and "domesticating" agenda can be inferred from her various dedicatory pieces in the two editions. When Thicknesse published the first and only volume of her 1778 edition, she had "addressed" it to the accomplished female classicist and Bluestocking Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806), the English icon of perfection in both the traditional provinces of masculine and female knowledge.¹⁵ Interestingly, she dedicated the first volume of her second edition to an intellectual figure of authority, "Reverend Mr Graves" (1715-1804), who had close connections with the Bluestockings Elizabeth Montagu and Catharine Macaulay.¹⁶ Additionally, in her general introduction reprinted in both editions she reiterates the reformist inflection of her agenda as she proceeds to give the names of "the most distinguished" English ladies, alongside that of Carter, "Aikin [Anna Letitia Barbauld], [Hester] Chapone and [Elizabeth] Montagu" (I, xviii), all four being key figures of the Bluestocking circle, and often represented together.¹⁷

The title page of the opening volume of both editions is enhanced by an enigmatic frontispiece representing a medal on which musical instruments are engraved and on which is

inscribed the name of the controversial seventeenth-century libertine and salon writer Ninon de Lenclos (Fig. 1). The image provides a sharp contrast with Carter being hailed for her erudition in literary and scientific subjects, combined with a fine knowledge of the culinary arts.¹⁸ In the third volume of her dictionary (208-9), Thicknesse lifts the mystery of this controversial choice and explains how at the suggestion of Marie-Jeanne de Riccoboni (a famous anglophile French novelist) with whom her husband had corresponded, she came to choose the engraving of Lenclos, “whose celebrity”, Riccoboni stressed, “[was] of a far different nature from those of Mesdame de Sévigné and de La Fayette” (208), still acclaimed today for their literary finesse. This indicates that Thicknesse was aware of the implications of her choice, somewhat challenging La Porte’s ambiguous praise of Lenclos (LP, I, 317-34): after listing her literary qualities, he adds that he therefore “thought he could allow her a place among French women of letters, although arguably her presence would be more appropriate among gallant women”.¹⁹ In justifying himself, La Porte sums up the stigma attached to female authorship at the time, and reminds his readership of the alleged incompatibility between women’s moral integrity and intellectual genius. Thicknesse’s removal of the term “gallant” (which in the French original means “courtesan”) speaks volumes about her own experience as a young performer, resulting in her defiance of the dominant discourse.²⁰ Through this omission she is therefore careful not to create lexical ambiguities that would inflect the meaning of the ambivalent phrase “French gallantry”, the positive connotations of which, as I noted earlier, she sees as crucial to women’s intellectual and social self-fulfilment.

Thus, on the one hand, her reference to Riccoboni’s suggestion is perhaps a way of sanctioning her iconographic choice. On the other, the frontispiece almost turns into a memento of Thicknesse’s subversive choices as a young woman. In fact, the presence of stringed instruments could well be interpreted as a deliberate act of self-identification on Thicknesse’s part. This is confirmed by her footnote in which, by citing the example of the English courtesan Constantia Philips, having “died miserable in Jamaica” (1780-1: I, 156), she makes a point of reminding her readership that Lenclos, the fair seductress, is not a French exception. This editorial intervention is unquestionably intended to deconstruct the association in the francophobic British imaginary between Frenchness and female decadence, often linked to the negative definition of “gallantry” as a purveyor of licentious behaviour. At the same time, the frontispiece introduces her enterprise as an audacious one, since her subject matter (i.e., women of letters) is that of a species considered dangerous by the tenets

of patriarchy. Evidently, this implies that no author's name will be censored on the ground of her scandalous life. As for the stringed instruments below the medal, these provide a tuning metaphor, allegorising Thicknesse's role as editor and reformer through her annotated and revised entries. This frontispiece thus functions as a portal into her anthology, capturing many of the contradictory issues at stake on Thicknesse's agenda, which oscillates between transgression and normativity. As the following discussion will show, Hays sensed Thicknesse's unease with some of the controversial subjects of her "sketches". When Hays undertook her own *Female Biography*, a counterwave of radical feminism started to challenge the advances of its foremothers, too "domesticated" for its taste, too complicit with society's ingrained phallogocentrism. And Hays was one of those who steered the ship in the dangerous seas of societal deviance. It is in this way that Hays's preface, despite its similarities with that of Thicknesse, conveys an audacity that calls for a re-assessment of her work in the history of feminism.

