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"There is another, and a better world": Crafting Female Authorship in Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*

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Abstract

As a novelist, pamphleteer, and poet, Mary Robinson (1757-1800) provides an example of women who contributed in various ways to the world of letters and to the broadening of definitions of femininity. *The Natural Daughter* (1799), Robinson's last novel, centers on the outcast heroine Martha, who is forced to leave home and seems doomed to replicate the tragic fate of "the fallen woman," a figure commonly found in works authored by women in this period. In *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson also turns away from the conventional domestic setting, which corresponds to the domestic spheres in real life that women were expected to inhabit. My claim is that Robinson actively participates in the negotiations for women's positions in the marketplace, and that she attempts to unsettle discursive assumptions about the public-private model through an emphasis on women's presence in professional spheres of activity. This paper addresses that claim first by considering the rise of female authorship and the accompanying debates about gendered roles and responsibilities through a discussion of how Thomas Mathias's satirical poem *The Pursuit of Literature* (1794-1797) and the Quaker philanthropist Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798) are a response to women's public

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engagements. This paper then places *The Natural Daughter* in relation to Robinson's autobiography, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson* (1801), and thus turns to the critical connections that one can make between Robinson's experience in real life and her fictional creation in *The Natural Daughter*. This paper thus argues that Robinson's response is more nuanced and also more historically significant than previously understood. A consideration of the ways in which *The Natural Daughter* extends codes of femininity will also point to in effect women writers' awareness of the importance of issues of self-assertiveness and the rite of passage to self-authorization in Robinson's time.

Keywords: Mary Robinson, *The Natural Daughter*, female authorship, Thomas Mathias, Priscilla Wakefield.

"There is another, and a better world": Crafting Female Authorship in Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter*[1]

> I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what *an author* means. If I know that she has read any thing I have written, I cut her acquaintance immediately. This sort of literary intercourse with me passes for nothing. (Hazlitt 168)

In his essay "On Great and Little Things" (1821), William Hazlitt openly proclaims his antipathy to women writers and his "utter aversion to *blue-stockings*" (168).[2] Like Hazlitt, other male writers and critics adopted a patronizing and sometimes belligerent attitude towards literary women. William Wordsworth, for example, shows a patronizing attitude towards the much admired and popular poet Felicia Hemans for her devotion to poetry at the expense of womanly decorum and domestic values. Dismissing her literary success, Wordsworth sardonically writes: "As a woman, [Hemans] was to a considerable degree a spoilt child of the world" who was "totally ignorant of housewifery, and could as easily have managed the spear of Minerva as her needle" (193).[3] The masculine satiric hostility towards intellectual women specifically ties to the issue of dismissive attitudes towards women who are participating in the world of letters as well as the related issues of the liabilities of writing for women, the construction of an evolving female literary authority, and the increasing presence of women in the literary marketplace.

The question of gender continues to be intricately involved in the shaping of a professionalized literary culture. The idea that persists today that there are separate spheres based on gender traces at least as far back as the eighteenth century. Thus, Jürgen Habermas's mid-twentieth-century model of the public-private dichotomy suggests a distinct gender divide between the masculine

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[1] In a letter to Jane Porter dated 15 October 1800, two months before her death, Robinson informs her friend: "My illness has indeed been so perilous, that I believe little hopes were entertained of my recovery"; "every day [I expect] to prove that 'There is another, and a better world'" (*Works* 328).

[2] The first group of Bluestockings generally refers to the female circle formed in Elizabeth Montagu's salon, including Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney, and Hester Chapone. Later, the wording is used in a much broader sense to denote intellectual and literary women in society. For discussions on Bluestocking women writers, see, for example, Elizabeth Eger's monograph *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism, and Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role*, a collection of essays edited by Deborah Heller.

[3] Felicia Hemans, on the other hand, praises Wordsworth as a poet of domesticity in her dedication to him: "When night hath hushed the woods, with all their birds, / There, from some gentle voice, that lay were sweet/ As antique music, linked with household words; / While in pleased murmurs woman's lip might move, / And the raised eye of childhood shine in love" (281).

(public) and feminine (private) spheres.[4] However, since the 1990s, critics have been devoting significant energy to the positioning of women writers on a spectrum and so have rejected Habermas's model of separate spheres and instead urged a more expansive approach to accommodate the range of women's participation in the public sphere.[5] The historian Amanda Vickery challenges and complicates Habermas's conceptual paradigm in her well-known article "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?"—a survey of English women's participation from the early modern to Victorian period.[6] Literary critics in particular are among those who have responded vigorously to Habermas's notion of separate spheres. There are ongoing debates about whether or not women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were unequivocally public figures despite their ways in which they published their work. Nevertheless, few scholars would question the fact that literary careers offered women of the eighteenth century, including Sarah Fielding, Mary Collyer, Sarah Scott, and Charlotte Lennox, the opportunity to give a public voice to their opinions. Scholars have sustained a long interest in the constructed gendered paradigm of separate spheres. Cora Kaplan, Harriet Guest, and Anne K. Mellor, among many others, forcefully argue the case that there was "women's full participation in the very public sphere theorized by Habermas himself" and that women's "opinions had definable impact on the social movements, economic relationships, and state-regulated policies of the day" (Mellor, *Mothers* 3).[7] In her study of gender politics and authorship in the Romantic period, Sonia Hofkosh similarly points out that "the assumption or assertion of authorial identity appeals to the preservation of certain distinctions and hierarchies in literary culture that are repeatedly arranged along gender lines" (13). Despite the seeming exclusion of female gender that is supported by standard accounts and notions of the public sphere, women writers in the latter half of the eighteenth century, were actively participating in the shaping of national and social matters through their discourses.

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[4] Habermas first proposed this public/private model in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in German in 1962 (and in the first English translation in 1989).

[5] Critics have worked to revise and augment Habermas's notion of the public sphere. See for example Kathleen Canning's monograph *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship*; Jane Rendall's "Women and the Public Sphere"; Joan B. Landes's "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration"; and Landes's monograph, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*.

[6] See, also, Vickery's book *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, which offers accounts of female experience and increasing opportunities for women to engage in the public world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

[7] Essays in this important volume, *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, edited by Elizabeth Eger, et al., show how "the conventional critical notion of separate spheres . . . immediately appears problematic and inaccurate" through an examination of women's writing in this period (3).

