

**CONSTRUCTING THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WOMAN:
THE ADVENTUROUS HISTORY OF SABRINA SIDNEY**

By

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ABSTRACT

The story of Thomas Day's attempt to educate a young girl according to the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with the aim of marrying her, has often been referred to as a footnote in Enlightenment history. However, the girl chosen by Day, Sabrina Sidney, has never been placed at the centre of any historical enquiry, nor has the experiment been explored in any depth. This study places Sabrina at its centre to investigate its impact on her and to examine the intellectual and societal debates that informed Thomas Day's decision to educate a wife. This thesis argues that Sabrina Sidney was in a constant state of construction, which changed depending on a myriad of factors and that constructions of her were fluid and flexible. These constructions were both conscious and unconscious and crucially, they were created as much by Sabrina as by those around her. This research concludes that placing minor historical figures to the centre of historical enquiry fundamentally changes the histories of which they are a part and that it is possible to use a variety of sources to construct a rich and detailed biographical study that offers a new perspective on the English Enlightenment.

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NOTE ON NAMES

Sabrina Sidney had a number of names during the course of her life; her given family name was Manima Butler, but, she never became aware of this. The name given to her by the Foundling Hospital authorities was Anne Kingstone (also rendered as Ann and Kingston in various hospital documents) and Thomas Day re-named her Sabrina Sidney in 1769. This thesis uses the name that Sabrina would have understood as 'her' name at the particular period of time under discussion. Therefore, when discussing her early years at the Foundling Hospital, she is referred to as Anne and after she left the hospital with Day, she is referred to as Sabrina.

The second girl Day acquired from the Foundling Hospital likewise underwent a change of name and the same naming convention has been applied. She is referred to as Dorcas Carr (sometimes rendered as Car in the hospital records) during her time at the hospital and after 1769 she is referred to as Lucretia. The surname given to Lucretia by Thomas Day has not been identified.

Surnames are used to refer to all other persons mentioned. However, to avoid confusion between Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter, Maria, the surname Edgeworth only applies to Richard Lovell and Maria is always referred to by her full name.

CHRONOLOGY: SABRINA SIDNEY BICKNELL (1757 – 1843)

- 1757 May Manima Butler born, probably in Clerkenwell, London and possibly christened in St James Church, Clerkenwell.
Received into the Hospital for the Education and Maintenance of Deserted and Abandoned Children, Lamb's Conduit Fields, London.
Renamed and baptised Anne Kingstone, numbered 4579 and sent to wet nurse Mary Pemble of Wotton, Dorking, Surrey.
- 1759 August Anne Kingstone returned to the London Foundling Hospital and sent to the Shrewsbury Branch Hospital.
Sent to nurse Ann Casewell of Longden, Pontesbury.
- 1765 April Anne returned to the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.
- 1769 August Thomas Day decided to educate a girl based on the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and approached the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.
Anne Kingstone apprenticed to Richard Lovell Edgeworth.
Apprenticeship indenture witnessed by Thomas Day and John Bicknell.
- September Thomas Day became a governor of the London Foundling Hospital and donated £50.
Dorcas Carr (child number 10413) apprenticed from the London Foundling Hospital to Richard Lovell Edgeworth.
Anne Kingstone was re-named Sabrina Sidney and Dorcas Carr was re-named Lucretia (surname unknown) by Thomas Day.
- November Day took both girls to France to begin their education.
- 1770 Day and the girls returned to London. Lucretia was re-apprenticed to a milliner in Ludgate.

Sabrina lodged briefly with John Bicknell's mother and then moved with Day to Stowe House in Lichfield.

Sabrina's education continued and she was introduced to Day's friends, including Anna Seward, Dr Erasmus Darwin and Richard Lovell Edgeworth.

Day gave up his education of Sabrina and sent her to a boarding-school in Sutton Coldfield.

- 1771 Day and Edgeworth visited France.
- 1773 Day wrote *The Dying Negro* with John Bicknell.
- 1774 Sabrina and Day returned to Lichfield. A perceived 'disobedience' by Sabrina caused Day to end his relationship with Sabrina.
Dr William Small introduced Thomas Day to Esther Milnes.
- 1775 Day and Bicknell assumed a *nom de plume* and satirised Dr Charles Burney in the *Joel Collier* pamphlets.
- 1778 August Day married Esther Milnes.
- 1779 Thomas and Esther Day moved to Stapleford Abbot.
- 1784 Sabrina employed as a ladies companion, possibly for Mary Yonge of Newport, Shropshire.
Received a marriage proposal from John Bicknell.
On 16th April Sabrina and John Bicknell are married at St Philips Church Birmingham by special license.
- 1785/6 John Laurens Bicknell born to Sabrina and John Bicknell.

- 1786 December Henry Edgeworth Bicknell born to Sabrina and John Bicknell.
- 1787 March John Bicknell died.
- April Henry Edgeworth Bicknell is christened at St Pancras.
John Bicknell is buried at St Dunstan-in-the-West.
- 1789 Thomas Day died after a fall from his horse.
- 1791 Sabrina joined Reverend Burney's household as housekeeper.
- 1792 Esther Day died.
- 1804 Anna Seward published *Memoirs of the Life of Dr Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, which reveals Sabrina's relationship with Thomas Day and the educational experiment.
- 1817 Richard Lovell Edgeworth died.
- 1818 October Maria Edgeworth visited Sabrina at her home in Greenwich to show her the manuscript of Edgeworth's *Memoirs*.
- 1827 Sabrina is recorded as resident in Circus, Greenwich.
- 1841 Sabrina appeared on the census as a resident of Greenwich and of independent means. Two domestic servants are living with her, Ellen Woolvet and Sarah Hunt.
- 1843 September Sabrina Sidney Bicknell died at 9 Circus, Greenwich.

CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Quiet Revolution	36
Chapter 3: The Unconstructed Female (1) 1757 – 1759	53
Chapter 4: The Unconstructed Female (2) 1759 – 1769	79
Chapter 5: Constructing the Ideal Wife 1769 – 1774	105
Chapter 6: Constructing the Actual Wife 1769 – 1774	134
Chapter 7: Constructing the Ward 1774 – 1784	174
Chapter 8: Constructing the Woman 1784 – 1787	195
Chapter 9: Constructing the Mother 1787 – 1804	221
Chapter 10: Constructing the Heroine 1804 – 1843	246
Chapter 11: Conclusion	285
Appendix 1: Regulations of Shrewsbury Hospital	305
Appendix 2: Letter from Mr Taylor White to Reverend Dr Adams	307
Appendix 3: Extract from Thomas Day's <i>The history of Sandford and Merton</i>	311
Appendix 4: Thomas Day's undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney	313
Appendix 5: Correspondence between Sabrina Sidney and members of the Edgeworth family	314
Bibliography	323

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Pages
Figure 1: Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital, now Shrewsbury School	64
Figure 2: Anne Kingstone's entry in the General Register of Shrewsbury, 1769	108
Figure 3: Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769	109
Figure 4: Portrait of Sabrina Bicknell by S. P. Denning, 1832	253

ABBREVIATIONS

LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
BL	British Library
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
LRO	Lichfield Record Office
SJBM	Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum
BAHS	Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service
SA	Shropshire Archives
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
FHR	Foundling Hospital Records, London Metropolitan Archives

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1769 Thomas Day educated a young girl with the view to making her his wife. Day was a young man of philosophical interests and austere morality and wished to live a simple, ascetic existence. He had previously tried and failed to secure a wife who would consent to abandon contemporary society and live in austerity with him. Attributing his failure to the type of woman he had approached, the fashionably educated daughters of the middle-classes, Day decided to acquire two girls and, after a short time, select one to train following the progressive educational principles laid down by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book *Emile*.¹ The experiment ultimately failed and Day went on to marry Esther Milnes, who ironically was the fashionably educated daughter of a wealthy gentlemen. The girl Day chose to participate in the experiment, whom he named Sabrina Sidney, then lived a peripatetic life until she married Day's close friend, John Bicknell and later, when widowed, became housekeeper to the Reverend Charles Burney of Greenwich.

Day's experiment with female education was acknowledged to be an unusual undertaking by his peers and generated interest from its inception, which did not diminish after the experiment ended. During Day's lifetime, it was read as a romantic episode in the life of a confirmed eccentric which amused his contemporaries. This view informed many of the early biographies of Day and the episode became an integral part of the life story of Thomas Day and the history of the Lunar Society, with

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (Switzerland: Jean Néaulme, 1762; repr. London: Penguin, 1979). The main principles of Rousseau's theories centred around acknowledging childhood as a series of distinct developmental stages, using age-appropriate education and learning from nature and experience.

which he was associated. As the Enlightenment and the Georgian period began to be explored historically, Day's experiment with Sabrina Sidney was presented as an example of changing pedagogical opinions, especially with regard to the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and developments in the education of girls. However due to the singular nature of Day's actions, it tended to be treated more as an interesting anecdote rather than a serious contribution to the history of education or women.² Latterly, the experiment has also been included in literary criticism as well as historical studies, due the reformulation of the story in fictional form, particularly in Maria Edgeworth's novel, *Belinda*.³

From this brief summary of the ways in which Sabrina Sidney's history was recorded and reproduced, we can identify why her history was so fascinating to contemporary and historical writers, but it also serves to demonstrate the rather shallow ways in which her life has been presented. It suggests that aspects of the existing history require consideration, such as the emphasis placed on Thomas Day and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which has obscured Sabrina from the narrative and offered rather superficial readings of her time with Day. Little, if any, new research has been undertaken concerning Sabrina herself beyond the biographical accounts offered by

² E.g. Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), John Blackman, *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Bedford Leno, 1862), Robert E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham: A Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) and Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School: A Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929). These points are given fuller consideration throughout this chapter.

³ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1801; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Anna Seward, James Keir and Richard Lovell Edgeworth.⁴ These initial findings suggest that this study offers entirely new and original research into the life of the girl at the centre of a famous, and possibly even infamous, pedagogical Enlightenment experiment. This thesis also offers an example of what Barbara Caine has described as the 'biographical turn' in the humanities.⁵ By this we mean that biography is used to do more than 'enliven' history and that it has been shifted to 'occupy more of the centre ground' and in so doing offers 'ways of throwing new light on a range of different historical time periods ... and of bringing individuals and groups who had previously been ignored into the framework of analysis.'⁶ A biographical study of Sabrina Sidney is an example of how a previously ignored individual can be brought into a framework of analysis and have a significant impact on the historiography of individuals (for example Thomas Day, Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Anna Seward as well as Sabrina herself) and of a group such as the Lunar Society, or a family, such as the Burneys. A biography of Sabrina does far more than merely enliven the history of the West Midlands enlightenment or the Lunar Society; it offers new ways of understanding how relationships functioned, how class and gender operated, both on individuals and on the relationships they had with each other, how gender was understood and how the self was constructed. An understanding of the life of Sabrina Sidney can change the way we understand the historical record of the Lunar Society and women's place within eighteenth-century society.

⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*.

James Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Stockdale, 1791).
Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820).

⁵ Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p.1.

⁶ Caine, *Biography and History*, p.1.

If we examine the literature about Thomas Day and Sabrina Sidney, we can identify a set of different discourses in which reference to Sabrina Sidney can be found. The first discourse is that created by contemporaries of Sabrina Sidney and Thomas Day, specifically those who knew them both personally, and publicised their relationship through biography and memoir. Secondly, there are later biographies, as subsequent generations of biographers and historians examined the life of Thomas Day, his contemporaries and the historic time period in which they lived. Thirdly, there is an academic discourse, in which Sabrina's history is located within two contemporary academic fields, firstly, the history of children and childhood and secondly, literary criticism.

The first biography of Day was written by his Lunar Society friend, James Keir and was published soon after Day's death. The proximity of the work to the life and death of the man, meant that there was a certain amount of caution inherent in Keir's presentation of Day's life. Esther Day, Thomas's widow, and Jane Day, his mother, were both alive and grieving and Keir's work was predicated on this consideration.⁷ This being so, it was deferential and sombre and offered little but the acknowledged facts and an extended eulogy. Even some of the acknowledged facts are less than honestly presented, as Day's experiment with Sabrina was touched upon in the blindest of ways. Rather than exploring Day's reasoning for undertaking it or providing details, Keir chose to concentrate on the influence of Rousseau on a young and impressionable but virtuous mind and focused on Day's charitable treatment of two girls, one of whom, Keir acknowledged, Day might have considered as a possible

⁷ Keir, *Thomas Day*, p.iii.

wife. The involvement of Sabrina in Day's life was, in Keir's presentation, honourable, worthy and without sensation and merely illustrated Day's moral supremacy over his idol, Rousseau.⁸ Keir appeared more concerned with of the feelings of Mrs Day and her mother-in-law, than those of Sabrina Sidney Bicknell. His appraisal of Day's life carries nothing that could compromise him and, by extension, nothing that could compromise Sabrina.

This rather bland portrait of Day was anathema to one of the Lunar Society's associates, Anna Seward.⁹ Doyenne and poet of Lichfield society, Seward answered Keir's strictly accurate but nonetheless misleading representation of Day by moving to the opposite extreme. In her 1804 biography of Dr Erasmus Darwin, Seward included a lengthy comment on Day, his pedagogical experiment and named the girl who had been included in it.¹⁰ In doing this, Seward framed Day as an eccentric young man, who was defeated by his own impossibly high aspirations and philosophical thought. She revealed to the public the deficiencies in Keir's account and offered tangible details of Sabrina's relationship with Day. A further work, the *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, did much the same, only in a more benign manner.¹¹ Edgeworth died before his memoirs were finished and his daughter Maria completed them on his behalf. One of Edgeworth's closest friends was Thomas Day and Edgeworth was closely involved in the experiment with Sabrina. Because of this, it was impossible for reference to her to be excluded and again, Sabrina's history with

⁸ Keir, *Thomas Day*, p.29.

⁹ See Marion Roberts, 'Close Encounters: Anna Seward, 1742 – 1809, A Woman in Provincial Cultural Life' (unpublished MLitt, University of Birmingham, 2011) for a detailed analysis of Anna Seward's life.

¹⁰ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, pp.69-74.

¹¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, pp.214-227, p.245, pp.337-340 and Vol 2, pp.316-319.

Day was described in detail, as was her life following its end. Both Seward and Edgeworth's work provide important details of the experiment and offer insight into the characters of Day and Sabrina. The importance of their work comes not only in the detail they offer, but in the fact that, along with Keir, they had known the main protagonists for many years and therefore offered first-hand accounts of the Sabrina experiment. A final memoir that offers a minor comment on Sabrina was that of Mary Anne Galton, later Mrs Schimmelpenninck.¹² Mrs Schimmelpenninck was the daughter of Samuel Galton, another Lunar man and her memoirs offer details of Sabrina's life with Day, but not a first-hand account as it appears she did not meet Sabrina personally.

The first two historical studies of Day were written by John Blackman and Michael Sadler.¹³ Both give sympathetic and uncritical accounts of Day's life. Blackman's account, in particular, attempts to be a straightforward narrative, merely aiming to provide a more detailed biography of the author of *Sandford and Merton* than had hitherto been written.¹⁴ Although Blackman acknowledges Day's philosophical absurdities, of which the Sabrina experiment is deemed to be one, he nonetheless sees Day as a virtuous and worthy gentleman whose moral naivety led him into challenging situations. However, there are omissions from Blackman's work which subsequent writers and critics have identified which makes this account only memorable because it is the first historical study of Day's life. Sadler views Day in the

¹² Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858).

¹³ Blackman, *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day*. Michael Sadler, *Thomas Day: an English Disciple of Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928).

¹⁴ Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton, a Work intended for the Use of Children*, 3 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1783-1789; repr, Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008).

context of his associations with Rousseau and his account is more detailed than Blackman's regarding the Sabrina experiment. Sadler also includes Richard Lovell Edgeworth as both a practical adherent of Rousseau and a friend of Day, therefore linking for the first time the educational training of Edgeworth's son, Dick and that of Sabrina Sidney. Both accounts are useful for the biographical details of Sabrina's life with Thomas Day and her subsequent marriage to John Bicknell, but neither gives much attention to Sabrina herself or her life beyond her associations with these two men.

The first major work on Thomas Day was by George Warren Gignilliat.¹⁵ His work offered a deeper study of Day and his friendships, especially with the men of the Lunar Society and the ideas and experiences that motivated him. Gignilliat accessed a greater variety of primary source material than either Blackman or Sadler and approached that material with a greater critical rigour. Gignilliat also looked at Day's own literary work to provide some psychological depth to his study. In keeping with the rest of the work, the Sabrina episode is dealt with in depth. Gignilliat provided more detail on the selection of the two girls - he is the first to link the institution at Shrewsbury with the Foundling Hospital in London - and the decision to take them to France for the first stage of their training. This allowed Gignilliat to examine the underlying philosophical reasoning behind Day's actions as well as detailing the experiences of the girls more fully. Neither did Gignilliat dismiss Sabrina after Day's removal of her to the boarding school at Sutton Coldfield. He outlined the second phase of her relationship with Day when she was seventeen and also discussed her

¹⁵ George Warren Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton: a Life of Thomas Day* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

subsequent life and marriage to John Bicknell. Gignilliat paid Sabrina respect in that he sympathized with the situation in which she found herself, choosing not to eliminate her from discussions of her own life. However there was a condescending tone inherent in this sympathy, which prevented Gignilliat's work from engaging with Sabrina's story in any other capacity than an episode in the life of Day.¹⁶

Despite Gignilliat's comprehensive and scholarly examination of Day's life, in 1935 Samuel Haslam Scott wrote an account that he acknowledged was a re-telling of other versions of the story.¹⁷ Scott made no attempt to provide an original piece of research; he did not engage with primary sources and therefore did not provide anything new in the history of Day and Sabrina. By far the most substantial, and coincidentally the most recent, biography of Day is that of Peter Rowland.¹⁸ Acknowledging a debt to Gignilliat, Rowland managed to extend the research into Day's life to provide the most detailed study of his life and achievements. In terms of its scholarship, Rowland's work is a significant achievement, by providing a wealth of new material on the various stages of Day's life, including his and Bicknell's involvement with Sabrina. Rowland not only referred to more secondary printed sources for information regarding the Sabrina experiment, but he also found primary sources that shed new light on the relationship between the two. Rowland's study shows the range of source material that can be found to investigate the life of Sabrina Sidney Bicknell.

¹⁶ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.81.

¹⁷ Samuel Haslam Scott, *The Exemplary Mr. Day 1748-1789: Author of Sandford and Merton: A Philosopher in Search of the Life of Virtue and of a Paragon among Women* (London: Faber, 1935).

¹⁸ Peter Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day, 1748-1789: English Philanthropist and Author: Virtue Almost Personified* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

In biographies of other luminaries from the Lichfield circle, we also find reference to the history of Thomas Day and his romantic adventures. Day's eccentric nature has led others to muse over his singular character, even when the subject of their biography is not Day himself. Biographers of Erasmus Darwin, Seward, the Edgeworths, both father and daughter, and Lichfield itself, have all included accounts of the Sabrina experiment.

In Hesketh Pearson's biography of Darwin he made it clear he was rather taken with Day as a biographical subject and admitted he had 'been severely tempted by Day from his path of duty to Darwin'.¹⁹ He devoted a whole chapter of his work entirely to Day, although none of the detail was original research and most of it was culled from Seward, Keir and Blackman. Pearson entertainingly told the story but, although he displayed a modicum of sympathy towards Sabrina at the end, he fell into the trap of assuming the sources for the tale were unbiased and that Sabrina simply was not a good enough example of womankind for a man such as Day.

Margaret Ashmun, one of two biographers of Anna Seward, was even more dismissive of Sabrina and sympathetic towards Day.²⁰ Displaying little critical thinking towards the experiment Day set himself, Ashmun seemed predisposed to think badly of the two young girls at its centre, calling them 'wicked jades' who pestered the unfortunate Mr Day with 'unreasonable demands'.²¹ Even the choice of

¹⁹ Hesketh Pearson, *Dr Darwin* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1930), p.48.

²⁰ Margaret Ashmun, *The Singing Swan: An Account of Anna Seward and her Acquaintance with Dr. Johnson, Boswell & Others of their Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937).

²¹ Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p.44.

Sabrina as the potential wife was cast in a negative light, for Ashmun commented she was chosen because she 'proved herself the less objectionable'.²² While Ashmun does show some degree of sympathy towards Sabrina in her later years, she seemed to conclude marriage to him would have been something of an honour, commenting that Sabrina 'did not do so badly in the world as might have been prophesied of one who so lightly resigned the privilege'.²³ The second biography, that by Edward Verrall Lucas, was less damning but only by virtue of the fact that the entire story of Sabrina and Thomas Day is quoted wholesale from Seward's *Memoirs of Dr Darwin* and therefore added little to the sum total of literature regarding Sabrina and Day.²⁴

A scholarly account of Sabrina and Day can be found in Desmond Clarke's biography of Richard Lovell Edgeworth.²⁵ Day and Edgeworth were best friends and in various ways had a profound effect on each other's lives. Clarke provided an analytical summary of Day's early life, arguing that his natural seriousness, problematic relationship with his step-father and boyhood bullying could account for his eccentric introspection and that in Edgeworth, Day found both a friend and a mentor who helped to connect the dreamer Day with the reality of the outside world. Clarke very successfully compared the two men, rightly identifying that it was their differences that rendered their friendship a success – they complemented each other. Regarding Sabrina, Clarke was equally as sober and provides an even-handed critique of the experiment. Clarke provided details of the later relationship between Edgeworth

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.55.

²⁴ Edward Verrall Lucas, *A Swan and her Friends* (London: Methuen, 1907).

²⁵ Desmond Clarke, *The Ingenious Mr Edgeworth* (London: Oldbourne, 1965).

and Sabrina and his generosity towards her which was reciprocated by a warm affection and respect.

A far less detailed reference can be found in Marilyn Butler's equally scholarly biography of Edgeworth's daughter, Maria.²⁶ Butler only mentioned Sabrina in the footnotes in reference to Day's 'remarkable educational project'.²⁷ The details are skeletal and not even in reference to *Belinda* is Sabrina referred to in any great depth. However the connection is made between Sabrina and Maria Edgeworth rather than omitted altogether.

In *Dr Johnson's Lichfield*, Mary Anne Hopkins took as her biographical subject, not a person but a place, Lichfield itself, and recounts the residency of Thomas Day and the ensuing Sabrina experiment.²⁸ Hopkins provided a history, both of Lichfield and the characters which populated it in its heyday. Although the title suggested Samuel Johnson is the focus, Hopkins gave equal weight to the variety of other characters that made Lichfield their home, from Anna Seward and Honora and Elizabeth Sneyd to various members of the Lunar Society. Hopkins traced the development of Lichfield as a lively intellectual and social centre and gives space to each of the main protagonists, the Johnson family, Anna Seward, Honora Sneyd and John Andre, Edgeworth and Day. Hopkins rather drily commented Day, 'proposed to six women before he secured a Perfect Wife'.²⁹ Hopkins' solid account of Day's early life and romantic attachments provided an interesting commentary on his attempts at

²⁶ Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.39.

²⁸ Mary Alden Hopkins, *Dr Johnson's Lichfield* (London: Peter Owen, 1956).

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.3.

matrimony, not the least of which is his contradictory habit of falling in love with grand ladies.

For many years the definitive text on the Lunar Society was by Robert Schofield.³⁰ Determined to counter the London-centric prejudice that had militated against the acknowledgement of men of genius from the provinces, Schofield's was a considerable achievement. He detailed the lives of the Lunar men, their achievements and the friendships that facilitated those achievements. Unfortunately, Schofield fails in one respect – that of the women. In his concentration on the lives of the men, he only touched on those of the Lunar women and failed to examine the real commitment and support they undoubtedly gave. This being so, the relationship between Sabrina and Day is referred to, but in nothing like any depth or detail; it is an aside in the life of Thomas Day. More worryingly, Schofield was incorrect on certain aspects of the story and this does raise problems around the veracity of Schofield's research, at least with regard to those he considered lesser players in the history of the Lunar Society.

The pre-eminence of Schofield's work was not challenged until that of Jenny Uglow.³¹ In an extensive study, Uglow sought to tell the story of the Lunar Society for a new generation. Uglow matched the achievement of Schofield but rectified some of his textual errors. Uglow's is by far the most accurate work on the Lunar Society and in her brief discussion on the influence of Rousseau on the 'younger' generation of the Lunar Society - Edgeworth and Day - she provided the most concise summary of the

³⁰ Robert E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham*.

³¹ Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002).

known facts of Sabrina's history. Like Schofield before her, Uglow chose not to elaborate on the lives of the Lunar women, Sabrina included, so we do not learn anything remarkably new in her account. However, Uglow did integrate the women, their experiences and relationships with their husbands, brothers and fathers more satisfactorily than Schofield.

With developments in historiography, two distinct academic fields began to interrogate the Day/Sabrina relationship. Firstly, the scholars dealing with the history of children and childhood included Day's attempts to educate Sabrina because it highlighted an extreme example of the influence of Rousseau and the debates around the shortcomings in the education of girls. Secondly, those working in the field of literary criticism referenced the experiment when providing readings of Day's work, *Sandford and Merton*, and the writings of Maria Edgeworth.

With the academic field relating to the history of childhood, three early works, Dorothy Gardiner, Josephine Kamm and Mary C. Borer, gave comprehensive studies of the development of education for girls and all three identified, to a greater or lesser extent, the influence of Rousseau on educational thought and practice in the eighteenth century.³² It is within discussions of Rousseau that we find reference to Sabrina Sidney, by way of Thomas Day. Gardiner, while dismissing any great influence Rousseau may have had and viewing his ideas in a negative light, was more generous in her appraisal of his disciple, Day. She acknowledged his scheme was far

³² Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School*.
Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965).
Mary C. Borer, *Willingly to School: A History of Women's Education* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1976).

more romantic than Rousseau ever envisaged and called Day's subsequent attempts at 'foster-fatherhood' tragic-comic.³³ But Gardiner saw Day's subsequent support of Sabrina as generous and compared it with Rousseau's treatment of his own children.³⁴ Kamm also judged Day as the 'most eccentric of Rousseau's disciples' but her inclusion of Sabrina's story was anecdotal rather than purposeful and Borer's inclusion of Sabrina was also an aside.³⁵ Borer included Sabrina's story by way of a discussion of eighteenth century boarding schools, one of which was attended by Day's wife, Esther Milnes. Here Borer retrospectively recounted Day's early matrimonial experiments but apart from calling him a 'fervent disciple' has little else to say concerning Sabrina.³⁶

Gardiner, Kamm and Borer all offered a survey specifically of girl's education. Other studies took a wider view, but the influence of Rousseau leads to discussion of Day and Sabrina. Brian Simon provided a reading of the period that gave due credit to those who were thinking about, experimenting with and developing new systems of education in Britain.³⁷ Locating the new interest in educational reform firmly in the developments of the Industrial Revolution, Simon cited the new interest in science and industry and developments in commerce and banking, that required new forms of education. He also referred to the new civic responsibilities emerging due to the growth of the new towns such as Birmingham and Manchester. Exploring the Birmingham Lunar Society and the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society,

³³ Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, p. 451.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.440.

³⁵ Kamm, *Hope Deferred*, p.128.

³⁶ Borer, *Willingly to School*, p.186.

³⁷ Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960).

Simon illustrated just how pervasive the impact of the Industrial Revolution was on the intellectual and social pursuits of the middle classes and how they came to re-think education for their own children and thus for wider society. In a comprehensive study of the influences on, links between and work of the wide range of writers and practitioners in this area in the late eighteenth century, Simon clarified just how much pedagogical activity was taking place in Britain at this time and to what purpose; social, economic and intellectual. Despite this Simon gave little specific mention to the education of girls. He did identify Darwin's *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* and noted that this called for a wider curriculum for girls, but apart from this, the educational experience, in Simon's view is primarily a male experience.³⁸ Reference to Sabrina was brief and formed part of a survey of the influence of Rousseau; even the main details of her time with Day are absent.³⁹

William A. C. Stewart and William P. McCann provided a critique of the educational thought and influence of Rousseau and the educational experiments and writing it stimulated, not just on supporters of his ideas but those opposed such as John Brown, Vicesimus Knox and Hannah More.⁴⁰ By way of illustrating the extensive influence Rousseau had, Stewart and McCann cited Sabrina but as before, she is mentioned only briefly and the authors considered the training she received from Day to be a caricature of Rousseau's advice.

³⁸ Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1797).

³⁹ Simon, *The Two Nations*, p.36.

⁴⁰ William A. C. Stewart and William P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880* (London: Macmillan, 1967).

John Lawson and Harold Silver's study was detailed and comprehensive but although they did include the education of girls and the debates surrounding it, their consideration was brief as was their discussion of writers such as Maria Edgeworth, Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More. Lawson and Silver also identified Rousseau and the influence he had on 'middle-class experiments' in which they included, but only briefly, reference to *Sabrina*.⁴¹ What Lawson and Silver achieved was to locate education as one of the central areas of tension and conflict in a society that was undergoing immense change and illustrated its links with political and social thought.

Roy Porter's *Enlightenment* provided a reading of the history of childhood and girl's education located within arguments for a specifically English Enlightenment.⁴² The English Enlightenment had, until Porter's work, been under-researched, but he successfully argued for an extensive and important Enlightenment in England that included changes in thinking about and conducting educational practice. Porter looked not at girls' education *per se*, but the debates surrounding gender, biology, anatomy, religion, nature and the opportunities the Enlightenment offered to women. Education is thus located in a wider social, political and intellectual framework and Porter's reading was stimulating in its examination of the impact of the Enlightenment on women's lives and education and the readings of it by subsequent feminist historians. Porter located the adoption of *Sabrina* by Thomas Day within a discussion of the impact of Rousseau's educational views and the notion, which he

⁴¹ John Lawson and Harold Silver, *Social History of Education in England* (London: Methuen, 1976), p.223.

⁴² Roy Porter, *Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000).

said was an appealing one to women as well as men, of nature forming women for a specific moral and ethical purpose.⁴³

Another perspective is provided in Alice Browne's study of gendered educational practice which included the Sabrina and Day relationship.⁴⁴ Browne traced the development of feminist thought arguing that this dimension of the period had been neglected. Looking at the theories of Rousseau and the reaction to him, Browne, like Gardiner and Kamm, argued that Rousseau provided women with a sense of themselves as a group within society. Defined by their gender, the implications of this new group identification were uncertain and Rousseau did not necessarily provide the model with which they were comfortable, but they took from him the notion that their place in society was not fixed and immutable. Browne argued that in outlining for his fictional character, Sophie, a new educational model,⁴⁵ he was providing a 'specifically feminine moral education', something the emerging feminists could take forward and re-model in their own image.⁴⁶ Browne referred to Sabrina Sidney, but in the move to a more equal marital relationship rather than in the context of Rousseau's ideas. Browne argued that while this move led to a greater emotional tie between the partners, the male remained the senior of the two. It is in this context that she referred to Thomas Day and Sabrina, commenting that he took this 'fantasy' of male seniority to its 'logical conclusion' with the education of Sabrina to be his wife.⁴⁷ Browne, by turning the experiment on its head and commenting that for a woman to train a husband in this way would have been 'unthinkable', used the

⁴³ Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp.329-330.

⁴⁴ Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).

⁴⁵ Rousseau, *Emile*, pp.357-450.

⁴⁶ Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind*, p.102.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.49.

Sabrina experiment in a different way to other commentators and highlighted the gendered power dynamics that lay at the heart of their relationship.⁴⁸

In recent years, work has emerged that challenged the 'grand narrative' of education put forward by the likes of Simon. Ruth Watts and Jenny Uglow sought to examine female experience and their works included reference to Sabrina Sidney.⁴⁹ Watts looked at the Unitarians and examined the impact this relatively small but influential group had on the prevailing notions of gender and female abilities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She examined the social context of women, education and work and the arguments and theories that were emerging during the late eighteenth century around these issues. It is in this context, by way of Rousseau, that Watts referred to Sabrina by looking at the two 'notable' experiments of Edgeworth and Day which implemented Rousseau's ideas. Watts gave significance to the difference in methodology of the two experiments – that Richard Edgeworth's education was left to 'nature and accident' while that of Sabrina and Lucretia was tightly controlled.⁵⁰ Watts used these examples to conclude that Rousseau's theories proved problematic and went on to look at other educational writers offering opposing views to those of Rousseau. Uglow also provided an examination of the educational thought and practice of a specific group, that of the Lunar Society, of which Edgeworth, Day and Joseph Priestley were members. Other discussions of the contributions of these men to educational theory, with the exception of Simon and

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, Jenny Uglow, "But What About the Women?" The Lunar Society's Attitude to Women and Science and to the Education of Girls', in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by C.U.M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.163-177.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians*, p.25.

Watts, have not greatly expanded on their Lunar friendships. Uglow took the group as a whole, to examine their thinking on female education and therefore contextualised Edgeworth and Day's experiments within the wider Lunar circle. Uglow noted the coalescence of the 'profound influence' of Rousseau with Day's own rejection of materialism and 'luxury' and the resultant attempt to educate Sabrina.⁵¹ Ultimately, Uglow argued, Day's experiment failed to provide a model for female education and noted that while some of his Lunar friends supported him, they did think him misguided.

In *Shaping Childhood*, Roger Cox attempted to bring more depth to the discussion of the wider cultural forces that influenced parenting and the concept of childhood.⁵² Cox argued that while both Locke and Rousseau's principles were part of the Enlightenment, Locke's ideas lost the confidence of later eighteenth and nineteenth century society, while at the same time Rousseau's notion of the natural child led to the Romantic/Victorian idealisation of the innocent paradise of childhood. Once again it is through Rousseau that we find Sabrina and Thomas Day. Cox argued that England was the country most strongly influenced by the ideas of Rousseau and briefly examines the Sabrina episode and *Sandford and Merton* as examples of his early influence. Noting the curious way in which Day subverts Rousseau's theory in practice, in his use of 'supposedly Rousseauesque' teaching methods, Cox also argued

⁵¹ Uglow, "But What About the Women?", in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by Smith and Arnott, p.166.

⁵² Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of Uncertainty in the History of Adult-Child Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

that Day subverts Rousseau in print, calling *Sandford and Merton* a 'travesty of Rousseau's educational principles'.⁵³

Hugh Cunningham's study of the history of childhood was a broad examination of the changes in perceptions of childhood and how it was experienced from the Middle Ages to the present.⁵⁴ Cunningham's chapter on the eighteenth century opened with the equation of a growing sense of national identity, pride and status, with a philanthropic motivation and led him into a discussion of the Foundling Hospital. Like both Gardiner and Kamm before him, Cunningham identified the 'self-congratulatory' responses to the Foundling Hospital along with the ambiguities that surrounded it. These included the vulnerability of apprenticed girls who were raped by their masters, the children's attendance at church services for their objectification by the public, and the anxieties surrounding the potential for the over-education of the foundlings.⁵⁵ Cunningham then considered the writings of Locke and Rousseau. Yet again, it is in relation to Rousseau and his influence on Britain that Sabrina is referenced. Cunningham outlined her history and made the rather dry comment that had the story been fiction it might have been thought to be too far-fetched.⁵⁶ Cunningham proceeded to critique the writings of Locke and discussed how Rousseau's writings were a reaction to these. Commenting that Day was a 'slavish adherent' to the theories of Rousseau, Cunningham nonetheless noted that Locke and Rousseau had a considerable impact on parenting in Britain.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Ibid*, p 83.

⁵⁴ Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.106.

It is partly due to Maria Edgeworth that we find Sabrina Sidney referenced in the second of the academic fields that refer to Sabrina Sidney, due to the fictionalisation of Thomas Day's educational experiment by Edgeworth in her novel, *Belinda*. Because of this publication and the literary work of Day, Sabrina's history has been examined in the context of literary criticism, sometimes more obliquely than others. However, the first text in this discourse relates to a literary mystery rather than literary criticism. In 1979, Roger Lonsdale attempted to identify the writer of the satirical *Joel Collier* pamphlets, which humiliated the musicologist Dr Charles Burney, father of the writer Fanny Burney and the educationalist, Rev Charles Burney, in the late eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Lonsdale identified Thomas Day and John Bicknell as collaborators, but in doing so gave a detailed summary of Day's educational experiment with Sabrina and Lucretia and also Bicknell's involvement. Lonsdale gave a far fuller consideration to the circumstances of the girls' apprenticeship; Thomas Day and John Bicknell's own histories and friendship; the coincidences and ironies that kept the lives of Sabrina, Day, Bicknell and the Burneys intertwined and the recurrence of the Foundling Hospital in the story. In confirming Day and Bicknell as the authors of the *Joel Collier* pamphlets, Lonsdale was responsible for identifying the ironies inherent in Sabrina's later life and gave far more consideration to her story than other accounts had done thus far. Lonsdale also succeeded in bringing to the fore John Bicknell's influence in shaping Sabrina's experiences, a contribution that had previously been unknown or unrecognised. In Lonsdale's account of a literary mystery we find a valuable critique of the interplay of fact and fiction; he referred to Seward's account of Sabrina's life, the subsequent argument between the authoress

⁵⁸ Roger Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina', in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship: Essays in Memory of James Marshall Osborn*, ed. by René Wellek and Álvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). pp.281-308.

and Sabrina's son, and Maria Edgeworth's far more sympathetic literary treatment of Sabrina's history. Lonsdale also provided an identification of historical and literary facts that allowed the historical Sabrina a greater role not only in her own history but also the histories of Day and Bicknell. In 'proving' Bicknell and Day's authorship and highlighting the ironies inherent in the story, Lonsdale can be seen as one of the first authors who attempted to broaden the story of Sabrina and Day and provided valuable historical leads for others to follow.