Hays's preface reiterates Thicknesse's strong advocacy for women's access to culture. Thicknesse views herself as a mediator, playing a key role in the transmission of knowledge, "for the information and excitement" of the English ladies (I, xxi). Hays, too, insists that "for their improvement and to their entertainment, [her] labours have been devoted" (I, iv). Like their female predecessors, both condemn women's imposed servitude to the cultivation of their beauty rather than to that of their minds, and make it clear that their task is to undo the androcentric prejudices that are given to women who enjoy public fame. However, their conclusion diverges in intent: Thicknesse inflects her closing lines with a patriotic note, hoping that through her examples of French women's literary achievements, she will succeed in reforming her compatriots (AT, I, xxi-xxii). By contrast Hays's enterprise is akin to that of Christine de Pisan's *City of Ladies*. Designed to inspire, rather than simply reform, any woman who may read her book, Hays's work has a universalistic appeal. However, when Hays states "[her] book is intended for women, and not for scholars", it is nonetheless driven by a scholarly impulse (however contentious the predicate "scholarly" might be in the context of the Enlightenment).²¹ Unlike Thicknesse's anthology, Hays's work is not a systematic compilation of women's works, and tends to give extracts from women's "Memoirs", rather than from their novels or poetry. Indeed, Hays seeks to "humanise" history; she creates an alternative history, in which women's real voices can be heard, and in which their real identities and selves can be grasped from a psychological rather than moral perspective.²² Yet, her methodology indicates scholarly strength, despite some flaws which early critics

were quick to point out. Conversely, Thicknesse has a tendency to cut and paste La Porte's entries to such an extent that the original often becomes a jigsaw through the swift motion of her editorial wand. In a nutshell, when one compares the two women's entries, it is clear that, in many cases, Hays made a conscious effort to restore the linearity of the biographical narratives.²³

If we return to the prominent case of Lenclos, Hays's entry (IV, 298-313) is less dramatic than that of Thicknesse which opens with a rather comical and theatrical anecdote, setting the scene for Lenclos's life in the limelight (AT, I, 126-156). Hays opts for a more scholarly incipit guiding her reader through Lenclos's childhood, adolescence and adulthood in an orderly fashion, and offers a faithful representation of Lenclos as an icon of French gallantry with all the implications this concept may well entail in the puritanistic climate of eighteenth-century England. Thus, where, as we have seen above, Thicknesse removed the term "gallantry" intentionally, lest it should carry with it the redoubted connotations of debauchery, Hays reintroduces it unabashedly, and deletes Thicknesse's final footnote implicitly comparing Lenclos to the English courtesan Constantia Philips (AT, I, 136). It is, however, one of the very few entries on French women writers where Hays includes citations by Thicknesse. Hays ends her entry with a famous poem on Lenclos, which, like Thicknesse, she does not translate. However, Thicknesse does not stop her entry at this point, and elucidates the poem through a final paragraph in which she praises further the elegance of Lenclos's poetry and letters, but is unable to resist the temptation to gloss over the less commendable side of her behaviour (AT, I, 156). In sharp contrast, by simply leaving the poem to speak for itself, Hays adopts another strategy, that of encouraging her readership to assimilate and digest these lines written in French and, thereby, to exercise freely their own private judgment.

Clearly, there is a recurring pattern in how Thicknesse and Hays deal with their controversial figures, such as the Renaissance poetess, Louise Labé, and many others, who were classified as "courtesans" by their male detractors. On the one hand, Thicknesse's feminist endeavour as historiographer of women is best illustrated in her entries on Labé and Lenclos: her aim is to ensure that her female reader does not dwell on the anecdotes of these women's lives, but that she draws on these women's works for a just appreciation of their intellect, and for improving herself as an epistemic subject (AT, I, 30-1). On the other, Thicknesse's intrusive collage technique betrays her underlying conservatism. This partly explains why in 12 out of Hays's 35 entries on French women writers present in Thicknesse's

dictionary, Hays does not acknowledge the latter.²⁴ The entries selected for this analysis feature eminent women of letters who enjoyed European fame: the scholars Emilie du Châtelet (1706-1749) and Anne Dacier (1645-1720), the novelist Marie-Catherine Desjardins Villedieu (1640-1683), and the queens, Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) and Christina of Sweden (1626-1689), both well known for their involvement in politics but also in literature. With the exception of Dacier, whose profile will be examined last, these women's biographies exemplify the tensions underpinning their public image which is at odds with the codified behaviour imposed on woman by society.

The erasure of Thicknesse's name: a feminist subtext?

Given her scholarly endeavour, it seems unlikely that Hays did not read Thicknesse's entries. Did she choose not to acknowledge Thicknesse for scholarly or ideological reasons, or for both? Thicknesse's tendency for digression, and taste for literary fictions, rather than historical, objective facts, provides part of the answer. Also, Thicknesse's overtly nationalistic agenda yields another clue to Hays's less "domesticated" stance.