Pursuing this vein of inquiry, in this paper I focus on Mary Robinson's *The Natural Daughter* (1799), the last fictional work that Robinson produced before her untimely death in 1800. My claim is that Robinson actively participates in the negotiations for women's positions in the economic system and attempts as well to unsettle discursive assumptions about the public-private model and about the presence of women in professional spheres. This paper also moves beyond the restrictive public/private binary to consider the validity of female intellectual capacity and the literary landscape of late eighteenth-century Britain. *The Natural Daughter* provides a pertinent case for discussing the writer's claim to agency and identity—for both the author Robinson and her fictional heroine Martha assume authorship and suggest an alternative model of femininity to that which reflects the repression of it.[8] First, I will briefly consider the intersection of cultural and social trends in late eighteenth-century Britain, including the rise of female authorship and the accompanying debates about gendered roles and responsibilities. Thomas Mathia's satirical poem *The Pursuit of Literature* (1794-1797) and Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798) are cases in point, for both share similar concerns about women's utilization of their talents and the clashing of that with their responsibilities to family and society. I will then place *The Natural Daughter* in relation to Robinson's autobiography, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson*, posthumously published in 1801, and turn to the connections that one can make between her experience in real life and her fictional creation in *The Natural Daughter*.

Relatively recent criticism by scholars such as Marilyn Butler, Janet Todd, Claudia L. Johnson, and Anne K. Mellor prompted the first wave of inquiry into the characteristics of women's writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and so significantly complicated standard understandings of women writers and their writing. The efforts of these scholars are followed by a more general interest in the literary culture, especially in novels of the early Romantic period.[9] The expanding scholarship is indicative of the interest in the rise of women writers in the given period and the range of their writing. However,

[8] This essay does not attempt to argue that women writers craft a unique identity for women as opposed to male writers of the same period. These are interesting and unquestionably important questions that would require more space, perhaps a separate study, to provide more satisfactory answers.

[9] In *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* and *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*, Gary Kelly provides a detailed analysis of the politics of the radical novel. M. O. Grenby, in his *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution*, examines the trajectory of conservative novels and suggests that their authors were participating in an ideological movement as more radical writers were doing. Adriana Craciun's study of Romantic-period women writers' representations of women, a study entitled *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, testifies to the diversity of scholarly inquiries into these related concerns.

while we know more about Robinson now thanks to a renewed interest in her biography, she has been mainly introduced through her brief romantic entanglements with the Prince of Wales, and her relationships with other prominent male figures. Her works are read largely in light of the trope of sexual transgression or in light of her reformist position and evident admiration and support for the controversial figure Mary Wollstonecraft and the growing radicalism of the early 1790s.[10] Robinson's discourses are hardly original, but what makes her efforts significant is how she uses *The Natural Daughter* to awaken society to its ignorance of women's roles and economic values in the public world. As this paper will show, her response is more nuanced and also more historically significant than previously understood.

The Natural/Unnatural Woman: Thomas Mathias and Priscilla Wakefield

In order to examine the struggles and challenges that women faced as professional writers in the second half of the eighteenth century, it is helpful to look at discourses about female authorship in the works of Robinson's contemporaries. It also is important to point out that the issue of female authorship attracted hostile reactions in an earlier era, and this anxiety about the effects and consequences of female authorship persists and continues into the Romantic period, and later. One notable example is Alexander Pope's anxiety about women writers and the feminization of cultural forces in the early eighteenth century, cogently expressed through his representation of the prolific and popular novelist Eliza Haywood (1693-1756) as a scandalous and frivolous writer in *The Dunciad* (1728).[11] In one of his footnotes to *The Dunciad*, Pope condemns Haywood for her "profligate licentiousness" (206) and "scandalous books" (207). He describes her, further, as one of those "shameless scribblers (for the most part of that sex which ought least to be capable of such malice or impudence) who in libellous Memoirs and Novels, reveal the faults or misfortunes of both sexes,

[10] A special issue of *Women's Writing* that focuses solely on Robinson came out in 2002; monographs that focus on Robinson remain scarce. These include Eleanor Ty's *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812*; Amy Garnai's *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald*; Daniel Robinson's monograph, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame*; and, most recently, Ashley Cross's *Mary Robinson and the Genesis of Romanticism: Literary Dialogues and Debts, 1784-1821* (published in 2016).

[11] See, for example, Catherine Ingrassia's monograph *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England*, and also her "Introduction" to the Broadview edition of Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* and Henry Fielding's *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews*.

to the ruin of public fame, or disturbance of private happiness" (206). In the second half of the eighteenth century, representations of political events (inclusive of civil unrest and numerous wars) and women often were juxtaposed to show that women who engaged in public activities were unruly and likely to pose threats to the social system. For instance, the conservative orator Edmund Burke (1729-1797) states that women who are politically active in the public sphere are "lost to shame," for they indulge in "insolent fancies" and "direct, control, applaud [and] explode" in ways that are unsuited to their nature (69). Women, in Burke's description, have clearly abandoned modesty and femininity, and departed from civilising manners.[12] Following this vein, it is not surprising that learned women were a subject of intense and controversial political debates.

Similar sentiments are expressed by Thomas Mathias (1754-1835), whose treatment of women writers in *The Pursuit of Literature* (1794-1797), an uncharitable satirical poem about his contemporaries, demands notice. As Orianne Smith points out, Mathias's "millenarian fears" about "the influx of contemporary novels celebrating female enthusiasm" should be seen as part of "the specter of 'Gallic frenzy', or the danger of female enthusiasm, exacerbated by the radical politics of the French Revolution" (64-65).[13] Mathias singles out dissenting female writers including Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Mary Robinson and argues that they are "too frequently *whining* or *frisking* in novels," and these are "tainted with democracy" (58). He deplores these women for their activism and engagement in the world of politics, and condemns them for abandoning the virtues of the female sex. *The Pursuit of Literature* had a profound impact on contemporaneous works, especially works by other male writers who strove to identify female political activists and the dissemination of their progressive ideas. For instance, in Richard Polwhele's poem, "The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of the Pursuits of Literature" (1798), the author makes an all but direct reference to Mathias in the title of his poem. He also calls Mathias "a true poetical genius," whose discourses have "fixed the principles [of those] whose politics and even religion have long been wavering" (Lawson-Peebles 95). In addition, Polwhele's satirical poem is headed with a quotation from *The Pursuit of Literature*: "Our unsex'd female writers now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild

[12] For discussions about Edmund Burke and gender debates in the period, see Thomas Furniss's essay, "Gender in Revolution: Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft"; and Daniel I. O'Neill's discussion of "the democratization of the public sphere" in the fourth chapter of *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy.*

[13] For a detailed catalogue of "female enthusiasm" in writing in this period, see the first chapter of Orianne Smith's *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826.*

with Gallic frenzy" (467). Like Mathias, Polwhele singles out "unsex'd females," contrasting them with women who fit the social norms, in an attempt to combat radicalism in the late eighteenth century, and so denounce women who follow the path of Wollstonecraft and espouse her radical politics and the possibility of a new millennium.[14] This "progressive millennialism" (Smith 56) was fervently contested in contemporary conservative works, which targeted radical women writers for their radicalism and political activism. Both Mathias and Polwhele's efforts to categorise women writers and to brand certain ones "unsex'd" could be viewed as being tactics to preserve patriarchal values and traditional gendered codes.