Julia Douthwaite looked at the links between Enlightenment scientific investigation, literature and popular culture in the eighteenth century and how this led to the development of popular science.⁵⁹ Douthwaite examined several educational experiments of the eighteenth century, including that of Thomas Day and Sabrina, Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his son, and Manon Roland and her daughter, Eudora. Douthwaite gave the standard version of Sabrina's experiences with Day, but the value of her study came from the juxtaposition of Sabrina with Richard Edgeworth and Eudora Roland and the location of Sabrina within practical, literary, gendered and class-based contexts that can be read as dangerous and problematic within Enlightenment thought. Douthwaite considered various alternatives to the Rousseau's method, most notably Maria Edgeworth's, both in *Practical Education* and *Belinda*.⁶⁰ Douthwaite's was a valuable study encompassing literary criticism, the history of science and social experimentation and one in which the history of Sabrina and its subsequent readings, although not discussed in great detail, are deepened.

⁵⁹ Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild girl, Natural Man and the Monster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁶⁰ Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2 vols (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798).

One study which critiqued Day's *Sandford and Merton* is by Anne Chandler.⁶¹ Chandler offered a queer reading of *Sandford and Merton*, arguing not only for a homoerotic sub-text in the relationship between Tommy and Harry, but also implying that Day himself was a homosexual who 'sabotaged' his heterosexual relationships in favour of 'rich and satisfying relationships with men', had a sexless marriage with Esther and used his fiction to play out his resistance to social and pedagogical development in favour of a homosexual stasis.⁶² Chandler referred to the Sabrina experiment as background to the novel and argued that Day re-worked the experience, with two young boys at the centre of his fictional educational experiment in place of the two young girls at the centre of his actual failed experiment. While reference to Sabrina was more fleeting in this study than in the others under discussion, Chandler's is a valuable critique both of Day himself and his writings and can be seen as giving a new reading to Day's disastrous relationships with women, including Sabrina, and his subsequent literary works.

The rise of feminist criticism and the re-discovery of Maria Edgeworth as a literary figure meant that the Sabrina experiment was discussed in the re-readings of Edgeworth's novel *Belinda*. Caroline Gonda's work covers both fictionalised accounts of father and daughter relationships and the fictions of Burney and Edgeworth as literary daughters.⁶³ Gonda examined *Belinda* and what she referred to as its

⁶¹ Anne Chandler, "'Defying 'Development': Thomas Day's Queer Curriculum in *Sandford and Merton*", in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp.201-226.

⁶² *Ibid* p.203.

⁶³ Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters Fictions: 1709-1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

'emphasis on the activity of education' which included 'Clarence Hervey's misguided rerun of Rousseau's scheme for educating the perfect wife'.⁶⁴ It is within this discussion that Sabrina and Thomas Day are referenced as the real-life originals of the characters of Virginia/Rachel and Hervey. While Gonda looked at the Virginia/Hervey sub-plot in some detail, she concentrated on Virginia's relationship with her long-lost father rather than Hervey as teacher/husband. Gonda only touched on the critique of Rousseau's educational ideas and Day's actual experiment and Sabrina is not referred to by name, nor is the real-life experiment considered in any depth.

Patricia Comitini takes a different perspective in her examination of women's writings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶⁵ Comitini examined Edgeworth's educational and fictional writings and noted that she was aware of the problematic attitudes emerging due to the growing popularity of the novel. Comitini argued that the emergent novel form generated anxieties that intersected gender and class issues in concerns over the its influence over female readers and its association with aristocratic and therefore decadent values. In Comitini's critique, *Belinda* therefore was distinguished as a 'Moral Tale' rather than a novel and Belinda herself is the mediator between reader (the middle-class woman) and text. Like Gonda, Comitini only touched on the real-life story behind the Virginia/Hervey subplot and identifies it as a 'feminist' critique of the education of Rousseau's Sophie.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.211.

⁶⁵ Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women's Writing, 1790–1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.124.

One work that gave an extensive reading not only of the fiction of Edgeworth but of Sabrina's life is by Mitzi Myers.⁶⁷ Myers sought to re-examine *Belinda* to look beyond the long-held contention that it is a classic case of 'patriarchal intervention'.⁶⁸ Rather than Richard Lovell Edgeworth, it is Thomas Day that Myers identified as a key influence and dominant patriarchal figure in Edgeworth's life and literary development. It is because Day was fictionalized in *Belinda* in the form of the male protagonist that Myers argued for a detailed understanding of the 'real life pre-texts' of the novel.⁶⁹ Myers identified the Sabrina story as the basis of the sub-plot of Virginia and Hervey and argued that it is intricately and vitally woven into the wider story and is not, as others have suggested, an unsuccessful afterthought. Myers did what no other literary critic had done – she foregrounded the factual basis of the Virginia sub-plot and examined the reality of Sabrina's life. She gave an extensive reading of Day's history with Sabrina and how it intersects with the fiction of Virginia and Hervey. Thomas Day himself became, as Myers put it, 'available for scrutiny' but in this work Sabrina herself is foregrounded in a wholly new way.⁷⁰ This in itself is a major progression, for although Myers' central concern remained Edgeworth and her literary achievements, Sabrina, for the first time, began to move beyond the footnotes in the detailed reading Myers gave of her life both with Day and after him. Myers showed that Edgeworth's work provided a scathing critique of her literary father and 'undoes the commodification and objectification [of] Day's two foundling pupils and gave her fictional girl a voice denied her prototypes', but she also proved that

⁶⁷ Mitzi Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Text of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority', in *Revising Women: Eighteenth Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp.104-146.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.106.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.107.

Sabrina's life is worthy of greater attention, not only for its literary but also for its historical worth.⁷¹ As with Lonsdale, Myers provided another valuable reading of Sabrina's history that went beyond the superficial.

This review of the secondary sources associated with Sabrina Sidney and Thomas Day, indicates that there is a breadth of material about them as historical figures that explores the experiment Day attempted. However the recurring theme of the works reviewed is that the research into Sabrina's life has not been developed beyond the superficial. With the possible exception of Rowland, the story has been taken at face-value and has been subjected to little or no interrogation from Sabrina's point of view. Even when it has been subjected to a more nuanced reading, such as in Lonsdale's or Myers' work, there is a lack of significant new research to provide a broader understanding of Sabrina's life and Sabrina has not been placed at the centre of the narrative.

The review of existing literature opens up some fundamental research questions. Firstly, as some aspects of Sabrina's life have been recorded but many have not, can her history be investigated further to illuminate these 'gaps' and provide a fuller record of her life? Secondly, how might this construction of a fuller record change readings of the experiment and how might placing Sabrina Sidney at its centre affect readings of Thomas Day and his associates? Thirdly, how did Sabrina Sidney respond to the experiment of which she was a part? Was she the silent, passive figure that has thus far been presented, or to a greater or lesser extent, a participant, active in ways

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.117.

that have not yet been explored? Fourthly, given Sabrina Sidney was recorded in the historical sources comparatively early, such as in the biographies of Day and Darwin, but also fictionally by Maria Edgeworth, can we identify how those constructions interacted with Sabrina's own sense of self? Can we distinguish other ways Sabrina was constructed, or constructed herself, and how are these constructions informed by gender and class? Finally, and again because of the specifically literary constructions of Sabrina, how does the connection of different texts, such as novels and verse, support a construction of history? These are the research questions that have informed the archival research and subsequent analysis in the following study.

The research questions also inform the methodologies used in this study. Because no discrete archive of material regarding Sabrina Sidney exists, a variety of research methods were employed in order to explore the research questions. The basic framework of the study involved three stages: research, analysis and writing.

The research stage involved investigation of primary sources using a reconstruction approach. This meant the use of detailed archival research and 'objective and forensic research into the sources'.⁷² The aim of this was to recover as many objectively quantifiable facts about the life of Sabrina Sidney as the available evidence allowed. This enabled the development of a detailed chronology for the life of Sabrina Sidney.⁷³

⁷² Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.18.

⁷³ See the Chronology: Sabrina Sidney Bicknell (1757 – 1843), pp.v-vii of this thesis.

After recovering as much quantifiable information as possible, it was analysed in relation to other primary sources and relevant secondary sources to generate a contextualised understanding of the life events of Sabrina Sidney in relation to her peers and contemporary society. The main analytical frameworks that were utilised were those of gender and class and the interplay of these with the contemporaneous social, economic and cultural environment. The analytical stage also applied deconstructionist techniques because it is accepted that 'all texts' and therefore all the sources that are interrogated are only 'a representation of ... the past'.⁷⁴ Deconstructionism treats the past as a text, which has two specific points of construction; the point of production by historical figures and the point of consumption by historians.⁷⁵ In this framework, historical truth is elusive and ultimately unknowable, because the historian accesses the past through the 'texts' of the past that have been constructed by its participants and the historian produces meaning by his/her consumption and presentation of that past. It is thus understood in deconstructionist history that all texts, including evidence and interpretation are 'a representation of the past rather than the objective access to *the* reality of the past.' [original emphasis].⁷⁶ This theoretical framework is especially relevant to the study of a life that in many ways can be read only as a text, and therefore can be open to a literary criticism as well as historical (re)-construction, because of 'the elusive nature of the text as full of gaps, silences and uncertainties of meaning – unfixed and flowing signifiers'.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Munslow, p.25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.29.

The methodology of this thesis aims to reinforce an overarching contention that Sabrina Sidney's life was a series of constructions. By 'construction' we mean that her gender and class informed understandings of 'who' she was and her societal status and role. This assertion stems from the work of historians who have argued that gender is less about biology than ideology and is constructed through societal expectations and understandings of gender, of what it means to be female.⁷⁸ It has been argued that gender is not innate, but learned and that the family and educational structures were instrumental to an individual's understanding of the 'self'.⁷⁹ Therefore, gender can be seen as assumed, either consciously or unconsciously and 'class' (by which we mean the labouring poor and the middling classes) has further implications for understandings of the self and the individual's status and role in society. Sabrina Sidney was subject to this process of construction and during her life, there was not one construction of her but several. All of these constructions were mediated and transmitted through written and/or literary forms and therefore this study can only claim to be another construction of that life, but a created past organised and produced by the detailed interrogation of evidence and sources.

In contrast to previous studies, such as Schofield, Rowland and Uglow, which were largely based on the three contemporary accounts by Keir, Seward and Edgeworth,

⁷⁸ See Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), *Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700*, ed. by Deborah Simonton (New York: Routledge, 2007) and Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) for examples of the work undertaken in this area.

⁷⁹ See Lynn Abrams, 'At Home in the Family', pp.14-53 and Rebecca Rogers, 'Learning to be Good Girls and Women: Education, Training and Schools', pp.93-133 in *Women in Europe since 1700*, ed. by Simonton.

this thesis considers a wider range of additional material. Writers following Keir, Seward and Edgeworth, have tended to repeat their conclusions about Sabrina's life and Day's experiment with Sabrina, rather than engage in primary research to support their arguments. This thesis has brought to light archival material and printed sources and utilised relevant secondary sources to contextualise and illuminate her life. It therefore provides a more comprehensive account of her history than has hitherto been given.

Therefore, this thesis makes use of primary sources, including printed eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century texts, to uncover hitherto under-researched areas of Sabrina Sidney's life and secondary sources to contextualise various aspects. These sources cover a wide range of material and formats. The sources for the early period of Sabrina's life are extensive and mainly come from the records of the Foundling Hospital.⁸⁰ The administrative records for the hospital were kept to a very high standard for the time and have been excellently preserved, allowing a detailed picture to emerge of the movement of Sabrina through various geographical locations and 'sites of care'.⁸¹ However, two caveats need to be applied to these records. Firstly, there are gaps in some of the Hospital's records, most significantly, the administration of the Shrewsbury branch of the Foundling Hospital. One reason for this is that the Shrewsbury Hospital underwent a period of administrative mismanagement; the other reason could simply be geographical. The Shrewsbury branch was at a distance from the main Hospital in London, and the record keeping

⁸⁰ Held at the London Metropolitan Archives.

⁸¹ By which is meant the different locations and nature of care given to children taken in by the Foundling Hospital, such as the homes of the country nurses which were geographically dispersed; the hospital in London; branch hospitals and other associated locations such as infirmaries and venues for inoculation.

may not have been as precise as in London and some records may have been lost or destroyed when re-located from Shrewsbury. The second caveat relates to the provenance of the records themselves. It must be remembered that the extensive records were not created to provide a qualitative history of the children but rather for the administration and governance of the Hospital. Furthermore, the records were created by the adults in whose care the children were placed; the child's perspective is noticeable by its absence. Therefore a level of caution needs to be applied when attempting to reconstruct Sabrina's experience as a child of the Foundling Hospital through its records.

Further sources of information are parish and census records, from which can be extrapolated details of Sabrina's marriage, the birth of her children, and the death and burial of John Bicknell, and local history material, such as rate books which can provide evidence of Sabrina's material existence during her later years. These records allow us to trace the geographical locations of Sabrina at various times, from which we can begin to draw some conclusions about her life, which, through the use of local history material and contextual information can enhance our reading of certain periods.

Letters, both published and unpublished, offer a wide range of information as there is correspondence between those who were the main protagonists in Sabrina's history and Sabrina herself. The letters of Thomas Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Anna Seward and others; of Seward to various acquaintances; of Esther Day; of the Burney family to each other and those in their wider circle and eventually correspondence

from Sabrina Sidney to members of the Edgeworth family, provide a rich source of information that support analysis of Sabrina's material circumstances, the ways in which she was viewed by others and her own responses to the events in her life. However caution needs to be exercised as some of these letters, especially those of Thomas Day, only survive because they were included in the printed sources mentioned above, specifically that of Edgeworth, meaning that they have been explicitly included while other letters from Day have been excluded.

Biographical material written by contemporaries of Sabrina, including Day himself, also form an important set of primary sources. The biographies and autobiographies of Day, Edgeworth and Darwin are valuable sources because they were produced contemporaneously (or very nearly) with the events that took place. They have the virtue of being written by those who knew Day and Sabrina and were observers of the experiment, and friends to both Day and Sabrina after the experiment's end. However, we must be aware of gaps in the records, either by accident or design and keep in mind that these are conscious literary constructions of events and characters, some of whose families were still alive. Thus Keir's biography of Day is self-consciously written with Day's widow Esther and mother Jane in mind. Similarly Edgeworth's autobiography, while opening out Sabrina's experiences a little more, is explicit in its author's admiration for Day and circumspect over the pre-Day life of Sabrina. Seward's biography of Darwin, which carries the most detailed exposition of Sabrina's origins, the experiment and her life after Day, needs to be read in the context of Seward's relationship with both Day and Edgeworth. There is a paucity of information relating to various periods of Sabrina Sidney's life in these works. After

Keir, Seward and Edgeworth recount Day's experiment and its immediate aftermath, Sabrina became less central to their narratives and therefore the information about her becomes partial and vague.

Literary sources are also examined to shed light on the background to Day's experiment. Day wrote both prose and poetry, which was subsequently published and this provides a context for his views on marriage and women and helps to articulate the reasons for undertaking such an extraordinary project. Day's *Sandford and Merton*, a narrative that re-packages the theories of Rousseau for a young audience, offers a description of the education of a Miss Sukey Simmons, an education that is markedly similar to that received by Sabrina Sidney and so has a relevance when analysing this aspect of Sabrina's life.⁸² Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* provides a reading of Day and Sabrina that helps to analyse the explicit constructions of Sabrina in written form that emerged when biographies of Day, Darwin and Edgeworth began to appear. That both Day and Edgeworth offer fictionalised narratives serves to add an extra dimension to the study and allows an analysis of the relationship between fact and fiction. While it is accepted that literary sources are not usually interrogated in a historical study, it is suggested that in this case, if approached with care and caution, they provide contextual information that offers answers to the research questions in this thesis.

Finally, contextual sources and information have been utilised to deepen some aspects of Sabrina's life in an attempt to explain or offer an hypothesis for questions

⁸² Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*, pp.170-171.

to which a definitive answer is not possible. These contextual sources include primary material, but also secondary sources. For example, various chapters include material regarding the background of the children of the Foundling Hospital; female occupations such as wet-nursing, ladies companions and housekeeper; the status of spinsters; the development of Kensal Green Cemetery and the growth of Greenwich.

This study attempts to trace the life of one eighteenth-century woman, who as a young girl was placed at the centre of an unorthodox social experiment and whose presence in the historical record is greater than her background and status might otherwise have afforded her. Further, her inclusion in that record did not dissipate with the cessation of that experiment and so it is possible to trace the course of her life and the ways in which she survived. The thesis will explore the life of Sabrina Sidney through the following ten chapters. Chapter 2 provides a contextual overview of the life of Sabrina Sidney, looking at two specific groups of which she was a part: women and children. It examines how far the late eighteenth century can be defined as a turning point for these groups, especially children, and how Rousseau's writing impacted on thinking about children, childhood, education and marriage. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the background and early life of Sabrina Sidney, arguing that she was undergoing a series of constructions from birth that rendered her suitable for her future inclusion in the experiment that Day undertook. The background to that experiment and the philosophical context for it are considered in Chapter 5. This chapter also examines the upbringing and character of Thomas Day. Following on from this, Chapter 6 explores the actual experiment and how Day applied Rousseau's theory in relation to Sabrina. It charts the development of Sabrina herself and Day's

responses to her and his experiment as a whole. Chapter 7 looks at the renegotiated relationship between Day and Sabrina and how she responded to the change in her circumstances. Sabrina's relationship with John Bicknell, her marriage to him and the birth of their two sons is the subject of Chapter 8. Chapter 9 explores the ways Sabrina coped after the death of Bicknell and the ways she began to construct herself in light of her status as widow. The ways in which Sabrina was portrayed by others, as well as how she lived out her later years with the Burney family are the subject of Chapter 10. Chapter 11 draws conclusions from the study: how it changes the historiography of Sabrina Sidney and Thomas Day, how Sabrina was constructed and by whom, and the extent to which Sabrina gained control over those constructions. This chapter also considers the wider methodological conclusions that might be drawn from the study as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: THE QUIET REVOLUTION

In his book *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Roy Porter cautions against not only viewing the eighteenth century as a lost English golden age, but also eliding its differences in an effort to acknowledge its modernity. We should instead, argues Porter, view the eighteenth century as a watershed: 'a distinctive moment in the making of modern England'.¹ Accepting Porter's contention, this chapter will provide an overview of the ways in which the eighteenth century can be regarded as such a moment for the two groups who lie at the heart of the following study: children and women. It is as a child and a woman that Sabrina Sidney Bicknell was framed by the society in which she lived and thus her life cannot be understood without an appreciation of the socio-economic and gender contexts in which she existed and which gave rise to the events that shaped her life. This chapter will examine attitudes towards children in the eighteenth century, the shifts in those attitudes precipitated by the Enlightenment and the concomitant debates surrounding the role of women in society. In doing this, the aim is to contextualise the life and education of Sabrina Sidney and thus understand the Enlightenment pedagogical experiment that shaped and constructed her life.

If the eighteenth century can be seen as an elongated turning point, a gateway between the medieval and the modern, then it is in the area of childhood and child welfare that we can mark the start of a new attitude. Historians have pointed out that this change was not sudden or cataclysmic; on the contrary, it was slow and beset by

¹ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.2.

problems, false starts and opposition.² Likewise, some have argued it is also wrong to deny affective relationships existed between parents and children prior to the eighteenth century and have foregrounded continuity rather than change as an analytical model.³ However there is some agreement that the eighteenth century was the site of a major change in attitudes towards children.⁴ This change can be characterised as a quiet revolution, with resultant waves that stretched out towards the nineteenth century and beyond, change that affected both the iconography and the reality of the child throughout the period.

To discuss the 'child' during the eighteenth century is a complicated task and its historiography is indicative of the complexities. We have already indicated the continuity versus change debates and there are others, such as when did childhood emerge as a distinct stage in the life cycle and when and why did motherhood become ideologically significant?⁵ These debates highlight the difficulties presented when trying to extrapolate what is meant by the 'child' or by 'childhood' during the eighteenth century. However, the body of work undertaken does offer ways of engaging with the concepts of children and childhood and even some consensus, which allows the construction of a broad overview of the period.

The history of the family, being the first and, arguably the most important context for the majority of children, has offered ways of viewing the child. Laurence Stone

² Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (New York: Longman Group Ltd, 1995), p.62.

³ In *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* Cunningham discusses the historiography of the subject and cites Pollock, Wrighton and Houlbrooke as proponents of the continuity model. See also Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society* (Essex: Pearson Education, 1998).

⁴ For examples see Cunningham, Porter and Shoemaker.

⁵ See Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*.

argued that, prior to the eighteenth century, families at all levels of society were viewed as a unit bound more by economics and survival than affection and kinship ties.⁶ For all, the continuance of the family unit was a matter of economic necessity, either to ensure the unproblematic transfer of property, or that one was supported and provided for in old age. Children were vital as heirs and providers of social security. High levels of infant mortality and mortality in general made it unwise to become overly attached to one's progeny.⁷ The eighteenth century then saw a change in the quality of familial relationships, with the replacement of the patriarchal family with the affective one.⁸ This view of the rise in the affective family has been challenged by others who, again, argue that continuity rather than change should be the site of enquiry regarding the family.⁹ Certainly the argument for affectionate parent/child relationships prior to the eighteenth century is a strong one but here, as in most other areas, attitudes to such relationships cannot be viewed as fixed or homogeneous. They could be as subject to the same dynamics of personality, economics, societal pressure, prejudice and fate as any other relationship. Therefore perhaps the safest conclusion to draw is that affectionate ties between parents and children did not always mitigate the overwhelming pressures of economic necessity or expediency, but neither did economics obliterate strong emotional bonds within a family unit.

Keeping in mind the arguments put forward in support of affective familial ties, research still remains which asserts that, at the beginning of the eighteenth century,

⁶ Laurence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), p.88.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.57.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.149-172.

⁹ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, pp.9-12.

the status of the child was equivocal at best and imperilled at worst.¹⁰ The high infant mortality rates endangered the very existence of children and, in a society dominated by hierarchy children were liable to be placed at its nadir. The reasons are many and varied; class and economics conflated to render children of poor parents vulnerable to poverty, characteristically resulting in poor diet, poor health, disease, illness and expediency concerning wage-earning. The Poor Laws affected children in such a way as to frame the child as an economic burden rather than a potential resource.¹¹ Religion and ideology conflated to reinforce the vulnerability of the child. The doctrine of original sin testified to the inherent evil of children, and the patriarchal structure of society privileged the authority of the parent (stereotypically seen as the father, but mothers were also implicated) or those *in loco parentis*, over the child.¹²

Therefore, the hierarchical nature of society offered a model for the subordination of children. They were the property of their parents, or those to whom their parents entrusted them, or those who assumed the duty of care if their parents could not or would not.¹³ Physical punishment was endemic and as life was both raw and cheap, some children were expendable.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* and M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985).

¹¹ Alys Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.5.

¹² See Cunningham, *Children and Childhood* and Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.149.

¹³ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p.340.

¹⁴ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.17.

Yet they were also seen as a threat, as fears over feral and idle children abounded.¹⁵ There was a belief that children should be occupied with work as soon as was feasible and Daniel Defoe articulated the benefits of this in 1726.¹⁶ Education, for poor children, was therefore occupational, approved of because it kept them out of mischief, was productive and was delivered through apprenticeships in which children's vulnerability could be exposed.

This leads to the consideration of the very concept of childhood: were children regarded as children at all or merely proto-adults? Some argue that children were indeed viewed as small adults; those of the upper classes were kept separate from their parents until such time as they were deemed fit for the adult world, and those of the lower classes entered the adult world as soon as they no longer needed the constant care of mother or nurse.¹⁷ For these children the ability to contribute financially to their families was the overriding consideration. Tanya Evans has argued that 'only in the eighteenth century did childhood come to be acknowledged as a separate state in the lifecycle and children valued'.¹⁸ While some offer evidence that childhood was privileged in other societies and periods prior to the eighteenth century, there does appear to be a strong argument for the eighteenth century as the tipping point for a change in attitude towards children.¹⁹ However, this change in attitude was patchy and subject to a variety of extraneous circumstances, the two most significant of which are class (and therefore economic status) and gender.

¹⁵ George, *London Life*, pp.218-219.

¹⁶ See Katrina Honeyman, *Child Labour in England 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.4 for a discussion of the belief in economic and moral benefits of child labour as articulated by Defoe and others.

¹⁷ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.266-267.

¹⁸ Tanya Evans, 'Women, Marriage and the Family' in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), p.68.

¹⁹ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p.42.

Against this backdrop of complex historical attitudes towards children, new models of 'the child' and 'childhood' were emerging and these prompted a nascent interest in child welfare and developing responses to it; the quiet revolution to which we have previously referred and which was to directly impact on the life of Sabrina Sidney. This response was rooted in the 'festering problem' of poverty in the eighteenth century.²⁰ It was a problem that was endemic and accepted by all sections of eighteenth-century society as part of the natural order of things.²¹ The response that caused this quiet revolution in child welfare was not in response to poverty *per se*, but the results of poverty that became embodied in the form of the illegitimate, exposed, abandoned and dead infant of eighteenth-century London.

Levene has pointed out that thousands of babies were abandoned in the eighteenth century; this was not a new phenomenon throughout Europe or the world.²² Abandonment and exposure was a time honoured, if crude, method of dealing with unwanted children. Although the work of Levene and others has highlighted that identifying abandonment trends in England can be problematic, the fact remains that children were abandoned in England, and that during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the numbers of abandoned children was rising.²³ The reasons for this rise are difficult to pinpoint, but London in the eighteenth century was a city undergoing radical and rapid changes. Incipient industrialisation had led to a growth in population, changing employment patterns and personal relationships.

²⁰ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.15.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp.15-16.

²² Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, pp.2-4.

²³ *Ibid*, p.3, Tanya Evans, 'Unfortunate Objects' *Lone Mothers in Eighteenth Century London* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.2 and *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920*, ed. by Alysa Levene, Thomas Nutt and Samantha Williams (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.5-8.

Urbanisation was rapid and expanding employment opportunities drew men, women and families away from rural areas to the growing city. With the increase in population came the inevitable social and economic strains. As vibrant and commercially successful as London was becoming for some, it was also racked with poverty, homelessness, crime and deprivation for many others.²⁴ Children for whom their parents could not care were vulnerable to infanticide and abandonment. Those who were not left to die on the streets remained exposed to poverty, abuse and disease. The economic and social strains of an emerging industrial society on a pre-industrial social structure could therefore account for the rise of child abandonment in England at this time as one strategy to enable families to cope with poverty.²⁵

Coupled with this was the issue of illegitimacy. Just as child abandonment was not a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century neither was that of illegitimate births, but evidence shows that, as with abandonment, illegitimacy rates were on the rise.²⁶ Reasons for this are similar to those for child abandonment - population growth and a concentration of that population in an urbanising area, but also relevant was the removal of people from their traditional communities. The growing service industries in London led to an increase in the numbers of single women in vulnerable situations and spaces, and the numbers of men, as employers, sweethearts or acquaintances with whom these women could associate.²⁷ Without the safety net of the traditional close-knit, rural communities, pre-marital sexual activity which led to pregnancy was no longer kept in check by that community bringing pressure to bear

²⁴ Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects'*, pp.19-24.

²⁵ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, p.42.

²⁶ Levene *et al*, *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p.5.

²⁷ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, p.4.

on the man to marry, and so absorb the pre-marital relationship into a courtship ritual.²⁸ In the increasingly anonymous communities of urbanising London there was substantially less pressure on men to marry the girls they impregnated, and no family to whom those girls could potentially turn if they were abandoned. Family and social ties were loosened and sexual activity, both consensual and non-consensual, that led to unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, was an inevitable result of growing urbanisation, increasing populations and shifts in community values.²⁹ These are the pressures that could explain the rise in illegitimacy levels in eighteenth-century England.

The rise in illegitimate births together with the poverty and deprivation of eighteenth-century London worked together to make certain children doubly vulnerable to abandonment. While we cannot automatically equate the abandoned child with the illegitimate one, it remains a reasonable hypothesis that an abandoned child was likely to be illegitimate. This was due to the combined effects of economics and morality. As the Poor Laws struggled to cope with increasing numbers of poor, old, young and ill in their midst, the age old distinctions between deserving and undeserving poor widened. Illegitimate children and their mothers were placed very definitely on the side of the undeserving poor. They represented an economic burden and a flagrant challenge to social mores and morality. The illegitimate child was living proof of sexual incontinence and social irresponsibility, and society saw no reason why it should concern itself with the economic welfare of either mother or

²⁸ Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects'*, p.2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

child.³⁰ Hence illegitimate children were vulnerable to abandonment and infanticide. This was because, not only were they the financial responsibility of the mother, but the mother may have been unable to secure employment either on practical grounds or on moral ones. Some employers would refuse to employ a woman whose loose morals and bad character were proven by the existence of her child, others due to the practical problems raised by employing a woman who had a dependent child.³¹ Therefore illegitimacy could carry an immense social stigma and a virtually impenetrable barrier to financial stability or basic subsistence.

Prior to the formation of the Foundling Hospital, the only statutory provision for illegitimate and abandoned children existed within the remit of the Poor Law, and therefore the responsibility of the parish and its officials. The Poor Law, prior to the strains placed on it by the Industrial Revolution, can be seen as a relatively effective method of dealing with poverty, because it localised need and provision and strengthened community bonds and social cohesion. However, it was also problematic, especially where illegitimacy was concerned. There were various ways to establish a settlement, the right of a person to claim support from the parish; for children it was through the father's residence, for women it was through marriage; for others it was through entering into service or apprenticeship, or renting a property. If a child was illegitimate settlement was gained through birth within the

³⁰ Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp.9-13.

³¹ Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects'*, p.161. Work by Evans has questioned the stereotype of the pregnant servant girl dismissed by her employers and abandoned by her family. However, while Evans presents evidence for a substantial network of support for unmarried mothers, the existence of a child prevented many women from remaining economically active and this was the basis of their applications to the Foundling Hospital, pp.173-190.

parish boundaries.³² Since the power of settlement entitled people to relief from one parish only, it also conveyed the power of removal on to parish officials who were notorious for dealing peremptorily with those who could not prove their right of settlement. In the case of women bearing illegitimate children they could act with even greater harshness, forcing them to marry men from other parishes, therefore transferring the right of settlement through legitimate matrimony. Unmarried pregnant women with no male to which to attach themselves were hounded from parish to parish, sometimes when labour had begun, in an effort to prevent the child from being born within the respective parishes. Even if a woman managed to give birth to her child in relative comfort, there remained the need to approach parish officials and make public the nature of her need for relief. This could be both humiliating and detrimental to a woman's economic and marital future and could result in fluctuating levels of financial relief as well as disapproval and stigmatism. For women, bearing an illegitimate child was no easy way of accessing Poor Law relief and for parish officials the children were viewed purely as an economic burden. As Levene comments 'The poor laws were thus a significant factor in shaping responses to infant abandonment in England' and, due to the correlation of the illegitimate child with economic burden, those responses were predominantly negative.³³

Therefore in the early part of the eighteenth century, the socio-economic environment comprised a growing urban population, rampant poverty, a system of social care and finance that was at breaking point, a prevailing view of children that

³² Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.127.

³³ Levene *et al*, *Illegitimacy in Britain*, p.5.

was rigorously bound by economics, and a view of illegitimacy as morally and socially repugnant. It led to a society in which it was normal for new born children to be left abandoned in the streets of London, dead or dying. But there were a number of coalescing forces that focused attention on illegitimacy and abandonment in eighteenth-century London. There was growing concern amongst the philanthropic middling classes over the perceived decline in population which inexorably led to fears for the viability of commercial England, for trade and prosperity. There was also a growing concern for those on the edges of society, a concern for the poor and needy that linked to the growing cult of sensibility and included children in its remit. Philanthropy was becoming fashionable and indicative of the tender-hearted concern of the rich for the poor, which when linked with hard-headed national commercial imperatives, seemed beneficial to all concerned.³⁴

If the results of poverty found an embodiment in the form of the abandoned child, then the growing concern for it were embodied in the form of one man, Thomas Coram. A retired, childless sea merchant, Coram was not the first to propose the formation of an institution for the reception and care of abandoned children in England.³⁵ Just as the unwanted child was not a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century, neither were charitable responses to it. Across Europe various organisations took responsibility for abandoned infants, but in this area, England was noticeable by its absence. Across Roman Catholic Europe philanthropy was closely linked to faith, and foundling hospitals were run by religious houses, although some Catholic monarchies supported foundling hospitals because they saved bodies for the military

³⁴ Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2007), p.31.

³⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.9.

as well as souls for the church.³⁶ In Protestant Europe, Holland was the only country to make a significant attempt to deal with foundling children, with the foundation of an orphanage in 1666 which was in part supported by indirect taxation.³⁷ The English John Bulls considered religious groups to be the right location for philanthropy, and any care of infants that extended beyond the limited reach of the Poor Laws; but England did not have the same voluntary, religious infrastructure of Continental Europe that facilitated the development of Foundling Hospitals.³⁸ Any charity that did extend to children at this time was limited to those whose parents had the good sense to be virtuous and properly married. When various individuals and groups proposed the setting up of a charity specifically for the *illegitimate*, abandoned child, they were thwarted, even when they received tentative monarchical approval.³⁹ This being so, it was going to take someone of remarkable drive and determination to procure enough support, both moral and financial, to set up a Foundling Hospital for the abandoned children of eighteenth-century London. Thomas Coram was that man.

The motivation behind Coram's tireless advocacy for such a hospital, the long years of fund-raising, awareness-raising and lobbying and the eventual success with the granting of the charter in 1739, have all been discussed in Ruth McClure's *Coram's Children*. For the purposes of this study, it is only necessary to highlight the remarkable character of Thomas Coram who took up the cause of the illegitimate, abandoned child at an appropriate time in English history.

³⁶ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.14.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.15.

³⁸ See McClure, pp.3-6 for the involvement of the Church with founding hospitals on the Continent.

³⁹ See McClure, pp.9-15 for the various proposals that were suggested but failed to find support.

In Thomas Coram and his efforts regarding the Founding Hospital we can identify a working out of some of the ideals of the Enlightenment regarding child *welfare* and reflect its contribution to changing attitudes to children, childhood and motherhood. One argument for the success of Coram in 1739, when he failed in earlier attempts, is that the mood of the country had shifted and the ideals of the Enlightenment had pervaded the collective consciousness to a sufficient extent for him to be successful.⁴⁰ So what were those ideals? Intellectually there were the works primarily of Locke and Rousseau in the area of child development and education, which shifted the debate in a more child-centred direction. These worked concomitantly with new ideas about human nature, challenges to the notion of original sin and a more subtle understanding of the relationship between nature and nurture. There was a growing positivism regarding the human ability for change, development and improvement and a move towards privileging the maternal role and motherhood, exemplified by Rousseau's emphasis on the involvement of the mother in the early years of development.⁴¹ The relationship between mother and child was promoted and the role of the father was subtly shifted to allow for a more affectionate relationship while the psychology of the child-adult (parent and teacher) relationship also received attention. This move towards new models of childhood was reflected in two significant ways, firstly the iconography of the child and secondly in the rise of the child as consumer. The art of the day began to reflect the importance of the child to its family with the rise in child portraits, exemplified by Fuseli's *The Apotheosis of*

⁴⁰ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, p.2.

⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (Switzerland: Jean Néaulme, 1762; repr. London: Penguin, 1979), pp.46-48.

Penelope Boothby.⁴² The rising importance of the child was also reflected in the growth of two markets aimed specifically at them, literature and toys, which foregrounded childhood as a separate stage in life, demarcating it from adulthood.⁴³

Thus the Enlightenment served to shift the emphasis regarding children in a variety of ways. However, here, as in other areas, the shift was not consistent, nor unproblematic. While the experience of childhood may have changed for some children, notably those of the aristocratic and enlightened middle ranks, there remained a large section of children for whom the ideals of the Enlightenment remained irrelevant. For them, the shift in attitude was theoretical and remote rather than practical and specific. The shift in attitude has been seen by Porter as problematizing childhood. Porter argues that the new ways of viewing children and childhood only served to subordinate them, placing them in groups considered potentially problematic, and therefore in need of special attention and treatment (into this category, Porter also placed those with mental or physical difficulties, animals and foreign or ethnic groups).⁴⁴ In essence, Porter argues that this qualified the child as the 'other'; which could work to enhance their status or diminish it. It also provided a model for seeing the child as an object of charity, which could translate into a method of surveillance and control.⁴⁵

⁴² Henry Fuseli, *The Apotheosis of Penelope Boothby*, 1792 (Oil on canvas, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 1792). This painting was commissioned by Brooke Boothby after the death of his six-year old daughter. Boothby was devastated by the loss of his daughter and this work exemplifies the levels of affection that parents demonstrated towards children and their growing visibility through family portraits.