This is, at least, suggested in how Thicknesse presents mathematician and physicist Emilie Du Châtelet (II, 275-6), whose salon was one of the liveliest hubs of intellectual production across Europe. When compared with most of Thicknesse's entries, that on Du Châtelet is unusually plain. It is all the more surprising as Du Châtelet stands out as an exceptionally gifted scientist who made mathematics accessible to a broad audience through her still authoritative annotated French translation of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (1759). Thicknesse's factual and contrite entry ends with clichéd rhetoric, failing to acknowledge Du Châtelet's foray into the masculinist realm of scientific knowledge: "she died much lamented, by all lovers of literature, in 1749, at the age of 43" (ibid.) By contrast, Hays concludes hers more emphatically, thereby ensuring Du Châtelet is remembered as a scholar of high calibre: "Her work affords a proof of the power and force of her mind, and of the capacity of her sex for profound investigation, and scientific research: she deservedly ranks among the first philosophical writers." (MH, II, 54). One may wonder why, in comparison, Thicknesse was so subdued – especially when she dedicated her work to the erudite Elizabeth Carter who was applauded for her translation of the works of Stoic Greek writer Epictetus in 1758. This contrast between Hays's and Thicknesse's entries point to Hays's brasher, more radical enterprise. Hays's ambitions for women break through the

societal expectations which the editorial voice in Thicknesse's anthology dutifully reproduces in many of her entries.²⁵ To conservative commentators, Du Châtelet's reputation was likely to be smeared by her personal circumstances: she was a married woman, who died after giving birth to her child born out of wedlock, and had had several affairs, most famously with Voltaire – all this combined made her perhaps unsuitable as an exemplar of female achievement in a book dedicated to a Bluestocking and to “honourable” ladies.²⁶ But Hays, immersed as she was in the revolutionary climate of change, probably saw Du Châtelet as a foremother of the modern intellectual woman, tuned to life's uncertainties.

Hays's endearing portrayal of audacious women who do not quite fit within the mould of female perfection as epitomised by Carter is given weight in her entry on the exuberant salon writer Villedieu. Villedieu is best known for her semi-fictional, salacious and comical *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1671-4), which was also translated into English and avidly read across the Channel.²⁷ On the whole, Thicknesse replicates La Porte's entry faithfully. Nevertheless, her translation insists on Villedieu's propensity for gallant adventures, by reminding her reader of the dangers of passion. She ensures that her entry on Villedieu will not misguide her female compatriot. She re-writes La Porte's incipit by transposing his euphemistic phrasing (“[she] would therefore not appear to be fitted for adventures”)²⁸ into a warning blended with adverbial sympathy (“[she] seems to have unfortunately given herself up to the government of her passions [AT, II, 26]”. From the outset, Thicknesse indicates her “sketch” is a cautionary tale for her readers to remember. Instead, Hays's incipit is short and crisp, plagiarising *verbatim* Bayle's neutral statement: “Mary Catherine de Jardins flourished in the seventeenth century” (MH, IV, 455; PB, III, 552-3). Thus Hays does not judge the romanticised persona of Villedieu. Like Bayle who brashly objects to the libellous reports on Villedieu's private life, she remains within the boundaries of scientific objectivity. Loosely following his account, she succinctly relates Villedieu's “marital” misfortunes, and chooses to echo his generous appreciation of Villedieu as an accomplished writer and as a mature woman, unjustly defamed.²⁹ Despite the “bewilder[ing] and mislead[ing]” nature of some of her writings, which Hays cursorily mentions, she formulates, like Bayle, a balanced assessment of Villedieu's work – which Thicknesse does not.

When Hays acknowledged Bayle, but not Thicknesse, it was probably because he had recognised the genius of Villedieu. Hays repeats Bayle's praise of Villedieu's innovative flair in the field of literary production: “she invented a new method of writing: her short gallant

novels and stories superseded the ancient heroic romance. This style of fiction, more amusing, but less favourable to virtue and elevation of mind [...] became popular and continued to prevail” (456-7). Hays does not delete Bayle’s negative comments, but her entry and Bayle’s can be credited with offering a new perspective on women’s writing. Hays understood that the literary canon was being distorted by moral prejudice, and that women’s fictional works were not assessed on aesthetic criteria, but on gendered and moralistic grounds, as evidenced further in her revised entry on Marguerite de Navarre.

Marguerite de Navarre was not only a controversial queen who took an active part in the political affairs of her kingdom, but a woman of letters who experimented with both religious and secular writing. Thicknesse’s entry (I, 3-26) mostly consists of excerpts from the Queen’s best-selling work, *The Heptameron*, published posthumously in 1558. Out of the eight stories contained in La Porte’s anthology, Thicknesse discarded the tales of male infidelity and retained the following three, *The False Prude*, *The adultrous more cruelly punished than with death*, and a comical tale, *the Butcher and Two Cordeliers*. This editorial selection points to Thicknesse’s domesticating, skewed agenda, through which she reproves women’s adultery, and encourages married women to cultivate virtue and modesty. Her entry reflects the admonitory subtext of her editorial censorship: “[Marguerite de Navarre’s] writings are in some places, bordering with indecent allusions” (I, 3). Although Thicknesse recognises the Queen’s “fertility and variety of invention” (26) she comments negatively on her style, which she judges “very inferior both as to sentiment and expression” (ibid.). In short, her entry is biased and says little about Marguerite de Navarre’s eventful life, and does not comment on her crucial role in politics and the religious wars. Hays’s entry (V, 456-73) reads differently; it erases Thicknesse’s callous portrait of the Queen both as a political and literary figure. Similarly to Bayle and La Porte (PB, IV, 316-22 ; LP, I, 35-71), Hays describes her refined education at the court of Louis XII, and endows her with humane traits. She introduces the queen favourably, as a loving sister who defied political convention and took it upon herself to save her brother, Francis I. What Bayle and La Porte term “affection” (and is deleted in Thicknesse’s entry) becomes under Hays’s pen “a lively and tender affection” (V, 457). Hays also mentions the queen’s diplomatic interventions, with special attention to her great potential to challenge the authorities, more especially the Church of Rome, through her protection of the Protestants. In particular, unlike Thicknesse, Hays draws her reader’s attention to the Queen’s active theological engagement with important figures such as Calvin. Hays then turns to an assessment of the queen’s literary production, based on