Like their male contemporaries, women writers recognized the social and political significance of women's roles and behaviors, and they also sought to rethink and contest existing gender lines and gendered codes of conduct. The Quaker writer Priscilla Wakefield (1750-1832), for instance, launches a critique of women's social and economic roles in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798).[15] Wakefield is a successful writer of educational works particularly for the young; her *Introduction to Botany* (1796) has gone through eleven editions and is widely considered as the first comprehensive study of botany written by a woman. Compared with her other works, *Reflections* is written in a more serious tone. On its opening page, Wakefield alludes to the Enlightenment writer Adam Smith's notion that every individual ought to contribute to society: "every individual is a burthen upon the society to which he belongs, who does not contribute his share of productive labour for the good of the whole" (1). She then criticises Smith for not specifying that both sexes are contributors to society: "since the female sex is included in the idea of the species, . . . their sex cannot free them from the claim of the public for their proportion of usefulness" (2). Wakefield sees "Smith's free enterprise economy as itself an encroachment on the liberty of women" (Sutherland 104), which denies equal economic opportunities for the female sex. Different from Smith, Wakefield sees female labour as productive and useful, and argues that in the current society "the intellectual faculties of the female mind have too long been confined" (5), and women do not know how to exercise their mental powers because of the inap-

[14] For discussions about the politics of poetry in the Revolutionary period, see Richard Cronin's monograph *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth*, in particular pp. 61-82.

[15] This work hereafter is referred to as *Reflections*, for the sake of brevity. For discussions of Wakefield's discourses in relation to political economy in the early Romantic period, see Robert Dimand's essay "An Eighteenth-Century English Feminist Response To Political Economy: Priscilla Wakefield's *Reflections* (1798)."

propriate education they receive. Through *Reflections*, Wakefield calls for a more productive and improved economic system, which would allow women to exercise their share of labor and contribute "for the good of the whole" (1).

Unlike contemporary proto-feminists such as Wollstonecraft and Catherine Macaulay, who center their arguments on women's rights and roles, Wakefield focuses on the issue of lack of employment opportunities for women. She recognizes the dreadful situation of women who have neither male protection nor any opportunity to make a decent living:

> There is scarcely a more helpless object in the wide circle of misery which the vicissitudes of civilized society display, than a woman genteelly educated, whether single or married, who is deprived, by any unfortunate accident, of the protection and support of male relations; unaccustomed to struggle with difficulty, unacquainted with any resource to supply an independent maintenance, she is reduced to the depths of wretchedness, and not unfrequently, if she be young and handsome, is driven by despair to those paths which lead to infamy. (66)

In order to cross this "insurmountable barrier against a woman" (67), Wakefield promotes job opportunities and equal pay for women. The description above is reminiscent of Robinson's own situation: she was deprived of male protection and financial support after her separation from her husband and the abandonment of her by the Prince and by (later) other lovers. In *The Natural Daughter*, Martha faces a similar situation due to a series of unfortunate events (content that will be discussed later). Wakefield notices that: "[women's] rights and [women's] duties have lately occupied the pens of writers of eminence" yet "the employments which may properly exercise [women's] faculties, and fill up their time in a useful manner, without encroaching upon those professions, which are appropriate to men, remain to be defined" (8).

Wakefield also distinguishes herself from other proto-feminists of her time in the sense that her views are more moderate and often grounded in a traditional discourse of sexual politics and values.[16] Such views are clearly revealed in these words to her readers: "there can be but one head of chief in every family," for "nature or reason, as well as custom, have established this power in the hands of the men" (108). It is for this reason, as she states, that women should "employ their time and their talents, beneficially to themselves and to the community,

[16] Women writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are often categorised into two rival groups: the radical, progressive camp, which includes Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld; and the conservative group, which includes Hannah More, Elizabeth Hamilton, and Sarah Trimmer. For discussions of these women writers and their narratives, see for example William Stafford's *English Feminists and Their Opponents in the 1790s: Unsex'd and Proper Females.*

without destroying the peculiar characteristic of their sex, or exceeding the most exact limits of modesty and decorum" (8-9). Wakefield's emphasis on so-called natural male dominance over women reflects standard notions in the late eighteenth century of biological difference between the sexes. Thus, in making a case for women's educational and employment opportunities in society, Wakefield "[distances herself] from reform proposals" that challenge those notions as well as "from any association with the enthusiasm of Wollstonecraft for the French Revolution or of the historian Catherine Macaulay for republicanism" (Dimand 197). Yet, her use of "the conservative language of the duties and obligations of women," in this way, also allows her to "argue for a radical alteration of women's education and opportunities" (Dimand 201).[17] Wakefield strives to argue for women's presence in the literary marketplace by way of reconciling two opposing constructions of female identity, constructions that are at either end of the spectrum: the domestic and maternal female who exemplifies moral propriety; and the adventurous public female. The economic system and the lack of opportunity for women that Wakefield focuses upon is both elaborated upon and contested by Robinson. In *The Natural Daughter*, as I will show, Robinson carves out a newly defined subjectivity and future for women through her fictional narratives.

Assuming an Authorial Presence in *The Natural Daughter*

The Natural Daughter tells the story of the heroine, Martha. From the outset in the narrative, it is clear that Martha's father, Mr. Bradford, prefers Martha's sister Julia, for Julia is the more compliant, sweet, and submissive daughter.[18] On the other hand, Martha is presented to readers as being a sensible and rational being, observant and judicious, and not averse to expressing her opinions. For example, when Mr. Bradford ignores his doctor's advice and instead follows his "own inclinations" (106) to eat as he pleases, Martha is the only one in the family to speak against this. It is Martha who remains calm when her father has a fit of apoplexy; the other family members are overwhelmed by his state: Mrs.

[17] However, Dimand suggests that Wakefield's strategy is not successful, for compared with her other educational works, which were popular and critically well-received, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* had a limited print run of two editions.

[18] In *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson adopts the "pair sisters" model, a narrative strategy commonly seen in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century fiction inclusive of Sarah Scott's *Agreeable Ugliness* (1754), Jane West's *The Gossip's Story* (1796), and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). However, while I recognize that situating *The Natural Daughter* in this narrative device tradition could help us understand the contrasting personalities of the two sisters, I focus on Martha's evolving self and authorial identity.