⁴³ Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, p.122.

⁴⁴ Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.268-269.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.269.

With the impact of the Enlightenment beginning to be revealed in the area of children, childcare and child welfare, it is inevitable that its influence would extend further into the life cycle to include education. This became significant regarding the education of the girls who would become women, wives and mothers. Margaret Jacob has argued that we can find within the Enlightenment movement, far from an exclusive concern with men, discourses that placed women in a central position.⁴⁶ The reasons for this are complex and interconnected and include, but are not limited to, a belief in the capacity for improvement, the notion of *tabula rasa* and the growing importance of women as mothers, educators and role-models. In these debates, in terms of content and complexity, Jean-Jacques Rousseau remains predominant. Rousseau's ideas about the role, status and abilities of women can be read as both restrictive and liberating. His importance to this debate centres on the wide dissemination of his ideas, their pervasive influence and the conflicting responses his work provoked. He elevated the status of the mother and privileged breast-feeding and maternal relationships, while also anchoring the woman firmly in the domestic sphere, tied exclusively to the husband and negating any female autonomy.⁴⁷ Yet Rousseau's didactic *Emile* is undermined by his romantic novel *Julie*, in which the influence he assigns to the female within the domestic context is both profound and intrinsic to the success of the family and the community, but ultimately undermined by illicit romantic love, with which Rousseau appears to sympathise. Despite the mixed messages of his ideology, Rousseau found a large swathe of support for his ideas and a determination amongst a significant number of people to apply the

⁴⁶ Margaret Jacob, cited by Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.xv.

⁴⁷ Rousseau, *Emile* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie or The New Eloise* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1761; repr. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987).

theories he expounded.⁴⁸ Amongst this number we can count Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who undertook the education of his eldest child, Richard according to Rousseau's theories and Thomas Day, who applied Rousseau's ideas to a more radical social experiment and chose to educate not a child, but a future wife.⁴⁹ The practical applications of Rousseau's theories met with varying degrees of success, but they drove forward the move toward a child-centred pedagogy and offered a model for others, who took issue with aspects of his argument, thus pushing the debate on further.⁵⁰

This is the background into which Sabrina Sidney was born, grew-up and experienced life as a child and a woman. Practical and ideological contexts shaped the environment in which she moved from childhood to adulthood, affected the events in her life and informed her responses to them. Changing attitudes towards children, childhood, education and gender had an impact on her survival, her social role and status, her relationships and her understanding of herself. For these reasons it can be suggested that Sabrina Sidney was a child of the Enlightenment, saved from abandonment by the growing philanthropic spirit, educated to be useful and productive and chosen to be the model of a rational wife. It is to Sabrina Sidney we turn, having explored the contexts within which her life was played out, to examine that life and recover her history, both as a child and a woman. In doing so we examine

⁴⁸ Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man and the Monster* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002) pp.134-135.

⁴⁹ Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 1, p.177 and p.214.

⁵⁰ See writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft who engaged with the theories of Rousseau in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

the practical implications of the Enlightenment project for a particular woman and consider what her history suggests about the construction of the female self.

CHAPTER 3: THE UNCONSTRUCTED FEMALE (1) 1757 - 1759

To date, all considerations of the life of Sabrina Sidney have concentrated on the years after her selection by Thomas Day and removal from the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital in 1769.¹ Sabrina was then twelve years old, and yet the influence of these first twelve years and the impact of being removed from the only life she had experienced have never been acknowledged. The following two chapters explore Sabrina's early upbringing and the influence that its 'anonymity' may have played in her perceived suitability for the experiment upon which Thomas Day embarked, the meanings of which have been left unexplored by historians and biographers. Despite being perceived as 'unconstructed' during this period, it is argued that Sabrina was actually undergoing the first of many 'constructions', which laid the foundations of concepts of 'self' in terms of gender and class. In this chapter, Sabrina's early years at the Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children are examined, including a consideration of her background prior to admission. The development of the branch hospital at Shrewsbury is considered as one of the strategies adopted to cope with the influx of children at this time and because of its significance in the life and education of Sabrina herself.

As outlined in the previous chapter, through the work of Thomas Coram, the Charter for the Hospital for the Reception, Maintenance and Education of Exposed and

¹ See John Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Stockdale, 1791), pp.27-28, Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), p.69 and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 1, pp.214-215.

Abandoned Young Children was granted in 1739 and two years later the first children were received at the temporary hospital at Hatton Gardens.² By this time, plans were already in place for a larger, purpose-built hospital on what was then the outskirts of London, but it was clear from the first day of reception that the need for places was going to far outstrip supply. From the very start, the governors of the Hospital struggled financially, and this led to various strategies to rationalise the numbers of children accepted.³

By 1745 the staff and children had relocated to the purpose-built Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury, whose capacity was far in excess of that of Hatton Gardens, but despite this the Governors were never able to fill it with the number of children it could sustain because they never had enough money to support them.⁴ After investigating various strategies for extending the charity, the Governors turned to Parliament, and in 1756 they petitioned for funds. Parliament agreed to support it, but with one important condition, that the Hospital accepted all the children offered to it; the only restriction being that of age, which remained set at two months.⁵ Thus the Governors had the money they needed, but no way of controlling the numbers of children they accepted; the period known as General Reception had begun.

² London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/A/001/002, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), Docket for Keeper of the Privy Seal for Charter of Incorporation for Relief of Foundling Children, 1739.

³ The first strategy was the restrictions on admission that were put in place; no child under the age of two months would be admitted, and all had to be free from infectious diseases, including venereal disease.

⁴ Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p.65 and 76.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.79.

Despite knowing that all children, regardless of illness or infirmity, were to be accepted, the Governors could not have anticipated the sheer number of children with which they dealt. Records show that they made preparations for about 500 more children, but by the end of June they had admitted 425 with no appearance of the tide being stemmed.⁶ The result for the Governors of the Foundling Hospital was far more children than it anticipated.

It is against this background that the infant, later known as Sabrina Sidney, became a child of the Foundling Hospital, during its most difficult period. Almost a year after General Reception began, a female child was received into the Hospital on 24th May 1757, and as with all the other children admitted since 1741, the same administrative procedure was followed.⁷ An entry billet was filled out with the month and year of reception and any identifying marks, notes or information about her birth name, family, or first few weeks of life. A number was added to the billet and it was this number that identified the child for the length of her residence in the Hospital. The billet was then sealed and the child was baptised - regardless as to whether she had been baptised previously - and renamed. The reason for this elaborate ceremony was to protect the identity of the mother and so keep the promise of anonymity that the Hospital offered.

The entry billet of this female child states that her birth name was 'Manima Butler' and that she was baptised in 'St James Church Clarkenwell' [sic] (Clerkenwell).⁸ Although this is the only information given regarding her birth name and family, we

⁶ *Ibid*, p.81.

⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/09/002/002, FHR, General Register 2, 1757.

⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/09/001/056, FHR, Billet Book, 1757.

can attempt to draw some conclusions about her birth and background. Firstly, her given name of 'Manima' is an unusual one and not in common usage as a girl's name in eighteenth-century London. However Manima does appear as the name of towns in three countries along the West African coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Gabon.⁹ Given the links between this area of the African coast, London and the slave trade, the possibility is therefore raised that this name indicates a connection, via the father or mother, with the slave trade and/or the black community in London.

London's geographical position close to the River Thames had led to its strategic importance as a port for general trading links well before 1700.¹⁰ By the eighteenth century the English were also well entrenched in the trade in human beings and London became not only the largest port in Europe but the central port and location for the British slave trade.¹¹ This being so, the development of a black community in London and across the country as a whole was inevitable, not only because people of colour entered the country as slaves but because they entered as sailors, servants and musicians and therefore 'the foundations were laid for the early black communities in Britain'.¹² The inevitable result of this growing community was mixed race relationships and marriage, which although they may have caused a *frisson* of scandal in some circles, do not appear to have done so amongst the working class.¹³ In fact in

⁹ National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, *Manima Sierra Leone, Manima Guinea and Manima Gabon* [online]. Available from: http://www.geographic.org/geographic_names/index.html (2010)

¹⁰ See James A. Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade* (London: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

¹² James Walvin, 'Black People in Britain' in *Transatlantic Slavery: Against Human Dignity*, ed. by Anthony Tibbles (London: HMSO, 1994), p.85. See also Gretchen Gerzina, *Black England: Life before Emancipation* (London: John Murray, 1995) and Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories: Black people of England and Wales during the Period of the British Slave Trade, c. 1660-1087* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹³ Gerzina, *Black England*, p.21.

her work on the black presence in Britain, Gerzina states 'The cases of inter-racial marriage are far too common to delineate here'.¹⁴ This suggests a far higher incidence of mixed-race marriage than might have been thought and the birth of dual heritage children. By the middle of the eighteenth century there existed a significant number of children born to mixed-race unions of all kinds, from the consensual marriages of the working class to the children of slave women born, either consensually or non-consensually, to their white masters.¹⁵ Fryer and Walvin both note that members of the black community in London were mostly employed in domestic service and women working in this area have been identified as an 'at risk' group for illegitimate births.¹⁶ It could be argued that a female servant of colour was even more at risk of being placed in a sexually compromised position than her white counterparts because she was not only dislocated from her family and childhood community, but also her country and continent, with the attendant issues of difference in culture and language. However, it should also be stated that there is evidence for the existence of a considerable and effective black community which could have served as a surrogate family to women in this position.¹⁷ With a significant black population resident in London and many of them, especially women, occupying the very social and economic spaces that increased their vulnerability to the risk of an illegitimate pregnancy, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the child, Manima Butler, was the child of a mixed-race relationship. Evidence from the Foundling Hospital records shows that some children who were admitted were

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.22. This is supported by the work of Chater, pp.203-206.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁶ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p.72 and Walvin, 'Black People in Britain', in *Transatlantic Slavery*, ed. by Tibbles, p.83.

See John R. Gillis, 'Servants, Sexual Relations and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900', *Feminist Studies*, 5, 1 (1979), pp.142-173.

¹⁷ Gerzina, *Black England*, p.24.

positively identified as 'black' in their entry billet, but as the default position was to record no race or ethnicity identification at all, we cannot assume that because no comment is made a child is automatically 'white'.¹⁸ Further, the long history of the black and mixed-race population in London could mean that it was not 'Manima' herself who was directly the child of a mixed race relationship, but rather her mother or father may have been the child of such a relationship. It is distinctly possible that this child had a mixed-race heritage without being positively identified as 'black'.¹⁹

The second statement entered on the entry billet claimed that Manima Butler was baptised in St James's Church in Clerkenwell.²⁰ This indicates that her parents or mother were resident in that parish. Clerkenwell is geographically close to the Foundling Hospital and the parish of St James's was one of the poorest.²¹ McClure noted that 'the poorest parishes (within the Bills of Mortality) contributed the largest number of children' to the Foundling Hospital, adding that 100 came from the parish of St James's.²² Circumstantial evidence thus indicates that Sabrina was born to a poor family and, as poorer parishes are identified as having a larger immigrant population, possibly an immigrant one.²³ Alternatively, given that the wider areas of Islington and Westminster had developed as residences of the wealthy, there remains the possibility that Manima Butler was born to a young woman in domestic service.

¹⁸ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.142.

¹⁹ With no firm evidence to prove or disprove this hypothesis, the strongest evidence in its support is the name of "Manima" itself. There is the tradition amongst slave communities of giving their children "homeland names" (Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p.454). This does suggest a familial link, however distant, to the West African Coast.

²⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/09/001/056, FHR, Billet Book, 1757.

²¹ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.85 and Tanya Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects' Lone Mothers in Eighteenth Century London* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).pp.21-22.

²² McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.85.

²³ Alysa Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.28-29.

Evans has shown that the majority of illegitimate children in London were born to women in their late twenties who were employed as servants.²⁴

Crucially the issue of Manima's illegitimacy remains unresolved. Despite the contemporary correlation between abandonment and illegitimacy, recent research by Levene and Evans has questioned the automatic assumption that Foundling Hospital children were illegitimate.²⁵ Levene has argued that the Foundling Hospital records show that entry to the hospital was used as a means for married but poverty-stricken parents to ensure the care of their infant children, while Evans has drawn similar conclusions, and noted that widows and widowers also used the Foundling Hospital. Lone but not unmarried parents also left their children at the Hospital.²⁶ One conclusion concerning Sabrina's status may be drawn from the entry billet. Levene has discussed how the information or lack thereof on each entry billet can be used to decide whether infants were legitimate or not. Levene argues that the lack of specific reference to a parent, especially the father, implies illegitimacy.²⁷ As the entry billet includes no reference to either parent, following Levene's argument, this would indicate that Manima Butler was indeed illegitimate.

The claim that Manima was baptised at St James's Clerkenwell could, in theory, answer the question either way, because illegitimate children were christened at St James's with their illegitimate status recorded in the registers. Unfortunately, this

²⁴ Tanya Evans, "'Blooming Virgins All Beware": Love, Courtship, and Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century British Popular Literature' in *Illegitimacy in Britain, 1700-1920*, ed. by Alysa Levene, Thomas Nutt and Samantha Williams (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.22.

²⁵ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality* and Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects'*.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.42 and *Ibid*, pp.130-1.

²⁷ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, p.32.

claim cannot be substantiated. Careful scrutiny of the parish records of St James's has not located any reference to a child with the name Manima Butler having being baptised there.²⁸ The question is then raised as to why those placing Manima at the Hospital claimed she was christened if that claim could not be proven upon examination. Three possibilities present themselves; firstly that she was christened, but clerical error on the part of the parish officials led to an omission in the registers; secondly, that she was christened at a different church and the recording of St James's was an error on the part of the person writing the note that was delivered with Manima to the hospital; and thirdly, that she was not christened at all and it was a calculated gamble on the part of the parents, either to ensure the child's entry to the Foundling Hospital or to assure the governors of the Hospital that they had done their duty as parents. The latter seems unlikely, as they could not have been sure the governors would not check the claim of baptism, especially as Clerkenwell is geographically close to the hospital and any lie could have been easily detected. Therefore it seems most likely that Manima's baptism remains unrecorded due to human error. We can only speculate as to the background of Manima Butler prior to her entry to the hospital, but it is probable that she was from a poor background, probably but not definitely illegitimate and potentially a mixed-race child.

Speculation regarding her family and background aside, the parents or mother of Manima Butler decided to place her with the Foundling Hospital. In January 1757 the Governors raised the age limit for the reception of children from two to six months; this would suggest Manima was born sometime between the beginning of November

²⁸ LMA, P76/JS1, Records of Saint James Church, Clerkenwell, 1756-57.

1756 and 24th May 1757, the day she was admitted.²⁹ Again, since no record of her baptism in the Clerkenwell Parish records has been located, there is no way of pinpointing her date of birth with any more accuracy. The entry billet was therefore completed and sealed up and all evidence of Manima Butler's birth family and original name disappeared. 'Manima Butler' became 'Anne Kingstone' and numbered 4579. From here the Foundling Hospital records track the movements of Manima, who was subsequently brought up with the name of Anne. The Nursery Book, which records where and with whom the children were sent to nurse, states that 'Ann [sic] Kingstone' was sent to Mary Pemble of Wotton in Dorking under the inspection of Mr Kerr on 24th May 1757.³⁰ As the Register of the Shrewsbury Hospital also confirms that 'Anne Kingstone' was received at London on 24th May 1757, we can therefore assume she was admitted, re-named, re-baptised and sent to nurse on the same day.³¹ This indicates that upon her admission she was not suffering from any disease or illness that caused concern, otherwise she would have been sent to the Hospital's Infirmary and her residence with a nurse would have been delayed. The records also state that 'Anne' was sent to be wet nursed.

Two other female infants were received at the Foundling Hospital during this period whose lives would connect with Anne Kingstone's in due course. On 7th February 1758 an unnamed child was admitted and renamed Deborah Venner number 7264.³² She too was sent to a wet nurse, Elizabeth Shaw.³³ On 10th November 1758 a child named 'Ann Greig' was admitted; she was born on 11th May 1758 in Clerkenwell and

²⁹ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.87.

³⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/10/003/005, FHR, Nursery Book, 1757.

³¹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/007/001, FHR, General Register of Shrewsbury, 1759 – 1772.

³² LMA, A/FH/A/09/001/082, FHR, Billet Book, 1758.

³³ LMA, A/FH/A/09/002/002, FHR, General Register 2, 1757.

to her entry billet is attached a square of blue and white linen. This child was re-named Dorcas Carr number 10413.³⁴ Unlike Anne and Deborah before her, Dorcas was not sent out to nurse until 17th November, indicating that for some reason - either ill-health or lack of nurses - a week passed before she left the Hospital. When she was sent to nurse, it was to Mary Bristow in Brentwood, Essex.³⁵

As the avalanche of humanity of which Anne, Deborah and Dorcas were three small parts continued to engulf the Foundling Hospital, it became increasingly clear that as big as the London building was, it simply could not cope with the increased number of children, neither the infants in need of wet nursing, nor the older children for whom education and training were the priority. Under the resolutions of April 1756, by which Parliament had conceded that financial help was necessary and that all children offered should be accepted, they had also acknowledged the need for further hospitals.³⁶

By 1757 the first branch hospital had been set up in Ackworth, Yorkshire.³⁷ Word had clearly spread throughout the kingdom of the opportunities a branch of the Foundling Hospital might bring to the provinces. On 2nd August 1758 the General Committee learnt the following: 'Mr White communicated to the Committee a Letter from the Rev Adams of the 28 July setting forth that he was of opinion that there might be a [sic] Establishment made of a proper place for the Maintenance and

³⁴ LMA, A/FH/A/09/001/117, FHR, Billet Book, 1758.

³⁵ LMA, A/FH/A/10/003/006, FHR, Nursery Book, 1758.

³⁶ Journal of the House of Commons: Eleventh Parliament of Great Britain: third session (13 November 1755-27 May 1756). London. 6 April 1756. p.567.

³⁷ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.121.

Education of some of the Children in the County of Salop.’³⁸ The county of Salop is now that of Shropshire and at this time the term was used to refer to the county and also one of its foremost towns, Shrewsbury.³⁹ The London Committee looked favourably on this proposal and Taylor White, the long serving treasurer of the London Hospital, was ‘desired on his journey to Chester to enquire into the particulars and to come to such agreement as he may judge convenient’.⁴⁰

Taylor White was impressed with the gentlemen he met in Shrewsbury and the environment they proposed and needed no further persuasion of the suitability of the town as the location for a branch hospital.⁴¹ The Corporation of Shrewsbury had already identified a piece of land ‘which they have lying opposite to the Town and on the other side of the River Severn, which has many conveniences and is a very beautiful situation’.⁴² Healthy and well-situated, the location identified, known as Kingsland, lay on the outskirts of the town, was very similar to the location of the London building and made Shrewsbury an attractive situation for a branch hospital.

³⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/15/003/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Contracts & Agreements, 1758-59.

³⁹ Barry Trinder, *A History of Shropshire*, 2nd edn (West Sussex: Phillimore, 1998), p.73.

⁴⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/15/003/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Contracts & Agreements, 2nd August 1758.

⁴¹ LMA, A/FH/A/15/003/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Contracts & Agreements, Letter from Taylor White, 13th August 1758.

⁴² *Ibid.*



Figure 1: Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital, now Shrewsbury School.

Kingsland was a stretch of land outside the town walls of Shrewsbury and on the far side of the river Severn. It was attractive because it was a healthy situation and conveniently situated for the delivery of provisions and employment of labourers from the nearby town. However it was not in such close proximity that the children might be unduly influenced by some of the more negative characters. On the 20th October 1758, an assembly of the Mayor, Aldermen and Assistants of Shrewsbury met at the Guildhall to discuss the application for the perpetual lease of Kingsland and agreed to assign it to the Foundling Hospital Governors.⁴³

⁴³ LMA, A/FH/A/15/003/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Contracts & Agreements, 20th October 1758.

By April 1759 White was in the process of ordering a plan for the Shrewsbury Hospital capable of housing 500 children and ordered an estimate based on the plans already procured for the Ackworth branch hospital. The estimate was requested from a Mr Thomas Farnolls Pritchard. Pritchard was a successful Shropshire architect, who in his later years was to provide the initial designs for the Iron Bridge at Coalbrookdale, which became a striking symbol both of the Industrial Revolution and Shropshire's seminal role in its genesis.⁴⁴

The plans for the hospital at Kingsland had not impeded the more immediate reception of children at Shrewsbury and one of the hospital governors, Roger Kynaston was, in 1758, able to inform the London Committee that a warehouse had been located in 'Dog Lane' (now Clairmont Street), which lay close to the Town Square in the parish of St Chad's and was converted to accommodate the children.⁴⁵ White began to consider sending the first children to the hospital and requested the Shrewsbury governors to consider the issue of staffing.⁴⁶ The Shrewsbury Committee elected Mrs Elinor Poghe as Matron on the 22nd January 1759 at £10 per annum. A few weeks later, just prior to the first reception of children, Mr Thomas Morgan was appointed Master at £15 per annum on the 12th February.⁴⁷ With the two main offices filled, the Governors engaged Mary Cadmore and Sarah Peplow as nurse and cook maid respectively and the hospital was ready to receive its first intake

⁴⁴ See Julia Ionides, *Thomas Farnolls Pritchard of Shrewsbury: Architect and 'Inventor of Cast Iron Bridges'* (Ludlow: Dog Rose Press, 1999) for Pritchard's career and involvement with both the Iron Bridge and the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.

⁴⁵ LMA, A/FH/A/15/003/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Contracts & Agreements, 10th-11th October 1758.

⁴⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 22nd January 1759.

⁴⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 22nd January and 12th February 1759.

of children.⁴⁸ Thus ready for its small charges, on the 27th February 1759 the Shrewsbury committee met and a letter was read from White, informing them that Mrs Elizabeth Lancey accompanying 14 girls had left London for Shrewsbury.⁴⁹ The minutes note that 'Whilst the Board was sitting the first 14 girls were Received'.⁵⁰ In due course forty children were received in the Hospital and the London Governors began to consider sending younger ones which required the engagement of country nurses.⁵¹ The Shrewsbury committee accordingly ordered handbills to be printed to enquire after the cost of dry nursing and six days later, Kynaston was able to inform London that terms had been agreed with six nurses who were ready to travel upon London's order.⁵² From this date a steady stream of infants as well as older children arrived at Shrewsbury. The numbers of children with whom the London Hospital now dealt is evident from the direction received from Thomas Collingwood, the London secretary. In June 1759, he requests nurses to be sent to London on a weekly basis and wet nurses be employed as '... there is no fear of their being disappointed of Children.'⁵³

The sheer number of children involved, the logistics of transporting them from various parts of the country and employment of nurses explains the immediate problems faced by the officers at Shrewsbury. One issue, which was only briefly mentioned in early correspondence, but would later become of major concern to the Governors, was that of identification. In September 1759, the Shrewsbury secretary,

⁴⁸ LMA, A/FH/D/02/016/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Servants Entry and Discharged, 1758-1767.

⁴⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 27th February 1759.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Number of children extrapolated from LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/001, Shrewsbury Hospital Letter books, FHR, 28th February, 7th March and 13 March 1759.

⁵² LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 8th May 1759.

⁵³ LMA, A/FH/D/02/003/001, FHR, Letter Bundles, 16th June 1759.

Morgan, reported that a number of children had been received into the hospital from nurses in Staffordshire without 'any lead number with them'.⁵⁴ This referred to the small leaden tag which bore the number allocated to the child upon reception. This number was not only instrumental in tracking the movements and various residences of each child, but provided the only link back to the entry billet and any identifying details of family, name and background. Despite their care to preserve the anonymity of the mother, which led to the instant re-naming and sealing up of their entry billet, the London Governors were equally anxious to preserve these tiny shreds of a child's former identity. This would be especially important if the child's parents or family returned to reclaim them. The only means of ensuring a child was returned to its rightful parents was this lead tag and the elaborate record keeping system put in place in 1741 by the London committee. There were injunctions laid upon the hospital staff and country nurses not to remove the tags but children were arriving in Shrewsbury without these vital tokens of identification. How much of an issue this would become was not yet apparent, but it was clear that for Shrewsbury as much as for London, General Reception brought with it what McClure called 'a constant battle against confusion'.⁵⁵

It was during the first summer of the Shrewsbury Hospital's existence that it became relevant in the history of Anne Kingstone. Despite the fact that children had been removed from various nurseries across the country and sent to Shrewsbury it is not clear what, if any, criteria was applied for the selection of children to be sent to the branch hospitals. For those at nurse in Derbyshire and Staffordshire there was clearly

⁵⁴ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, 24th September 1759.

⁵⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.81.

a geographical reason, but the London Governors also sent word to the Inspectors for areas around London itself to request the return of some of the children in their care. One of those inspectors was Mr Hugh Kerr, under whose auspices Anne and Deborah both came.⁵⁶ On 14th August 1759, Kerr reported that he had dispatched a group of children which included both girls to London.⁵⁷ Further records state they were sent to Shrewsbury two days later, on the 16th August, together with sixteen other children and they were received at Shrewsbury on 24th August 1759.⁵⁸

At the time they were delivered to the care of the Shrewsbury Orphan Hospital, Sabrina was just over two years old and Deborah was aged eighteen months; these ages are approximate and they take as the starting point of calculation the girl's date of entry into the London Hospital. Sabrina could have been anything up to six months older and Deborah up to a year. However, Gillian Clark argues that the records for the hospital at this time suggest that the children who were received into the hospital were less than one year and 'commonly less than a week [old]'.⁵⁹ The only indication that Sabrina was significantly younger than six months at her date of reception is the fact that Dorcas Carr, about whose date of birth we can be more certain, would have been exactly six months upon reception and she was sent to a dry nurse. It may have been the case that Dorcas was dry nursed for some reason other than age, possibly due to infection or illness or simply due to a shortage of lactating nurses. The ages of

⁵⁶ LMA, A/FH/A/10/003/005, FHR, Nursery Book, 1757-1758.

⁵⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/06/001/012/010/09, FHR, London Letter Bundles, 14th August 1759.

⁵⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/10/003/005, FHR, Nursery Book, 1757-1758 and LMA, A/FH/D/02/007/001, FHR, General Register of Shrewsbury, 1759-1772.

⁵⁹ Gillian Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire, 1757-68* (Reading: Berkshire Record Society, 1994), p.xxviii.

the girls meant that they were still too young to enter the main hospital itself and for the second time in their short lives they were delivered to the care of a country nurse.

The role of the country nurse in the running of the Foundling Hospital was of vital importance. The London committee had adopted the European model whereby all the children were sent to country nurses outside the hospital.⁶⁰ In this the governors were following the standard practice of the time of using the services of wet nurses, and for the Foundling Hospital there were two very good reasons for this practice: the first was the issue of finance and the second was that of practicality.⁶¹ Having already decided that the best way to care for the infants when they were first admitted was through wet-nursing, it was considered too expensive and impractical to manage such nursing within the hospital itself, so placing infants with women in their own homes became the favoured option.⁶² From a financial point of view it was far cheaper to manage the situation this way, and practically it allowed the hospital itself to receive older children and manage their education and training for apprenticeships. Secondly the mortality rates were significantly improved when children were nursed in the country. By adopting the traditional practice of sending infants out to be wet nursed, the hospital was able to exploit the best means of maintaining the lowest possible mortality rates, keep costs in check and maximise their resources to care for significantly more children than if they had remained in the house from first reception.

⁶⁰ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.47.

⁶¹ Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital inspectors*, p.xxxvii.

⁶² *ibid*, p.xiii.

The care of the children by their nurses extended beyond that of wet-nursing. We know now of the benefits of breast-feeding infants as far as their physical health is concerned, but it always had been the intention that the children remained with their nurses until the age of five, which allowed the children a greater degree of emotional stability than might otherwise have been the case. Not only was it cheaper, more beneficial to their health and logistically sensible, but sending the children to nurse for a period of not less than five years did at least provide displaced children with a stable family environment during what are now recognised as vitally important developmental years.⁶³

Nursing as an occupation was a time-honoured one for women. Female employment is a problematic area of historical enquiry, but one that has benefited from several excellent studies that have sought to reclaim women's roles in the family economy, and therefore the wider economy.⁶⁴ Clark in her work on the Foundling Hospital provided an introduction to the occupation of wet-nursing, and identified what she terms 'occupational communities' associated with wet-nursing, that were utilised by the Foundling Hospital to place significant numbers of children from 1741 onwards and especially after 1756. Clark's study also looked at the social backgrounds of both parents who placed their children out to wet-nurse, and the nurses themselves. Nursing was an occupation, an economic relationship, and as Clark pointed out, 'there

⁶³ See Cara Flanagan, *Early Socialisation: Sociability and Attachment* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁴ See *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London: Routledge, 2005), *Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700*, ed. by Deborah Simonton (New York: Routledge, 2007) and Susie Steinbach, *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* (London: Orion Books, 2005) for discussion of women's role in the family economy.

were market forces that dictated both the location and quality of the care'.⁶⁵
Regarding the nurses Clark commented:

The nursing of foundlings, like that of parish children, was not rated highly on the nursing occupational scale because of the calibre of the children, the stigma of poverty and illegitimacy and because the pay was low and without benefits of any kind. As a result of this it was the poorest women who were available to nurse foundlings, women about whom there is very little supplementary background information.⁶⁶

At the start of the Foundling Hospital initiative the nurses were carefully screened and inspected before employment. The requirements were rigorous; they were to be free from infectious diseases and were examined to ensure 'they have good milk, that they had no breakings out, bad breath or teeth and that they are not pregnant and the like'.⁶⁷ This strict set of requirements, together with the similar screening of infants and the oversight of the inspectors during the years 1741 to 1756 accounts for the relatively low mortality rates of the infants received into the hospital. However, General Reception led not only to a lack of screening of the children for illness and infection, but a massively increased need for nurses, which made the inspection process harder to apply. McClure estimated that during the latter half of the period of

⁶⁵ Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors*, p.38.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.42.

⁶⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/03/005/003, FHR, Miscellaneous Correspondence, "Regulation of country nurses", 1759.

General Reception (1758 – 1760), between two and three thousand nurses were required and for this reason the quality of some may have been less than desirable.⁶⁸

Despite the undoubted existence of less qualified and attentive nurses, most of them appeared to be competent and discharged their duty to the best of their ability. The evidence from the wider records of the hospital suggests a high level of bonding between nurse and child. It might have been an economic transaction, but a certain level of bonding is necessary for the successful nursing of a child. The records suggest that many children were absorbed into the family unit, and when the time came to return the child to the care of the hospital it was a traumatic event for both foster parent and child.⁶⁹

A hint of this can be seen in the correspondence of Hugh Kerr at the time he was arranging the removal of children from nurses under his inspection, a group which included Anne and Deborah. On August 14th 1759 Kerr made a list of the children he had sent in which he makes the following comment: 'I have inclosed (sic) a Letter which I beg might be shown the Committee that they might see the opinion of the world upon taking the Children so young from the Nurses.'⁷⁰ The 'inclosed letter' was not archived together with Kerr's, presumably because during a later reorganisation, all letters were filed by date, and then alphabetically by the writer's surname. Thus far the letter Kerr referred to has not been located but it can be inferred from his covering letter that the opinion of the world was far from favourable. The reaction

⁶⁸ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.104.

⁶⁹ Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors*, p.lvii and McClure, *Coram's Children*, pp.94-5 and pp.130-1.

⁷⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/06/001/012/010/09, FHR, London Letter Bundles, 14th August 1759.

Kerr received from the nurses continued to trouble him and a few days later he wrote again to Collingwood:

I am obliged to the Committee for not recalling any more Children as many of my women live near those under the Inspection of Mr Dolson and Mrs Moorton; and think it very hard their Children are to be taken away and those of their Neighbours which are older and stronger to remain.⁷¹

Not only does this indicate the pain caused by the separation of child from nurse, but also another problem the inspectors faced due to the close proximity of nurses to each other; the perceived disparity in their treatment by the inspectors. Yet again Kerr returns to his theme a few days later, ‘... the poor women think it extremely hard to come up in Harvest and to leave their children so young’.⁷² Here there is a suggestion that economic imperatives played some part in the women’s distress and centred on the necessity of leaving the revenue-making opportunity of the harvest. Nonetheless, it is clear that the women were unhappy about losing their foster-children, and specifically children they deemed too young to be parted from the only mothers they had known. We cannot assume that Anne and Deborah’s nurses felt this strongly about their young charges, but both girls are listed in the three letters that contain these observations.

⁷¹ LMA, A/FH/A/06/001/012/010/09, FHR, London Letter Bundles, n.d.

⁷² LMA, A/FH/A/06/001/010/073, FHR, London Letter Bundles, n.d.

The General Register of the Shrewsbury Hospital recorded that on 24th August 1759, Anne Kingstone was 'sent' (i.e. received) into the care of the hospital.⁷³ A further set of records, the General Register of Children at Nurse, states that she was then given into the care of Nurse Ann Caswell of Longdon.⁷⁴ This record put the date she was given to nurse as 22nd August but this is more likely to be an error on the part of the person entering the information, as a further source, a letter written by Thomas Morgan to Mr Collingwood dated 25th August stated that eighteen children including Anne were received 'yesterday and like were delivered to proper nurses'.⁷⁵ A further record for Shrewsbury, known as the Clothing and Linen book reveals that not only Anne, but Deborah Venner was also given into the care of Nurse Caswell.⁷⁶ Cross referencing to the General Register of Children at Nurse confirms that on 24th August Deborah Venner was sent to nurse Ann Caswell,⁷⁷ and from this point forward, the two girls were raised in the same household.

The village of Longden (recorded as Longdon in the Foundling Hospital records) is situated approximately six miles from Shrewsbury on the road to Pulverbatch. A settlement had probably existed at Longden since medieval times and the economy of the area was based around agriculture and cattle breeding. By the late eighteenth century, coal-mining had developed at Longden and Pulverbatch, and cottages were built at Longden to house miners. One key indicator of population levels at the time

⁷³ LMA, A/FH/D/02/007/001, FHR, General Register of Shrewsbury, 1759-1772.

⁷⁴ LMA, A/FH/D/02/010, FHR, General Register of Children at Nurse, 1759-1764.

⁷⁵ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter books, August 25th 1759.

⁷⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/018, FHR, Shrewsbury Clothing and Linen Book, 1759.

⁷⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/010, FHR, General Register of Children at Nurse, 1759-1764.

Deborah and Anne were resident is that by 1759 the village economy could support two alehouses.⁷⁸

The records of the Pontesbury parish, in which Longden is situated, show that on March 19th 1752 John Casewell married Ann Davies.⁷⁹ (The Foundling Hospital records the family name as Caswell.) No indication is given of John's occupation but given the economy of the area it was likely he was an agricultural labourer or a miner, or both. On 6th April 1755 they christened a daughter, Mary and on 5th April 1757, a second child, Robert was christened.⁸⁰ This indicates that at the time the Shrewsbury committee distributed the handbills around Shrewsbury requesting dry nurses in May 1759, Ann had a four-year old daughter and a two-year old son. How the information regarding the request was transmitted from the handbills to Ann is unknown. As Ann's mark on the Nurse's duplicates which acts as a receipt for her wages is a cross rather than a signature, it is reasonable to conclude she was illiterate.⁸¹ Therefore it is possible that what Clark refers to as an 'occupational community' of nurses existed in the Pontesbury area at the time, and doubtless a combination of local networks and word of mouth relayed the information to Ann and the network of nurses who became employees of the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.

⁷⁸ *The Victoria History of the County of Shropshire*, , Vol. 8, ed. by A. T. Gaydon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.261.

⁷⁹ Shropshire Archives (SA), 105, Shropshire Parish Register, Vol. 12, Hereford Diocese, Pontesbury. p.344.

⁸⁰ SA, 105, Shropshire Parish Register, Vol. 12, Hereford Diocese, Pontesbury. p.351 and p. 356.

⁸¹ LMA, A/FH/B/01/018/035, FHR, Nurses Duplicates, 1760–1761.

Whether Ann Casewell had a history of earning a supplementary income through nursing prior to her employment with the Foundling Hospital is unrecorded, but as she had two children of her own, one of whom was almost identical in age to Anne Kingstone, it must have seemed a fortunate opportunity to earn some extra income. For each girl, Ann received 2s per week.⁸² Levene has examined the economics of the wages earned by the nurses at the Foundling Hospital and shown they compare favourably with the average wage of a labourer at the time. Ann could well have been contributing significantly to the Casewell household with her wages of 4s a week.⁸³ The evidence we therefore have concerning the Casewell family shows that from the age of two Anne Kingstone was brought up in a family of four children, within a small rural community. Despite being abandoned at birth, the structures of the Foundling Hospital had provided a significant family unit for Anne and her foster sister Deborah. No details of Anne and Deborah's life with the Casewells exists, but reference to other children with the nurses can shed some light on aspects of their lives. As stated previously, there is evidence that a strong bond could develop between nurses, their husbands and the children for whom they cared. As more children arrived at Shrewsbury and were dispersed into the local communities, nurses and their husbands began to apply to take children they fostered as apprentices, in some cases explicitly because of the affection that had developed.⁸⁴

⁸² LMA, A/FH/B/01/018/035, FHR, Nurses Duplicates, 1760–1761.