Bayle's own entry, which invalidates Thicknesse's depreciative comments. Hays returns to what the Queen's first biographer, Brantôme (quoted by Bayle), finds characteristic of her writings: "Her tales, scarcely inferior to those of Boccace, indicate, by the *warmth* of their colouring, a tender and sensible heart, while they inculcate and command chastity and fidelity" (MH, V, 469). Her re-phrasing of Bayle's citation (see my emphasis) suggests that she was conversant with *The Heptameron*, and thus could genuinely share her own reading and aesthetic experience of it.³⁰ The substitution of the phrase "a style so soft and flowing" in Bayle's entry with the image of "warmth" illustrates how Hays consciously invests Bayle's entry with a highly emotional charge. Through a careful choice of adjectives in the process of negotiating with Bayle's entry and its labyrinthine, minute footnotes, Hays highlights the salient features of this charismatic persona effectively and sharply. In a final rhetorical move, not losing sight of the Queen's flaws, she shifts the reader's gaze away from the latter, and leads him/her to reflect on the "vigour of her talents, her courage and character" (473). As with her entry on Mme de Sévigné (MH, VI, 398-402), whom Thicknesse disparages for her anti-protestantism (I, 206), Hays draws her reader's attention away from the dark shades of Thicknesse's sketch back to what fascinates her most: not solely women's literary and cultural accomplishments, but also their individuality, "their tenderness and sensibility" beneath their public image (VI, 402). Reflecting her own quest as a writer of fiction,³¹ Hays's choice to end most of her entries with positive traits sums up her philosophy which is indebted to the "the language, culture and traditions of Rational Dissent",³² and is fully focused on "valuing" and "humanising" the women she cites. This is achieved most convincingly in her entry on Christina of Sweden, a renowned francophile who played a significant role as a patron of French women writers during the reign of Louis XIV.

The presence of the Swedish queen in Thicknesse's dictionary of French women comes as a surprise, all the more so since it appears to be the sole entry that does not feature in La Porte's text. For that reason, of all the women included in both Hays's and Thicknesse's dictionaries, the entry on Christina of Sweden serves as a reliable blueprint for ascertaining their authorial divergences. Thicknesse's entry on Christina is unconventional: it does not contain the essential information specific to a biographical entry (such as the dates of her birth and death); it does not even fit within the original purpose of La Porte's dictionary, which is to provide a sample of the writings of the women writers therein included.³³ Thicknesse explains she has a moral duty to rectify the positive image she drew of her as a generous patron in her earlier entries on Madeleine de Scudéry, La Comtesse de Suze and

Lenclos. As with the latter, she starts her entry with a theatrical effect; but this time she lifts the curtain on a sombre stage, representing the Queen as a murderess. She brings to the fore the anecdote of her notorious killing of the Marquis of Monaldeschi at the Palace of Fontainebleau (AT, II, 164-178). Then, after a fourteen-page in *medias-res* opening, Thicknesse interrupts her citation of Father Bell's account only to stress how exceptional the Queen is, while emphasising the "sad use she made of such rare and extraordinary talents" (AT, I, 177). Her editorial aside reads as a condemnatory message against one's unruliness, and breaches of decorum: a warning to her female readers that posterity, in the hands of scathing historians, revels on the scandalous and the sensational. To support her claim, Thicknesse shifts her swift portrayal of Christina as a great intellectual back to that of the redoubtable foreign queen, and interprets the circumstances that led her to commit murder. Thicknesse's final verdict reiterates the deep-rooted misogyny against female rulers: she implicitly refers to the Queen's two-bodies trope,³⁴ conflating the notions of the body natural and the body politic, when she remarks that the Queen's crime was driven by "her *femality* and *weakness*" rather than "her *Queenly* character" (AT, I, 180). On the whole, Thicknesse shows little sympathy for Christina; and in the process of magnifying the horror of her crime, she resorts to phallogentric imagery. She perpetuates within her own text, and more specifically within a footnote on Queen Elizabeth I (*ibid.*), a prejudiced history of women rulers. Thus, in light of Thicknesse's haphazard handling of biographical and historical data in this entry, it is therefore not surprising that Hays did not indicate her as a source.