Bradford "vociferated loudly," and Julia "sunk upon the carpet" (101). Martha marries Mr. Morley shortly after his proposal. Their relationship starts to deteriorate after Martha takes in Frances, an abandoned baby girl whose identity remains unknown until the very end of the novel. Mr. Morley is of the opinion that Frances is in fact Martha's own child, even though Martha repeatedly denies this. Driven from her home by her husband, Martha supports herself and the baby by taking up jobs as an actress, writer, and teacher, all the while forcefully refusing an offer to become a kept mistress. The end of *The Natural Daughter* witnesses her success at survival. She has broken free from traditional notions of femininity and represents a new and more optimistic path for women in the future (a point that will be discussed later). Nevertheless, in narrating Martha's adventure in the public world, Robinson suggests that common concepts of "woman" and "public professions" often are in conflict. In the following, I begin with a discussion of Martha's careers, the first of which was acting and the second of which was writing.

Drawing on her own experiences in the public world, Robinson uses the form of the novel as the basis for her critical assessment of the challenges and unique obstacles confronting women. Martha's first venture in this public world is her embarkation on a stage career. Martha enacts different versions of Robinson's own experiences: in Robinson's case, her husband Thomas Robinson's debts forced her to earn money to support the family; in Martha's case, she "looked not forward to any thing beyond a decent independence" (181), hoping to obtain financial means for her and baby Frances. Robinson was herself a successful actress who performed many roles and received tremendous applause for her performances in the late 1770s. But, in the eighteenth century, it was considered morally dubious for a woman to act on the stage, for this upset conventional gender expectations.[19] In *The Natural Daughter*, when Mr. Morley learns about his wife's profession, he cries out: "So irreligious a profession!"; "Why have you disgraced yourself—your family?" (201). Sexual remarks were frequently directed at actresses in this period. Martha clearly understands that a stage career is "too frequently...subjected to the petty scorn of upstart insignificance" (178) and "condemn[ed] with unpitying asperity" (181). According to Laura J. Rosenthal, the eighteenth century witnessed an increasing "visual and sexual objectification" of women on the stage, and actresses were associated

[19] For discussions about actresses and theatre culture in the eighteenth century, see, for example, Laura J. Rosenthal's essay "Entertaining Women: The Actress in Eighteenth-century Theatre and Culture"; and essays in *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theatre, 1660-1830*, edited by Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr.

"with prostitution regardless of their behaviour off stage" (160). For sure, some actresses used to their advantage these detractions; they highlighted the putative notorious aspects of their profession in order to attract attention. For instance, the careers of Dora Jordan (1761-1816) and Anne Catley (1745-1789) show the extent to which notoriety and scandal could successfully generate publicity for actresses and help secure a sizeable audience.[20] Other actresses, such as the famous and highly respected Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), consistently presented themselves as moral subjects and stressed their maternal and virtuous qualities to avoid social criticism. However, in *The Natural Daughter*, the "all-potent tyrant Prejudice" (181) proves impossible to overcome. Martha is rejected by society. She becomes the subject of scandal and her reputation is degraded. Although she receives "unbounded applause" (181) for her dramatic performances, she is "deemed an unfit associate for the wives and daughters of the proud, the opulent, and the unenlightened" (181), and eventually she is dismissed by the dramatic company. Robinson laments how unfairly actresses are treated in society: "the wealthy fool can always point that shaft of prejudice against the children of Genius and Misfortune" (178-79).

The distress that Martha experiences in the theatrical world is replicated in the world of professional writing. From the outset of *The Natural Daughter*, Martha constantly turns to writing to express her thoughts, in good times and bad. For instance, she writes a poem after saving the life of a wounded soldier (103-04), composes another poem to express her ideas about love and relationships (115-16), produces a satirical poem after being discharged from the dramatic company (194-95), and leaves several stanzas for the pupils she instructed before her forced dismissal (216-17). This interpolated poetic content in Martha's predominantly prose narrative reflects her talent and serious interest in writing. Turning to the pen is a practical decision for women to obtain economic subsistence in this time; however, it is no easy decision for Martha. Martha makes up her mind to become a writer only "after various resolutions, rapidly formed and as rapidly relinquished; after weighing and rejecting, musing and trembling, hoping, fearing, and anticipating the chances for and against her in the revolving wheel of fortune" (207). These long and careful considerations not only point to a sense of determination, but also reflect the struggles and dilemmas women face in society. Martha is acutely aware of society's hostility

[20] For the acting career of Dora Jordan, see Claire Tomalin's biography *Mrs Jordan's Profession: The Story of a Great Actress and a Future King*; for the acting career of Anne Catley, see E. Ambross's *The Life and Memoirs of the Late Miss Ann Catley*. For discussions of the relationship between actresses and their public reputation, see Kimberly Crouch's essay "The Public Life of Actresses: Prostitutes or Ladies?," especially pp. 62-67.

towards outcast women. While she acknowledges that "the busy metropolis, it is true, presented a variety of roads to independence," she laments that "a female without protection, or even the power to apply for character to her own relatives . . . , had little to hope for from a world selfish and prejudging" (207).

The treatment of Martha by other people around her reveal how in the male-dominated society of her (and Robinson's time) women's intellectual capacities are consistently underestimated and belittled as well as how male figures' restrictive codes of gendered behavior inform and shape wider societal attitudes towards women. Forced to act as a docile daughter and submissive wife, Martha is a woman whose voice and self-assertiveness are constantly denied. This is apparent from the first pages of *The Natural Daughter*: intellectual, rational women are ignored and rejected by the male hierarchy. In addition, this hierarchy in effect refuses women the right to earn their own incomes. Martha's wealthy and patriarchal father, Mr. Bradford, for instance, not only seems to believe that wealth constructs worth but also that women should be satisfied with being given money rather than earning money on their own terms. He brags, "who is worth more than I?" (95); and of Mrs. Bradford he rhetorically asks: "has she not every thing that can render a woman happy? Is she not envied by all her acquaintance; and shall I not leave her the richest widow on the east side of St. Paul's?" (96). Martha's father finds no value in women's ability to think and be rational: "you had no business to think"; "it was your duty to listen"; "you have no business ever to speak" (93). His incapability to control his spirited daughter Martha also makes him "impatient to marry [her] off" (93). He wants a husband for Martha to "keep her in order; for, she is beyond [his] management" (93). In addition to this treatment of Martha, the scurrilous attacks on her person and reputation leave Martha few options other than that of relying on her literary talents. Both Martha and Robinson represent women writers who are literally writing against the gendered narratives imposed on them. In addition to the work that she finds as an actress, teacher, and governess, Martha repeatedly turns to writing to support herself, and she also turns to writing when all other efforts to make a living fail: "Once more left with no resource but that which would arise from her own talents, Mrs. Morley resolved on making another effort" to write (214). Later, when she loses a lawsuit and is ask to make immediate reparations, Martha "flew for that passport" given by her pen, "the only one she could obtain, to those who by rank and fortune were far removed from the sorrows which annoyed her" (226).