⁸³ Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*, p.135.

⁸⁴ See LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 16th Apr 1765 for the case of a farmer and his wife who, 'having contracted an Affection for the Children' who were placed with them applied to take them as apprentices.

Adequate care could not always protect children from danger.⁸⁵ Child mortality rates were high at this time and the Shrewsbury registers record the deaths of children, while at nurse and in the hospital, from a variety of illnesses.⁸⁶ A common affliction was worms, but two unfortunate girls died not from the condition itself but medication given to them, presumably in good faith, by their nurse.⁸⁷ On a more positive note when, in 1764, the London Committee enquired after the provisions made for the children's education while at nurse, Morgan responded that although no such instructions had been transmitted 'we have the pleasure to find that several of the Children have been Instructed by the Nurses or Else put to school by them at their own expense'.⁸⁸ The evidence that some nurses had given of their time and in some cases their money reflects the high level of concern and affection these children could experience.

While we cannot conclude with any certainty the level of care experienced by Sabrina and Deborah while at nurse, no concerns regarding them during their time at Longden found their way into the Shrewsbury Hospital records and, put simply, they survived.

To conclude, this chapter has outlined the background of Anne's admission to the Foundling Hospital in an attempt to contextualise her early years and the ways in which her subsequent education and development would be shaped. Despite lack of any concrete evidence, it is possible to extrapolate some tentative conclusions

⁸⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, pp. 89-91.

⁸⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/007/001, FHR, General Register of Shrewsbury, 1759–1772.

⁸⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/002, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, 21st October 1761.

⁸⁸ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, 1st September 1764.

regarding the circumstances of her conception. It also remains virtually certain that she was placed at the Hospital because her mother or parents were not in a position to care for her, either emotionally or financially and had no other support system to which they felt able to turn. Whatever the facts of her family background, they were swallowed up with the sealed entry billet and in the eyes of contemporary society Anne's admission to the Hospital from thereon classified her as abandoned and illegitimate. For the duration of her childhood it would be the structures and regulations of the Hospital that influenced her development. The peripatetic nature of her first two years, the relative stability of life with Ann Casewell and the institutional nature of her future life upon returning to the Hospital, dictated how the world viewed her and how she would view herself. In the following chapter, the further development of the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital is traced, focusing on the education and training that the children received and the strategies on which the Governors relied as the numbers of children reaching adolescence grew, and required apprenticeships.

CHAPTER 4: THE UNCONSTRUCTED FEMALE (2) 1759 – 1769

With Anne and Deborah placed with the Casewell family, their immediate future was secured. Despite this, ultimately they would return to the Foundling Hospital, if the precedent set at London was adhered to, by the age of five. This chapter will examine how the permanent hospital at Kingsland was established and managed, including its relationship with the main London Hospital and the branch hospital at Ackworth. How the management and the various relationships with which the Hospital was involved had an impact on the children in its care will be analysed, leading to conclusions regarding the care, education and ‘construction’ of Anne Kingstone during the years 1759 to 1769.

Work on a permanent building at Shrewsbury began in 1759. By November 1761 the building had progressed sufficiently to allow a partial occupancy and it was ‘Ordered that the children [employed in the woollen manufactory] for the Future do card and spin in the Garretts at the new Hospital’.¹ Without any direct reference to the completion of the new building, it appears circumstantially that it was inhabited fully by the end of April 1764.² The children's occupation in the ‘Garretts at the New Hospital’ highlights one of the major developments during the building of the hospital - the decision to develop a woollen manufactory in which the older children would be employed. It seems as though the Shrewsbury Committee had decided to follow the

¹ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/D/02/01/001, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 16th November 1761.

² On April 17th 1764 the committee meeting minutes record that the committee ‘are to meet for the first time at this place on Monday next at 12’ LMA, A/FH/D02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 17th April 1764. This would suggest that for the first time the Committee met in the newly built hospital and the children took up residence at approximately the same time.

example of Ackworth and set up a manufactory and by February 1761 the Woollen Manufactory of the Shrewsbury Orphan Hospital had begun.³

It is unsurprising that some sort of employment venture was set up for the children at Shrewsbury because a revenue generating enterprise not only benefited the hospital economically, but also provided the means of training the children in the textile trades and inculcating them to work. Thus with the physical building at Kingsland inhabited by 1764 and the woollen manufactory producing usable cloth by 1761, the environment to which Anne and Deborah would be returning was beginning to be established.⁴

Despite this the overall management of Shrewsbury Hospital was far from satisfactory, a state of affairs which could, and possibly did, have repercussions for Anne and Deborah as well as other children in the care of the hospital. From the beginning of its existence, there were administrative problems at Shrewsbury. In some respects this is hardly surprising; despite the fact that excellent records were made and kept, the period of General Reception involved a vast increase in the numbers of children, a multiplicity of Foundling Hospital sites and, most crucially, a sharp rise in the country nurses and the Inspectors overseeing them.

Initially the problems at Shrewsbury were understandable and indicative of the large numbers of children requiring care. The Shrewsbury secretary, Thomas Morgan

³ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 19th May 1760 and 23rd June 1760.

⁴ For start of textile production at Shrewsbury Hospital see LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/02, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter book, 4th March 1761.

requested clarification over which children have had smallpox, commented on how badly clothed some of the children appeared to be and made reference to the fact that children were received at Shrewsbury either without names or numbers or both.⁵ This was as a result of the numbers of children being passed around the country, between hospitals, inspectors and nurses. However, evidence from the London and Shrewsbury records indicates that at Shrewsbury more than just pressure of numbers was at work. From as early as November 1760, London was raising queries about the information they received from Shrewsbury regarding the status of the children, queries that persisted until 1765 when Morgan was dismissed as Secretary to the Shrewsbury Governors. The minutes of the Shrewsbury hospital record that Morgan had been dismissed, having 'been guilty of great Negligence in his Duty'.⁶ From the records following this incident it appears that Morgan's lackadaisical record keeping, which gave rise to London's queries, was indicative of a far deeper problem. Morgan had been using the hospital as a personal source of financial gain and in the process had severely neglected the management of the hospital.⁷ The lax record-keeping had resulted in many of the hospital's children being unaccounted for. After dismissing Morgan the Shrewsbury Committee became aware they had a potential disaster on their hands and took action to rectify some of his negligent behaviour. One of the Hospital's governors, Roger Kynaston took possession of the books and accounts and the apothecary was ordered to make a report of all children at nurse.⁸ In both the case of the accounts and the children, Morgan had presided over serious mismanagement.

⁵ LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, 6th April 1759.

⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 9th February 1765.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid* and 4th March 1765.

What exacerbated this situation for the Shrewsbury committee was that the revelations of Morgan's behaviour and his dismissal coincided with the most serious threat the entire Foundling Hospital had faced - the complete severing of its connection with Parliament. Since the end of General Reception in March 1760, the hospital had received funds to support the children who were taken in between 1756 and 1760. McClure gives an account of the struggles faced by the London committee each year when applying to Parliament for funds.⁹ Even though year by year the cost was decreasing, the cumulative cost of caring for the 'Parliamentary' children was increasing, a fact with which Parliament was none too happy. In March 1765 a committee appointed by Parliament considered the issue and recommended a series of resolutions; the education of foundling children was condemned, all children should be apprenticed at the age of seven and the country hospitals should be sold to fund this wholesale apprenticeship.¹⁰ The London Governors learnt of this development on 3rd April, but it appears they neglected to correspond with their branch hospitals as, on 16th April, Shrewsbury sent a lengthy epistle on this subject.¹¹ Their letter defended both the Foundling Hospital project as a whole, 'we still firmly believe that if the Uses of these Country Hospitals and the conduct and Economy of them were well understood, they would be thought to deserve the Encouragement rather than the Censure of Parliament.' and their own particular branch, 'we may with confidence affirm that the children under our care are brought in a manner as

⁹ Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p.115.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.116.

¹¹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 16th April 1765.

likely to make them useful to the publick [sic] as in any other method that can be thought of'.¹²

Unfortunately for Shrewsbury, although this was in the strictest sense the truth, the mismanagement of Mr Morgan over the previous six years could not but damage their case and confirm the sceptic's opinion that the Foundling Hospital was a waste of public money. The Shrewsbury governors had plenty of common sense arguments to level against the resolution, not least of which was the absurdity of 'pronouncing useless' a building 'made Necessary by Parliament' at precisely the point 'when it is just brought to answer its End intended'. However, it was a gamble to take issue with both London and Parliament in such strong terms when they were dealing with a serious case of mismanagement on their own doorstep, something they had not yet revealed to their counterparts in London.¹³ The governors of the London hospital presented a petition opposing the resolutions and due to pressure from friends in high places the Bill to carry out the resolutions was dropped.¹⁴ As McClure succinctly put it 'By the end of May the crisis had passed', but she goes on to say '[The Governors] could not mistake the trend of Parliament's thinking'.¹⁵

Once the Parliamentary crisis had passed, the Shrewsbury governors were able to reveal the extent of Morgan's transgressions. Until then they had been circumspect in the information they revealed to London; they had informed them of Morgan's dismissal and the inaccurate state of the accounts in February 1765, but they had not elaborated further. By April the Parliamentary crisis had erupted and it appears a

¹² LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book. 16th April 1765.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.118–119.

decision was taken to conceal any further details. But by June, the new secretary Samuel Magee, either could not continue to obfuscate or had permission to reveal the situation to the London committee, and he explained that the hospital was dealing with the cases of the missing children and inaccurate records.¹⁶ By then, some children had been successfully recovered, identified and returned to the hospital, among whose number were the two girls resident with Ann Casewell. Two sets of records indicate that Ann Casewell brought both girls back into the Foundling Hospital on 6th April 1765, almost a month after the Committee meeting minutes record that the apothecary had been ordered to make a visit to all the children at nurse.¹⁷ By April 1765 both girls were seven years old, although Anne was nearer eight, the anniversary of her admission being May. What is notable is that by the precedent set by London, the girls should have been returned around their fifth birthday, so they seem to have remained with their foster family two to three years beyond the time which was deemed suitable. There is no explicit evidence that Anne or Deborah were amongst the 'lost' children, as records show that Ann Casewell was regularly receiving wages for both girls until 1764 and there is no reason to suspect that this did not continue until 1765. It could well have been that the sheer numbers of children Shrewsbury was dealing with made it more cost effective for them to remain with the Casewells. Nonetheless, the fact that they did return soon after the inspection was ordered, that they were considerably older than precedent allowed, and the evident administrative mess left by Morgan, suggests the girls were caught up in the Shrewsbury turmoil.

¹⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 21st June 1765.

¹⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/018, FHR, Shrewsbury Clothing and Linen Book, 1759 and LMA, A/FH/D/02/029/002, FHR, Journal and Waste Book, 1765–1772.

Evidence of the potential danger Morgan's mismanagement could have posed to both Anne and Deborah is found in records of the fate of other 'lost' children. In a letter written by Samuel Magee, Morgan's successor, he outlined the results of his enquiries into the fate of children still unaccounted for by August 1765. Of child 5332, Martha Bates, no information could be found 'nor does it appear by the Register that she was ever placed out at Nurse although she could be but 2 years old when sent down viz 24 August 1759'; several of the children were in the hospital but under the wrong name or number, such as child 4191, Elizabeth Chester, whose nurse was called into the hospital and informed them, 'this child should be called Lucretia Farmer 3985'. Other children simply disappeared, such as child 7058 Rosamund Church: 'This child is registered to be in the House but is not to be found there and nobody can remember anything of her, possibly she may be one of the children buried at Meole and Registered without a Name'.¹⁸ What these enquires demonstrate is how the lack of efficient record keeping led not only to the disappearance of the children, but the disappearance of their identities, whether by being misnamed or simply buried without one. For Anne and Deborah, the danger of them slipping out of the relatively protected world of the Foundling Hospital is indicated by the fact that one of the children on Magee's list, Martha Bates, was amongst the eighteen children who arrived at Shrewsbury on 24th August 1759, along with Anne and Deborah.

Despite Shrewsbury's fears, there is no evidence that the Morgan affair damaged their reputation. Magee continued as Secretary until the hospital's closure in 1772. As for the lost children, letters to London show that various children's original

¹⁸ LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/03, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, n.d. [August–September 1765].

Foundling Hospital identities continued to be revealed through 1766 and into 1767.¹⁹ For Anne and Deborah, while Shrewsbury's problems had the potential to dramatically change the course of their lives, they did not, and after five years as foster daughters of the Casewells, they returned to the institutional environment of the Foundling Hospital.

Here it is important to consider how this dislocation from the only surroundings they had ever really known and the family of which they must have considered themselves a part may have had an impact on the two girls. The work of Clark on the correspondence of the Inspectors in Berkshire during General Reception provides an insight into the nurse/child relationship and how it functioned in relation to the Foundling Hospital children.²⁰ She notes that, evidence of hostility towards some of the children and their nurses aside: 'By the second anniversary of reception a child who had spent almost all of that time living with a Berkshire family was, to all intents and purposes, a local child'.²¹ In the case of Anne and Deborah, this bonding was disrupted as they spent their first years with nurses in locations outside London and were placed with the Casewells at the ages of 2 and eighteen months. However, it can be argued that the point Clark makes could also apply to older children. It is important not to over or understate the psychological effects of the fostering relationship as experienced by Anne and Deborah. On the one hand, it is clear that between birth and the age of two years they had experienced multiple sets of carers, from their own birth mothers, through the reception nurses at London, their

¹⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/03 and A/FH/D/02/05/04, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter books, 1766–1767.

²⁰ Gillian Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors in Berkshire, 1757-68* (Reading: Berkshire Record Society, 1994)

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

individual country nurses, nurses on the road from London to Atcham and finally Ann Casewell. This could well have affected their ability to bond with others and form meaningful attachments as they grew older. On the other hand, they did arrive with the Casewells at a relatively young age and remained with them, in a distinct family unit and wider rural community, for the next five years. Research is still continuing into the point at which children's long-term memory begins, but one recent study concluded that a child will retain no long-term memories prior to the age of one.²² This would suggest that both Anne and Deborah, on arrival at Longden, could have retained significant memories of, and concomitant emotional bonding with, their first nurses, Mary Pemble and Elizabeth Shaw, but as their time with the Casewells progressed it could be argued that these familial bonds would have strengthened.

The bonds with the wider community could also have developed as the years passed. Evidence from Foundling Hospital records shows that children were placed with nurses in the area around Shrewsbury which encompassed Marchamley in the north, Uckington in the east, Leebotwood in the south and Shrawardine in the west.²³ This suggests Foundling Hospital children were placed in a concentrated area and were therefore not an unusual occurrence in these communities. More explicitly it appears that there was a network of nurses working in the same geographical area in support of each other. Evidence from Ann Casewell's Receipt for Wages shows that several

²² William J. Cromie, 'Long-term Memory Kicks in After Age One', *Harvard Gazette* (2002) <<http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/2002/11.07/01-memory.html>> [accessed 27 December 2011]

²³ LMA, A/FH/A/015/003/002, FHR, Report on Shrewsbury Hospital, 1763.

other nurses occasionally collected wages on her behalf in the years between 1760 and 1764.²⁴

All of the evidence suggests Foundling Hospital children in this area of Shropshire were absorbed into the community with little disruption or problem. It could thus be argued that although Anne Kingston and Deborah Venner unquestionably experienced a peripatetic and emotionally unstable first two years of life, this early start was balanced by a relatively stable and cohesive period between about the ages of two and seven years. A far more traumatic event was probably the removal of the two girls from their home at Longden and the father, mother and siblings with whom they had grown up. Clark claims that evidence from the Berkshire Inspectors suggests that when children remained with their foster families after the age of five, the emotional bond between parent and child strengthened considerably.²⁵ Clark is careful to state that ‘The degree of preparation given to the children before separation and any distress that they suffered is not recorded’, but McClure argues that the children very often regarded their country nurses as mothers and homesickness was an issue.²⁶ This homesickness often revealed itself when a child ran away and returned to their former home. McClure found evidence that it was not the return to the Hospital itself that precipitated this course of action but the act of apprenticeship, which once again represented a dislocation of the child to a very different life.²⁷

²⁴ LMA, A/FH/B/01/018/035 and A/FH/B/01/018/046, FHR, Nurses Duplicates, 1760-61 and 1761-1762.

²⁵ Clark, *Correspondence of the Foundling Hospital Inspectors*, pp.lv-lvi.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. lvii and McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.94.

²⁷ McClure, *Coram's Children*, pp.130-131.

So from this evidence it can be argued that the return of Anne and Deborah to the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital on 6th April 1765 was one of the most, if not the most, traumatic event in their lives. They were no longer part of a small family unit but placed in a large institutional environment which, although safe and sheltered, was very different compared to their earlier experiences. The only point of continuity for them would have been each other. From this point on, until the time when each girl was apprenticed, her life was governed by the rules and regulations of the Hospital. A range of records attest to the ways in which life in the hospital was managed, but the one of greatest value is the Shrewsbury Regulations.²⁸ This document, undated and handwritten, outlines the responsibilities of each position in the Hospital and included a detailed summary of the daily activities of the children.²⁹ [See Appendix 1 Shrewsbury Regulations]

What this document suggests is that despite life at the hospital being regulated and designed to inculcate habits of industry and submission, there were two distinct aspects that are worthy of consideration. The first is the time allotted to the 'younger' children for play.³⁰ There was no explicit explanation as to when a younger child became old enough to work, however other records, such as the Letter books, indicate that the age of ten was a significant marker.³¹ If this is indeed the case, then we can argue that children under the age of ten enjoyed three distinct timetabled periods in which to play. There is a difference between descriptive and prescriptive

²⁸ LMA, A/FH/M/01/013/001, FHR, Regulations of Shrewsbury Hospital, n.d.

²⁹ The repository at which the Foundling Hospital Records are held, London Metropolitan Archives, has given an estimated date of 1760, evidence from Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes and Letter books suggest December 1762 as a more accurate date but this remains speculative.

³⁰ LMA, A/FH/M/01/013/001, FHR, Regulations of Shrewsbury Hospital, n.d.

³¹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/02, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 28th July 1762.

documentation, but in this case there is evidence that this was more than rhetoric. A visitor to the Hospital around 1771 recorded his observations: ‘... there is a large piece of ground allotted the children to play in and what seems extraordinary there should be an occasion for, a master is appointed to see that they do play’.³² It appears that play for the Foundling Hospital children was a standard part of their routine, something that would not necessarily have been true for their counterparts outside the hospital. However, the quality of the play itself needs to be analysed. From the Regulations themselves a gendered approach can be seen, ‘The Boys are provided with play things that may habituate them to robust Exercise such as Hoops Tops Balls and Batts. The Girls are taught to sew and knit before they are big enough to be employed in the Manufactory’.³³ McClure points out that this is due to the fact that this was ‘not play for the fun of it but play for a purpose’.³⁴ The Governors were encouraging healthy, robust young boys who would be fit for apprenticeships and a working life of a high level of physical exertion. The girls, on the other hand, were destined for domestic service or an apprenticeship in a suitable industry, before settling down to a life of marriage and motherhood. For this the Governors clearly thought sewing and knitting to be the best training and that it would serve as ‘play’ for the girls. The notion of ‘play’ in the Foundling Hospital was heavily proscribed for both sexes and underpinned the wider aims of the Hospital in its training of the children.

The second aspect of the timetable is the provision of education. Again this is something that would not necessarily have been a feature of the lives of poorer

³² LMA, A/FH/M/03/036, FHR, Extract from *Notes and Queries*, 27th January 1917.

³³ LMA, A/FH/M/01/013/001, FHR, Regulations of Shrewsbury Hospital, n.d.

³⁴ McClure, *Coram’s Children*, p.225.

children at this time. As stated in the previous chapter, some of the children did receive basic education when with their country nurses. This was revealed in a letter written from Morgan to Collingwood in which the former defended the lack of explicit instructions to the nurses for the education of the children by saying: 'as we take the children into the house from the age of 5 to 6 years I believe it was not thought necessary by this Board to give instructions for those principles as it might be time Enough when Rec'd into Hospital'.³⁵

The fact that some children received early-years education while at nurse, places them on a par with their contemporaries, as some children from the poorer classes could have received a basic education at the local dame school. What does differentiate the Foundling Hospital children however, is the assumption on the part of Morgan that their education would begin upon their return to the Hospital around the age of five or six and at precisely the time when their peers would very likely be finishing whatever meagre instruction they may have had and/or beginning their experience of work. Children formed a vital part of the economic unit of the family at this time and so began contributing to their own subsistence, as soon as they were able.³⁶

This was one of the most contentious aspects of the Foundling Hospital's remit. McClure has noted that many people disliked the idea that illegitimate and abandoned children should receive an education at all, especially given the debates

³⁵ LMA, A/FH/D/02/05/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 1st September 1764.

³⁶ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.219.

around whether the lower classes should be in receipt of an education.³⁷ On the one hand, some argued that an education which consisted of the ability to read and calculate would convince the lower classes of their place in the social order. Others argued that this would only lead to social unrest and socio-economic imbalance which could see legitimate, lower-middle class sons competing with the lower classes for clerical jobs.³⁸ The Foundling Hospital was caught up in this debate by virtue of its need to educate, to a greater or lesser extent, the poorest children in society. At first they erred on the side of caution and reading was the only skill that was extensively taught. However, as time went on, their attitudes shifted and developments in the pedagogical practices can be traced. During the 1760s the attention of a sub-committee in London focused on the educational methods employed by the hospital. The sub-committee evaluated current methods of teaching and suggested ways in which they could be adapted for the better use of the hospital, with an emphasis on ensuring that the methods were suitable for the children and any equipment used was durable.³⁹

These records also reveal something of the quality of the education the children should have received. The Governors paid attention to the pace at which they believed the children should be allowed to develop, '... It seems improper to perplex the minds of Children with Variety, therefore it is proposed to leave out the Arithmetical figures and place them in a different part to be learnt by the Children after they are well acquainted with their Letters and can spell'.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.48.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.220.

³⁹ LMA, A/FH/A/03/005/004, FHR, London Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, 6th September 1760.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

Likewise there seems to be an atmosphere of gentleness and kindness and the use of imitation and cooperation between the children seems to have been favoured by the Governors rather than hostility or competitiveness. 'Frightening the children with any terrible ideas' was frowned upon and flattery was encouraged instead. 'Emulation and Imitation' was also approved of and the children themselves encouraged to peer-teach each other.⁴¹ The records also suggest an emphasis on understanding and enjoyment that suggested a distinct move away from rote-learning. Evidence for this view occurs in a minute, taken in 1763, and was specifically in reference to the teaching of girls. The minutes stated that 'It appearing that the Reading Mistress puts the Girls to reading passages in the Scripture which it is absolutely impossible they can understand and consequently cannot read with any pleasure or improvement'. It was thus ordered that the girls were taught to read material they could understand, 'so that they may read with delight' and the Reading Mistress can explain to them, 'in an easy familiar manner such parts as are most interesting that they may be improved in their understanding and at the same time learn to read with so much the greater ease'.⁴² These teaching methods can be considered progressive in the context of contemporary education and instruction and gave an indication of the pedagogical environment that the Governors encouraged at the time of Anne's residence at the Foundling Hospital. Regarding Anne's education, while it is clear that girls did not receive as broad an education as boys, due to their intended future in the domestic sphere, the education of girls was not subordinated to the point where it had no value in the Foundling Hospital environment. In this the Foundling Hospital was reflective

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² LMA, A/FH/A/03/005/004, FHR, London Sub-Committee Meeting minutes, 3rd September 1763.

of its time, not treating the sexes equally, but neither dismissing the educational needs of girls.

Moral education was not neglected and a few days subsequent to this sub-committee meeting, another recorded the type of material that could be used once the children had learnt to read. This material includes 'Stories ... either Sacred or Prophane' taken both from the Bible and fables, neatly summed up by a comment of the reading master of the time, who remarked that this material would '... amuse and instruct them and also to engage their attention to read them more perfectly'.⁴³

What this material indicates is the education received by Anne Kingstone was not only of a relatively high quality in comparison with other children of her socio-economic status, but that it was potentially delivered in a progressive and child-centred manner. It also indicates a Lockeian influence, the notion of learning as play and the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to children.⁴⁴ As institutional as the care of the Foundling Hospital was, it seems as though the intentions of the governors towards the children was characterised by tenderness and child-centredness.

How much this was compromised by other aspects of the Hospital's environment is difficult to tell. Certainly the Foundling Hospital children were 'marked out' in a variety of subtle ways since their birth and these would only have increased as the children grew older. Aspects such as their clothing singled them out even before they

⁴³ LMA, A/FH/A/03/005/004, FHR, London Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, 20th September 1760. LMA, A/FH/A/03/005/004, FHR, London Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, 12th September 1760.

⁴⁴ Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp.340-343.

were returned to the main institutions, as, when they were settled with their country nurses, all Hospital children were issued with sets of clothing which were replaced yearly.⁴⁵ These ideas of distinctness can only have been heightened by their return to the hospital. Firstly it was a very different environment than that of their early country years; but secondly the hospital, for all its child-centred educational policies, was always mindful of the status of its charges and evidence suggests this status was clearly communicated to the children themselves. Early hospital records advise employees to remind the children of 'the lowness of their Condition, that they may early imbibe the Principles of Humility and Gratitude to the Benefactors, and to learn to undergo with Contentment the most Servile and labourious Offices'.⁴⁶ The children were therefore never to be allowed to forget their lowly position in society and the gratitude they owed to their social superiors in deigning to care for them. This attitude is reflected in another aspect of the Hospital's regime, religious instruction. In the hymns the children sang there is evidence of their supposed origins and their continued abandoned state.⁴⁷

As McClure pointed out, we have no way of assessing how much of this the children understood or internalised, but it would have been difficult for the children, including Anne and Deborah, not to have become aware of their humble status and equivocal origins and internalised this in the development of their own notion of self. From the

⁴⁵ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.193.

⁴⁶ Quoted in *Ibid*, p.233.

⁴⁷ One of the hymns the children sang included the following words

Left on the worlds bleak waste forlorn,
In sin conceiv'd, to sorrow born,
By guilt and shame foredoom'd to share
No mother's love, no father's care,
No guide the devious maze to tread,
Above no friendly shelter spread.

Ibid, p.232.

first they were defined as Foundling Hospital children and this came with distinct social meanings.

Despite this, the Foundling Hospital children shared one of the defining eighteenth-century childhood experiences, apprenticeship. As outlined earlier in this chapter, Shrewsbury had followed the lead of other hospitals and developed its own woollen manufactory which served as a useful training ground for the older children, provided much needed textiles for clothes and blankets for the children themselves and the staff, and gave the hospital another revenue stream. By 1767 the children that were taken in under General Reception approached the age for apprenticeship.

Just as the beginning of the General Reception era had presented the Hospital's governors with the problem of a multiplicity of babies and young children, by 1767, the problem was a multiplicity of young people who required appropriate apprenticeships. The key word here is appropriate. The Governors wanted to ensure that the children in their care were placed with adults who would care for and train them in trades consistent with the reputation of the hospital. Records show many people applying for apprentices who were denied because they were not deemed suitable.⁴⁸ However by 1767, the pressure on the wider Foundling Hospital authorities to diminish the numbers of children in their care, which had been steadily increasing since 1760, was reaching a critical mass. The Parliamentary scare of 1765 had proved how equivocal the hospital's position was and the Foundling Hospital authorities were caught between doing the right thing for the children and appeasing

⁴⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/12/001/015, FHR, Applications for Apprentices to Shrewsbury Hospital, 1769.

their political masters. In an attempt to resolve the apprenticeship problem two expedients were adopted: mass apprenticeships and the sending of large numbers of children to Ackworth.

Mass apprenticeships was a strategy embraced by London out of necessity and adopted by Shrewsbury. Most significant to this discussion are the children apprenticed to Job Wyatt, a screwmaker from Stafford. Twenty-one girls were apprenticed to Wyatt in January 1767 (eleven girls) and April 1768 (ten girls) but in August 1769 two of the girls returned to the Hospital and gave an account of the physical and sexual abuse they and at least two other girls had suffered.⁴⁹ While it is clear the Shrewsbury committee acted swiftly in the case of Job Wyatt, this case highlights the potential danger apprenticeship could hold for children and the comparative ease with which people could acquire children for purposes other than the legitimate.⁵⁰

Regarding the second expedient, the sending of children to Ackworth, the first reference to this is from an order in 1766 from the London committee to send a number of older children there.⁵¹ For well-argued reasons (this would be to the detriment of their own manufactory) the Shrewsbury committee offered a compromise (to send younger children) which indicates their priority was their own hospital and its smooth management.⁵² However London replied swiftly that it was

⁴⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 16th January 1767 and 8th April 1768 and 23rd August 1769.

⁵⁰ All the children were removed from Wyatt's care and the matter was investigated. LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books. 25th August 1769.

⁵¹ LMA, A/FH/A/6/002/001, FHR, London Letter Book, 16th August 1766.

⁵² LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/003, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books. 23rd August 1766.

indeed the older and therefore larger children who were needed at Ackworth and thus 32 children were dispatched.⁵³ All then remained quiet until the summer of 1769, when in May London ordered the removal of 45 children from Shrewsbury to Ackworth; from this point until the middle of August 243 children were sent to Ackworth on the orders of London.⁵⁴ Clearly this exodus of children was alarming to the Shrewsbury Governors, as, after receiving another order for the removal of 50 more children, on behalf of the Shrewsbury committee, Magee wrote to London desiring, 'to know if your committee intends to send any more Children from hence to Ackworth and how many, or whether it be their Resolution to destroy this Hospital entirely, that proper Notice may be given to the servants of this place to provide for themselves'.⁵⁵

For the first time, an inkling of the wider purpose of the governors in London seems to have dawned on the Shrewsbury committee, leading to this rather terse communication. This was a different threat to the one posed in 1765 during the Parliamentary agitation, that, if seen through, would see the end of the Foundling Hospital experiment in Salop. Shrewsbury's letters at this time precipitated a lengthy and detailed explanation of the Foundling Hospital's situation which interestingly comes from Taylor White to a Shrewsbury governor, Reverend Adams, rather than from Mr Collingwood to Mr Magee.⁵⁶ This suggested the London committee recognised their actions needed explanation from, and to, the managerial level above that of the secretaries. In this letter White explains in great detail the situation of the

⁵³ LMA, A/FH/A/06/002/001, FHR, London Letter Books, 27th August 1766.

⁵⁴ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes. 1769.

⁵⁵ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 23rd August 1769.

⁵⁶ LMA, A/FH/A/6/002/002, FHR, London Letter Books. Letter from Mr Taylor White to Reverend Dr Adams, 31st August 1769.

hospital thirteen years after the first children were taken in under General Reception.
[See Appendix 2 Letter from Taylor White to Reverend Dr Adams, 31 August 1769]

Three points can be extrapolated from this letter, firstly that the status of girls at the hospital and in wider society led to their apprenticeships being more problematic than that of the boys. This was a circumstance for which Parliament made no allowance, meaning this was an issue the Foundling Hospital itself had to mitigate. Secondly, the long-term situation of the Foundling Hospital had been severely affected by the General Reception experiment which had led to a period of retrenchment in order to guarantee the continued existence of the Hospital. The position the governors appear to have taken in order to facilitate this was a holistic approach, which encompassed all of the larger hospitals and retained the children as the central concern. Thirdly, at this point the London Committee was keen to transmit their thanks to the Shrewsbury governors and to assure them that there was no immediate threat. The point of this appears to be, to ensure that the Shrewsbury Committee were placated and there was no danger of them resigning their positions and therefore leaving the Salop branch unmanaged.

This correspondence reveals the interdependent nature of the committees in the wider aim of caring for the still vast numbers of children under the Foundling Hospitals care and the need to work together if the scheme was to continue. Parliament was clearly the adversary, despite ostensibly providing much needed financial support, but tied into that support was General Reception and the unfortunate fact that it had been a disaster and potentially had the capacity to cripple

the whole Foundling Hospital scheme. Despite this interdependence, there was evidence of tensions between the various branch hospitals and the main point of the contention seemed to be the children themselves. For Shrewsbury, this tension appears mainly in relation to the hospital at Ackworth, because the latter was in receipt of so many of the Shrewsbury children. Letters between London, Shrewsbury and Ackworth suggested that Shrewsbury actively used strategies to stall the removal of children to Ackworth as ordered by London.⁵⁷ The directive to remove children from Shrewsbury to Ackworth was ordered to 'place out the Parliamentary Children as soon as maybe'.⁵⁸ Ackworth, it seems, was in a very advantageous position as regards the apprenticeship of children; its secretary, Mr Hargraves informed Shrewsbury directly 'we are in great want of more children to apprentice, many people who apply are obliged to go without for want of greater Choice'.⁵⁹

The answer to the question as to why so many children were readily apprenticed from Ackworth and why Shrewsbury's children could also meet this demand, may be found in the woollen manufactories established at both hospitals. Yorkshire was one of the main sites of the woollen trade in England and changes in production were allowing the trade to expand.⁶⁰ Employers in all branches of the trade would be looking for apprentices and where better to look than to an organisation which trained children in the basics of their trade before they were even apprenticed. This might explain the significant demand for apprentice children at Ackworth, to satisfy

⁵⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/6/002/001, FHR, London Letter Books, 6th July 1769.

⁵⁸ LMA, A/FH/D/02/003/016/01, FHR, London Letter Bundles, 30th December 1769.

⁵⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/003/016/01, FHR, London Letter Bundles, 19th June 1769.

⁶⁰ See Katrina Honeyman, *Child Labour in England 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) for an discussion of the textile industry in Yorkshire and the use of apprentice labour within it and p.26 for the practice of sending Foundling Hospital children to centres of textile production.

the growing need for apprentices to the Yorkshire woollen trade and the children at Shrewsbury would also have skills that would make them suitable for apprenticeship from Ackworth. Shrewsbury, however, appeared not to have been entirely happy with being seen as a training ground of skills for Ackworth to exploit. Collingwood wrote to Magee in July 1769 warning against the stalling tactics that Ackworth believed were being used.⁶¹ Shrewsbury denied any such charge and in defending their actions, once again voiced their disquiet with the actions they were being asked to undertake, actions which they saw as undermining not only the hospital's reputation with the local population, but also the well-being of the children:

... so solicitous have Managers here been that so much as to appear to counteract the order rec'd that they have directed several children who had been promised to Persons in this neighbourhood apprentices to be sent away with the Rest in order to complete the Number, not that they thought themselves acting the best Part for the Children by carrying their compliance so far – Their conduct would have appeared rather more justifiable to themselves if they had retained several of those who were thus promised as it seems to them this would have been perfectly consistent with the real Reason and true intent of the orders sent and the children would possibly have been disposed in a manner equally advantageous to them, with the settlements in which they have be placed at a great distance.⁶²

⁶¹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/003/016/01, London Letter Bundles, 6th July 1769.

⁶² LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 25th August 1769.

This correspondence illustrates the complex and interconnected pressures that the hospitals, collectively and independently, were struggling with at this time and it appears as though the welfare of the children was a substantial part of the concerns that were raised and led to the tensions between branches.

The tensions surrounding apprenticeships and the second aspect of White's letter, where girls emerge as problematic, ultimately had a direct impact on Anne Kingstone. Ironically, at the very same time that Shrewsbury was worrying about its future and dealing with the fallout from the mass apprenticeship to Job Wyatt, the apprenticeship of Anne Kingstone to Richard Lovell Edgeworth was agreed, minuted and indentured, with no fee being paid.⁶³ The details of Anne's apprenticeship and its implications will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter, but in the context of the wider issues outlined above it appears that the governors devolved themselves of the responsibility of this particular young girl without fuss or fees. Therefore by 31st August 1769, Anne Kingstone was no longer a child of the Shrewsbury branch of the Hospital for the Education and Maintenance of Abandoned Children.

The Salop hospital continued for a few more years and the records suggest that despite the assurances of Taylor White in 1769, as time went on communication between London and Shrewsbury was not as forthcoming as the latter would have wished. The diminution of children in favour of Ackworth continued through 1770, severely compromising Shrewsbury's ability to supply apprentices to the local

⁶³ LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/010, FHR, Governors Rough Minutes, 1769-1771 and A/FH/A/12/004/060, Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

community.⁶⁴ In early 1772, the hospital was trying to place out the remaining children in its care as apprentices and no more young children were sent.⁶⁵ By August the last girls had been either apprenticed or sent to other hospitals, most notably Ackworth, and Magee began discharging his final responsibilities as secretary for the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.⁶⁶

The history of the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital almost exactly parallels Anne Kingstone's association with it. She was amongst the first nursery children to be removed there from London in 1759. She was caught up, to a greater or lesser extent in the Thomas Morgan crisis of 1765, her apprenticeship can be seen as a direct result of the complex web of issues that surrounded apprenticeship and conflated gender and economic issues, and almost exactly three years after her departure the hospital was no longer operating. London had retrenched for the final and most significant time and from 1772 onwards, the Foundling Hospital no longer had a presence in Salop.