Hays offers a rather different entry – she is just as admiring of the Queen as she was in her earlier work, *Letters and Essays*, in which she paid tribute to her fortitude.³⁵ While Thicknesse is dismissive of the Queen's masculine and eccentric behaviour, placing her among a lineage of monstrous female rulers, a far more positive portrait of the Queen emerges from Hays's entry. Hays turns her into a more humane figure, as she begins with the description of her infancy and her tender years – giving context for the magnanimous and charismatic character she was to become. Hays turns the queen's life narrative into a vivid introspective record of how she was empowered to construct herself as a fully-fledged epistemic subject, regardless of gender constraints, and of cultural and religious bias: "Like all human characters, that of Christina appears to have been mingled [...] we must at least give her credit for ingenuousness" (313). "Ingenuousness" is an attribute which Hays values and comes back to, when for example, she comments on the *Mémoires* of another military

princess, Mlle de Montpensier [I, 237*].³⁶ Undeniably, Hays is far more tolerant, than Thicknesse, of her female characters' conflictual idiosyncrasies.

Intellectually gifted women with unconventional lives dominate the stage in *Female Biography*. As we have seen, most are “controversial”; yet one of them stands out for her apparent tameness: Anne Dacier (née Lefèvre), a classicist who was renowned for her French translation of Anacreon's and Sappho's poetry (1681) and, more generally speaking, for the vernacularisation of Greek and Latin literature. It is worth noting that Hays did not include an entry on Elizabeth Carter, despite her status as England's pride (“France” being no longer able to “boast her Dacier”),³⁷ but devotes one of her longest entries on French women to Dacier (IV, 1-21). Furthermore, Hays positions her entry on Dacier at the beginning of her fourth volume, and thus symbolically makes sure that Dacier is not forgotten as one of the Muses, or Calliopes, that has astounded the world. The salient position of Dacier in this volume nonetheless resonates with Thicknesse's incipit (AT, II: 146-7), repeating La Porte's eulogy of Dacier as surpassing her illustrious female contemporaries, and matching the “greatest men” (ibid., 147; LP II: 396). Interestingly, Thicknesse closes her entry with Dacier's biography of the Greek poetess Sappho, as though the destinies of these two women belonging to distant pasts were meant to merge through sheer association. The opening and closure of her entry therefore work to create a chiasmic movement, a *translatio studii* commemorating, and conflating these two iconic figures in the collective memory as exemplars of intellectual prowess. Nevertheless, Thicknesse says very little about Dacier as a child, unlike Hays who describes the early years of Dacier's education, and extol her father's progressive views. With an ironic twist, and light tone, whereby she calls into question gender stereotypes, Hays recounts how Dacier came to be taught “serious”, namely “masculine”, subjects by listening to her brother's lessons, and how her father discovered she was more intellectually able than her sibling (MH, IV, 2). Hays's inclusion of this amusing anecdote pertains to an early feminist discourse which claimed, well before a Simone de Beauvoir, that “one is not born a woman”.³⁸ In her reconstruction of Dacier's life as a young child and teenager, Hays offers a pedagogical model of self-discipline, and autonomous learning that enabled Dacier to “emancipate herself from the trammels of authority” and to “presume to differ, on subjects of literature and criticism, from her respectable father” (IV, 3). Essentially, she focuses on the intellectual sophisticatedness of Dacier's work, and on her conversations with other scholars on matters ranging from poetry and philosophy to religion. While citing some of the important works by Dacier, albeit less comprehensively than Hays

does, Thicknesse emphasises the piety and modesty of the female scholar (II, 151). More strikingly, as in other entries, Thicknesse shifts the focus to an attendant theme in many female-authored works, promoting the compatibility between domestic/private and intellectual/public lives: “Amidst these occupations, Madam Dacier, did not omit that important, and material duty, the education of her own children” (II: 155). In particular, Thicknesse dwells on Dacier’s maternal love for the daughter she lost, and cites a long extract from her preface to her translation of Homer’s *Illiad* (156-9): here the sustainedly domesticating flavour of Thicknesse’s ambivalent agenda can be detected. Thicknesse’s aim is to touch her reader through the rendition of this “susceptible and excellent mother bewailing her lost child”. In her typically fanciful and disjointed style, she goes on to cite Dr Young, “lamenting on the loss of his wife” (159). Thus through this citation (not cogently linked to her topic), Thicknesse seeks to shape and domesticate her compatriot’s behaviour, so she not only proves a good mother but also a good wife. Hays makes no mention of Dacier’s preface to the *Illiad*; she simply gives very brief and factual information about her children at the end of her entry, and highlights the exemplarity of the conjugal and spiritual love between Dacier and her husband, as depicted in their letters to each other (MH, IV, 15).