In *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson also poignantly comments on the injustices of the publishing industry in the eighteenth century through her descriptions of women's lack of control over intellectual property. It is only after

Martha completes her first novel that she realises that she has chosen a competitive genre, for the literary market is full of novels, which are "palatable to splenetic valetudinarians and boarding-school misses" (208).[21] In the literary marketplace, commodity value is controlled by readers' taste and marketing possibilities:

> The terrific had been worn to a mere spectre; . . . the sentimental would no longer suit the languid nerves of those who were devoted to dissipation; and the pathetic, which described the force of enthusiastic honour and genuine sensibility, was deemed both gothic and unnatural; chivalry was out of fashion; the tales of adventurous knights were considered as ridiculously romantic; and the sober lessons of good sense and morality had long been consigned, exclusively, to the shelves of boarding-school libraries. (207-08)

Thus it is not surprising that Martha now is "at a loss what kind of story to delineate" (207). The dishonest publisher, Mr. Index, then advises her: "If you have any talent for satire, you may write a work that would be worth purchasing" (209), for this promises a reading public. He also reminds her of the importance of the title: "A title is the thing above all others," for it is "a wonderful harmonizer of things, in all ranks and all opinions of men, both morally and politically" (210). Mr. Index subsequently proclaims that Martha, "a novice in the arcanum of literature," is "too timid to obtain the laurel of victory" and "will never dash into the broad stream of popularity" (209). After realising that the obstacles she faces are "almost insurmountable" (208), Martha compromises and sells her novel to the publisher for ten pounds. Later, when she is imprisoned in a madhouse, she learns that her novel was very well-received by the reading public and ran through six editions. Not surprisingly, none of the profits produced from the reprinted editions reaches her pocket. Martha's imprisonment in a madhouse leads to many "menaces and grimaces," the introduction of "a waistcoat of coercion," and horrific medical treatment (242), but these do not throw Martha into a frenzy. It is only when Martha realizes that she has been duped by the publisher for publishing "six editions for ten pounds" that she collapses into madness: "Her chagrin was considerably augmented, and she threw the book on the ground in an agony of vexation. . . . Mrs. Morley was pronounced to be in the most decided state of raving insanity" (242-43). As Jennifer L. Airey points out, *The Natural Daughter* is one of Robinson's "most explicit condemnations

[21] Robinson clearly is aware of debates and controversies surrounding the novel genre in the eighteenth century. A contemporary, Vicesimus Knox, famously summed these up when he wrote, "the present age is more corrupt than the preceding, [and] the great multiplication of novels probably contributes to its degeneracy" (185) in *Essays, Moral and Literary* (1779).

of society's treatment of authors" (5). In this novel, Robinson writes about a culture that not only devalues artistic labor but also belittles women; it reflects the cruel realities that women faced in the literary market. Those realities could drive one insane, and even more so than any amount of physical violence.

Robinson's concern for women's second-class status in the publishing industry is drawn from her own experience as a professional writer. When her scandalous relationship with the Prince of Wales ended, she was forced to turn to the pen and write prolifically for financial remuneration. As she makes explicit in *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson* (1801): "I resolved on turning my thoughts towards literary labour, and projected a variety of works, by which I hoped to obtain at least a decent independence" (1:184-85).[22] Contrary to her expectations, Robinson was never treated fairly by her publishers.[23] Robinson laments that her health is impaired "in so destructive a pursuit" and sorrowfully pronounces: "Alas! how little did I then know either the fatigue or the hazard of mental occupations!" (*Memoirs* 1:185). Robinson's first long-term relation was with Hookham and Carpenter. She bitterly complained about her publishers in a letter to John Taylor in 1796: "My mental labours have failed through the dishonest conduct of my publishers. My works have sold handsomely, but the profits have been theirs" (*Works* 303). Thus, while "in 1796 Robinson was the best-selling single author at Hookham," in her "four-and-a-half year relationship" with this publisher, she earned "less than £10"; the publishers were neither "good judges of the market" nor proponents of "good advice" (Fergus and Thaddeus 196, 197). Robinson later switched to the larger publisher Longman, which promised "a more profitable relationship" and also was "more dignified and professional" (192, 197).

Another critique of the publishing industry that Robinson forcefully presents in *The Natural Daughter* is the sacrifice of the quality of works due to high production pressure. Martha "confined herself to incessant labour" for "six weeks" before she presented her "work of two volumes" to Mr. Index, "with the hope of attaining at least a sprig of that prolific laurel" (208). What is revealed here is the sacrifice of literary quality on the altar of hasty production and the competitive literary market. A review of Robinson's earlier novel *Hubert de Sevrac* (1796), published by *The Analytical Review*, criticizes the hastiness of Robinson's own writing and composition:

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[22] Hereafter referred to as *Memoirs* for the sake of brevity.

[23] In "Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820," Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus provide a detailed account of the financial treatment of some of the best-selling female authors inclusive of their relations with publishers in this period.

> Mrs. Robinson writes so rapidly, that she scarcely gives herself time to digest her story into a plot, or to allow those incidents gradually to grow out of it, which are the fruit of matured invention. . . . The consequence is obvious; her sentences are often confused, entangled with superfluous words, half-expressed sentiments, and false ornaments. . . . [Robinson] could write better, were she once convinced, that the writing of a good book is no easy task. ("Art. XXV" 523)[24]

The reviewer associates speed with poor craftsmanship and so harshly judges Robinson's style. In any case, or regardless of whether or not Robinson compromised her writing at times because of a publishing deadline, Robinson clearly felt the pressure of the limited time allowed for products of press, and, at the same time, saw "the criticism as a jibe at her literary talent" (Cross 147). Later in her life, Robinson confessed in retrospect that most of her works "had been composed in too much haste," and "*should* she recover [from illness], she designed to commence a long work, upon which she would bestow great pains and time" (*Memoirs* 2:161). Robinson was never given the opportunity to fulfill this wish. Her disorder and pain "rapidly drawing towards a period" (2:161), she passed away within a few weeks' time. What she hopes to show in *The Natural Daughter* is that although the commercial marketplace in the late eighteenth century provides a forum by which women can have a voice and financially support themselves, their position and quest for fame in the literary world remain uncertain.