Despite this rather ignominious end, the Shrewsbury Hospital had a profound effect on its surrounding area, not least by the physical legacy of the hospital itself, which remains to this day as a testament to the history of Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital at Shrewsbury. It also had a profound effect on the development and life of Anne Kingstone. We can deduce that she spent the years between the ages of two and eight in a relatively stable household and that upon her return to the hospital in

⁶⁴ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 1770.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 22nd June 1772.

⁶⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 5th August 1772.

1765, the most significant relationship in her life would have been with her foster sister, Deborah. From eight to twelve, she lived within the regulated but to a certain extent atypical (when compared to the experiences of her peers) regime of the hospital and would have learned at the very least to read and acquired skills within the textile industries; it is also reasonable to surmise that she worked in the woollen manufactory.

Therefore it can be argued that far from being 'unconstructed', by the age of twelve Anne was in fact being 'constructed' very carefully to a specific, pre-determined template, as an industrious, respectful young woman. Her place in wider society was not only clear but internalised and would always be informed by her origins as a putatively illegitimate, but definitely abandoned orphan girl. The numerous caregivers in her early life could well have led to feelings of dislocation and uncertainty, which may have been mitigated by the stability of her years with the Casewells, but these could well have been undermined by her return to the Hospital and the complete change, both in practical and emotional terms, to her environment.

Having discussed her early years, the next chapter examines Anne's apprenticeship in more detail and how this perceived 'unconstructed' status led specifically to her apprenticeship and her relationship with Thomas Day.

CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTING THE IDEAL WIFE 1769 - 1774

At the age of twelve, Anne Kingstone was far from being 'unconstructed', and this was an inevitable outcome of her early years growing up within the Foundling Hospital system. Her intended future, like all the other Foundling children was not left to time and chance. She was to be apprenticed and educated for a distinct occupational role. Apprenticeship was one of the rationales behind the formation of the hospital in the 1730s. Thomas Coram, when preparing the ground for the Charter, had become acquainted with Dr Thomas Bray, cleric of the parish of St Botolph Without Aldgate. Bray wrote a pamphlet in support of the hospital, stating that the children would be 'rendered useful and fit for Services, and Apprenticeships to the meanest of Trades, instead of being inured to Beggary, Pilfering and Stealing'.¹ Saving the children's lives was not an end in itself - they were being saved so that they could become productive and economically self-sufficient subjects. But the Governors were always very clear where in the social hierarchy the children would end up and as such they would,

learn to undergo with Contentment the most Servile and laborious Offices; for notwithstanding the innocence of the Children, yet as they are exposed and abandoned by their Parents, they ought to submit to the lowest stations, and should not be educated in such a manner as may put them upon a level with the children of Parents who have the Humanity and Virtue to preserve them, and the Industry to support them.²

¹ [Bray, Thomas] *A Memorial Concerning the Erecting in the City of London or the Suburbs thereof, an Orphanotrophy or Hospital for the Reception of Poor Cast-off Children* (n.d.), pp.15-16.

² London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/A/05/001, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), General Committee Agenda, 1739.

As such the children, once returned to the Hospital from their country nurses, were educated and trained to accept their place at the lowest levels of society; to be good workers, honest, deferential and humble. Their education was less about self-fulfilment and more about training in these attributes. As to the nature of the apprenticeships themselves, the Governors intended the boys for maritime service and the girls for domestic service or 'household business'.³ This plan was largely adhered to until the enormous numbers of children received during General Reception led to pressures on the apprenticeship system. Nonetheless, as far as Anne Kingstone was concerned, her upbringing, education and employment in the Woollen Manufactory was directed towards apprenticeship; she was being constructed as a worker in the 'most servile and laborious offices' of the 'lowest stations' of the economic hierarchy.⁴

The following two chapters explore the specifics of Anne's apprenticeship. The first chapter examines the details of her apprenticeship as recorded in the Foundling Hospital records and then looks at the background and personality of Thomas Day, the man who acquired Anne. It is through the interaction of Anne and Day's lives that specific research questions can be extrapolated. What was Day's specific purpose in becoming the custodian of an adolescent girl and undertaking an experiment in education, in the hope of fashioning for himself a wife? What were the wider societal and intellectual developments that explain the extraordinary decision of Day? How do contemporary discourses around education, the position of women, marriage and gender relations help to place his actions within an Enlightenment

³ Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), p.47.

⁴ [Bray], *Orphanotrophy*, pp.15-16.

framework? The second chapter looks in detail at the experiment itself and explores responses to these questions: how did Anne's residence at the Foundling Hospital render her a suitable candidate for participation within Day's experiment; what was Day's methodology; what were the nature and consequences of the experiment and how did the relationships that subsequently developed have an impact on those concerned?

The growing pressures on the hospital as the children received during the period of General Reception reached their early teens have been outlined in the previous chapter. The specific repercussion for Shrewsbury, was the swift diminution in the numbers of children via mass apprenticeships to local masters and, more predominantly, to the Ackworth branch of the Foundling Hospital. From the records of the Shrewsbury Hospital, it appears that the intention for Anne Kingstone was dispatch to Ackworth as part of another batch of adolescent children.⁵ However, the Shrewsbury Register of Children contains a double entry for Anne Kingstone which indicates a change in the direction of her apprenticeship. The record states that Anne Kingstone was 'sent to Ackworth' on August 30th 1769 (supporting the contention that Anne was employed in the woollen manufactory and thus had acquired skills which rendered her suitable for an apprenticeship within the textile trade), but this information was crossed out and replaced with the following: 'August 17th 1769 Apprenticed to Richard Lovell Edgeworth'.⁶ So rather than actually being removed to Ackworth, Anne was singled out for an apprenticeship in a domestic setting, as the London Governors' minutes of 17th October 1769 recorded her apprenticeship: 'to be

⁵ LMA, A/FH/D/02/007/001, FHR, General Register of Shrewsbury, 1769.

⁶ *Ibid.*

employed in household business'.⁷ These minutes also act as a record that the London Committee knew of, and approved, the apprenticeship. As was the procedure, apprenticeship indentures were drawn up between the Foundling Hospital and a married man, in this case Richard Lovell Edgeworth, stating that on the 17th August 1769 the Governors and Guardians of the Foundling Hospital placed Anne Kingstone with him.⁸ The London Register also shows that Edgeworth took a second girl, child number 10413 Dorcas Carr on 20th September 1769, again to be employed in household business.⁹

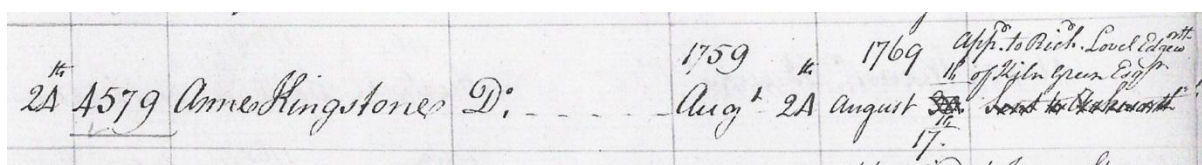


Figure 2: Anne Kingstone's entry in the General Register of Shrewsbury, 1769.

Thus on the face of it, two fairly innocuous and standard apprenticeships had taken place. It was not uncommon for people to take more than one apprentice at a time and for girls to be placed as apprentice domestic servants was entirely in accordance with the Foundling Hospital's philosophy. However, the indentures of both girls conceal a different reality from that which they purport to document. It is in the indenture of Anne Kingstone that hints of the exact situation can be found. Anne's indenture appears to have been signed by Richard Lovell Edgeworth and witnessed by Thomas Day and John Bicknell; in fact Edgeworth was not present at either girl's apprenticeship and had no knowledge he had legally acquired the guardianship of

⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/010, FHR, Governors Rough Minutes, July 1769-March 1771.

⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/12/004/060, FHR, Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

⁹ LMA, A/FH/A/12/003/001, FHR, Apprentice Register, 1769.

two adolescent girls.¹⁰ The apprenticeships to Edgeworth were a fraud, perpetrated by the witnesses, Day and Bicknell. Neither Day nor Bicknell were unknown to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. On the contrary Day and Edgeworth were, by 1769, close friends and it is partly in their friendship that the genesis of the fraud can be found; and partly in the background and character of Thomas Day.¹¹

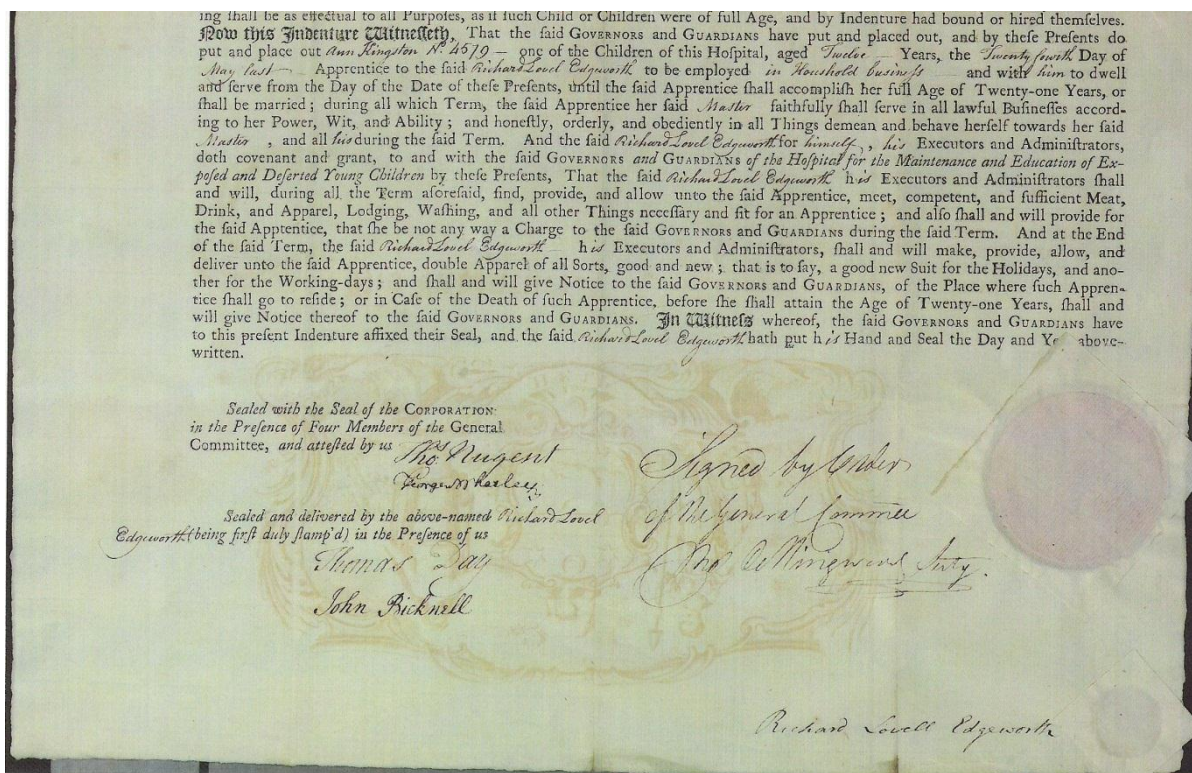


Figure 3: Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

Thomas Day was born in 1748 to a wealthy tax-collector and his wife, Jane.¹² His father died when Thomas was only a year old, but the combination of his father's industry and good fortune ensured the financial security of mother and son. Day was

¹⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/12/004/060, FHR, Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769 and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 1, pp.214-215.

¹¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol, 1, p.180.

¹² George Warren Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton: a Life of Thomas Day* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p.2.

educated at home until the age of seven, whereupon Jane Day married a family friend, Thomas Phillips. The young Thomas was then sent to boarding school at Stoke Newington, one of the Dissenting Academies that was experimenting with a wider ranging curriculum for its students.¹³ His education was cut short by illness and after a time recovering at home, he returned to school but this time to Charterhouse.¹⁴ From Charterhouse, Day progressed to Oxford and Corpus Christi College.¹⁵ Thomas Day's character and upbringing both conspired to form him into a singular and uncompromising young man. His father's death left him as the sole responsibility of his mother and she undertook his education during the seven years before her remarriage to Phillips.¹⁶ Jane Day appears to have been a strong-willed, intelligent young woman who, through both nature and nurture, bequeathed these attributes to her son. His early education within the Dissenting pedagogical tradition, however briefly, can only have encouraged his intelligence and respect for knowledge and enquiry and would have introduced him to the modern curriculum: mathematics, science, history, modern languages and accountancy as well as English, Classics, philosophy and theology. Following this, Charterhouse would have been very different and emerges almost as a caricature of a boy's public school education; a Spartan regime, bullying, plenty of Latin and Greek, sport and boxing - the latter being a test of a boy's popularity.¹⁷ Thomas, having benefited from a healthy, outdoors education from Jane and being a sturdy, well-built lad, does not appear to

¹³ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁵ James Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Stockdale, 1791), p.5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.16.

have suffered too much in this environment.¹⁸ By the time he was sixteen, in 1764, Thomas exhibited many of the characteristics that he would continue to demonstrate throughout his life. He was serious and studious, dispensed charity to the local poor by way of his own pocket-money and happily allowed an opponent, whom he had effectively beaten, to take victory in a boxing match.¹⁹ All of which indicates a susceptibility to an ethos that a certain writer and philosopher had been articulating for some years. It is not clear at what point Day first encountered the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but by 1764, Rousseau had produced two of his most popular and influential works, *Julie*, in 1761 and *Emile* in 1762. Day was a keen student and appears to have read widely therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Day would have been aware of Rousseau's work by the age of sixteen and could have imbibed his ideas.²⁰

The friendship between Thomas Day and Richard Lovell Edgeworth began in 1766, when as a young man visiting his mother and step-father at Barehill in Berkshire, Day visited the neighbouring estate and introduced himself to its tenant, Edgeworth.²¹ Despite the fact that they were dissimilar in character and temperament the two men became friends almost instantly.²² The elder of the two, Edgeworth was descended from an Anglo-Irish family who owned a considerable estate in Ireland, named Edgeworthstown. By 1764 (at the age of 19) Richard Lovell was already a husband to

¹⁸ See Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.17 for an account of Day's response to fighting his school-fellows.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Keir, *Thomas Day*, p.6.

²¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.180.

²² *Ibid.*

Anna Maria and father to his first born son, also named Richard. Richard and Anna Maria Edgeworth resided in the village of Hare Hatch in Berkshire.²³

A combination of their shared Corpus Christi antecedents and fortuitous geographic proximity drew Day from Barehill to Hare Hatch and Edgeworth; but the crucial philosophical and intellectual connection that united the men in a lifelong friendship was the work of Rousseau. Both were enthusiastic followers of Rousseau's work and Day especially found in Rousseau a male role-model to admire and emulate. It is clear that Day was already leaning towards a Rousseauist philosophy of life and therefore it was unsurprising he was an enthusiastic disciple.²⁴ It seemed as though Edgeworth also shared his enthusiasm for Rousseau, for at the time of their first meeting Edgeworth was undertaking the education of his son according to the principles outlined by Rousseau in *Emile*.²⁵ In his friendship with Edgeworth, Day had found someone who not only admired Rousseau, but was prepared to put into practice the theories he expounded. This may have led to Day's own decision to do the same and apply Rousseau's childrearing philosophies to a project of his own, but not in the raising of his son, at least not yet. Day first needed a wife and it was to this end that he intended to apply Rousseau's theories. Thus Day had, at the age of twenty-one, come to the decision that he would attempt to educate for himself a wife. This necessitated the acquisition of a young girl, which in turn necessitated the

²³ *Ibid*, p.177.

²⁴ Peter Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day, 1748-1789: English Philanthropist and Author: Virtue Almost Personified* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.13.

²⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.177.

ostensible apprenticeship of Anne Kingstone and Dorcas Carr to Richard Lovell Edgeworth.²⁶

So what led Day to this extraordinary decision? A decision that was clearly influenced by his friend Richard Lovell Edgeworth's experiment, but that was so different and took the boundaries of Rousseau's theories to such extremes? The answer lies in the conflation of Day's particular character and the societal and intellectual discourses that the Enlightenment had engendered.

The first discourse that can be identified is that of Rousseau himself. Evidence that Day was inclined towards, and possibly even emulating, a Rousseauist mode of life can be found in his juvenile writings. Day began exploring his own literary and philosophical voice at Charterhouse and under the pseudonym of 'Knife and Fork', had sent a number of articles to the *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser*. Several were published between February and August 1764.²⁷ As Day did not mark his sixteenth birthday until June of that year, these writings demonstrate both his precociousness and self-confidence at a relatively young age. The works themselves exhibit the strong views that had already been formed by Day and certainly hint at the early influence of Rousseau and from them we can begin to unpick some of the influences Rousseau had on the development of Day's philosophical ideas.

The first piece he submitted is possibly the most interesting by virtue of not actually being published. The *Gazetteer's* Editor chose instead to say:

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.214.

²⁷ *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser* (London, 1764). The name of the publication changes in May 1764 to *Gazetteer and the New Daily Advertiser*.

Knife and Fork has sent us some very sensible reflections on the baneful effects of great luxury and corruption. But as he is pleased to express his apprehensions of having said more than we may choose to venture upon making public, and had been so obliging as to leave any omissions or alterations entirely to our own judgement, we shall accordingly take the liberty to communicate his sentiments in language more guarded than that which he has made use of.²⁸

While this editorialising strongly suggests that, at fifteen, Day had already embraced a strident, didactic and not entirely politically expedient tone, it also introduces the concerns to which Day was applying himself at this time; the ‘baneful effects of great luxury and corruption’. This can be identified as the first Rousseauist theme that Day publicly explored. To Rousseau, ‘the history of civilisation could be read as the history of effeminacy’.²⁹ He was not alone; there was a fear developing amongst the literati that the modern reformation of manners, the rise of the consumer society, the move towards ‘civilisation’, especially the Arts, could lead inexorably to ‘effeminacy’.³⁰ In this context effeminacy had specific connotations which were gender neutral and ‘became short-hand for numerous deleterious effects of luxury – such as corruption, degeneracy, enervation, supineness and self-indulgence’.³¹ Writers as different as Wollstonecraft and Fielding identified effeminacy as a problem

²⁸ [Editor] *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*, Issue 10 888 (9th February 1764).

²⁹ Sylvana Tomaselli, ‘Civilisation, Patriotism and Enlightened Histories of Women’ in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.125.

³⁰ See G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) for discussions around the issue of luxury and effeminacy.

³¹ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p.63.

and applied the terms as equally to women as to men.³² Thus Day proclaims his opposition to luxury and corruption and its concomitant evil, effeminacy.

Possibly the paraphrasing rather than publication of his work persuaded Day to temper his style as subsequent submissions were printed. In these works, he explores further the Rousseauist discourse and the themes that can be found within it. The most significant work is a poem entitled 'The Triumph of Politeness' which appeared in two parts on 5th May and 15th August 1764 respectively.³³ The poem offers a critical view of society; Politeness, Reason, Dancing and Dress are personified and all but Reason are allowed to take centre stage and soliloquise. In the first part of the poem, the fashionable world of 'minuets, balls and powder'd beaux' exemplified by Vauxhall Gardens are the subject of Politeness's consideration. It quickly became clear over whom, in Day's opinion, Politeness and her 'friends that dance' and 'friends that sing' have the greatest influence; 'over the widow, maid and bride'. One of these friends, the Genius of Dancing then steps forth and claims it is her aim to free people from the 'cumb'rous load of common sense' and to 'impart/The first great precepts of the fiddlers art' allowing the 'chaste nymph' to 'enchant...the young collegian, while he feels/His empty head much lighter than his heels'. Exalting in the defeat of Reason and Philosophy, Dancing then brings a nationalistic slant to the observations; 'tutor'd by my care they learn to dance/And Britons caper like the sons of France'. This early work again demonstrates Day's engagement with the Rousseauist ideas around

³² Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p.303 and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.63.

³³ [Thomas Day, writing as Knife and Fork], 'The Triumph of Politeness', *Gazetteer and the New Daily Advertiser*, Issue 10 967, 5th May and Issue 11 054, 15th August 1764.

fashionable society, manners, dance and music and the parallel concern with effeminacy and luxury.

Day was clearly articulating his own abhorrence of fashionable clothes and society, dancing and music were the subject of his disdain and those who indulge in them are sweepingly dismissed. Britain, clearly the superior nation, was in danger of sliding into the decadence that has already overtaken France and while men are just as prone to pointless indulgence, women are susceptible to the folly of dancing and dress from childhood to old age. This preoccupation with dress is continued in the next part of the poem, where the Genius of Dress steps forward and addresses the reader. Fearful that Reason and Philosophy might 'blast' a lovely youth's 'genius with rusticity', Dress comes as, 'the lord's delight, the lady's passion' and, as 'The great directress of each reigning fashion', exhorts, 'taylor's' and barbers to 'bow before your King!'. Again, the work then takes on a nationalistic tone when Day makes it clear that the fate to which France has already succumbed, 'The willing world shall rush into my arms./See thoughtless France, advancing o'er the plain,' is one that Britain is blithely heading towards, 'See, happy Britain! See, thy sons confess/The mighty monarch of their hearts is Dress:'³⁴

What these early works demonstrate is the influence of the Rousseauist discourse on Day, in which he articulates his strong rejection of the outward signs of societal conformity, and offers criticism of fashion and fashionable society; criticisms which can be found in both *Emile* and *Julie*. For Day as for Rousseau, fashion is merely the

³⁴ [Day writing as Knife and Fork], "The Triumph of Politeness", 15th August 1764.

outward sign of luxury and an indication of inward personal and civil decay and inevitably, therefore, effeminacy. Effeminacy was as applicable to woman as to men and thus had implications for their marital relationships and maternal roles. Day's concerns took a logical course and concluded that luxury, effeminacy and indulgence detrimentally affected women (and thus society) and the relationships they had with their children, ultimately having implications for child-rearing and the next generation. To Day the move away from a 'natural' state, which includes the 'easy dictates of common sense' is no more than a 'perversion which makes women prefer lap-dogs to their children'.³⁵ Passing judgement on the French, Day articulates his concerns over the effect of being 'Attached entirely to exteriors', which he claims to include ' - a universal infidelity ... the men can feel nothing but indifference for their nominal wives; hence all the ties of nature are broken through, all the sweet connections of domestic life unknown - husband, wife, father, son and brother, are words without meaning'.³⁶ Again fearing the influence of French society on the British, he comments:

If I have time I would add a little Essay, by way of a calculation of the number of years, which will elapse, before my fair country women who are improving very fast, may flatter themselves with having equalled their [French women's] perfections; that is to have neither modesty, delicacy, decorum, sentiment, tenderness or love for their lovers: as to husbands it is out of the question.³⁷

³⁵ Letter from Thomas Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, quoted in Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.223.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.224.

Here it is clear that for Day, a natural state, natural affection and natural relationships are those that, for women, involve the primacy of the domestic sphere; the relationship between a wife and her husband and the care of her children. Becoming absorbed by luxury and effeminacy, signalled by an obsession with appearance, dress and fashion, and frivolous activities, such as dances and masked balls, undermine the devotion of women to that sphere. The women he consistently encountered appeared to demonstrate the characteristics of the former, rather than the latter, ultimately driving his decision to acquire a girl such as Anne Kingstone, who had had little opportunity to 'improve ... very fast' and was young and 'natural', as a prospective wife.

The second theme within the Rousseauist discourse that Day appears to be engaged with is that of authenticity.³⁸ Thomas Day graduated from Charterhouse to Oxford's Corpus Christi College.³⁹ Within its walls, Day pursued his studies, which seem to have been centred on the classics and philosophy as James Keir recalled the main object of Day's study to be 'the discovery of moral truths'.⁴⁰ From these studies, Day 'gained a contempt for wealth, ease, and pleasure; an admiration for heroism and magnanimity, for simplicity and purity of manners'.⁴¹ In many respects, Day's background, upbringing and education seemed almost to encourage him to become a 'natural man'; an inclination given concrete affirmation by the theories of Rousseau. What Rousseau appeared to offer Day was confirmation of his own world view, together with a philosophy of life and a practical system of living; in short, Rousseau

³⁸ Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJBM), 2001-71-16, Letter from Thomas Day to Anna Seward, Lichfield (1771).

³⁹ Keir, *Thomas Day*, p.5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.6.

⁴¹ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.27.

validated Thomas Day, at a time when that validation was most influential. Among that validation can be found the idea of 'authenticity'. This notion of authenticity has been explored by Mira Morgenstern who interpreted it thus: 'there is a unique component to each individual, a component that carries with it a moral imperative of its own. It is the fulfilment of this moral imperative that is designated by the term "authenticity"'.⁴² It can be argued that it was to this idea of authenticity that Day was attracted as a young man and which he continued to strive to realise for the rest of his life. Likewise this notion of authenticity was the springboard for many of the decisions and projects he undertook.

The third discourse with which Day was engaged was the broader one running through the Enlightenment, that of the female in society and female education. Much fruitful work has been undertaken recently that has shifted historical attention from the Enlightenment as a primarily male and European experience, to the Enlightenment also as a female and British one, to the extent that it is no longer easy to argue that the 'model enlightened person was the educated adult, presumed affluent, independent - and male'.⁴³ It can be argued that it is the female who emerges as the quintessential model of Enlightenment experience. The reasons for arguing this are challenging to extrapolate, primarily because the Enlightenment itself was a 'world of interlocking influences and intellectual exchanges'; it was not a linear development of a set of monolithic ideas.⁴⁴ Enlightened discourses were many and

⁴² Mira Morgenstern, *Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. xiii

⁴³ See *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Knott and Taylor, passim; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000) p.339.

⁴⁴ Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, 'General Introduction', in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Knott and Taylor, p.xvii.

varied, voices overlapped, influenced, rebutted and revised ideas and theories. The very issue of 'women' admirably exhibits how this worked in practice, incorporating as it did ideas regarding science, biology, nature, nurture, education, metaphysics, religion, rights both natural and civil.

The background to this new thinking about women and their role and status in society can be found in the position of women in the early Georgian period. Even here we see a dichotomy (although that could be argued for any period of human history). Certainly women were constrained, both legally and practically. Patriarchy both underpinned, and was underpinned by, conservative opinions and religious justification. In the writings of the Earl of Halifax and Lord Chesterfield we see the prevailing views - men were superior, from divine ordination and naturally bestowed faculties and it was for the better management of society that this was so.⁴⁵

There were however challenges emerging in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the works of women such as Mary Astell, Judith Drake and Margaret Cavendish.⁴⁶ While they did not call for a gender revolution, they started to unpick the rationales behind the status quo and found them wanting. At the same time changes in family life and society have been identified that led to 'a general

⁴⁵ See Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.55-60 for discussion of definitions of patriarchy and its emergence as a political theory.

⁴⁶ See Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School: a Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929); Josephine Kamm *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965); Mary C. Borer, *Willingly to School: a History of Women's Education* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1976) and Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has no Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989) for discussions of these and other women who challenged the gender status quo.

softening of patriarchy'.⁴⁷ Stone identified the rise of affective individualism and a move towards greater intimacy and affection between husbands and wives, parents and children.⁴⁸ These societal developments both coincided with, and derived from, developing Enlightenment thinking. The challenge to the Divine Right of monarchs inherent in the Civil War and its aftermath, logically led to a challenge to the Divine Right of husbands and fathers to rule over their family, which led to the disapproval of extremes of male behaviour and the emergence of the 'Man of Feeling'.⁴⁹ Print culture expanded, including publications both by and for the female audience.⁵⁰ By the mid eighteenth-century women writers and scholars were beginning to be celebrated, but also natural philosophy, especially biology, was leading a new gendered reading of the body which in turn raised questions around the idea of the 'natural' and, for some, gave new resonance to the ideology of 'separate spheres'.⁵¹ The writings of Locke introduced the notion of the 'tabula rasa' which gave tantalising hints that nurture could be just as crucial as, or more important than, nature.⁵² Locke also outlined an educational system which changed the view of children and childhood, in which children were projected as innocent and human nature malleable. Education was broadened to encompass learning for life; it was about training in character, habits and conduct, promoting self-control and

⁴⁷ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p.324.

⁴⁸ Laurence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), pp.76-89.

⁴⁹ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p.325.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.73. See also Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters' Fictions, 1709-1834: Novels and Society from Manley to Edgeworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Patricia Comitini, *Vocational philanthropy and British women's writing, 1790-1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) and Eve Tavor Bannet, *The Domestic Revolution: Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) for discussions on the growth of print culture by, and for, women.

⁵¹ See Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁵² Specifically John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. (London: A and J Churchill, 1693).

responsibility. Rote-learning and cruelty were dismissed; simple habits and healthy environments were encouraged and crucially, as far as education was concerned, girls were no different from boys. Locke's influence was significant and education became central across the whole spectrum of the Enlightenment project.⁵³ Attitudes to children changed and as the eighteenth century progressed more thought was given not just to the how, but also the why, of female education; to what end were girls educated?

At this point we need to be aware of two crucial points. Firstly, that education was used to further both conservative and radical Enlightenment philosophies. For the conservatives it was used to curtail the influence of the more socially radical elements of society that threatened to disrupt the hierarchy. For them, education inculcated in the lower orders a proper respect for their divinely ordained place in society and undermined calls for revolution; it can be argued that the education given to Anne Kingstone at the Foundling Hospital was one example of this type of education.⁵⁴ For liberals, education offered the potential for self-improvement which influenced wider society for the better.⁵⁵ Secondly, class played a vital role in the debates around education for girls. Much of the discussion focused upon girls from the middling-classes, as girls from the labouring-classes did not have the time or opportunity to consider their educational needs. Certainly in the area of education at this time class was as important, if not more important than gender, in its qualitative and quantitative differences. The question, for what were girls being educated, was

⁵³ See Chapter 3 for discussions on the development of attitudes to children and childhood and its historiography.

⁵⁴ Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.165.

⁵⁵ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p.345.

therefore a problematic one. Obviously girls from the labouring and middling classes were being educated for different reasons and to different ends – that of the economic being one of the most crucial. It was imperative that a girl from the labouring classes learnt to earn her own living and equally as imperative that a girl from the middling ranks did not. For the middling classes this ‘non-economic’ education caused the most angst, because it led to another question: what was the (middle-class) female's place in society? If it was as a wife and mother, how was she to fulfil this role? What skills, what education, what training did she need? And how was she to acquire them?

After Locke, the most important contribution to this debate brings us again to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Utilising Locke's theories, Rousseau produced a work in *Emile* that ‘spelt out in extreme form’ the natural man (and woman) theory that had developed from biological, anatomical and physiological discoveries emanating from the emerging scientific disciplines.⁵⁶ The body was revealed to be differentiated according to sex; and those differences, in skeleton, nervous system, brain, organs and so on all supported the contention that women were by God and Nature formed for child-bearing and rearing. Rousseau therefore argued that women were created exclusively for the male, marriage and motherhood. As such they should be educated with the domestic, private sphere in mind, neither seeking public exposure nor private self-fulfilment.⁵⁷ Rousseau was one of the clearest advocates of the masculinity of citizenship. Certainly in his world view, the citizen was male and female was an adjunct of him. Rousseau, although highly influential did not receive

⁵⁶ Porter, *Enlightenment*, p.328.

⁵⁷ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (Switzerland: Jean Néaulme, 1762; repr. London: Penguin, 1979).

unequivocal approbation. *Emile* was published in 1762 and almost immediately the ideas expounded therein were critiqued. Some of them were embraced, such as his focus on the biological imperative for women, which elevated their status as mothers and their role as early educators in their children's lives. Other ideas were rejected; specifically the extreme, infantile, dependant form of femininity which was the logical extension of Rousseau's theories for women.⁵⁸ Herein lay the particular dilemma for women of the mid-eighteenth century period. Enlightenment investigation seemed to offer a 'naturally' constructed reading of gender which placed women in the domestic sphere, but Enlightenment thought also offered the possibility of improvement and intellectual development due to the Lockean 'blank slate' all children were blessed with at birth. In other words, nature and nurture were constantly placed in conflict with each other. Despite this, Rousseau's theories gained wide circulation amongst a section of the upper and middling classes and evidence of a practical Rousseauism began to emerge, of which Edgeworth's experiment with his son, Dick, was one example.

Against this wider context of Enlightenment discourses around women and their education and the influence of Rousseau's theories on the already authentically minded Thomas Day, the friendship that developed between himself and Edgeworth brought Day into the sphere of a growing group of intellectual and influential men. Through his scientific interests, Edgeworth had begun an acquaintance with Dr Erasmus Darwin of Lichfield. Darwin was the nucleus, together with Birmingham entrepreneur Matthew Boulton, of the West Midlands Lunar Society, a loose but loyal

⁵⁸ Most notably Mary Wollstonecraft. See Jean Bloch, 'Discourses of Female Education in the Writings of Eighteenth Century French Women' in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. by Knott and Taylor, p. 252 for other responses to Rousseau's writings.

grouping of businessmen, scientists, philosophers, mechanics and inventors who embodied middle-class enterprise and ambition.⁵⁹ Around Darwin and Boulton gathered men such as Josiah Wedgwood, Dr William Small, James Keir and Dr William Withering, as well as Edgeworth and Day.⁶⁰ Associated with the Lunar group were women such as the Lichfield poetess, Anna Seward and Maria Edgeworth, the daughter of Richard Lovell.⁶¹ Despite being a varied a group of people with diverse interests, all of the Lunar associates were united in their interest in progress, whether in science, business, commerce, philosophy or literature. There was an emphasis on experimentation, explanation and innovation, on improvement in its most generic form. This sense of progress and innovation transmitted itself from the mechanics of the steam engine, and the decorative properties of chemicals, to social progress. This brought them to the realm of education.⁶²

The Lunar fathers, predominantly Darwin, Edgeworth, Keir, Boulton and Samuel Galton all gave serious consideration to the education their children should receive.⁶³

The boys were destined to follow in paternal footsteps as doctors, businessmen and

⁵⁹ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, pp.68-79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002).

⁶² The educational philosophy of the Lunar Society has been considered by various authors, such as W.H.G Armytage, 'The Contributions of the Lunar Society to Education', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 11 (1) (1967), pp. 65-78, Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960) and Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England, 1760-1860* (London: Longman, 1998). Within the Lunar circle, both Darwin and Priestley were interested in education but Rousseau's influence was felt most heavily by Day and Edgeworth, as the experiments with Sabrina and Edgeworth's eldest son, Richard illustrate. However, their attitudes changed, becoming less favourable, especially after the experiments with Sabrina and Richard had ended without clear success. Edgeworth was also influenced by his second wife, Honora, who undertook observations of her young children playing and learning which ultimately led to a change in Edgeworth's attitude towards Rousseau. The development of Edgeworth's educational philosophy culminated in his work, *Practical Education*, 2 vols (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798) written in collaboration with his daughter, Maria.

⁶³ See Uglow, 'But What About the Women?' The Lunar Society's Attitude to Women and Science and to the Education of Girls', in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by C.U.M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

innovators; professions that eschewed the traditional education supplied by the English system. This led to alternative forms of education for the Lunar boys, such as home-based tuition by subject specific tutors. The girls were both less and more problematic. Less because no Lunar father seriously considered a future as anything other than a wife and mother for his daughters (the only exception being that of Darwin's two illegitimate daughters, Susan and Mary), and more because the Lunar men appreciated the general paucity of intellectual substance in girls' education at the time. The married Lunar men, to a greater or lesser extent, had benefited from wives who were capable, intelligent and practical women.⁶⁴ The Lunar men did not encourage their daughters to leave the domestic sphere, but they nonetheless placed a high value on the role women undertook within it. Education was therefore a high-profile topic within the Lunar circle.

Edgeworth was one of those who took most interest in educational theory and was most radical in its practice. After the birth of his eldest son Richard, or Dick as he was known, in 1764, Edgeworth decided to raise him according to the theories outlined by Rousseau in *Emile*. He explained in his *Memoirs* 'when I compared the many plausible ideas it [*Emile*] contains, with the obvious deficiencies and absurdities that I saw in the treatment of children in almost every family with which I was acquainted, I determined to make a fair trial of Rousseau's system'.⁶⁵ It was probably this willingness to engage practically with the theories of education, on no less a personage that his own son and heir, which endeared Day to Edgeworth when they met in 1766, when the experiment was already in progress. Edgeworth recalls how

⁶⁴ See Uglow, *The Lunar Men* and "But What About the Women?" in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by Smith and Arnott.

⁶⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, pp.177-8.

he 'steadily pursued it for several years, notwithstanding the opposition with which I was embarrassed by my friends and relations, and the ridicule by which I became immediately assailed on all quarters'.⁶⁶ Again it was this very ridicule that would have persuaded Day that his friend had the right idea; he was beginning to consistently swim against the tide of prevailing opinion.