Hays’s negotiations with Thicknesse’s entry on Dacier are echoed in her revised entry on Mme de Sévigné who, unlike Dacier, made her way into France’s literary canon. Thicknesse eulogises the strong bonds between mother and daughter that shine through the Sévigné-Grignan correspondance (AT, I, 202-3). Her progressive, female-centered agenda cannot be mistaken. Writing at a time when a new approach to parenthood was being revisited,³⁹ albeit within a highly conservative climate, Thicknesse cleverly legitimates her praise through reference to the ultimate, unshakeable figure of authority: “God”. Thereby, she ensures that such love between mother and daughter is not deemed by her readership to be reprobable. Hays takes Thicknesse’s promotion of maternal and filial devotion a step further: she portrays Sévigné and her daughter as ahead of their time in their mutual feeling of closeness, and depicts their relationship as the metaphorical microcosm of modern society, where human beings can freely enjoy “the charm and tenderness of equal friendship” regardless of their status, or rank (MH, VI, 400). This resonates with how in her entry on Dacier she emphasises the married couple’s mutual affection, and their emotional and intellectual connectedness (MH, IV, 21), rather than Mme Dacier’s maternal leanings. Thus Hays’s editorial conversation with her hypotext reflects her desire to propose a new story for women. Motherhood as an emotionally charged experience had been the prime focus of the

Rousseau generation; but the role of women within wedlock, as well as the boundaries of filial relationships, still had to be redefined. The Dacier, and the Sévigné-Grignan women provided those inspiring models for generations to come.

Thicknesse and Hays nonetheless agreed on one point when they edited their respective entries on Dacier: both retained the same anecdote regarding her response to a German scholar, who requested from her an autograph. Dacier chose a “verse from Sophocles, implying that silence is the greatest ornament of a woman” (MH, II, 21; AT, II, 153). Male historiographers may well have relished citing Dacier’s reference to Sophocles, and taken it at its face value, in line with their androcentric allegiances. However, Dacier’s response bursts forth with irony, and both Thicknesse and Hays would have fathomed the sarcasm within it. No doubt, what Dacier secretly meant, was that women have a right to private lives, and private thoughts, to “a room of their own” – in other words, to be intellectuals without becoming curiosities.

In conclusion, Thicknesse and Hays shared a similar taste for “French principles”, namely “French gallantry”, as synonymous with women’s social inclusion in the production of knowledge. Undeniably, they both expressed identical aspirations for intellectual equality between the sexes; but Hays’s agenda developed in another, more mature, and tangible direction. What this comparative study demonstrates is that Hays sensed that radical, rather than “small”, change must take place for concrete advances to be made in the arena of gender politics. Indeed, Thicknesse’s editorial voice veers between subversiveness and adherence to societal convention, reminding us that she is a close affiliate of the Bluestockings whose progressive ideas were paradoxically steeped in the phallogentric mindset of Enlightenment thinking. Her remarks and digressions are thus reminders that her translation is a carefully weighed blend of “domesticating” strategies, whereby she revises the original to make it acceptable to the custodians of English civility. Instead, Hays’s feminism leaves no room for negotiation or compromise. So, while Thicknesse’s literary career embodies the Bluestocking ideal of progress at its best, Hays’s work challenges the *status quo*, defying the established cultural taste, and recognizing women’s undervalued potential to be creative. That is not all, however: in line with her *Weltanschauung* as a radical dissenter and feminist, she invites her readership to cultivate “tolerance” and impartiality in their assessment of these women’s lives.

¹ On Hays as a radical Dissenter, and her connections with Wollstonecraft, see Gina Luria Walker, *Mary Hays (1759-1843): The Growth of a Human Mind* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and “The Two Marys: Hays writes Wollstonecraft”, in *Called to Civil Existence: Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Enit K. Steiner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 49-70.

² Subsequent references to this work are from *Female Biography, or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of All Ages and Countries* (London: R. Phillips, 1803), 6 vols, thenceforth abbreviated as follows MH, followed by the volume and page numbers (e.g MH, III, 6-8).

³ The boundaries between queenship, authorship and political or religious engagement are porous: for example, amongst the queens or princesses compiled here, some were also known for their refined intellect and literary talent, such as Marguerite de Navarre, Queen of France (see my discussion below) and Louis XIV’s niece, Mlle de Montpensier (Anne Marie Louise d’Orléans, 1627-1693). As with her entries on British women, Hays is not exhaustive: for example, she included the revolutionary key-figures Charlotte Corday and Mme Roland but omitted Olympe de Gouges – which is surprising, given De Gouges’s role as a feminist activist. There are, nevertheless, many other important omissions of key French novelists such as Marie-Jeanne de Riccoboni and Mme de Genlis. Could it be that Hays had another publishing plan for those women she omitted – a plan similar to her 1821 project *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrious and Celebrated?* (see Elena Woodacre, “Well Represented or Missing in Action? Queens, Queenship and Mary Hays”, in Gina Luria Walker (ed.), *The Invention of Female Biography* (Pickering and Chatto, forthcoming).

⁴ As the passages consulted have been checked against the French original, and are a faithful rendering of the source text, subsequent references to this work are from the 1734-1738 English translation, *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, 5 vols. (New York: Garland, 1984), henceforth abbreviated PB, followed by the volume and page numbers (e.g PB, II, 23). On the importance of Bayle’s work, see Gina Luria Walker, “The Invention of Biography”, *Enlightenment and Dissent* 29 (2014), pp. 92-100.