In order to examine how authorial agency is constructed in *The Natural Daughter*, it is helpful to look at the ways in which Robinson rescripts her authorial self through the use of pseudonyms. These tie to the fact of Robinson's notorious reputation and her many scandalous affairs. The latter included Robinson's relationships with eminent social and political figures, inclusive of Prince of Wales (in the early 1780s) and Charles James Fox and Banastre Tarleton. Robinson instantly became an object of ridicule and was so represented in caricatures, satirical cartoons, poetry, verse adaptations, and portraits.[25] The associations that were being made between Robinson's reputation, morality, sexuality, and distinguished place in the literary market are unsettling and problematic,

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[24] It is generally assumed that Wollstonecraft wrote this review for *The Analytical Review.* Scholars have attempted to explain Wollstonecraft's disparaging and hostile comments. Sharon M. Setzer, for example, argues that Wollstonecraft's criticism is "inflected with at least a touch of jealousy" because of Robinson's intimate relationship with William Godwin (19).

[25] Mellor argues that there is no clear distinction between "the self *as* art and the self *in* art," for Robinson presents "a set of visual and verbal public texts" for readers/viewers to explore more of her ("Making" 300). For discussions of different representations and versions of Robinson, see Mellor's article "Making an Exhibition on Her Self: Mary 'Perdita' Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality."

yet they persisted. A review in *Gentleman's Magazine* reflects those associations: "Without at all detracting from the merits of [Robinson's] publication," the author states, "we are inclined to apprehend that, had she been less distinguished by her personal graces and accomplishments, by the impression which her beauty and captivating manners have generally made, her poetical taste might have been confined in its influence, and might have excited the complacent approbation of her friends, with little attention, and with less reward, from the public" ("Art. 82" 560). The reviewer makes perfectly clear that women writers' influence and reputation are inseparable from beauty and sexual attractiveness. In addition, there is a blurring of the boundaries between a woman's public and private life. Robinson was clearly aware of the extent to which her sexual notoriety was damaging her literary reputation. The anxiety about her tainted reputation is cogently expressed in many of her works, most notably in *Memoirs*. At the end of her career, she devoted herself to writing an autobiography and determinedly requested her daughter Maria Elizabeth to carry on the writing and ensure its publication after her death: "*Promise* me that you will print it! The request of a dying parent, so made, and at such a moment, *could not be refused*" (2:158).

While Robinson portrays her fall as tragic and inevitable in Memoirs, she nevertheless expresses a desire for the rehabilitation of her reputation. A pseudonym provides a way for her to do that; it also alleviates and mitigates her fear and anxiety. This is explicitly stated in Robinson's confession to using the identity of "Laura Maria" in the Preface to *Poems* (1791):

> Mrs. Robinson has the particular gratification of knowing that the efforts of her pen were warmly and honourably patronized under FEIGNED Signatures: had she avowed them at an earlier period the pleasure she now feels would have been considerably diminished, in the idea that the partiality of friends had procured the sanction her POEMS have been favoured with from the candid and enlightened. (iii)

Here, Robinson recognizes that the public's knowledge of her real identity could jeopardize her authorial credibility. Robinson's adoption of multiple pseudonyms, including Laura, Laura Maria, Sappho, Miss Anne Frances Randall, Tabitha Bramble, Bridget, not only reflects her desire that her work be fairly assessed; it also suggests a self-consciously constructed persona that is as much a vehicle of self-expression as it is way to protect her actual identity. For instance, under her signature of "Laura," Robinson uses "plaintive, melodious strains," and these "elicited highly sympathetic and complimentary responses from a number of men" (Setzer 16). According to Judith Pascoe, Robinson's "pseudonymous excess" reflects "an array of cultural forces rather than a such narrative self

developing over time" (178).[26] In this sense, by using different narrators Robinson exposes readers to a range of situations and perspectives. By developing the persona of Laura, Robinson seeks to negotiate a plausible authorial presence, one that cannot be achieved vis-a-vis a persona such as "Perdita," the well-known mistress and fallen beauty in London society. Like Robinson herself, the first formidable obstacle Martha encounters upon searching for employment is her degraded reputation. The advice Martha receives from Mr. Dodson, a family friend, is to "change her name, and carefully avoid every thing that might [lead one to] discover what had passed in her family" (146). Martha understands his concerns and agrees to take up the pseudonym "Mrs. Denison" in her pursuit of a stage career. Such disguise allows Martha to participate in the labor market and be properly judged according to her efforts and talents.

Robinson's name was circulated and distributed widely by publishers in the period, and Robinson herself was well aware of the commercial value of her name and the many attempts and efforts to exploit her name and reputation. However, as the adage goes, fame is a double-edged blade that must be handled carefully. Pascoe, in her analysis of the relationship between art and the selling of it (in the context of the theatre), reminds us that if adopting multiple pseudonyms can function as "an attempt to rescue some stable and constitutive self from public display and commodity status," then the "double aspect of theatrical forms of self-presentation" has a potentially dangerous side, or the "ability [in effect] to heighten as well as to disguise" (176-77). Robinson "had in the past been the pawn of scandal sheets," and so she began to take "an active and decisive role in the celebrity coverage" of her and to "substitute for her old notoriety a new, distinguished status as a serious literary figure" (172-73). Daniel Robinson elaborates on the use of pseudonyms in the literary marketplace and reminds us that Robinson continues to use pseudonyms even after her identity is widely known. Her pseudonyms, then, function as different representations of a self, as a way to "network with actual associates" and "with popular culture and literary tradition" (D. Robinson 21). In other words, pseudonyms are "protean, a refraction of identity, one potentially of many," deployed "to evade any attempt to render a coherent writerly subjectivity" (D. Robinson 20). Martha's mirroring of some of the aspects of Robinson's own experiences serves as a pertinent example of the kind of multiplicity emerging through anonymity. Martha's

[26] For discussions of Robinson's use of pseudonyms in her works, see in particular Chapter 6 of Judith Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality*. According to Pascoe, Robinson's multiple selves "can be read as an attempt to rescue some stable and constitutive self from public display and commodity status" (176). See also Daniel Robinson's monograph, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame*, especially pp. 15-22.

pseudonyms are an inseparable aspect of her public identity and contribute to her stage success. Anonymity not only helps obscure her notorious reputation; it also allows her more control over the way she is viewed as a woman. Through *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson draws attention to a society that continually belittles women and underestimates their professional worth. According to Rooney, this novel can be seen as Robinson's "attempts to authorize a self that she intimately aligns with the idea of authorship" (358), and to establish an authorial subjectivity that enables her to write "not simply poems and novels but, more importantly, narratives of the self" (359-60). In so doing, women who assume literary authorship "could gain some control over their scripted selves" and create a self "who doubly belongs to no/body as a legitimate, sustainable alternative to the suffocating scripts of illegitimacy and the fallen woman" (Rooney 364, 355). Reading Martha's use of pseudonyms and performances on the stage as being carefully undertaken decisions helps us understand these particular enlistments; they can be an effective way of creating multiplicity and female authorization in a world that does not freely grant such agency.