Edgeworth's interest in childhood and education had been affected by his own experiences. In his *Memoirs* he recalls his own childhood and the respect he had for his mother, Jane, who 'took various means early to give me honourable feelings and good principles ... inspired me with a love of truth, a dislike for low company and an admiration of whatever was generous' and 'even while I was but a child of eight years old, was in the habit of treating me like a reasonable being'.⁶⁷ Nonetheless Jane Edgeworth allowed him to be cosseted and overprotected:

I was naturally strong and active but now I was obliged to take a course of physic twice a year ... I was not suffered to feel the slightest inclemency of the weather ... my feet never brushed the dew, nor was my head ever exposed to the wind or sun.⁶⁸

He also recalls learning to read; the confusion he felt with regard to the books he was given, *The Old Testament* and *Aesop's Fables* and the beating he received for not knowing a particular word 'that I had never before heard or spelled', an occurrence

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.178.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.32 and p.37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.31-2.

which 'put me back a little in my learning'.⁶⁹ This experience of a rather arbitrary early education is, arguably the reason Edgeworth considered the matter of Dick's education so carefully. Also Jane Edgeworth set a precedent: 'to the education of her children her whole being was bent from ordinary occupation. She had read everything that had been written on the subject of education'.⁷⁰ Thus Edgeworth was easily inclined towards a practical implementation of a theoretical system, if it improved the education of his children.

Day clearly approved and it is possible that some of Edgeworth's educational experience mirrored his own. Jane Day taught Day at home just as Jane Edgeworth had taught her son.⁷¹ Did Day feel the same confusion when learning to read? Did he, at Charterhouse, have the same experience of rote-learning as Edgeworth? Did Day's experiences bring him to the same conclusion as Edgeworth, that little Dick Edgeworth should be raised as an actual Emile, a natural man and noble savage?

This phase of Edgeworth's life as a father and educator coincided with an equally important one for Day. While he was a gentleman, he was neither a frivolous nor a fashionable one; he had found an intellectual and moral imperative to justify his unique temperament and in Rousseau he had found philosophical validation. This philosophical validation brought with it a range of responsibilities, stemming from the central concept of 'authenticity'. It has been argued that Rousseau was looking for 'fully transformational politics', an aim that would be difficult to accomplish in its

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.108.

⁷¹ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.9.

entirety.⁷² Thus Rousseau attempted to 'find within the confines of everyday life a structure that would guard and even nurture whatever embers of authenticity might exist within an inauthentic world.'⁷³ This would both protect the 'authentic' man in the private sphere, allowing for an authentic personal life, and hold out the hope of imbuing 'a fully authentic life' on to the public and political world. The everyday structure Rousseau had identified was the family. Thus in Rousseau's philosophy, the family takes on both a private and political function - and specifically it is a regenerative political function, for it was not the family *per se* that acts as an assurance of authenticity but a 'New Family', one with a particular ethos at its heart.⁷⁴ In both *Emile* and *Julie* we can find exemplars of this New Family, which Rousseau argued played a major role for two reasons; firstly in defining the notion of the 'self' particularly regarding the roles and demarcations between the sexes and, secondly, by educating man to live in society, specifically political society. The key to this New Family was not to be found in its male head, but the female; herein lay both the revolutionary and reactionary elements of Rousseau's gender theory. Women were crucial to 'the fate of the transformational revolution that would promote the development of private and public authenticity'.⁷⁵ It was in the person of the wife and mother that the family, hardly a new concept, would acquire a revolutionary character and be transformed. By embracing their biologically ordained maternal and domestic functions, women would be directly responsible for the formation of their children's outlook, morals, sense of self and ways of relating to both the inner world of the family and the external world of society. Rousseau's ideas gave women

⁷² Morgenstern, *Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity*, p.181.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.182. See Morgenstern for a discussion of this concept of the 'New Family'.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.184.

tremendous power but, conversely, the burden of responsibility for all of society's ills should they fail. In *Emile*, but particularly in *Julie*, we are shown the power that women can exert over their society, if used correctly. *Emile* contains an advocacy of breast-feeding, commends the infant to its mother's care rather than a coterie of nursemaids and places on Sophie the solemn responsibility of raising the next generation of Emiles. At Clarens, Julie holds sway and rules by the power of her personality and goodness. She is the moral centre of the estate and together with Wolmar, they exemplify a marriage that functions on a political as well as personal level. Not only do they devote themselves to their children, raising and socialising them, but they devote themselves to the wider Clarens community, those who become absorbed into it and those who work for them.⁷⁶

It was a seductive philosophy, which appealed both to men and women and therefore it is unsurprising that it appealed to Day on an intellectual level. We must remember the early influence of Jane Day on her son, which seems to have imbued him with a solemn respect for womanhood that led to a disdain for fashionable society ladies. It is in Day's writings that we can find his own articulation of the Rousseauist attitudes he was developing. In a poem entitled, 'Written During a Tour to the West of England' and written in 1765, a year before he met Edgeworth, we find both a romantic, idealised view of the female sex, a vision of perfect womanhood and echoes of the utopian idyll that is Clarens and its position as an antithesis to the fashionable world. In this work we can identify some of the themes that were coming to dominate Day's views on marriage which in part stemmed from his wider

⁷⁶ Rousseau, *Julie or The New Eloise* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1761; repr. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), pp.302-303.

philosophical worldview. The future Mrs Day should care only for the approbation of her husband, distaining all opinions but his, '... heedless of the praise or blame/Of all mankind, of all but me'.⁷⁷ It is from society (both generic and fashionable), and 'Pomp's false glare' that Mrs Day should turn, placing her husband at the centre of her concerns and herself at his command, 'Tis thou must soothe my soul to rest;/Tis thou must soften ev'ry care'.⁷⁸ In this Day come very close to articulating the theories of Rousseau in Book Five of *Emile*, in which he turns his attention to women, personified as Sophie, Emile's future wife. From the 'moral relations of the two sexes' argues Rousseau, it becomes clear that 'woman is made specifically to please man ... and to be subjugated' and thus she 'ought to make herself agreeable to man instead of arousing him'.⁷⁹ To these opinions, Day adds his own, that money or a large dowry is not necessary to him, 'No haughty birth or dower I ask', again going against the grain of contemporary thinking on the socio-economic compatibility of husband and wife as much as the emotional.⁸⁰ Finally, he describes the future he envisions for them both, away from society, company and the scrutiny of a 'public' life, 'Sequestered in some secret glade,/With thee unnotic'd would I live;'.⁸¹ It was against this ideal that Day was to measure the various women he courted, amongst whom we must count Anne Kingstone as she developed under his tutelage.

Those who came to know Day would later contextualise these ideals. Seward maintained that although Day was 'suspicious of the female sex, and averse to risking

⁷⁷ Thomas Day, 'Written During a Tour to the West of England', in *Select Miscellaneous Productions of Mrs Day and Thomas Day, Esq in Verse and Prose*, ed. by Thomas Lowndes (London: T. Jones, 1805), p.7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p.358.

⁸⁰ Day, 'Written During a Tour to the West of England', p.7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

his happiness for their charms or their society' he, 'thought it ... his duty to marry'.⁸² In the context of Rousseau's theories it can be argued that Day was taking seriously the imperative that the family was the locale of authenticity and the basis for the family was marriage. Therefore for Day, marriage was a duty: to himself in order to protect his own authenticity; to society as, like Julie and Wolmar, he and his wife could run a benevolent patriarchal micro-society; and to posterity as an exemplar and prototype of the New Family.

For a while it appeared as though this desire for an intelligent, sensible wife would be easily satisfied in the person of Margaret Edgeworth, Richard Lovell's younger sister. During a visit to Ireland in 1768, Edgeworth observed his sister charm Day, with 'easy manners and agreeable conversation' almost against his will.⁸³ By the end of the visit, Margaret and Thomas were all but officially betrothed.⁸⁴ But the relationship lasted no more than a year. The failure of his relationship with Margaret Edgeworth left Day in a serious quandary. He seems to have given his lack of success in the field of matrimony serious consideration and instead of finding defects in himself or his proposed system of life, he identified the problem as being with women in general and their education in particular.

In this Day was not alone and, as has been indicated previously, certainly the Lunar circle was sensitive to the fact that the educational landscape, in general and for girls,

⁸² Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.181 and Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), p.69.

⁸³ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.202.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.203.

in particular, was rather barren. At this point, none of the other Lunar fathers needed seriously to consider girl's education as their daughters were either infants or unborn. But the environment which they had created for themselves was one of challenge to the status quo, including contemporary educational practices. The Lunar men can be seen as part of the wider Enlightenment movement.

It was against this wider social and intellectual background that Day grew from adolescence to adulthood. Within and against these various discourses his ideas were forming. He developed staunch philosophical views, possibly influenced by Rousseau, at an early age. The influence of Rousseau only increased as Day developed a vehement aversion to effeminacy, luxury and corruption and an equally vehement desire for an authentic life and he thought it his civic duty to marry. He therefore needed a wife, but a wife of a very distinct, unique type. This conclusion led to some equivocal relationships with women and, set within the on-going debates around women and education, led to the conclusion that it was the quality of the women that was going to be the problem for him in finding a wife, specifically their education. There clearly being no such woman of sufficient age or education to meet his criteria, Day, following the dynamic and experimental example of his Lunar peers, decided to follow Edgeworth's example and undertake an experiment of his own, involving not the education of a daughter but a wife. It is the practical undertaking of that experiment and the details of its development that forms the basis of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONSTRUCTING THE ACTUAL WIFE 1769 - 1774

Thomas Day's decision to educate a young girl according to the theories laid down by Rousseau, had, theoretically, solved the problems he had encountered when trying to acquire a wife. This chapter will look at the practicalities Day faced in executing his plan and how that brought him into the sphere of the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital and introduced him to Anne Kingstone. The details of Day's experiment and the immediate aftermath are analysed to try and establish how they affected the development of Anne Kingstone.

As has been examined previously, the blueprint for the type of wife Day was hoping to acquire was modelled on Sophie and Julie – the antithesis of the women who had rejected him. With Sophie as his starting point, Day turned his mind to how he was going to set about his task. Firstly, what was the 'raw material' that gave him the best chance of educating a Sophie? Secondly, how was he going to surmount the practicalities of acquiring a female child on which to experiment? If we consider the type of wife Day was hoping for, we see he required a girl with little or no knowledge of society, a basic standard of intelligence but little education and given his propensity for women of 'no haughty birth or dower', a girl from the lower orders rather than the middling or upper ranks.¹ Even so, how was he going to persuade any right-thinking parent to hand over the care and education of a daughter to a man whose avowed intention was to create a wife? However Day framed it, there was an

¹ Day, 'Written During a Tour to the West of England' in *Select Miscellaneous Productions of Mrs Day and Thomas Day, Esq in Verse and Prose*, ed. by Thomas Lowndes (London: T. Jones, 1805). p.7.

unambiguous sexual conclusion to the experiment, one which could compromise the reputation of any girl involved and might lead to suspicions of impropriety long before a marriage took place.

As he was resident in Lichfield, Shrewsbury was only 45 miles distant and was home to the Foundling Hospital. Here Day would find an abundance of girls who were from the lowest echelons of society, without dowries or families, inured to simple living, plain food and hard work with only a very basic standard of education. In terms of 'raw materials' they could hardly be bettered, added to which Day only had the Foundling Hospital authorities to deal with, not a family group. With the education, background and upbringing of the children rendering them particularly suitable for Day's experimental aims, he journeyed to Shrewsbury in August 1769 and he took with him another man by the name of John Bicknell.²

Day and Bicknell had been close friends since they met at Charterhouse and shared the same predilection for literature.³ The Bicknells were an old and distinguished family and by the eighteenth century had gained a foothold in the legal profession; John was the second son of Robert and Sarah Bicknell.⁴ By virtue of his friendship with Day, Bicknell became an intimate of the Lunar group, although he was never

² Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth, 2 vols* (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 1, p.214. and Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), p.69.

³ George Warren Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton: a Life of Thomas Day* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p.17 for Day and Bicknell's early friendship at Charterhouse and Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.187 for Bicknell's literary interests.

⁴ See Bicknell, A.S. *Five Pedigrees* (London: Sherwood, 1912) for background of the Bicknell family, including that of John Bicknell.

sufficiently termed a Lunar man. However his talents and personality were appreciated by them and summarised thus by Edgeworth, 'Mr Bicknell was a man of uncommon abilities ... besides being a poet, and a lawyer of the most promising abilities, [he] was a man of nice discrimination, sound judgement and various conversation.'⁵

Day obviously felt sufficiently secure in the friendship of Bicknell, as much as he did in that of Edgeworth, as it was the former to whom Day must have confided the reason for his journey to Shrewsbury in August 1769. Furthermore Day must have trusted Bicknell enough to request his compliance with the fraud of the girls' apprenticeship, a compliance to which Bicknell clearly agreed.⁶ The men thus travelled to Shrewsbury to select a girl. Although most sources suggest Bicknell merely accompanied Day to the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital, Maria Edgeworth, completing her father's memoirs on his behalf, stated that it was Bicknell who singled Anne Kingstone out from the line of girls brought before both men.⁷ This is a detail that gained more significance for Bicknell and Anne in later years.

The date of Anne's apprenticeship indenture was August 17th 1769.⁸ Given that the hospital correspondence indicates that once a child was chosen, the indentures were

⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, pp.187-8.

⁶ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/A/12/004/060, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769 contains Bicknell's signature as witness to Edgeworth's 'signature'.

⁷ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.110.

⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/12/004/060, FHR, Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

completed and they were taken on the same day, the date could be both the date of Day's visit to, and Anne's departure from, the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital.⁹

Whether Day expected a romantic attachment on his side to develop is uncertain, but what seems to be clearer is that the thoughts and wishes of the young girl in question were not taken into consideration. In this he seemed to place unassailable faith in the power of education to inspire sufficient like-mindedness and emotional compatibility, to support and sustain a marriage, and was more influenced by *Emile* than even Rousseau thought practicable. Rousseau reportedly became frustrated with the degree of exactness to which people were applying his theories, saying 'It is about a new system of education, whose outline I offer up to learned scrutiny, and not a method for fathers and mothers which I never contemplated'.¹⁰ However, Day may have been influenced by writers other than Rousseau and internalised the notion that women of the servant classes had no right to reject him, as women of his own class did. Here the figure of the female servant becomes important as, at this time, the female domestic was a problematic figure because of her sexuality and ambiguous position in the household.¹¹ The figure of the victimised female servant was a well-known stereotype and one that Day had actually defended in the past, by seeking to challenge the seducer of a young female servant to a duel if he refused to marry her.¹² Day was diametrically opposed to the servant-seducing *lothario*, but are there other female literary models who, along with Sophie and Julie, influenced Day's thinking

⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, Foundling Hospital Records, 26th August 1767.

¹⁰ Quoted in Peter Jimack, *Rousseau: Émile* (London: Grant and Cutler Ltd, 1983), p. 47.

¹¹ See Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism and Violence Between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009) for a detailed examination of the relationships between masters and servants in the eighteenth century.

¹² Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.33.

about women? Richardson's *Pamela* could provide another powerful influence on how Day approached his experiment.¹³ Pamela, in refusing to submit to her employer's sexual advances, succeeds in inspiring his moral regeneration and is rewarded with respectable marriage to him. In doing so, she 'negotiates a new imaginative space in which the woman servant's sexual magnetism guarantees social stability'.¹⁴ For Day, this would have coincided perfectly with his decision to acquire a Foundling Hospital girl; a girl who had been bred up specifically in the servant class and whose destiny was clearly domestic. To the figure of Julie and Sophie, Day could also add that of Pamela – a female domestic whose virtue redeemed a wealthy man and who, despite fighting his illegitimate advances, is attracted to him. One of the ways to read *Pamela* could be the affirmation that all masters have the right to demand their servant's affection and all female servants will ultimately succumb, if not to illicit lust, then to an economically beneficial marriage.

After acquiring Anne, Day had decided to improve his odds of success in his unorthodox experiment. He travelled to London, presumably accompanied by Anne, and acquired a second girl.¹⁵ The child's name was Dorcas Carr and the Apprentice Register states that she was apprenticed on the 20th September 1769.¹⁶ An examination of her apprenticeship indenture shows that Day again used Richard Lovell Edgeworth as the putative master, but acquired two new witnesses, Martha Preston and Richard Saywell and thus on this second indenture, Day's name does not

¹³ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, 1st edn (London: Messrs Rivington & Osborn. 1740).

¹⁴ Straub, *Domestic Affairs*, p.48.

¹⁵ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.69.

¹⁶ LMA, A/FH/A/12/003/001, FHR, Apprentice Register 1, 1751-1769.

appear at all.¹⁷ This raises the vital issue of the Foundling Hospital's complicity in the apprenticeships of Anne Kingstone and Dorcas Carr to Richard Lovell Edgeworth.

The issue of the Hospital's complicity over the girls' apprenticeship is a vital one in the development of Day's experiment, for it is at this point that the Foundling Hospital should have rejected Day's application and prevented his involvement with Anne Kingstone and Dorcas Carr. The restrictions around the apprenticeship of children from the Hospital were clear and longstanding, having been put into place when the first children reached their adolescent years in the early 1750s.¹⁸ The Hospital's governors were restricted by the law regarding apprentices. The 1562 Statute of Artificers restricted the apprenticeship to certain trades and allowed for a child to be apprenticed until the ages of 21 or 24 years and stated that individuals could not practice a trade without serving seven years as an apprentice.¹⁹ The Foundling Hospital refined these broad guidelines to suit their own organisation. Children would not be apprenticed until the age of eleven or twelve and the governors would make enquiries regarding the character of those applying for apprentices and the nature of the proposed trade.²⁰ During the first years of the Hospital's existence it was relatively easy to ensure the proper apprenticeship of the children from the Hospital. The governors continued to refine their rules regarding apprenticeship, including prohibiting taking any child out of the country and expected a master who wished to transfer the apprenticeship of a child to another

¹⁷ LMA, A/FH/A/12/004/058, FHR, Dorcas Carr's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

¹⁸ Ruth K. McClure, *The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), pp.124-128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.125.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

master to obtain the permission of the Foundling Hospital first.²¹ But, just as with the administration of the hospital and care of the infants, General Reception proved to have a detrimental effect on the apprenticeship system. As the children received into the Hospital between 1756 and 1760 reached their adolescent years, the pressure on the hospital grew exponentially and led to some of the issues referred to in the previous chapter, such as mass apprenticeship to manufacturers and the wholesale transferal of children to Ackworth.

Into this maelstrom of confusion and pressure Thomas Day came, looking for an adolescent girl, but by the rules of the Hospital, he should have been refused. The Governors firstly should have questioned Day on the nature of the apprenticeship and discovered it to be an unorthodox one. Secondly, the nature of the apprenticeship intended meant that Day was unmarried and the rules stated that any master taking a girl must be married and his wife must have met and approved of the girl.²² Thirdly, the hospital should have monitored the children apprenticed from it but as Day intended to take the girls to France for the first part of their education, this would be impossible.²³ Fourthly, Day intended to bind the girl he did not wish to make his wife over to another trade, and was implicitly taking a girl out of the Hospital only to re-apprentice her in the near future. All of these factors should have prevented Day's acquisition of both girls. The argument can be levelled that Day and Bicknell perpetrated a fraud and the Hospital governors knew nothing about it, but the fraud appears to have been on the surface only and there is a strong implication that the governors were aware of this situation. The apprenticeship indenture of Anne

²¹ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.127.

²² Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2007) p.69.

²³ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.127.

Kingstone clearly states that it was signed by Richard Lovell Edgeworth and witnessed by Thomas Day and John Bicknell.²⁴ However, Edgeworth was nowhere near Shrewsbury at this time and therefore could not have signed anything in the presence of the Shrewsbury Master, Samuel Magee.²⁵ Again, given that Edgeworth was nowhere near Lichfield, Anne clearly left the hospital with Day and Bicknell, possibly with the full knowledge of the Shrewsbury governors.

The contention that the authorities at Shrewsbury tacitly consented to Day's acquisition of Anne is supported by a curious exchange between the London Governors and the Shrewsbury authorities, which indicates that the London committee, at least, knew the real intent behind Day's acquisition of Anne. On 5th October 1769, Collingwood included an apparently off-hand aside in a letter to Magee, 'Sir ... Pray was anything remarkable in the girl Ann [sic] Kingston No 4579.'²⁶ To which Magee replied with equal off-handedness on the 9th October, 'Sir ... – I did not see anything remarkable in the girl Ann Kingston 4579.'²⁷ As brief as this exchange is, it does show that the apprenticeship of Anne Kingstone to Thomas Day had for some reason piqued the curiosity of Collingwood. Moreover, it appears to be the person of Anne herself, rather than the apprenticeship, that raises curiosity. Although we can only conjecture what prompted Collingwood's enquiry, it does reinforce the theory that the London Committee did have some notion that Anne's apprenticeship (and possibly Dorcas Carr's) was an unorthodox one and, even more

²⁴ LMA, A/FH/A/12/004/060, FHR, Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

²⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.214. Edgeworth's Memoirs suggested he was resident in London at the time of the apprenticeship.

²⁶ LMA, A/FH/A/06/002/001, FHR, London Letter Book, 5th October 1769.

²⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 9th October 1769.

significantly, that they approved it and had no intention of preventing its continuance.

So how was Day able to acquire the girls from the Foundling Hospital for a purpose so wholly in contravention of the Hospital's aims and seemingly with their tacit consent? The answer lies in the conflation of class and gender with the practical pressures on the hospital authorities at this particular time. Day was a gentleman and a wealthy one. He was a member of the elite class and friends with some of the most important men of the age and the area. His social standing elevated him above not only that of the girls he was looking to acquire, but also the men who ran the hospital. Moreover, it was girls that Day was interested in. Girls were consistently seen as problematic for the Hospital governors in terms of apprenticeship. Taylor White in his detailed letter to Reverend Adams in August 1769 says, 'the Girls will be harder to be placed out properly'.²⁸ Providentially for Day, he also appeared at precisely the time of most pressure for the Hospital as a whole and on the Shrewsbury branch. By 1769 there was consistent pressure from Parliament to decrease the numbers of children received during the General Reception, the children for which they were directly responsible. Due to this pressure, it seems that Day's status as a gentleman negated the need for adherence to the governor's own rules, allowing him to take the girls as a single man and for an apprenticeship that was not in any way formal. Day did make some concessions, for after his acquisition of Dorcas Carr in September 1769 he donated £50 to the hospital, and became a governor himself.²⁹ This seems to have

²⁸ LMA, A/FH/A/06/002/001, FHR, Letter from Mr Taylor White to Rev Dr Adams, 31st August 1769.

²⁹ LMA, A/FH/A/03/002/010, FHR, Governors Rough Minutes, 30th August 1769.

been more to placate the governors and assure them that he had no intention of slipping away into obscurity, than because he was genuinely interested in the charity.

Despite the Hospital's accommodation of Day, there were dangers that could have easily been associated with the apprenticeship of the girls. At the very time of Anne's apprenticeship and possibly a reason for its speedy and unproblematic administration, was the fact that Shrewsbury was dealing with the disturbing aftermath of a mass apprenticeship in previous years, including the case of some of the girls apprenticed to Job Wyatt, who claimed to have been sexually and physically abused by him.³⁰ Abuse of the children by the masters and mistresses they were apprenticed to was not uncommon; however the Hospital was keenly aware of this and for this reason had implemented extra precautions when considering an application for apprenticeship.³¹ Some children had died due to horrendous levels of abuse from their masters and mistresses.³² Having said this, the Foundling Hospital was certainly more attentive to the plight of abused children than other institutions and the records of Shrewsbury attest to the fact that they did everything in their power to remove abused children from their situation and to prosecute those responsible.³³ It seems surprising that despite the Wyatt case being under active investigation at the time of Day's arrival at Shrewsbury, he was allowed to take a child so easily. In fact the hospital's very own procedures for ensuring the safety of children were in this case explicitly overlooked.

³⁰ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 23rd August 1769. Also see next chapter.

³¹ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.125.

³² *Ibid*, pp.134-6.

³³ *Ibid*, p.135.

A poignant indicator of the dangers in which Anne could have been placed can be found in a comparison between her and her foster sister Deborah Venner. Deborah was apprenticed a year after Anne left the hospital, in November 1770.³⁴ The Hospital records state she went to live with Richard Lewis, a butcher from Shrewsbury, to be an apprentice in household business. Parish records show a Richard Lewis married Mary Williams in 1768 and their son, Thomas, was born in February 1770.³⁵ It would be reasonable to conclude that the Lewis' took on an apprentice to help Mary with the care of Thomas and running the household. By 1772 it appears that Deborah had been taken back into the care of the Shrewsbury Hospital and Magee informed London that, she had 'been barbarously treated by her Master and Mistress'.³⁶

Details of the abuse suffered by Deborah are not recorded but the level of abuse she suffered was sufficient for Collingwood to reply that the Lewis' 'ought to be Prosecuted according to Law for such treatment'.³⁷ However, by this time the Shrewsbury Hospital was almost completely wound down and Deborah had been returned to a hospital that now only housed about fifteen children. Eventually, Deborah was ordered to be returned to the London Hospital and was among the very last children to leave Shrewsbury.³⁸ No record of a prosecution has been found in the Quarter sessions for 1772.³⁹ After Deborah's return to London, she was re-

³⁴ LMA, A/FH/D/02/001/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Committee Meeting Minutes, 3rd November 1770.

³⁵ Shropshire Archives, 117, Shropshire Parish Register, Vol. 17, Lichfield Diocese, St Chads Shrewsbury Vol. 3, p.1789 and 118, Shropshire Parish Register, Vol. 12, Lichfield Diocese, St Marys Shrewsbury, p.444.

³⁶ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 20th July 1772.

³⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 31st July 1772.

³⁸ LMA, A/FH/D/02/005/004, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Book, 5th August 1772.

³⁹ [no ref], Orders of the Shropshire Quarter Sessions, Vol. 2, 1709-1782.

apprenticed to a surgeon in August 1773.⁴⁰ Whether the fact that she remained at the London Hospital for a year after her return from the Lewis's signifies the extent of her injuries is difficult to ascertain with any certainty, but it is clear she was not re-apprenticed quickly.

The fact that Deborah Venner and Anne Kingstone were foster sisters, growing up in the same household in Longden, returning to the hospital on the same day and growing into adolescence together, highlights the reality of abuse that could easily face Foundling Hospital children at this time. Just as the General Reception children were more vulnerable to unscrupulous nurses in their infant years, they were more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in their apprenticeships. Deborah was placed in a standard, formal and orthodox apprenticeship; Richard Lewis would have been vetted, was married and had a trade. Her foster sister, Anne, was placed with an unmarried man, in a highly unusual situation that had as its logical conclusion a sexual component. Yet it was Deborah who suffered the abuse and, from the Hospital record, it was Mrs Lewis who was as much a part of that abuse as her husband. Deborah's case highlights the potential dangers facing all apprenticed children.

Day's acquisition of Anne Kingstone and Dorcas Carr had two immediate consequences. Firstly, Day changed the names of both girls. Henceforth Anne Kingstone would be known as Sabrina Sidney and Dorcas Carr would be known as Lucretia; her new surname was not recorded. Evident in Day's choices were indications of the influences over him. Sidney was in honour of Algernon Sidney, one

⁴⁰ LMA, A/FH/A/12/003/002, FHR, Apprenticeship Register (2), 1770-1851.

of Day's republican heroes.⁴¹ Sabrina was a traditional name for the River Severn, on whose banks the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital sat.⁴² However the choice of this name may have had other resonances for Day. As Keir commented, Day knew his classics and would almost certainly have been familiar with the work of John Milton.⁴³ In his 1634 work, *A Masque presented at Ludlow Castle* commonly known as *Comus*, Milton had included a character called Sabrina, a mythic figure associated with the River Severn.⁴⁴ A brief reading of this work offers an interesting insight into the aspirations Day may have held for his pupil. The broad theme of *Comus* is the relationship between chastity and virginity and within the text it is the figure of Sabrina, a river goddess who saves the Lady from the unwanted sexual attentions of the male enchanter, Comus. The character of Sabrina is associated with uninhibited sexual behaviour as she is the product of rape and was thrown into the river to drown, but survived to become a healing goddess and protect female virtue when it is under threat.⁴⁵ The resonances to the history of Anne Kingstone are striking. Not only is she also the innocent but presumed product of illicit sexual behaviour (which includes the possibility of rape) and she is strongly associated with a group of infants that were left to die because of their origins, but nonetheless she survived. It is possible that Day believed that in naming Anne Kingstone, Sabrina, he was bestowing on her the ability to follow the literary Sabrina's example and emerge as a symbol of

⁴¹ Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton*, p.56.

⁴² Eilert Ekwall, *English River Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.358.

⁴³ James Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Stockdale, 1791) p.7.

⁴⁴ John Milton, *Comus: a Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater* (London: Humphrey Robinson, 1637; repr. Menston: Scolar Press, 1968).

⁴⁵ L.S. Marcus, 'John Milton's *Comus*' in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. by T.N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

healing, restorative virtue and goodness and act as a guide for other women, therefore protecting female virtue, chastity and virginity.⁴⁶

The reasons for Dorcas' new name remains more elusive, but given Day's knowledge of classical literature, it is possible that she was named after the Roman Lucretia, whose rape by the son of Rome led to the establishment of the Roman Republic. However, it is interesting to note that Rousseau wrote a play entitled *La Morte de Lucrece* which may also have been a source for Lucretia's name.⁴⁷

The decision to re-name the girls requires some analysis. Names are an important part of our development and the means we have of differentiating ourselves from others. The importance of names to an individual can be seen in the rituals that have developed across all cultures around naming ceremonies. By the ages of eleven and twelve Anne and Dorcas's names were an intrinsic part of their identity. Likewise the ability to bestow a name signifies a power dynamic between one individual and another and can also denote ownership. Parents name their children and this can be a powerful bonding experience, but masters also (re)named slaves as a means of asserting ownership and obliterating former identities. This form of authority was also exercised over servants, to whom generic names could be given to emphasize the demarcation between servant and master and to homogenise the servant class.⁴⁸ This de-emphasises individual identity and foregrounds the power dynamic between servant and employer. Therefore can the reasons Day re-named Anne and Dorcas be

⁴⁶ With thanks to Dr Malcolm Dick for suggesting this source.

⁴⁷ Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers read Rousseau* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.30.

⁴⁸ Wendy Bottero, *Stratification: Social Division and Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.28.

considered to be both about obliterating their former identities and asserting his ownership and control over them?

The second consequence of their apprenticeship was that the girls were withdrawn from the institution that had been central to their lives: the Foundling Hospital. The Hospital, its rules and regulations and environment, both physical and psychological, had held complete sway over both girls from their earliest days. From the large, crowded Hospital (in August 1769 Shrewsbury had 239 girls) they were removed and placed in the sole care of a twenty-one year old man.⁴⁹

For Anne and Dorcas, both of these circumstances were the second major emotional and psychological trauma they had faced in their lives; the first being their return from their country nurses to the Hospitals at Shrewsbury and London. For the second time they were abruptly displaced from an environment they knew well and whose rhythms, personnel and regulations they were used to and placed in a wholly new situation. Moreover, they were placed solely in male company. This aspect of the dislocation from an institutional to a domestic setting cannot be ignored. The Hospital's regulations enforced strict segregation between the sexes. While at their country nurses the girls could and did have male role-models and company, upon their return to the Hospital the sexes were rigidly segregated and it is debatable how much contact the girls had with the male sex. The hospital staff were predominantly female; men were also employed, although how much contact the girls had with them

⁴⁹ LMA, A/FH/D/02/015, FHR, State of the Orphan Hospital: monthly statistics of officers and children, on printed forms, 1766-1772.

is questionable.⁵⁰ It is reasonable to suppose that a girl such as Anne Kingstone would have had close contact with the males of her foster family (father John and brother, Robert), and other males in the village of Longden, from the age of two until eight. After that the only other male contact would have been in the rigid environment of the woollen manufactory. From this virtually all female environment, both she and Dorcas Carr moved into an environment dominated by a single man.

It is uncertain whether Day himself was aware of the issues that could have arisen from the situation, but he placed the girls temporarily in the care of a widow who lived in the Chancery Lane area of London.⁵¹ Yet this situation did not last long as Day decided he needed complete influence over them, their environment and their learning. The Foundling Hospital had done an excellent job of protecting the girls from the more pernicious influences of society, but Day wanted this to continue as he undertook the girls' education himself. He decided the best way to do this was to retain entire control over the girls and he took them to France.⁵² The theory was simple, due to the language barriers, in France the girls would not be susceptible to inappropriate influences, only those he chose for them. It was a potentially problematic move, for under the terms of the apprenticeship, Day was not allowed to take the girls out of the country and this again suggests complicity on the part of the Foundling Hospital with Day. The Governors undertook to monitor the apprentices after they left the hospital and in some cases brought children back if they deemed that they were being mistreated, such as Deborah Venner. Day does not seem to be

⁵⁰ LMA, A/FH/D/02/015, FHR, State of the Orphan Hospital: monthly statistics of officers and children, on printed forms, 1766-1772.

⁵¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.215.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.216.

concerned with the policy of follow-up care by the hospital, so one can conclude that the Governors had no intention of monitoring Anne or Dorcas in their apprenticeship; a possible result of Day's election to the Board of Governors and his financial donation.

The move to France signalled the first phase in Day's education of the girls. By the end of 1769 he was, according to Edgeworth, residing in Avignon.⁵³ A first-hand record of the events that took place there has only been recorded through the letters Day wrote, few of which remain in their original form, but two written to Edgeworth were re-printed in his *Memoirs*. They mostly outline Day's experiences with, and increasing contempt for, France and French society, but the second of the two throws some light onto his relationship with his two wards. Day reported that regarding his pupils, 'I am not disappointed in any one respect. I am more attached to, and more convinced of the truths of my principles than ever'.⁵⁴ These words betray a defensiveness in tone and vociferous reiteration of Day's attachment to his principles. He continued by contending that after only a few weeks in his care, he was responsible for the girls becoming, 'in respect to temper, two girls ... as you have never seen at the same age'.⁵⁵ This assertion was made, 'without vanity', yet Day's language betrays his belief that he was already beginning to mould the girls into versions of the womanhood he wanted.⁵⁶ His guardianship of the girls was no more than four months old but he said the girls 'have never given me a moment's trouble throughout the voyage, are always contented, and think nothing so agreeable as

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.221.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.225.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

waiting upon me'.⁵⁷ Their perceived acquiescence to him is highly likely to have been the result of their Foundling Hospital upbringing. They had been brought up specifically not to give a moment's trouble; to be as accommodating as possible and thankful of the benevolence shown towards them. Likewise in their education and training they had been trained to be agreeable and biddable; for being good workers was one of the aims of their education. We must also consider the effects of the dislocation the girls must have experienced at this time. They had gone from an institutional environment with little or no extended contact with men, to the sole company of, and care of, one man. The psychological shock of being removed from a 'child-rich' environment to an adult-orientated society must have had an impact. For two girls whose experience had taught them to be accommodating, respectful and to know their place, it is unsurprising that Day found them so attentive to him and so pleasing in their manners and temper. As far as the girls knew, their fate depended on pleasing the young man who had removed them from their home for a purpose unknown to them.

This need to please Day can also be detected in a letter Sabrina purportedly wrote to Edgeworth, 'word for word dictated by herself', which Day included in his letter.⁵⁸ In this letter Sabrina says:

Dear Mr Edgeworth ... I love Mr Day dearly, and Lucretia - I am learning to write - I do not like France so well as England - the people are very brown, they dress very oddly ... I hope I shall have more sense against I come to

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

England ... I love Mr Day the best in the world, Mr Bicknell next, and you next.⁵⁹

Sabrina's autonomy over this letter can be questioned, but if we accept that it was written by her, it clearly reflects Day's own opinions and concerns; she does not like the French and has already absorbed Day's prejudices around dress. She loved Day and the only friends she knows him to possess, both of which by this time she had met and perhaps she considered her well-being also to be dependent on their good will. Here we have compelling evidence that Sabrina was already constructing herself in ways that would ensure her survival in an uncertain environment.

A second and opposing version of events in France comes from Seward. She claims that the girls' tempers were far from pleasing and tranquil; and far from giving not 'a moments trouble' they 'teased and perplexed him' and were 'little squabblers'.⁶⁰ Again the veracity of this version can be questioned and the motives for Seward thus presenting it are discussed subsequently.

Certainly the France interlude was not as serene as Day reported. While boating on the Rhone, the three of them capsized and it was left to Day to save them; the girls were inappropriately approached by a French soldier and they fell ill with what was identified as smallpox.⁶¹ By early 1770 Day had come to the conclusion that their

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

residence in France was not providing the teaching environment he had planned and he took the girls back to England.⁶²

Upon returning, Day took the decision to concentrate his efforts on one girl only. Sabrina was the girl chosen to take his experiment further and she was sent to live for a short time with John Bicknell's mother.⁶³ His reasons for choosing Sabrina are not recorded; the only light shed on his decision is that he found Lucretia 'invincibly stupid', so his decision seems to be based more on a negative appraisal of Lucretia's abilities rather than a positive one in favour of Sabrina.⁶⁴ We can analyse this judgement in terms of Day's expectations and the girls' experience. Day was a highly educated young man, Lucretia was a basically educated young woman; his assessment of her 'invincible stupidity' was possibly the first concrete sign that Day was overreaching, both in terms of his abilities and in his expectations for the girls. The situation he found himself in was more than likely a manifestation of the differences in their backgrounds and understanding. Edgeworth himself articulated the problem, as he saw it, with Day's experiment:

... simplicity, perfect innocence and attachment to himself, were at that time the only qualifications which he desired in a wife. He was not perhaps sufficiently aware, that ignorance is not necessary to preserve innocence: for this reason he was not anxious to cultivate the understanding of his pupils.⁶⁵

⁶² Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.217.