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, citations from this work are from the second 3-volume edition (London, Printed for Dodsley and W. Brown, 1780-1), henceforth referenced as AT, followed by the volume and page numbers (e.g AT, I, 35).

⁶ See David A. Brenneman, “Intended by nature for a musician, Thomas Gainsborough, Musicians and the musical analogy for Painting in the 1770s and ‘80s”, in Deborah J. Johnson and David Ogawa (eds.) *Seeing and Beyond: essays on eighteenth- to twenty-first-century art in honor of Kermit S. Champa* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 21-38.

⁷ In *Letter from Miss F---d, Addressed to a person of Distinction* (1761) cited by Sophie Fuller, “Thickesse, Ann (1737–1824)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27179>, accessed 13 June 2015]. See also Gillen D’Arcy Wood, “Have you met Miss Ford?, or Accomplishment Revisited”, *European Romantic Review* 2012, 23:3, 283-291.

⁸ See Julie Candler Hayes’s useful account in “Sex and Gender, feeling and thinking: imagining women as intellectuals”, in Daniel Brewer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment* (2014), pp. 91-104 (pp. 95-6)

⁹ *ou lettres historiques et critiques. Contenant un Précis de la Vie & une analyse raisonnée des Ouvrages des Femmes qui se sont distinguées dans la littérature françoise* (Paris: Lacombe, 1769), 5 vols – henceforth abbreviated as LP followed by the volume and page numbers (e.g LP, I, 10). For an exhaustive list of his entries, see Suzan Van Dijk,

http://www.womenwriters.nl/index.php/La_Porte. The translation of cited passages in this essay is my own.

¹⁰ Here, the term “plagiarised” is not used in the negative sense generally ascribed to it; it is used to describe Thicknesse’s work as part of “a practice for which there was widespread tolerance” in the eighteenth century (on this notion see, Jennie Batchelor, <http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/ladys-magazine/2015/10/28/plagiarism-n-what-other-people-do-or-the-p-word-part-iii/>). At no point does Thicknesse reveal the name of La Porte in her dictionary; her only concession is to refer to him as ‘a French author says’. She also replicates more or less word for word most of La Porte’s entries, allowing space for comments of her own, and editorial changes motivated by a morally informed agenda. It is however interesting to note that it is only at the end of her anthology that Thicknesse explicitly reveals the editorial method she has used (still without acknowledging her primary source), insisting that her version has been improved for the benefit of her readers. In doing so, she ensures that she eschews “the charge of culpable plagiarism” (on this subject, see Tilar Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Thicknesse’s unacknowledged adaptation of La Porte’s text into English provides a good illustration of the translating practices described by Helen Mc Murran in her milestone study, *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹¹ The figure refers to the number of names found in Thicknesse’s anthology; a few names, due to the sparsity of information on these women, were conflated into “single entries” by both La Porte and Thicknesse.

¹² On the making of the history of women and feminism in the Enlightenment, see Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (London: John Hopkins Press, 1993), and Arianne Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹³ In her “Introduction” to *Sketches*, “gallantry” is referred to euphemistically in positive terms, as the “art de plaire”, which she defines by means of a long periphrasis that urges women to ornate their minds rather than their bodies, thereby echoing a long legacy of female-authored writings in early modern Europe (xx). On “galanterie” as a polysmically ambivalent concept, see Alain Viala, *La France galante* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008); and as a paradigm for the socio-cultural and literary production in seventeenth-century France, see Faith Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of 17th-Century France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁴ The authorial voice may well be a collective one, as implied by occasional reference to an editorial “we”, which may account for some of the misogynistic and highly paternalistic digressions in places (see notes 24 and 25)

¹⁵ On the educational and patriotic aspect of British women’s writing, see Harriet Guest, *Small Change, Women, Learning, Patriotism 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), in which she discusses Thicknesse’s dedicatory piece to Carter, pp. 121-3.

¹⁶ See David Oakleaf, ‘Graves, Richard (1715–1804)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11313>, accessed 1 July 2015]. Thicknesse and Graves are likely to have met at the fashionable circles in Bath where both resided. The second and third volumes are respectively dedicated to the francophile and “Honourable Mrs Grenville”, from a well-established Whig family, and “To the Honourable Mrs Bateman” (whom she praises for her exemplary conjugal affection, III, iv).

¹⁷ See Richard Samuel’s painting, *Portraits in the Characters of the Nine Muses in the Temple of Apollo* (1778) (National Gallery of London), NPG 4905.

¹⁸ Judith Hawley, “Carter, Elizabeth (1717–1806)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4782, accessed 25 June 2015].

¹⁹ “J’ai donc cru pouvoir lui donner une place littéraire des *Femmes Françaises*; quoique, sans doute, elles figureroit beaucoup mieux parmi les femmes galantes” (LP, I, 317).

²⁰ On this episode of her life, see notes 6 and 7.