Robinson's ideas of women asserting authorship in the public world are expounded in her *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799). Published in the same year as *The Natural Daughter, A Letter to the Women of England* is Robinson's feminist treatise, aimed at empowering women: "Let WOMAN once assert her proper sphere, unshackled by prejudice, and unsophisticated by vanity; and pride, (the noblest species of pride,) will establish her claims to the participation of power, both mentally and corporeally" (*Letter* 41).[27] For Robinson, women's literary capability is unquestionable. Thus, as she states, if women "have been condemned for exercising the powers of speech," then "they have successfully taken up the pen" and "their writings exemplify both energy of mind, and capability of acquiring the most extensive knowledge" (82). Robinson has great confidence in the construction of a literary female authorship and how it can change ideas about women and passivity. Once "women are acquainted with the languages," Robinson believes, they will know that they are "capable of mental energies, and worthy of the most unbounded confidence"; their writing, similarly, will "from year to year, challenge an equal portion of fame, with the labours of their classical *male* contemporaries" (82). Assuming an authorial identity, then, encourages women's sexual independence and intellectual development, and at the same time it helps women to challenge social and cultural

[27] Robinson was evidently influenced by Wollstonecraft's thinking and polemic, and she openly associated with Wollstonecraft and supported her in her own work—namely in *A Letter to the Women of England*.

mandates of gender ideology in the eighteenth century. If we agree that *A Letter to the Women of England* "marks Robinson's ongoing evolution as an increasingly radicalized and professionalized writer, qualities inextricably bound to her likewise increasingly vocal feminism" (Craciun 97), then we can see that in *The Natural Daughter* Robinson presents the lived experience of such a writer (inclusive of herself) and the struggle of such a writer to earn a reputation and establish herself in the literary world of the eighteenth century. Women's status in society is precarious, as Robinson tells us in *The Natural Daughter*: "A wife, a young and lovely woman, exposed to the insidious machinations of man; deserted, driven forth to seek for support, alone and stigmatized!—How many, like Martha, have been hurried on to ruin, by the sharp sting of kindred persecution!" (213). Robinson's desire is to provide an alternative prospect for women and to show that through literary production women can produce different narratives than those imposed on them.

Robinson's strategy is not without risk. While demonstrating how the discourses of labor, employment, and gender are inextricably linked to female authorship in the eighteenth century, Robinson also maps out the familiar and conventionally desirable reward for women at the time—marriage. In the novel, Martha is the only woman rewarded with a happy ending, a companionate marriage. Robinson thus sketches an alternative trajectory for women in the character of Martha, whose "imprudent conduct" and "rash defiance of [her first husband's] authority" (202) are, in the eyes of society, most inappropriate and a travesty of femininity and morality. The road to a companionate marriage is not an easy one, even for the deserving Martha, for it comes only after Martha survives the tyrannical rule of her first husband, scorn from her family, and numerous challenges in society. Modern criticism tends to see Martha's entering into a more blissful and harmonious second marriage at the end of the novel as an implication of the termination of her writing career. Eleanor Ty notes the ambiguity at the end of the novel: "while the novel illustrates clearly what it does not want woman to be, . . . it does not yet map out clearly what it wants woman to be" (82). In Ty's opinion, although *The Natural Daughter* "presents many tantalizing alternatives," the novel "nevertheless ends with the heroine's marriage or, in her case, remarriage, to a man who has admired her all along" (82-83). Katherine Watts notices that "women are unable to earn sustaining wages for writing or otherwise disseminating their opinions and interpretations. Any money earned on women's exertions in these areas will necessarily be misappropriated" (par. 3). Watts's reading resonates with familiar female narratives about gender inequities and the perceived unfairness in the public realm. Stephanie Russo, in a similar vein, points out that "there might be some pos-

sibility for happiness within the heterosexual romance plot in this novel, but it comes at the cost of a woman's independence and certainly at the cost of her career" (86). These critics read Martha's withdrawal from public adventures as an indication of Robinson's lack of confidence in and uncertainty about her capability to become a fully independent and socially free woman in society. On the other hand, Rooney suggests that the novel "is entirely in harmony with the more moderate feminism [that] Robinson expressed in *A Letter to the Women of England*," in which she provides "the old narratives associated with the debilitating myth of feminine passivity with a new dignity" (370-71). In this reading, Rooney concludes that *The Natural Daughter* propels "the formation of a new, writing, self-authorizing female subject whose intellectual powers, mobility, and independence endow her with a dignity that enables her to assume her rightful position as the equal partner of man" (371). Following this vein of argument, I suggest that Martha's second marriage, which is in complete contrast with her conventional first marriage, enables her to step out from traditional scripts of femininity and carve out a new femininity. As a literary woman, she can negotiate a space both domestically and professionally, and so write a new narrative, one that departs from the traditional fallen woman narrative. Martha's marriage to Lord Francis comes after her adventure as a single woman, which, while revealing much difficulty and many limitations, awakens her to the reality of the world of work. It is in fact Martha's professional experience and mobility that lead her to her second marriage and to a life that represents a more equitable relationship between the sexes.

Although Robinson remarks on the status of intellectual women in other publications, in *The Natural Daughter* she articulates the utopian possibilities for intellectual women and re-contextualizes the histories of literary women. *The Natural Daughter* sends out the message that women whose behavior does not fit neatly with society's codes of femininity will not inevitably meet with social defilement and exclusion. In this regard, contrary to what the marriage plot at the end of the novel suggests for some critics, *The Natural Daughter* can be read as a text that not only uniquely engages with definitions of femininity but also proposes a path for women that accentuates the potential breadth of their cultural authority.