⁶³ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁶⁴ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.217.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Edgeworth continued, Day's teaching methods were not too far removed from the methods Edgeworth himself had experienced as a child: 'He taught them by slow degrees to read and write; by continually talking to them, by reasoning, which appeared to me above their comprehension and by ridicule.'⁶⁶

Thus Lucretia's 'stupidity' may have stemmed more from inappropriate teaching and her disinclination to 'follow his regime' due to a dislike of being ridiculed. Lucretia's subsequent history was outlined by both Edgeworth and Seward. She was re-apprenticed to a milliner and in due course she married a linen-draper.⁶⁷ Edgeworth offered a positive but entirely unsubstantiated account of her life after Day: 'In this situation she went on contentedly, was happy, and made her husband happy, and is, perhaps, at this moment, comfortably seated with some of her grandchildren on her knees.'⁶⁸ Research into her re-apprenticeship, marriage and later life has failed to identify Lucretia's fate. The lack of information around the surname given to her by Day has hindered tracing her beyond 1770.

Day now concentrated his efforts solely on Sabrina and Edgeworth supplies us with a description of Sabrina at this time:

... a very pleasing girl of thirteen. Her countenance was engaging. She had fine auburn hair, that hung in natural ringlets on her neck; a beauty which was then more striking, because other people wore enormous quantities of pomatum. Her long eyelashes and eyes expressive of sweetness, interested all

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁶⁸ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.218.

who saw her, and the uncommon melody of her voice made a favourable impression upon every person to whom she spoke.⁶⁹

Edgeworth had a keen eye and appreciation for female beauty so it is unlikely he would have been so fulsome in his praise had Sabrina not been an attractive young girl. His description also supports the judgement John Bicknell made in his selection of her at the Shrewsbury Hospital. Despite Magee's judgement, there clearly does seem to have been something 'remarkable' about child 4579, Anne Kingstone, now known as Sabrina Sidney.

With Day's selection of Sabrina, his task could begin in earnest and he took the decision that isolation was not in its best interest. Day thus relocated himself and Sabrina to Lichfield. His reasons for doing so centres once again on his Lunar friends. Lichfield was one part of the twin hub that formed the Lunar society's epicentre, the other being Soho House on the outskirts of Birmingham.⁷⁰ In Lichfield resided Dr Darwin, Edgeworth and Anna Seward; frequent visitors included Boulton and Dr Small. Within close proximity to his philosophical friends, Day could enjoy the benefits of their support network. Lichfield society at this time was metropolitan and intellectual, it played host to concerts, balls, intellectual discussions and botanical societies. It had a circulating library, assembly rooms and a theatre and was the foremost social centre in the area.⁷¹ Despite this, Sabrina was not able to enjoy the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ See Robert E. Schofield, R.E. *The Lunar Society of Birmingham: a Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), and Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002).

⁷¹ Mary Anne Hopkins, *Dr Johnson's Lichfield* (London: Peter Owen, 1956) and Howard Clayton, *Coaching City: A Glimpse of Georgian Lichfield* (Lichfield: Abbotsford Publishing, 2009) for a history of Lichfield.

entertainments to which she was now so near; firstly because Day disapproved of many of the society events which Lichfield enjoyed and secondly because Day's social contacts largely centred around the Cathedral Close. The nucleus of life in the Close was the friendship between Anna Seward and Dr Erasmus Darwin; both had poetic and literary leanings and both were strong and charismatic personalities. They drew around them a wide coterie of friends and associates of which the Lunar Society was a part. The gatherings within the Close were convivial, Seward described them thus:

Mr Edgeworth enlivening us by a wit, extensive as the light of the sun and active as its heat, Dr Darwin laughing with us, while we have felt the fine edge of elegant, ingenious and what is most rare, good humoured irony. Mr Day improving our minds while he delights our imaginations.⁷²

Into such a society Sabrina was brought in the early months of 1770.⁷³ Day secured the lease of Stowe-Hill, a house on the outskirts of the city, not far from the Cathedral Close.⁷⁴ Here he brought Sabrina to continue her education and this time he chose not to seclude her from the society of others. Although he chose to reside with her without a female chaperone, Day introduced Sabrina to his Lunar and Lichfield friends, a move which brought Sabrina into the intimate society of a range of distinguished and intellectual men and women that would have been far removed from her previous experiences.⁷⁵ Moreover, according to Edgeworth, Sabrina became the linchpin between Day and the Seward family, 'Sabrina ... was received at

⁷² Letter from Anna Seward, quoted in Schofield, *The Lunar Society*, p.56.

⁷³ Peter Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day, 1748-1789: English Philanthropist and Author: Virtue Almost Personified* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.21.

⁷⁴ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.236.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

the palace with tenderness and regard. She became the link between Mr Day and Mr Seward's family, that united them very strongly.⁷⁶

This is interesting because it is clear that Day had an equivocal relationship with fashionable society and although he liked and respected many among the Lichfield group and beyond, his ultimate goal was a removal from society in general. Sabrina was part of that plan, she was supposed to support him in that removal and yet at this point, she seems to be working as a bridge between society and Day. Not only does this tell us that Sabrina was capable of forming relationships with someone of Anna Seward's status, but that she had sufficient significance in Day's life to be a strong link.

It is at this point that the education of Sabrina takes on its surreal edge and is probably the best known but least understood aspect of Day's experiment. The main source of information regarding the details of this period is Seward. She contends that Sabrina's education consisted of a variety of bizarre mental and physical trials. These included dropping melted wax on her arms to inure her to pain; firing blank pistol shots at her petticoats to strengthen her nerves; and being informed that Day's life was in danger, a danger that would increase if she imparted this information to others, to test her fidelity to him.⁷⁷ Seward goes on to outline Sabrina's 'averseness to the study of books and the rudiments of science', which indicates that education as well as training also continued to have a place in Day's quixotic syllabus.⁷⁸ While further specific information about Sabrina's education was not recorded, there is a

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp.239-40.

⁷⁷ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

source created by Day himself that one could argue offered a more detailed insight into the content and mode of his instruction. In 1784, Day's novel *Sandford and Merton*, which was intended to be a reworking of Rousseau's theories for a juvenile audience, was published and went on to be successful.⁷⁹ *Sandford and Merton* tells the story of spoilt young gentleman, Tommy Merton and his instructive friendship with farmer's son, Harry Sandford and their teacher, Mr Barlow. The story includes a character named Sukey Simmons, whose educational history is given in some detail and who is allied with Harry Sandford, as a character of simple tastes and moral conduct as opposed to the malign influences of fashionable society to which Tommy Merton falls victim. Rowland has suggested that Miss Simmons was a fictionalised version of Day's wife Esther; however a reading of the text would suggest another young lady as the model for Sukey Simmons.⁸⁰ Miss Simmons was raised by her uncle, who 'had such peculiar ideas of female character, that he waged war with most of the polite and modern accomplishments'; these opinions led him to ensure Miss Simmons was ignorant of her own 'very agreeable' and 'pleasing' singing voice because he thought, 'human life is not long enough to throw away so much time upon the science of *making a noise*'.⁸¹ Neither did he want Sukey learning foreign languages because, 'Women ... are not birds of passage, who are to be eternally changing their places of abode', and of the French nation especially: 'I am very doubtful whether the English will ever gain much by adopting either their manners or their government'.⁸² This gentleman articulates opinions very close to those of his

⁷⁹ Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton, a Work Intended for the Use of Children*, 3 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1783-1789; repr, Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2008). See Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p. 238 for the success of the novel.

⁸⁰ Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.225.

⁸¹ Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*, pp.170-171.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.171.

creator, Thomas Day, and in thus also having charge of a young girl's education, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Sukey Simmons was an idealised, fictional version of Sabrina Sidney. Therefore, in the detail that Day presents of Sukey's education, it is possible to argue that there are echoes of that which he bestowed upon Sabrina. Those details reveal that a healthy constitution was important, 'to prevent that sickly delicacy which is considered so great an ornament in fashionable life' which meant regular cold baths, early rising, and lengthy physical exercise.⁸³ Intellectual instruction included knowledge of 'the best authors in our language' as well as 'several parts of knowledge, which rarely fell to the lot of ladies; such as the established Laws of Nature, and the rudiments of Geometry'.⁸⁴ Because 'domestic economy is a point of the utmost consequence', especially for a woman who 'intends to become a wife and a mother', domestic economy was also included.⁸⁵ Some details of Sukey's education correlate with those details offered by Seward, such as the inclusion of book-learning, and others likewise correlate with what we know of Day's character and what he was searching for in a wife. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that *Sandford and Merton* offers us a far more detailed account of what Sabrina learnt, and how she learnt it, while living with Day at Stowe-Hill [See Appendix 3 excerpt from Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*]. It also offers a more balanced portrait than Seward's which tends towards the sensational and emphasizes Sabrina's negative reaction to the experiment. Through *Sandford and Merton*, Day explored the possibilities that his educational project offered and the outcome that might have occurred had it been successful. Despite the element of wish fulfilment inherent in this description, it nonetheless presents a picture which is too

⁸³ Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*, p.170.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

close to the known facts of the real life experiment to be ignored as a source of information about the education Day provided for Sabrina between 1769 and 1770.

Without being able to verify the details of this phase in Sabrina's education, what can be extrapolated from it? From both Seward's account and in the education of Sukey Simmons, it is clear that it was an education that departed from the standards of the time and could be seen to be a rather uneven system of training, but it does support the objective to which Day was aspiring: the creation of a woman who clearly understood her role as a wife, mother and homemaker. It suggests that through education, Day was trying to create a woman who was practical, sensible and robust and who had enough education to make her husband a suitable partner, but not enough to render her useless or inappropriately ambitious. In comparison to the system of education laid down by Rousseau, which Day purported to be following, Sabrina's education bore no resemblance to it. The central tenet of Rousseau's system was to allow a child to learn from nature; the child may be learning within a controlled environment, but the adults in Rousseau's system were careful to remain distanced from the child. Another striking feature of Rousseau's system was its longevity; it began at birth and continued until well into adulthood - until Emile married and became a father himself. Day's education of Sabrina, while carefully controlled, was not performed at a distance. There was an intrusiveness inherent in all the aspects of Day's training that cannot be found in Rousseau's work and it began twelve years after Sabrina's birth. The key to understanding Day's interpretation of Rousseau's theory lies firstly in Day's specific ambitions for Sabrina and secondly in *Julie* rather than *Emile*.

Regarding Day's specific ambitions, he wanted a wife, which was an intensely practical outcome of his experiment. If we refer back to the influences and discourses that led to his decision, we recall he wanted a wife modelled on Roman matrons and not an effeminate wife, who revelled in luxury.⁸⁶ To Day, Sabrina's first twelve years offered him less a child raised as a 'natural man' and more a child raised as the antithesis to the 'society lady'. In this sense, Day may have thought he had acquired, ready made in a Foundling Hospital girl, a prototype of Sophie at the same age, dispensing with the need to raise a child through its infant stages. Having acquired a girl who had none of the social conditioning to which he was so opposed, Day then wanted specifically to craft a wife for himself and from Edgeworth, Seward and Keir we get a specific indication of what that meant: virtuous, hardy, sensible, with no pretensions to fashionable dress or society. Spartan is a word that is used by Seward to describe the wife Day wanted.⁸⁷ From this we can begin to make sense of Day's treatment of Sabrina. He wanted a woman without the stereotypical characteristics of the female sex; he wanted fortitude, self-denial, common-sense, loyalty and with a contempt for frivolity and dissipation. To ensure he got it he embarked on the series of strange mental and physical trials. They were both a test of Sabrina's innate character and spirit, and a programme of training.

We can also look to Julie Wolmar as another type of womanhood for which Day could have been striving. A woman who, despite great personal love and passion for one man, acquiesces to the demands of another, her father, and marries the man he chooses for her. To that man and the marriage that binds them together, Julie

⁸⁶ This term was used explicitly by Seward in *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.69.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

sacrifices herself for the greater good, the needs of civic society and becomes the moral, feminine centre of Clarens.⁸⁸ In some ways, Day can be seen as a mixture of both Julie's father and Wolmar – the patriarch moulding a subordinate female and ordering her future and the benevolent husband, with whom a union can benefit the many rather than the self. The benefit to the many rather than the self, did form the basis of Day's attitude to marriage. His future wife Esther, explained, 'My husband's conduct was in a great measure conformable to that sentiment of Rousseau: "Whilst there is one of our fellow creatures who wants the necessities of life, what virtuous man will riot in superfluities?"'⁸⁹ Therefore in Sabrina, Day was looking for another Julie, a woman who would sacrifice her own desires for the greater good and join with him in a conjugal union that would become the nucleus of a civil society – however microcosmically that might be. A woman who would, like him, see marriage as a duty to oneself and the state.

While Day can be seen as an idealist in these ambitions for Sabrina and in his interpretation of Rousseau's theories, his intentions were nonetheless honourable and serious. In some ways its failure can be seen to be because Day expected so much and gave so little. Seward, in a burst of psychological clarity, comments that Sabrina's only inducement to succeed in these bizarre trials was, 'the desire of pleasing her protector, though she knew not how, or why he became such. In that desire, fear had greatly the ascendant of affection, and fear is a cold and indolent feeling.'⁹⁰ Day seems to have had a lack of understanding of the power dynamics between him and

⁸⁸ See Trouille *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*.

⁸⁹ Letter from Esther Day, quoted in Andrew Kippis, *Biographia Britannica: Or the Lives of the Most Eminent Person who have flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland*. 2nd edn. Vol 5 (London: John Nichols, 1793), p.25.

⁹⁰ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, pp.70-1.

Sabrina. The very reasons she had been so well suited to his project, were also the reasons it was immersed in problems. What was Sabrina in relation to Day? Was she his child, wife, servant or pupil? She had been brought up to exist in the humblest of roles, understanding her place in strict relationship to others, in a hierarchy that placed her at its nadir. That had not changed when Day took her into his household. Her place was still given meaning by its relationship to others, but the relationship of a child or a wife with a gentleman was subtly different to that of a female servant and as has been referred to previously, the female servant inhabited a very uncertain role in the domestic sphere.

Towards the end of 1770, Day's resolve was beginning to falter.⁹¹ Sabrina was not developing as he wished and in the end he admitted defeat and Sabrina was sent to a boarding school at Sutton Coldfield.⁹² However, it seems that other influences were at work in this decision by Day to abandon his experiment in education. In Lichfield he met Miss Honora Sneyd, pupil and *protégé* of Anna Seward, who was charming, well-educated and intelligent. Although disinclined to acknowledge it, Day found her attractive and infinitely more appealing as a wife than Sabrina.⁹³ This attraction could equally have played a part in his decision to send Sabrina to school, given his disappointment that Sabrina did not promise to become the wife he wanted.

No evidence exists of Sabrina's responses to Day and the extraordinary education he gave her between 1769 and 1770, but there are conflicting reports from others about how she reacted to it. Seward, giving the most detailed and sensationalised version

⁹¹ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.71.

⁹² *Ibid* and Edgeworth, Vol 1, p.245.

⁹³ *Ibid* and Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.71.

contends Sabrina 'could not endure [having hot wax dropped on her arms] heroically' and that she could not 'help starting aside, or suppress her screams' when Day fired at her petticoats.⁹⁴ However Reverend Robinson, a Lichfield contemporary of Seward and Day, explicitly refutes Seward's account, 'What Miss Seward says respecting Sabrina's not bearing pain heroically is not true. I have seen her drop melted wax voluntarily on her arm, and bear it heroically without flinching.'⁹⁵ Likewise, from another source, Mrs Schimmelpenninck, formally Mary Anne Galton, we hear that Sabrina 'stood unmoved when, every morning, he fired a blank pistol close to her ear; and how she bore melted sealing wax being dropped on her back and arms'.⁹⁶ This anecdote is as close as we get to Sabrina's version of events, as it came to Mary Anne Galton from a Miss de Luc, who boarded with Sabrina at a later date.⁹⁷

It is certainly not hard to see some truth in Seward's contention that fear and uncertainty lay at the heart of Sabrina's relationship with Day. He clearly was not an easy man to be with and Sabrina was almost exclusively in his company for over a year. Coupled with the extreme psychological and physical trials he put her through it must have been a disorientating and at times frightening experience, the culmination of which was yet another change of environment when she was sent to boarding school.

Of Sabrina's time at Sutton Coldfield we have no surviving record, although Edgeworth says 'Here it was intended, that she should improve in reading, writing

⁹⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, *Dr Johnson's Lichfield*, p.148.

⁹⁶ Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858) p.10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

and arithmetic and all the useful species of accomplishments’;⁹⁸ about which Day had very clear ideas. ‘To make a musician or dancer of his pupil was far from his wish’.⁹⁹ Day’s pathological aversion to music and dancing needs to be put into context and again comes back to his abhorrence of effeminacy and luxury. For some the pursuit of musical proficiency for women was simply a waste of time because in due course they became wives and mothers and had no time for such employment. It was also a sedentary occupation and as such was thought to be ‘injurious to the human condition, and weaken and disorder it in time’.¹⁰⁰ Music pandered to the gratification of the senses, weakened girls and lessened their ability to become healthy wives and mothers. To Day, a prohibition against music was less about restricting enjoyment and more about the preservation of health and fecundity.

Despite this ban on music and dancing, Sabrina received the standard education for a well-bred middle class girl, one much more in keeping with received wisdom at this time. The irony was that a boarding school education had been the antithesis of what Day had originally hoped to achieve and boarding schools were notorious for seeing middle-class girls as commodities, to which the addition of accomplishments could very easily turn them into ‘luxury objects’.¹⁰¹

Anna Seward, a keen observer of female education and educator of the aforementioned Honora Sneyd, gave the following judgement on the education Sabrina received while at Sutton Coldfield, ‘[she] gained the esteem of her

⁹⁸ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.245.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ T. Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism* (London: Samuel Stansburg, 1806), pp.44-5.

¹⁰¹ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p.164.

instructress; grew feminine, elegant and amiable'.¹⁰² One of the most significant aspects of Sabrina's attendance at a ladies boarding school was that it marked her clear move from the lower-class to the middle-class world. By placing her at a girl's boarding school, Day may have distanced himself from Sabrina, but in doing so he effectively distanced her further from the world of the Foundling Hospital and concomitantly the world of apprenticeship, manual labour and a working-class environment.

Sabrina remained at Sutton Coldfield for four years and returned to Lichfield at the age of seventeen in 1774.¹⁰³ By this time Day had proposed to both Honora Sneyd and her sister Elizabeth. His philosophical views on married life had been firmly rejected by the former and his attempts to cultivate a more socially acceptable veneer ridiculed by the latter.¹⁰⁴ It is possible that despite his disappointment with Sabrina four years before, finding himself once again rejected by well-educated society ladies, Sabrina's artless beauty became appealing once more.

It is from Edgeworth that the details of this episode are taken. Sabrina had become an attractive and amiable young lady and Day, having her back in his care, 'took great pains to cultivate her understanding, and still more to mould her mind and disposition to his views and pursuits'.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that despite Sabrina's four years at Sutton Coldfield, despite being educated according to Day's explicit instructions, the Sabrina that emerged was only acceptable to Day if he could extend

¹⁰² Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

¹⁰³ Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.61.

¹⁰⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.71.

¹⁰⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.337.

total control over her. That she may have had sufficient understanding as well as her own views and pursuits was not good enough for Day. The 'being his fancy had imagined' held a sufficiently strong hold over him to re-embark on trying to perfect Sabrina if she was to be his wife.¹⁰⁶ Again it appears that it is Day's excessively high expectations for the woman he wanted to be his wife that undermined their relationship. Even Edgeworth, Day's best friend and clearest appreciator of his qualities, indicates that he thought the strength of his friend's character and opinions were detrimental to relationships. Despite admitting 'I had not formerly thought that she was sufficiently cultivated, or of a sufficiently vigorous understanding to be his companion', Edgeworth says 'Sabrina was, as to many of these circumstances, well suited to Mr Day' but, he continues, 'she was too young and too artless, to feel the extent of that importance, which my friend annexed to trifling concessions or resistance to fashion, particularly with respect to female dress'.¹⁰⁷

This is a very interesting comment by Edgeworth, arguably the one person who knew Day best and who certainly held him in great respect. That Edgeworth considered Sabrina well suited to Day is the strongest indication that a marital relationship between Day and Sabrina was a possibility, and Edgeworth indicated the reasons for its failure resided with Day rather than Sabrina. To be young and artless is hardly unusual, or an insurmountable obstacle to marriage, unless you are intending to marry Thomas Day. It was, Edgeworth suggests, Day's intractable opinions, especially regarding female fashion, that was Sabrina's undoing, rather than any defects in Sabrina herself. That Edgeworth was equivocal about Day's attitude

¹⁰⁶ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.69.

¹⁰⁷ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, pp.337-8.

towards, and treatment of, Sabrina is even clearer in his account of the final break between them. Having persuaded Edgeworth by his behaviour that he would indeed marry Sabrina immediately because 'He certainly was never more loved by any woman, than he was by Sabrina' and 'I do not think, that he was insensible to the preference, with which she treated him; nor do I believe that any woman was to him ever personally more agreeable', Day abruptly changed his mind.¹⁰⁸ Edgeworth reported that Day had left Sabrina with a friend of his 'under strict instructions as to peculiar fancies of his own; in particular, some restrictions as to her dress' which Sabrina 'rejected, forgot, or undervalued' and therefore 'did, or did not, wear certain long sleeves, and some handkerchief which had been the subject of his dislike, or of his liking'. As a result of this Day, 'considering this circumstance as a criterion of her attachment, as a proof of her want of strength of mind, quitted her for ever!'.¹⁰⁹

Edgeworth's haziness over the exact details of both Day's injunction and Sabrina's response indicates he did not attach to it the same importance that Day did. In fact he continues:

Mr Day ... wrote me a letter explaining to me the feelings and reasoning, which decided him to give up, from a motive apparently so trifling, a scheme upon which he had bestowed so much time and labour ... and which ... promised him a companion, particularly pleasing to him in her person, devoted to him by gratitude and habit, and I believe by affection.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.339.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp.339-40.

Edgeworth is clear that because of these reasons and the importance Day attached to them 'he judged well for his own happiness', nonetheless 'in the same situation, I could not have acted as he had done'.¹¹¹

It is significant that the final breaking point for Day came over the issue of dress. As we have seen, Day conceived a passionate antipathy towards fashionable dress; for him it stood as a symbol for all the inauthenticity, effeminacy and luxury in the world. His fixation on dress can be seen in his early education of Sabrina and Lucretia, for it was to inoculate them against 'dress and luxury and fine people and fashion and titles' that he employed ridicule while they resided in France.¹¹² It also seems as if Day's lessons did have some impact, as according to Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, Sabrina recalled 'throwing a box of finery into the fire at his request'.¹¹³ But even so, it seems that Sabrina did not appreciate the extent to which women's dress impinged on Day's psyche and the extent to which he needed her to obey, to the letter, any instruction he gave her. Day placed sufficient weight on the particular injunction he gave her to see it as 'a criterion of her attachment and as a proof of her want of strength of mind'.¹¹⁴ Regardless of the details, this incident effectively ended the 'Sabrina Experiment'. Day was convinced Sabrina was never going to be the woman he wanted and as such she was no longer to undergo the construction to be the ideal wife.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.340.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p.217.

¹¹³ Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, p.10.

¹¹⁴ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.339.

Day was trying to achieve the working out of a theoretical system that would provide him with the tailor-made wife. He was looking for a specific type of woman who would embrace his very exact requirements for life. Day allowed no autonomy for his intended wife and the high standards he set for himself, he expected her to share completely. The rigorous requirements Day expected were rejected by several women, not the least of whom was Honora Sneyd, so it is hardly surprising that Sabrina failed to meet his expectations. But despite its failure what can be extrapolated from it?

Firstly, as bizarre as Day's notions and actions were, they do indicate a sincere attempt to re-examine and re-define the role of marriage in wider society and the relative roles of men and women within it; but, ironically Day's system privileged the ideological imperative over the emotional, just as the system it was replacing privileged the economical imperative over the emotional. Like Day, Rousseau was trying to elevate women by virtue of their biological function within the marital relationship. In both men's thinking there could be no higher attainment for a woman than to embrace the role 'nature' had assigned to her and to accept her role as wife and mother. In so doing, women could then maintain an 'authenticity' of their own which is not compromised by fashionable society. The problem was that the practice could not match the theory and in trying to create the perfect woman, Day overlooked certain important indeterminates, such as his own emotions and attractions, the power of self-determinism on the part of the female and the limits of education.

Secondly, we can extrapolate both the extent and limitations of patriarchy as a system. Certainly Day appeared to have complete control over Sabrina herself. In every aspect of her time with him, Day attempted to impress his will on her, from her name to her opinions, her thoughts, her experiences and environment. Sabrina can be seen as the embodiment of the female entrapped and controlled by the male; an example perhaps, of the attempts of Enlightened ideologies to 'dress' old patriarchal ideas in the new clothes of 'nature', the 'natural', 'maternity' and 'motherhood'.¹¹⁵ Yet the experiment failed. For all Sabrina was dominated by a male, she did not become what he wanted - either because his requirements were too high, or her acquiescence was not sufficient, or he simply discovered the actuality of his fantasy did not match the idea. Whatever the reason, Sabrina did not conform sufficiently and the male was defeated. He was defeated further by his interactions with other women. In his relations with the Sneyd women, Day once again tried to use patriarchal authority to control them. But this time, with the support of class and education that Sabrina lacked, they were able to reject the authority he tried to claim over them. In a very real way, Day stood as the embodiment of patriarchal power and in their various ways, Honora, Elizabeth and Sabrina defeated him.

Thirdly, Day's experiment throws new light on the interplay of class and gender. Day's interpretation of Rousseau's ideas led him to reject the traditional ideas about what constituted a model wife. This in turn led to the conclusion that the raw materials for a middle-class wife lay in a lower-class education. Partly this can be explained in terms of practicalities - it was far easier for Day to acquire a lower-class

¹¹⁵ See Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995) for a discussion on the ways patriarchy reconfigures itself.

girl on whom to experiment than a middle-class one; but it was also about requirements. Even if he could have experimented with a middle-class girl, would he have wanted to? Can the prerequisites for his experiment best be thought of in terms of negatives - what was absent - rather than positives? In this sense the sparse education and limited ambitions of a lower-class girl suited him very well. Was the thrust of Day's hypothesis that the regeneration of the middle-class lay in the lower? This brings us back to Sabrina herself. What can we extrapolate from this episode about her? Between the autumns of 1769 and 1770 she had gone from being a Foundling Hospital child destined for the textile industry of Yorkshire, to a ladies boarding school in the genteel suburbs of Sutton Coldfield by way of the intellectual hub that was the Lunar Society's Lichfield. In the space of a year her life had changed immeasurably. That change was consolidated by her four years at boarding school, for despite Day's prohibitions against music and dancing, she would still have received an education far different from that which she received at the Foundling Hospital. Yet she was still subject to the whims of others. Nothing she had experienced was self-determined, despite her material circumstances having apparently changed for the better. Beneath the surface appearance of material circumstances lay the issues of Sabrina's sense of self and relationships with others. By the age of seventeen, her sense of self had undergone several disruptions. From birth to the age of twelve Sabrina had been child 4579 Anne Kingstone of the Foundling Hospital, raised and educated for a burgeoning industrial sector and then marriage. Literally overnight she was transposed to a completely different environment and subject to a completely different type of education, the object of which she had no idea. But the Foundling Hospital training had taught her to comply

and be grateful, so we can assume this is why she appeared so amenable to Day; an amenability that appeared to follow her to the boarding school. Can that amenability be seen as part of a survival mechanism in a series of situations, the outcome of which she had no idea? What is more, she then had to deal with the second round of Day's quixotic treatment of her all over again in 1774; setting her arbitrary tests and ultimately rejecting her over her perceived failure. Both Sabrina's sense of self and her means of relating to others must have been fractured by this experience. Her sense of her own place in the world had been disrupted several times. After the relative security and consistency of the Foundling Hospital, she had once again been pulled from all she knew and placed in a series of continually changing environments, meaning she had to adjust to losing those with whom she had already formed relationships and begin forming new ones. The one thing this must have taught Sabrina is that her situation was liable to change at any time and to be dependent on any one person was unwise. Thus in the effort to construct a wife, a wife who would be able to be 'authentic' and in turn enable him to be 'authentic', Day only managed to construct an environment for Sabrina that was continually shifting and made the appearance of authenticity necessary while keeping one's true self repressed in an effort to survive.

The next chapter examines the renegotiation of the relationship between Day and Sabrina and how Sabrina was required to re-construct herself in light of this renegotiation.

CHAPTER 7: CONSTRUCTING THE WARD 1774 – 1784

The final break between Thomas Day and Sabrina Sidney in 1774 marked a major turning point in Sabrina's life. Just as Day had altered the trajectory of her life in 1769 by plucking her from the Foundling Hospital, his abandonment of the Sabrina experiment had much the same effect - she would not be the wife of Thomas Day, therefore what would she be? This chapter will examine the re-negotiation of the relationship between Day and Sabrina and the ways in which Day still attempted to exert control over Sabrina's environment and her development, in an effort to mitigate the effects of an experiment, it will be argued, he came to regret. From Sabrina's perspective, this chapter will examine how she responded to Day's change of attitude towards her and how she chose to re-construct herself, as her circumstances changed.¹

After departing from Thomas Day's immediate and specific patronage, it appears as though Sabrina moved from a boarding house existence to domestic employment. Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck recalls meeting and conversing with Miss de Luc, daughter to Jean Andre de Luc who was reader to Queen Charlotte. Miss de Luc recounted 'anecdotes ... of Sabrina Sidney, the *eleve* of Mr Day, who was boarding in the same house as her'.² Seward supports this by reporting that, 'When Sabrina left school, Mr Day allowed her fifty pounds annually. She boarded some years near

¹ This the period of Sabrina's life when there is the most difficulty in locating source material. As primary evidence is lacking, other types of material has been used to draw out conclusions regarding her existence and experiences during this period.

² Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans), p.10.

Birmingham, and afterwards near Newport, in Shropshire.’³ Edgeworth (this time Maria, as she had taken over the authorship of her father's memoirs after his death) says, ‘She went to reside with a lady in the country, and ... lived retired for some years’.⁴ This represents a significant change from the responsibility Day had undertaken since Sabrina was twelve years old. Since that time, he had ensured that Sabrina was provided for in material terms. It is reasonable to suppose that accommodation, food, clothing and the other necessities of life had been provided, but in 1774 it seems that with the withdrawal of his marital intentions, Day also withdrew his particular attention. Sabrina was now supposed to take care of herself.

However, as Seward indicated, Day did not entirely absent himself from concern for his erstwhile pupil. A document drawn up in 1776 attests to the fact that he did allow her fifty pounds a year ‘so long as she shall continue, under my protection’.⁵ [See Appendix 4 – Thomas Day’s undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney] This document is problematic as a source, because it is a facsimile copy of a document that has not been proven to be the original. Its provenance is attested to by its inclusion in Birmingham Archives, to which is attached information regarding the sale of the original.⁶ A comparison of the signature of Thomas Day on the agreement document, with that on Anne Kingstone’s apprenticeship indenture, does suggest it is his signature and that the document is a facsimile copy of the original. Accepting this

³ Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), p.73.

⁴ Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 2, p.109.

⁵ Birmingham Archives and Heritage Services (BAHS), MS 1651 (Acc 91/108), Thomas Day’s undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney, 25th January 1776.

⁶ *Ibid.*

document as a true copy of the original, it indicates Day did acknowledge some responsibility for Sabrina but it did not extend to continuing the relationship in any personal form. Seward, Edgeworth and Keir all recorded that Day never saw Sabrina again and corresponded with her 'parentally', which suggests a shift in the relationship, but even so Day does not accord Sabrina the conventional status and rights of a daughter.⁷ Despite the fact that Day asserts his right to keep Sabrina under his 'protection', the document actually begins by stating the annuity has been put into place so that Sabrina 'may not consider herself as dependent upon me'.⁸ Protection and dependency are clearly two separate issues as far as Day is concerned and it is interesting that he demanded that Sabrina should remain under his protection while wishing to separate himself from her dependency, which Day considered was financial.

The question here becomes: what was Day so concerned and anxious to avoid? He alone was responsible for the removal of Sabrina from the Foundling Hospital and into a situation entirely alien to her experience and understanding. He had also taken the decision to send her to that quintessential middle-class institution, the ladies boarding school. In all his dealings with Sabrina he was educating her out of the working-class environment for which she was destined until August 1769 and elevating her to a middle-class position, however Rousseauist, Spartan or authentic it might have been. Sabrina's education from the age of twelve to seventeen was not one in which it was intended she should earn her own living, and yet that was the result of Day's treatment of her after 1774. Moreover, her education and experiences

⁷ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

⁸ BAHS, MS 1651 (Acc 91/108), Thomas Day's undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney, 25th January 1776.

since 1769 had introduced her to another way of life and she had been required to become imbued with the norms of middle-class life. Sabrina had been required to internalise not just the aspects of womanhood that Day wanted, but also to make herself agreeable to his friends and conform to their expectations of feminine behaviour and propriety. She had been part of a wider group, making friends with Anna Seward, Dr Darwin, James Keir and the Edgeworths. Her ties to the group are evident in the fact that Day made the provision of £500 pounds on the occasion of her marriage to be contingent on the permission of Dr Darwin and James Keir.⁹ Yet he appeared to expect her to earn her own living, giving no consideration to keeping her within his household and truly 'under his protection'.

Evidence that Day took a firm and increasingly pessimistic view of his endeavours with Sabrina, which may go some way to explaining his treatment of her after 1774, can be found in later letters written to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Allowing himself to feel the full force of his misanthropy, he wrote to his friend in 1784:

If we chuse [sic] to make a lady out of what fortune has intended for a serving wench, or a gentleman out of the materials of a blacksmith, we certainly have a very good right; but we err extremely, if we imagine we are either promoting the order of nature, or the good of society; for there will in every country be more than a sufficient crop of gentlemen and ladies, growing up like thistles among the corn.¹⁰

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Letter from Thomas Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, cited in Peter Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day, 1748-1789: English Philanthropist and Author: Virtue Almost Personified* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p.261 from Thomas Day, *The Letters of Marius: or,*

The phrase 'to make a lady out of what fortune has intended for a serving wench' is too close to a summary of the Sabrina experiment to be a coincidence. Day clearly regretted his youthful decision and, it could be argued, took the decisions he did concerning Sabrina in an effort to turn the lady back into a serving wench - or as close to one as she could get. Her relationship with Day was not going to be a free pass to an idle life. This reading is supported by further correspondence between Edgeworth and Day in 1785 when Edgeworth was considering adopting a child from the lower ranks. When he informed Day of this, his friend's response sheds some light on how he considered his own experiences with Sabrina:

That child from the moment it begins to reflect, will consider you as doomed to supply all its wants and will infallibly proportion his expectations, not to any standard of justice or reason, but to the objects that are presented to his eyes ... If such a child, therefore, is to work for his living, are you not likely to do him more hurt, by taking from him stronger motives to exertion, than good, by bestowing upon him as many barrels of potatoes, as many kilderkins of milk, as will nourish him until he is sixteen?¹¹

From this we can infer that Day had serious doubts about the wisdom of any social experimentation and had come to the conclusion that the social stratification of society existed for a purpose and to meddle with it did more harm than good for all involved. Evidence that Day's purpose in his treatment of Sabrina was to strengthen

Reflections upon the Peace, the East-India Bill, and the Present Crisis (London: John Stockdale, 1784).

¹¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.97.

her character for self-sufficiency comes from his wife, Esther, in a letter she wrote to Edgeworth after Day's death. Here Esther reveals that her husband 'always considered lasting good of others more than their present gratification' and as such 'was not so lavish of his services at first' in regard to Sabrina, 'that he might lead Mrs Bicknell to exert herself'.¹² This view is backed up by an observation made by Maria Edgeworth much later when, after meeting Sabrina, she comments that, 'Mr Day thought her helpless and indolent ...'¹³ Again we can see here evidence of Day's attitudes towards marriage and the role of women, both in marriage and society. He had wanted a Spartan, hardy, practical and domestic wife; a woman who placed the needs of her family, husband and children before her own and the frivolous trappings of fashionable society. That attitude had not changed due to the failure of his experiment with Sabrina. It had not yielded for him the wife he desired, but rather, seemed to reinforce his belief in the importance of self-sufficiency, both for the individual and society at large.