²¹ The interpretation of Hays’s dictionary as “hack-work” (Gary Kelly, *Women, writing and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 234) has been challenged in recent years (Walker [2006, 2013]: this view fundamentally relies on a misconstrued assessment of historiography in the early modern period, which, as Mary Spongberg remarked, was “faced with a scarcity of reliable source material” (“Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft and the evolution of dissenting feminism”, *Enlightenment and Dissent* 26 [2010], p. 231). This is evidenced by the unquestioned conflation of identities in early modern historiographies, which requires from today’s scholars a detective work of “disambiguation” (see Maria Jesus Lorenzo Modia, “The contribution of Isabella de Rosares and Isabella de Josa to the Development of Learning for Women in the Sixteenth Century”, in Walker (ed.), *The Invention of Female Biography* (forthcoming).

²² Walker (2006), p. 134.

²³ Begoña Lasa notices identical editorial practices in her entries on British women (in this volume, pp. xxxx)

²⁴ This probably accounts for the omission of some important figures, such as seventeenth-century feminist Antoinette Salvan de Saliez, well known for her statement: “the equality of the sexes is no longer a contested principle” (Siep Stuurman, “Literary Feminism in Seventeenth-century Southern France: The Case of Antoinette de Salvan de Saliez”, *The Journal of Modern History* 71:1 [1999], p. 1). Thicknesse’s entry contains a puzzling, digressive outburst of misogyny which is all at once erased by a more progressive, radical voice. It is possible that Hays felt Thicknesse’s entry was simply unreliable, due to the scarcity of information on this renowned yet obscured feminist whom Bayle omitted from his dictionary, and whose biography consists of a brief entry in Jean de La Croix’s *Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres* (Paris: L. Cellot, 1769), vol. 2, p. 356), another source which Hays consulted.

²⁵ See note 24, and Hays’s entry on Jacquette de Guillaume, in which she deleted Thicknesse’s conservative and essentialistic digression on men and women (AT, I, 233; MH, IV, 376).

²⁶ See notes 15 and 16. See also Karen Green, *A History of Women’s Political Thought in Europe, 1700-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Chapters 6 (pp. 131-152) and 8 (pp.172-202) in which she discusses the agenda and legacy of the first and second generations of the Bluestockings.

²⁷ Donna Kuizenga, “Madame de Villedieu Englished: les traductions en anglais des ouvrages de Villedieu au XVIIe siècle”, in E. Keller-Rahbé (ed.), *Madame de Villedieu. Nouvelles perspectives de recherches* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2004), pp. 145-60.

²⁸ “L’histoire de Madame de Villedieu est plus curieuse, que ne semble le promettre la vie d’une femme qui a tant écrit, & qui conséquemment paroissoit être moins faite pour les aventures” (LP, II, 1). [“*The story of Madame de Villedieu is filled with more surprise, than one might think is expected from the life of a woman who wrote so much, and would therefore not appear to be fitted for adventures*”]

²⁹ For an accurate biography of Villedieu, see http://www.siefar.org/dictionnaire/en/Marie-Catherine_Desjardins

³⁰ Throughout the eighteenth-century Marguerite de Navarre's tales were reprinted several times outside France, most notably in Amsterdam. It was also translated into English, as *Novels, tales, and stories : Written originally in French, by Margaret de Valois, Queen of Navar. ... Translated into English by several hands*. (London : printed for W. Chetwood, and T. Edlin. The publication date has not been ascertained; while the ECCO catalogue indicates 1725 with a question mark, Paul Chilton suggests in his modern edition of *The Heptameron* that it was published around 1750 (London: Penguin, 1984, p. 23). It is possible Hays had access to the French original which was re-published in London in 1784 as *Contes et nouvelles de Marguerite de Valois, Reine de Navarre: Faisant suite aux contes de J. Bocace*.

³¹ See Helena Bergmann, *A Revised Reading of Mary Hays' Philosophical Novel Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796): Enlarging the Canon of the Mary Wollstonecraft Literary-philosophical Circle* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

³² Mark Philp, *Godwin's political justice* (London, 1986), cited in Spongberg (2010), p. 243.

³³ On Christina of Sweden's writings, see Suzanna Ackerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and her circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 308-9.

³⁴ On this notion see the recent study, Regina Schulte (ed.), *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World 1500-2000* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

³⁵ See Gina Walker, Mary Hays, *The Growth of a woman's mind*, 2006, pp. 70-71

³⁶ By contrast, Thicknesse inserts a footnote (I, 215) to express her disapproval of Montpensier's military involment in the French Civil War (1648-1653), thereby imbuing her entry with a conservative note more akin to patriarchal ideology than to feminism.

³⁷ *The Monthly Review* 18 (1758), cited by Guest, p. 70.

³⁸ One famous example is Madeleine de Scudéry's twentieth "Harangue of Sapho to Erinne" in *Femmes illustres* (1641), in *The Story of Sapho*, trans. and ed. Karen Newman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), pp. 137-143.

³⁹ In her recent chapter on Sévigné's "maternalism", Domna Stanton incisively argues that the representation of childhood and motherhood has been misconceived as an eighteenth-century invention, *The Gender of Dynamics in early modern France, Women writ, women writing* (Ashgate, 2014), pp. 149-79.