The aim of this paper has been to argue that *The Natural Daughter* is not merely about the injustices of the publishing industry. Robinson's novel also functions as a cultural force that is as effective as it is transformative, for it extends discussions of female intellectuality and women's presence in the public sphere. Robinson had first-hand experience of this subject matter and her experience included profound disappointment with the marketplace. Robinson's frustration

and anger concerning financial insecurity is explicitly revealed in a letter written to William Godwin in August 1800, only a few months before her death. Addressing Godwin as "Philosopher," she articulates in a sarcastic tone: "Ah! Philosopher, how surely do I feel that both are vanished! You tell me that I have 'Literary Fame.' How comes it then that I am abused, neglected—unhonoured—unrewarded" (*Works* 320). Profound disappointment over her careers grips Robinson, and she concludes her letter with this proclamation:

> Say no more, that I am unjustly discontented. Tell me, no more, that I have the means of being Happy. Those, alone, who witnessed my early years of Hope, are capable of sympathizing in my present hours of pain and disappointment! You see me but a wreck; and the little love of life, which I now possess, is scarcely worth preserving. Adieu, —my dear Philosopher, adieu. (*Works* 320)

The excerpt foregrounds some of the hard realities of the literary marketplace in the late eighteenth century. Robinson implies that although writing facilitates women's assertiveness and authorial capacities, women's intellectual worth remains devalued, and so choosing a writing career may not give women financial and other kinds of stability. It is important to note the move from the private sphere and domestic space to the public sphere and professional space is different in the case of the fictional Martha and that of the actual Robinson. At the end of *The Natural Daughter*, Martha forms a union with the worthy Lord Francis and starts a new life, while Robinson found herself alone at the end of her life. Only months before her death, Robinson was (once again) arrested for debts, and she suffer excruciating pain until her last breath. Despite being one of the most well-known public figures and celebrities of the late eighteenth century, only two mourners—her old friend Godwin and Peter Pindar—attended her funeral. Samuel Taylor Coleridge avoided public association with her name, and chose to leave a poetic tribute in private.[28] The juxtaposition of the fictional life of Martha with Robinson's real life story helps explain why, in *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson chose a different ending to that of the death of the fallen woman, a conventional ending in fictions. In so deviating, Robinson resists the conventional moral codes of her time. The ending of the novel, if we follow this argument, suggests a more balanced and mutually beneficial power relationship between male and female and envisions an utopian alternative for women and the life-stories that they might narrate in the future.

[28] Robinson had a colourful life and was one of the most well-known celebrities in the period, yet her gravestone inscriptions give us little of this life and are quite brief. See Amanda Elyot, *All for Love: The Scandalous Life and Times of Royal Mistress Mary Robinson*, p. 425.

Coda: Rewriting the Scripts of Femininity

As this paper has sought to show, the emergence of professional women disrupted conventional representations of female lives and forms of femininity in the late eighteenth century. As novelist, pamphleteer, and poet, Robinson is an example of a woman who contributed in various ways to the world of letters and to the broadening of the definition of femininity throughout her life. What Robinson suggests through the figure of Martha in *The Natural Daughter*, and what she suggests also in her unfinished autobiography, *Memoirs*, is the need for women to challenge and expand the limited gender roles in culture and society. At the end of *The Natural Daughter*, Robinson assumes the voice of narrator, directly addressing her readers:

> Reader, if you have had patience and curiosity sufficient to accompany the persecuted Martha through her varying scenes of unmerited suffering, you will be able to form some idea of the perplexities, pains, and humiliations which the children of Genius are destined to encounter: you will perceive, that of all the occupations which industry can pursue, those of literary toil are the most fatiguing. That which seems to the vacant eye a mere playful amusement, is in reality an Herculean labour; and to compose a tolerable work is so difficult a task, that the fastidiously severe should make the trial before they presume to condemn even the humblest effort of imagination. (238)

In fiction as well as real life, Robinson demonstrates that literary authorship can be employed to expand the conventional limits of femininity, and such authorship is an antidote to female passivity and women's economic dependence on men (something that Wakefield also forcefully argues in *Reflections*). Becoming an author, for women, represents not just the ability to narrate stories, but also to rewrite female lives. In this paper, I introduce Robinson to reflect on the legacy of middle-class literary women who occupied a particular space and contributed in multiple ways to the shaping of female authorship and the economic system. Through the creation of a woman who takes up the pen, Robinson challenges patriarchal boundaries of women's intellectual capability yet also adopts a reformist position with regard to existing perspectives of gender behavior and what is socially available to women.[29] Writing provides an opportunity

[29] In this regard, Robinson, along with her female contemporaries, was actively participating in the re-shaping of a "public femininity" (149), to borrow Felicity Nussbaum's phrase. In her careful analysis of actresses and celebrity culture in the eighteenth-century in Britain, Nussbaum observes that "through the course of the Restoration and the eighteenth century women on stage began to emerge as celebrities," and "actresses negotiated a kind of public femininity that had not been displayed before" (149).

for women to negotiate and imagine new gendered identities, and women writers in the eighteenth century were able thus to defy gender strictures as well as re-define "public femininity" (Nussbaum 149).

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形塑作者身份認同：論瑪麗・羅賓森之《親生女兒》

摘要

本文聚焦於瑪麗・羅賓森（Mary Robinson，1757-1800）於1799年出版的生前最後一本小說《親生女兒》（The Natural Daughter），透過分析十八世紀小說如何介入、改寫、並延續與婦德（female virtues）及陰性特質（femininity）的相關論述，進一步去思索女性在職場中所扮演的角色、及發揮的經濟文化效應。過往學界對羅賓森的探討多集中在她和當世顯著政治人物的緋聞情史，對羅賓森作品的討論也侷限於她的激進派政治理念和改革派脈絡，然而《親生女兒》的女主角瑪莎（Martha）與羅賓森人生經驗有相當多重疊相似處，惜尚未受到學界相當之關注。本文首先將分析兩位思想家湯瑪斯・馬西亞斯（Thomas Mathias）與普西拉・魏客霏（Priscilla Wakefield）所提出之性別相關論述，尤其後者提出之勞動力（labour）與市場的經濟學概念，後討論《親生女兒》之女主角瑪莎如何在傳統上由男性主導之公領域（the public sphere）中尋求生存空間、獲得一己之長職業的可能性，藉以釐清羅賓森對小說文類演變之貢獻，也幫助我們思考傳統女性價值觀與陰性特質於十八世紀之變形、挪用、及改寫的可能性。小說中呈現之女性與社會間多重且繁雜的關係性，一方面顯示出性別與社會階層關係有相當程度的影響連動關係，另一方面也表現女性特質爲一流動、不斷變動的元素，在文化歷史進程中持續受到挑戰、修正。本文認爲，相較該時期其他文本，《親生女兒》不僅展現了羅賓森改善女性就業處境、重塑跨越性別價值的企圖心，也實踐了小說蘊含之淑世社會功能，爲早期浪漫時期小說開啓了圓滿結局的可能性，而我們觀看十八世紀小說之方式得以更多元。

關鍵字： 瑪麗・羅賓森、《親生女兒》、女性作家、湯瑪斯・馬西亞斯、普西拉・魏客霏