From these sources it can be argued that Day was concerned that his education of Sabrina had merely created another idle middle-class lady, of which he was so dismissive, and that his efforts after 1774 were intended to prevent Sabrina's slippage into a life of indolence. Of Day's assessment that Sabrina was 'helpless and indolent' we need to be cautious. We know that Day's demands were exacting and he dismissed Sabrina as his future wife on a fairly slim pretext and therefore his judgement of her was likely to be negatively biased. We must also remember

¹² National Library of Ireland (NLI) MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

¹³ Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England, 1813-1844*, ed. by Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.122.

Sabrina's first twelve years; her background at the Foundling Hospital had hardly been designed to raise a child that was helpless or indolent. It is more likely that in the two years between 1774 when the experiment finally ended and 1776 when Day codified his relationship with her, that she was disorientated and uncertain. One thing her upbringing, both by the Foundling Hospital and Day, had inculcated in her was dependency. Her fate, her survival, was and always had been, dependent on others in positions of power and authority over her, she was trained to obey and comply. Now Day was expecting autonomy and self-motivation from a woman, barely out of girlhood, in whom those traits had positively been discouraged. Autonomy and self-motivation in women were not encouraged in any situation and yet it was expected of Sabrina and Day perversely misread her reaction as weakness and idleness.

Other opinions of Sabrina at this time do go some way to redressing the picture. Seward states, 'Wherever she resided, wherever she paid visits, she secured to herself friends. Beautiful and admired, she passed the dangerous interval between sixteen and twenty-five, without one reflection upon her conduct, one stain on her discretion.'¹⁴ Seward may have had an agenda in her depiction of Day and Sabrina's relationship; an agenda that relates to her views on, and experience of, female education, and the shifts in her relationship with Day himself (See Chapter 10 for further discussion on Seward's motives for her biographical writings on Day and Sabrina). Nevertheless, as she was disinclined to 'spread over [a biography] the veil of suppression', it seems unlikely she would have given Sabrina such fulsome praise

¹⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

had she not believed it.¹⁵ Seward's assessment of Sabrina is interesting; not only does Seward contend that Sabrina is amiable, beautiful and admired she tacitly refers to Sabrina's moral character.¹⁶ As the child of the Foundling Hospital, Sabrina held an equivocal place in society by virtue of being considered the child of an illegitimate union. Given that immorality of this sort was considered to be hereditary and Sabrina had been in the care of an unmarried man for several years beyond her infancy, Seward was subtly confirming Sabrina's virtue and her good reputation.¹⁷ This was a claim explicitly confirmed in Seward's next statement, 'Often the guest of Dr Darwin, and other of her friends in Lichfield, esteem and affection formed the tribute to her virtues'.¹⁸ Seward's view of Sabrina confirms the opinion that Edgeworth had formed of her that she was 'entitled by her manners and appearance to the appellation of a young lady', which may well have been the reason Day rejected her and thought her idle and helpless, but this may say more about Day's assessment of ladies in general than of Sabrina.¹⁹ It seems that none of Day's friends concurred with him in his opinions regarding Sabrina.

As far as Sabrina herself was concerned, we can only say that she lived a peripatetic existence living in boarding houses and visiting the members of the Lunar Society who had remained friendly towards her, until such time as she secured a position as a ladies companion in Newport, Shropshire.²⁰ There is no direct evidence as to whose employment she was in at the time, but referral to certain sources can lead to

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.53.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ See Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005) for a discussion around notions of inheriting sexual incontinence.

¹⁸ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

¹⁹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.337.

²⁰ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

tentative suppositions. The record of Sabrina's marriage in 1784 states that one of the witnesses was a Mary Yonge.²¹ Given that Sabrina was resident in Newport at this time and there was a prominent family by the name of Yonge who had been associated with Newport and its surrounding areas for several generations, it is possible that this was the woman for whom Sabrina had been acting as ladies companion.²² There is also evidence in letters, that members of the Lunar Society, Dr Erasmus Darwin and Dr William Withering, knew and worked with a Dr William Yonge of Shifnal.²³ Parish records show that a William Yonge of Shifnal was married to Mary Wicksted in 1773, so it is conceivable that the Lunar doctors, through their acquaintance with Dr Yonge, became aware of the need of a lady's maid or companion, either to Mrs Yonge or a relative of Dr William Yonge, and recommended Sabrina.²⁴ Although this is conjecture, it does offer a possible indicator of how Sabrina arrived in Newport and with whom she was residing by 1784.

By 1784, Sabrina Sidney was twenty-seven years of age. Ten years had elapsed since Thomas Day had rejected any possibility of taking her as his wife and she had been obliged to re-assess her position and her future. How she assimilated this turn of events is difficult to assess but it is clear that those who knew her and knew Day, judged her blameless of the failure of the experiment and that she responded to the change in her circumstances well. Anna Seward's assessment of her is telling and if Darwin or Withering did play a part in her move from a boarding-house existence in Birmingham to employment in Newport, this a clear sign they believed her to be

²¹ BAHS, Marriage Register 1784, St Philips Parish Records. p.182.

²² See Edward Yonge, *The Yonges of Caynton, Edgmond, Shropshire* (Publisher unknown, 1969) and Gaydon.

²³ Peter Sheldon, *The Life and Times of William Withering* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2004).

²⁴ Shropshire Archives (SA), P207/12, Marriage Register, Newport Parish Records, 1757-1784.

worthy of such a position and did all they could to help. Regardless of how she came to the position, the fact that she did undertake the role of a lady's companion indicates she was well able, both in education, manners and person to fulfil it. She appears to have developed from being 'young and artless' to being 'feminine, elegant and amiable' and securing for herself the approval of those of Day's acquaintance who could assist her when he would not.²⁵ That she did secure their good opinion and their 'esteem and affection formed the tribute to her virtues' is testament to the strength of her character and her ability to construct herself in ways that would secure her survival.²⁶

While Sabrina was maintaining herself as best she could and securing her future with the help of his Lunar friends, Thomas Day, while allowing her the maintenance annuity of £50, had given up ideas of creating a wife and returned with enthusiasm to his literary endeavours. Perhaps with more awareness of his character than he possessed himself, Day's Lunar friends intervened here as much as they may have intervened in the life of his former pupil. Through his friend, Dr William Small, Day was introduced to a young lady of equally high ideals and philosophical leanings as himself. Miss Esther Milnes was the daughter of a Chesterfield merchant and joint beneficiary, with her elder sister, of a substantial fortune.²⁷ Dr Small evidently believed her to be exactly suited to his friend and her own writings reveal a like mindedness with Day that should have pleased him. But in this Day, as in every other relationship with the female sex apart from Sabrina, was cautious to the point of

²⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1. p.338 and Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

²⁶ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

²⁷ Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, pp.62-3.

being pathological. Ultimately Day and Esther married in 1778,²⁸ but only after Day had become certain that Esther was indeed the woman for him and he had extracted from her certain sacrifices and conditions regarding their married life together.²⁹ In this we can once again find a clear example of the high ideals Day determined to apply to every aspect of his life, including his emotional life. Anecdotal and written evidence attest to the caution with which Day approached the possibility of courting Miss Milnes. In conversation with Dr Small he is reported to have interrogated his friend regarding Miss Milnes' attributes and qualities, which offer an insight into his requirements; he asked if she had 'white and large arms'; if she wore long petticoats and if she was tall, strong and healthy.³⁰ Dr Small replied to Day's questions, but demonstrating a certain exasperation with his high-minded friend, is recorded by Edgeworth as commenting:

My good friend, can you possibly expect that a woman of charming temper, benevolent mind and cultivated understanding, with a distinguished character, with views of life congenial with your own, with an agreeable person and large fortune, should be formed exactly according to a picture that exists in your imagination?³¹

The answer to this, as far as Day was concerned, was an emphatic yes, which was demonstrated by the Sabrina experiment; the object of which Day clearly had not entirely dismissed as an achievable aim. This exchange also reiterated Day's

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.120.

²⁹ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.72.

³⁰ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.341.

³¹ *Ibid*.

philosophical objection to the financial situation of his intended wife. In his reply to Dr Small he says: ‘... the only serious objection which I have to Miss Milnes is her large fortune. It was always my wish to give any woman whom I married the most unequivocal proof of my attachment to herself, by despising her fortune.’³²

This sheds more light on his intended plan of making a portionless girl his wife; he wanted to prove that his intentions were not sullied by financial consideration. Given that financial considerations could very much be the basis on which a marital relationship was built, the development of the affective family notwithstanding, this appears to be a philosophical standpoint taken by Day. This was a standpoint which rendered Sabrina suitable for his plans when he began his experiment in 1769 and conversely rendered Esther Milnes unsuitable in 1774 when he was introduced to the idea of her by Dr Small. The stumbling block of Esther’s money and the concomitant issues which Day believed they would bring, remained long after the two finally met and Day agreed that she was entirely suited to him. He wrote again to Dr Small that:

I know and feel this lady’s merit and nothing but her large fortune prevents me from wishing that I had it in my power to effect such a union; for the plan of life which I have laid down for myself is too remote from common opinions, to admit of flattering myself with the expectation of so much conformity from a person of her affluent circumstances.³³

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.65.

This reaffirms our earlier contention that, for Day, financial affluence was a deterrent to moral regeneration, seemingly on the part of the female in a marriage relationship at least; which again indicates that Day was looking for the moral regeneration of the family in the lower, rather than middling classes. Esther's affluent circumstances rendered her, in Day's opinion, unable to conform to his 'plan of life'; by implication then, it was partly Sabrina's impoverished circumstances that induced him to expect conformity to his plan of life from her.³⁴ Even in Day's courtship of Esther we have evidence of the minuteness with which he vetted his future wife; a minuteness that suggests only a woman who had independently formed a strong attachment to him, which Esther seems to have done by this point, could have tolerated. Edgeworth commented:

With Mr Day there were a thousand small preliminaries to be adjusted; not content with that influence which his merit and his superior understanding must necessarily obtain, there was no subject of opinion or speculation, which he did not, previously to his marriage, discuss with his intended bride ... In fact, I believe that few lovers ever conversed or corresponded more.³⁵

With such correspondence reassuring Day that Esther was indeed the right woman for him, the two were married; and in Esther, Day does seem to have acquired a wife who concurred with him in many opinions and respected him. However, Esther did not blindly acquiesce to her husband, for Edgeworth reported that his wife, Honora, who had enjoyed the attentions of Day for a time: 'had been well accustomed to Mr

³⁴ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1, p.248.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.343.

Day's habits of discussion and declamation: she observed that Mrs Day's replies, replete with sense and spirit, were always delivered in chosen language, and with appropriate emphasis.'³⁶

It seems Mrs Day was more than able to hold her own when it came to conversing with her husband. In this we can see the difference between Esther and Sabrina and start to consider the role that class, status and money played in the dynamics of their respective relationships with Thomas Day. It would be wrong to overstate the level of equality between Mr and Mrs Day, for it seems that Day expected and received from his wife a level of sacrifice and submission to his wishes, just as he had from Sabrina. However Esther was certainly better placed to consider her response to those expectations and enjoyed a greater level of autonomy from which to accept or reject them. The key element here is autonomy. By the very nature of her relationship with Day, Sabrina was dependent on him and her agreement with him, sacrifice for him and submission to him, was predicated on a lack of choice and independence. Whether she wanted to or not she needed to make Day believe she was complying with him in all things, conversely leading to the state of inauthenticity from which Day was struggling to free himself and others. Esther, on the other hand, with the benefit of the financial independence about which Day was so concerned, was in the position of choosing for herself whether she accepted and submitted herself to Day and his plan of life. Her survival did not depend on it and she was able to respond to Day with the authenticity he craved but did not always recognise. It seems as though Day believed that money in the hands of females led to an intolerable independence

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.344.

and curtailed the power he seemed to require in order to have an intimate relationship with them. Ironically, in his marriage to Esther the opposite seems to have been demonstrated. Esther's money allowed her to choose her fate and select Day as her husband, with all that this entailed, while Sabrina's poverty effectively curtailed her choices but bestowed on Day the power he seemed to need. By all accounts the marriage between Esther and Day was a happy one and served to prove to Day that which he had refused to believe ten years previously, that wives, perfect or otherwise, were found not formed.

While his relationship with Esther developed, Day's friendship with John Bicknell also strengthened and led them to collaborate on at least two literary productions; one laudable, the other questionable. Day's intense humanitarianism had been roused into indignation by the story, brought to him by John Bicknell, that a slave wishing to marry a fellow servant, had run away with the intention of being baptised and had been captured by his master and had subsequently shot himself.³⁷ This provided a focal point for Day's philosophical and humanitarian views and he and Bicknell collaborated on the poem entitled *The Dying Negro*.³⁸ This work gives voice to the captured Negro slave and he reflects on his enslaved state and the evils of slavery as an institution and allowed Day to explore the notion of the noble savage. This work was to become a trail-blazer in the anti-slavery movement and its attendant literature.³⁹ It was published in 1773 and ran to several editions, marking Day out as both a literary talent and a political mind, and although Bicknell played a

³⁷ Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.55.

³⁸ Thomas Day and John Bicknell, *The Dying Negro: a Poem* (London: John Stockdale, 1793).

³⁹ *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, ed. by Peter P. Hinks and John R. McKivigan (London: Greenwood Press, 2007), p.515.

significant part in its genesis and production, it remains most closely associated with Day. It certainly helped publicise the anti-slavery movement, with which many of the Lunar men and their associates became heavily involved.⁴⁰

This highly moral and successful endeavour is rather oddly counterbalanced by an equally successful but rather dubious literary production, again in concert with John Bicknell. In 1774 John Bicknell, under the pseudonym of Joel Collier, had produced a vicious and ribald parody of the work of Dr Charles Burney entitled *Musical Travels through England by Joel Collier*, which turned out to be a popular work running to four editions.⁴¹ At its most basic level, *Joel Collier* was merely a rather rude and disrespectful attack on an older, gentleman scholar, written for cheap laughs, but it can be subject to another deeper and far more serious reading, one that suggests Day's influence on, and collaboration with, John Bicknell. The authorship of *Joel Collier* was the subject of contention until Roger Lonsdale's thorough reading of it and its re-printed editions with an added appendix.⁴² Lonsdale convincingly argued for the attribution of authorship to Bicknell, with Day being responsible for the appendix written under the pseudonym of Nathaniel Collier, cousin to Joel. Once Day's involvement becomes apparent we can begin to subject the work to a more rigorous reading, for Day rarely, if ever, spent his time frivolously.

⁴⁰ See Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002) for the Lunar Society's involvement in anti-slavery campaigns.

⁴¹ 'Joel Collier', *Musical Travels through England* (London: G. Kearsley, 1785).

⁴² Roger Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina' in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship: Essays in Memory of James Marshall Osborn*, ed. by René Wellek and Álvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp.201-226.

While the main theme of the work is a satire of Dr Charles Burney's work inquiring into the state of music on the continent and therefore served as a suitable foil for Bicknell's coarse humour, for Day, Burney could well have stood as a symbol of something far more worrying and decadent.⁴³ We have to remind ourselves of Day's fierce opposition to music and what it represented to him. Dr Charles Burney's place as a music scholar and an enthusiast for continental music and its practices were anathema to Day. Satirising Burney's work and what he stood for was in the same spirit as Day's earlier writings under the name of Knife and Fork – a warning against frivolous arts and foreign influences. Even the very name of the purported author exposes the contempt with which Burney was held. Joel Collier changed his name to Collioni which is the Italian word for testicles and serves to remind readers of Burney's 'preoccupation' with supplies of castrati.⁴⁴

Thus Burney became a target for Day's disapprobation and Bicknell's sharp wit due to the threat which he seemed to symbolise to England from European aesthetics and music.⁴⁵ But there was another reason for Burney to have earned Day's scorn; a reason alluded to in the dedication of the work to the 'Governors of the Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children' – The Foundling Hospital. In 1774 together with Felice Giardini, his friend and the musical director of the London Foundling Hospital, Dr Burney had brought before the Governors a plan to form a music school, which would offer a musical education to

⁴³ Charles Burney, *Dr. Burney's Musical Tours in Europe, being Dr. Charles Burney's Account of his Musical Experiences as it Appears in his Published Volume: with which are Incorporated his Travel Experiences According to his Original Intention* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁴⁴ Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina' in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship*, ed. by Wellek and Ribeiro p.286.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

poor children and raise the standard of musical attainment in England.⁴⁶ The plan was not as far-fetched as it seemed, as music had always played an important part in the functioning of the hospital, with the involvement of Handel in supporting fund-raising activities, the regular performances of *The Messiah* that were held for the Hospital's benefit and the training that some gifted children received in order to earn a living as singers or musicians.⁴⁷ In some ways the Burney/Giardini plan was merely an extension of these activities and appeared beneficial to the Hospital, the state of music in England and the children themselves. At first the plan was approved, but it was short-lived and between the meeting to approve the plan in July 1774 and a second meeting in August, the approval had been withdrawn and a music school would emphatically not be run under the auspices of the Foundling Hospital.⁴⁸ Exactly who or what had caused the abrupt change on the part of the Foundling Hospital governors is difficult to ascertain, but it is true to say that this was exactly the sort of endeavour of which Thomas Day, lately a governor of the Foundling Hospital and custodian of one of its former charges, disapproved. Dr Burney therefore earned the disapprobation of Day due to his enthusiasm for continental musical practices and stood as a symbol for everything Day was attempting to change, both by his mode of life and in his experiment with Sabrina. That Dr Burney was attempting his experiment in the very institution to which Day had looked for the salvation of society, the Foundling Hospital, could only have inflamed Day's ire more. It may even have touched a raw nerve insofar as Sabrina had proved, in Day's eyes, to

⁴⁶ See *Ibid* and Ruth K. McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1981) for details of Burney's plan and its failure.

⁴⁷ McClure, *Coram's Children*, p.230.

⁴⁸ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/A/03/001/003, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), General Court Minutes, 1774.

come far short of his ideal woman, even without the exposure to the decadence of an extended musical education. To Day, therefore, this was a project just as much in need of a literary response as the story of the slave's suicide had been; to Bicknell it may just have been an excuse to be rude, vulgar and humorous. While Bicknell has been identified as the sole author of the main Collier satire, Day's influence was squarely and forcefully behind him. Day has been identified as the author of the Nathaniel Collier appendix to subsequent editions, which suggests that he was not as satisfied to let the Joel Collier episode fade in the public consciousness as was Bicknell.⁴⁹ This piece is less humorous and more didactic than its predecessor which certainly supports the theory that the less humorous and more didactic Day wrote it rather than Bicknell, and includes amongst its targets, music, literature, boarding-schools and hysterical ladies. While this episode puts another slant on what had been, until this point, the rather puritanical character of Thomas Day and suggests that when he considered himself provoked he could act in less than gentlemanly ways, it also foreshadows the irony of the later relationship that developed between the Burney family and Sabrina. The family whom Day and Bicknell had humiliated were the very family who offered to educate Bicknell's sons after his death and eventually offered employment to Sabrina herself. Despite suffering at the hands of Day and Bicknell, the Burney family showed remarkable generosity to Day's former pupil and Bicknell's widow and Sabrina was to become a much loved member of the Burney household.

⁴⁹ Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina' in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship*, ed. by Wellek and Ribeiro p.299.

After Day's marriage to Esther, they began to play host to a variety of young people including Esther's nephews and the children of his Lunar friends, one of whom was the eldest daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Maria. Short of stature and eyesight, Maria Edgeworth was a shy, intelligent girl who, while at the fashionable boarding school in London, to which her father sent her in 1781, gained a reputation for being a story-teller.⁵⁰ Most of Maria Edgeworth's early years had been spent away from her father's company, due to a combination of his antipathy for his first wife and Maria Edgeworth's mother, Anna Maria, and passion for his second, Honora Sneyd.⁵¹ Thomas Day, as her father's best friend, was probably the second most important male in Maria Edgeworth's life at this point and during her time at boarding school, she stayed with him and Esther during her holidays.⁵² In many ways, Day and Maria Edgeworth shared the same nature; both disliked society and were uncomfortable in it. For this reason, and probably because he actually spent time with her and took some notice of her, Maria Edgeworth became significantly more influenced by Day than her father.⁵³ This situation did not last long, as with the death of Maria Edgeworth's step-mother Honora, Edgeworth married his sister-in-law, Elizabeth and the couple had a rather less intense relationship, which allowed Maria Edgeworth and her siblings more time with their father than they had thus experienced. Nonetheless the influence of Day on Maria Edgeworth, formed through her father's friendship with him and strengthened by her visits to his home in 1781,

⁵⁰ See Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: a Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) and Mitzi Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Text of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority' in *Revising Women: Eighteenth Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), for discussions of Edgeworth's development as an author and Day's influence on her.

⁵¹ See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*.

⁵² Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.163.

⁵³ Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy?' in *Revising Women*, ed. by Backscheider, pp.105-146.

were to have long-reaching consequences, not only for herself but for Day's ward, Sabrina Sidney. Maria Edgeworth's development as a writer was heavily influenced by Day and she fictionalised him in print, through short stories and most significantly in her novel, *Belinda*, which takes as its subplot Day's educational experiment with Sabrina and, therefore, produced another literary construction of Sabrina.

Thus this period of Sabrina Sidney's life was a period of consolidation. She was forced to adapt to the change in her circumstances and find a way of living that did not compromise her gradually acquired status as a lady, but did not attempt to elevate her beyond her station in life. It was a difficult balance to strike, but from the evidence we have, Sabrina managed it successfully. Likewise, this was the period that Day finally achieved what he had set as his main goal; to marry a woman who would support him in his plan of life. Finally, during this period two connections were established that would have significance for Sabrina in the future, the connection between Day, Bicknell and the Burney family and the connection between Day and Maria Edgeworth. The next chapter examines the following stage of Sabrina's life, when she became a wife and a mother and how she began to construct herself.

CHAPTER 8: CONSTRUCTING THE WOMAN 1784 - 1787

In 1784 Sabrina Sidney was twenty-seven years of age, living and working in Newport, Shropshire as a ladies companion. Her relationship with Thomas Day had settled into a distant, quasi-familial one, which had lost any hope of developing into a marital relationship long before Day's marriage to Esther in 1778. What Sabrina expected of her life subsequent to Day's defection from his experiment and herself is unrecorded, but by 1784 she may have become resigned to self-supporting spinsterhood, with all the uncertainty that entailed. This chapter examines the period of Sabrina's life from 1784 to 1787, during which time she moved from being a lady's companion with genteel connections, but no real power or influence, to become a wife and then a mother. This change in her circumstances was, once again, a direct result of her relationship with Thomas Day, as the man she married was the gentleman who accompanied Day to Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital in 1769, the man who apparently picked her out from the line of girls presented to them, John Bicknell. This move, from single woman to wife and mother, is crucial in Sabrina's life, as it represents the achievement of the main role she was expected to fulfil in life and the tacit promise offered to her by Thomas Day – that of wife and mother. It also gave meaning to her education, both at the Foundling Hospital and with Day, and as such her reasons for marrying can be analysed as one example of the ways in which women positioned themselves and responded to marriage at this time.

Since the heyday of their literary collaboration over *The Dying Negro* and the *Joel Collier* satire, the relationship between Day and his friend John Bicknell appeared to

have cooled. This was partly due to Day's marriage to Esther Milnes, which effectively allowed him to follow his aim of living a retired life of philosophical philanthropy, and partly due to the differences in character between the two men. Despite their long friendship Day and Bicknell were very different personalities, and while Day was a sober and intense gentleman who positively eschewed the benefits of a financially secure life, Bicknell seems to have revelled in those benefits to the detriment of both his career and his health. By 1784 Bicknell was approximately thirty-eight years of age and in her father's *Memoirs*, Maria Edgeworth suggests that by this time, Bicknell's health was beginning to fail.¹ This seems to have galvanised Bicknell into considering his long-term future and he began to consider marriage. Whether or not Sabrina immediately sprang to mind, once Bicknell began this line of thought, is unknown, but his involvement with Sabrina in the early years of Day's experiment with her appeared to have pushed her back into his thoughts.²

Bicknell's involvement in the selection of Sabrina from the Foundling Hospital led later commentators to assume that they had undertaken the experiment together and acquired two girls, one for each of them rather than to give Day a fifty/fifty chance of success.³ Certainly the primary sources attest to a high level of involvement on the part of Bicknell with arrangements for the Sabrina experiment - more so than any of Day's other associates.⁴ Bicknell, along with Thomas Day, co-witnessed the

¹ Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 2, p.111.

² *Ibid.*

³ Paul Langford, 'Thomas Day and the Politics of Sentiment', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 11(2) (1984), pp.58-79.

⁴ Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010) and Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1.

apprenticeship indenture of Anne Kingstone to Richard Lovell Edgeworth in 1769; this both supports the anecdotal evidence that Bicknell accompanied Day to Shrewsbury and made him equally culpable in the fraud Day undertook to acquire a girl for his experiment.⁵ Bicknell's involvement with Sabrina continued, as it was claimed he countersigned the legal documents that were apparently drawn up to vouch for the well-being of the girls while under Day's care and in the future.⁶

Despite, or possibly because of, this heavy early involvement with Sabrina, Bicknell's assessment of her seems at some point to have departed from his initial positive judgement.⁷ Maria Edgeworth, who provides the most complete account of the events surrounding Bicknell's courtship of Sabrina comments:

Mr Bicknel [sic] thought so little of her, that he often expressed to my father the surprise, that "his friend Day could be so smitten with Sabrina - he could not, for his part, see anything extraordinary about the girl, one way or other". When my father praised her voice and manner, Mr Bicknel only shrugged his shoulders.⁸

This comment is interesting because it reveals the differing responses Sabrina seems to have inspired from the three most important men in her life. Contextually, it

⁵ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), A/FH/A/12/004/060, Foundling Hospital Records (FHR), Anne Kingstone's Apprenticeship Indenture, 1769.

⁶ These legal documents are referred to in many accounts of Sabrina's residence with Day (see Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin*, p.69.) but do not appear to have survived. The only document relating to the experiment is that of 1776, in which Day undertakes provision of Sabrina and sets out the terms by which he will pay her £500 in the event of her marriage; Birmingham Archive and Heritage Service (BAHS), MS 1651 (Acc 91/108), Thomas Day's undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney, 25th January 1776.

⁷ See Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.110 for reference to Bicknell's choice of Sabrina from the Foundling Hospital in 1769.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.110.

seems reasonable to place the time of Bicknell's comment to Edgeworth during the second phase of the Sabrina experiment, when she had returned from boarding school and Day was pleasantly surprised by her development and entertained serious thoughts of matrimony. This is the only point at which Day could be described as 'smitten' with Sabrina. Therefore Bicknell's comment reveals a new development in Day's response to Sabrina. At this stage in Day's educational experiment it could be suggested that Day's enthusiasm for Sabrina was born of relief as much as genuine emotion. Day had invested much in Sabrina. Personally, he was investing his own belief in the theories of Rousseau and gambling on his own future happiness; publicly he was investing his reputation and laying himself open to ridicule if he failed. Day probably cared little for his reputation and positively invited ridicule as a badge of honour; however, it is equally viable to argue that he did not want to provide evidence to undermine Rousseau's educational theories and so in this way, he would not have wanted his experiment to fail. Day was looking for a regeneration of society; a regeneration he believed could be facilitated through marriage and the re-alignment of the relationship between the sexes. Sabrina was his one and only chance to prove this theory to be correct and allow him to promulgate his and Rousseau's theories more widely. In addition, he would gain the perfect wife he so desperately wanted. At first Sabrina had proved a disappointment to Day; just how much is not directly recorded, but the fact that he dispatched her to a ladies boarding school indicates that his opinion of her at this point was not high. Ironically it was after her years at the type of ladies educational establishment against which he was so vehemently opposed, that Sabrina began to appeal to him. Whatever else the school at Sutton Coldfield had inculcated into her, it gave Day cause to reconsider his

intentions towards his ward once more. In considering Sabrina sufficiently qualified to be his wife, Day gave her the highest accolade he could bestow on a woman and tacitly acknowledged that his decision to experiment with matrimony and education was a success. In modern parlance, by marrying Sabrina, Day could put a positive 'spin' on the whole episode and, to a certain extent, disingenuously claim success for both himself and his philosophical idol.

With less personally at stake and certainly with a more realistic view of human nature, Edgeworth too had been impressed with Sabrina, saying she 'was entitled by her manners and appearance to the appellation of a young lady'.⁹ Despite Edgeworth's misgivings about Sabrina's suitability as a wife for Day, he nonetheless gave her credit for her pleasing 'voice and manner' and clearly tried to convince Bicknell of his point of view. Edgeworth remained an impartial and phlegmatic commentator, as aware of Day's limitations as much as his qualities. He admired the woman Sabrina had become and was cognisant of her attributes, but did not make any special claims for her or her abilities to become the perfect Enlightenment wife.

Finally, running counter to both men, Bicknell dismissed Sabrina as nothing 'extraordinary' and questioned Day's enthusiasm for the girl they both plucked out of obscurity and whom he had personally singled out as a prospective wife for his friend. Whatever he detected in the twelve year-old girl who went by the name of Anne Kingstone and thus 'decided his [Day's] choice in favour of [her]', he had reconsidered his opinion.¹⁰ Interestingly Bicknell's turn of phrase echoes that of the

⁹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 1. p.337.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Vol 2, p.110.

brief but telling exchange between the Foundling Hospital secretaries, Collingwood and Magee, when Sabrina was chosen by Day in 1769: Collingwood questioned whether there was anything 'remarkable' about Anne Kingstone, to which Magee replied there was not.¹¹ Yet at this point Bicknell clearly found something remarkable about her, only to dismiss her as nothing 'extraordinary' approximately five years later.

Responses to Sabrina therefore shift depending on the person appraising her and their relationship with her. Day's attitude certainly seemed to change with suspicious intensity, resulting in his sudden and immediate rejection of her, purportedly over her taste in haberdashery. Bicknell likewise changed his opinion of Sabrina almost in opposition to Day's. Can it be argued that Bicknell's dismissal of Sabrina during the second phase of Day's experiment was a reaction to Sabrina's potential marriage to Day? Did Bicknell, rather than seeing nothing extraordinary or remarkable in Sabrina, feel an attraction towards her? Was his stated ambivalence regarding Sabrina, an attempt to circumvent the appearance of partiality? If he did, in fact, retain an appreciation of Sabrina and even an attraction to the woman she was becoming, then her marriage to his friend Day, could be uncomfortable for all of them. There is a hint of defensiveness in Bicknell's assertion to Edgeworth that cannot be discounted when considering his attitude towards Sabrina.

Despite Bicknell's stated opinions of Sabrina at this time, by 1784 both their situations had sufficiently changed for him to reconsider those opinions. Edgeworth

¹¹ LMA, A/FH/A/06/002/001, FHR, Correspondence between Mr Collingwood and Mr Magee, London Letter Books, 5th October 1769 and A/FH/D/02/05/04, FHR, Shrewsbury Letter Books, 9th October 1769.

comments that upon Sabrina's rejection by Day, Bicknell, 'pitied her, but rejoiced in his friend's more suitable marriage with Miss Milnes' and he himself, 'lived in London, partly engaged by pleasure and partly pursuing his profession of the law'.¹² It is through Edgeworth that we gain some insight into Bicknell's motivation for his apparently sudden decision to marry and indeed, into the character of Bicknell himself and why his friendship with Day may have faltered. Despite being 'a man of shining talents' he possessed 'the too usual faults of a man of genius; he detested the drudgery of business'.¹³ According to Edgeworth, Bicknell not only had 'great wit and acuteness', but had a natural ability for the law which gave him a superiority amongst his contemporaries.¹⁴ In this Bicknell certainly had the advantage of Day, whose natural abilities led him towards politics and philosophy rather than the law. However, while Day's character embraced Spartan living and eschewed frivolity, Bicknell's character embraced it.¹⁵ Wryly, Maria Edgeworth comments that as his law practice failed, 'he consoled himself with wit, literature and pleasure', a charge that could not be levelled at Thomas Day.¹⁶ Thus squandering his natural talents in a largely promiscuous fashion, Maria Edgeworth stated that Bicknell's health began to fail and 'Then he thought more seriously; and, considering that it would be a comfort to secure a companion for middle life, and a friend, perhaps a nurse, for his declining years, he determined to marry'.¹⁷ Bicknell seems to have contemplated marriage only when his life of pleasure and dissipation was beginning to take its toll on his health and by implication, his finances; and if Maria Edgeworth's assessment of the

¹² Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.110 and p.111.

¹³ *ibid*, p.111.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ See Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 5th March 1789 in Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between 1784 and 1807* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1811), p.250.

¹⁶ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.111.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

situation is to be believed, it was a practical and pragmatic decision rather than a romantic one.

Having thus determined to marry, he then turned his attention to the question of whom to marry. In this Bicknell's situation mirrored that of Day some fifteen years earlier; both men took the rather arbitrary decision to marry and then sought a wife. Just as Day had previously, so Bicknell found himself turning to Sabrina. Just as Day hoped he would find in her a panacea to the problems presented by his worldview, so Bicknell seemed to have hoped he would find a panacea to the problems presented by his worldly living - and both wanted a wife who was far more than the sum of her parts. Having thus 'recollected' Sabrina, Bicknell made enquiries into her position and reputation and was agreeably informed that 'she was unmarried, living with a lady in the country, and that she had uniformly behaved so as to deserve the respect, and to conciliate the regard of all who knew her'.¹⁸

Bicknell travelled to Shropshire, to the small town of Newport where Sabrina was then living. Maria Edgeworth explains he then 'saw her, and saw her with very different eyes from those, with which he had looked upon her formerly - fell desperately in love - proposed, and was conditionally accepted.'¹⁹ How far this is a romantic embellishment on the actual circumstances of Bicknell's proposal to Sabrina is difficult to ascertain. Bicknell had previously identified Sabrina's potential at the Foundling Hospital and may have felt a later attraction towards her; together with his own desire for a companion, he may have felt at liberty to fall in love with her. At this

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.111-112.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.112.

point, he could not be accused of thwarting the romantic aspirations of Day and clearly felt his days of dissipation were behind him. It is also interesting to note that while Maria Edgeworth claimed a strong romantic attachment on the part of Bicknell for Sabrina, she does not claim the same on behalf of Sabrina for Bicknell. Had Maria Edgeworth been attempting to enhance the romantic aspects of the Sidney/Bicknell relationship, it would have made sense for her to claim an equal reciprocity on Sabrina's behalf, but she does not. Sabrina accepts Bicknell's offer, but without claims to a romantic attachment and only after consultation with Day. Sabrina's ardour for the match, in Edgeworth's account, is significantly less than Bicknell's and reveals a continuing acquiescence to the opinions and authorisation of her mentor, Thomas Day.

This brings us to a consideration of Sabrina's response to Bicknell's unexpected proposal. At this point in her life Sabrina must have known some measure of disappointment and frustration at the way events had unfolded. Although there is no evidence that it was ever explicitly articulated to Sabrina that she was intended for Mr Day's bride, it is unlikely that she reached maturity without having an awareness of the real reason for her removal by him from Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital. This awareness, coupled with the tight reign Day kept over her environment and acquaintances, could well have evoked in Sabrina an understanding and even an expectation that one day he would make her his wife. In this Sabrina would have little or no say, but there is no evidence that his attentions were unwanted by her. On the contrary, Richard Lovell Edgeworth explicitly states that Day 'was never more

loved by any woman, than he was by Sabrina ...'.²⁰ Whether this was the filial love of a ward for her guardian or whether it had developed into a mature, sexual love, it remains a bold assertion on the part of Edgeworth regarding Sabrina's feelings for Day. This situation - Sabrina's devotion to Day and Day's 'attachment' to her - implicitly led Edgeworth to believe their union was imminent, only to be surprised and vaguely disapproving when Day suddenly abandoned all marital intentions towards Sabrina. How much more of a shock and disappointment must this turn of events been for Sabrina herself? Her whole education, experience and upbringing had been shaped by a rigid set of expectations, not the least of which, for both the Foundling Hospital authorities and Day, had been marriage and motherhood. While the context in which those expectations sat had shifted - she had gone from expecting a life framed by respectable but robust poverty and deference, to one framed by intellectual middle-class privilege - the expectations themselves had remained.

Day's rejection of her had brought with it yet another realignment of her world view and her sense of herself and her place in that world. She had been forced into a life of almost complete self-sufficiency and while she did have financial support from Day and potentially the moral and practical support of some of the other Lunar men, what she did not have was security. The allowance from Day could be withdrawn as quickly as his favour had been. The good graces of Day's Lunar friends could be just as equivocal. Sabrina was, essentially, left to her own devices to ensure her survival. It is reasonable, therefore, to assert that Sabrina's sense of self had been very much predicated on her sense of her femaleness - her role as wife and mother had been

²⁰ *Ibid*, Vol 1, p.339.

inculcated into her through the ethos of the Foundling Hospital and then heightened by her place in Thomas Day's household and life. This sense of who she was and what she had been educated for, must have been significantly shaken by the events of 1769 and 1774; more than this, in 1769 she had been deliberately extricated from the environment she knew, that of the subservient lower ranks, and given a taste of better things, not just materially but intellectually and emotionally. The intellectual world of the Lunar men was far removed from that of the Foundling Hospital and yet may have offered Sabrina a measure of stability. Being ousted from this world, and yet not entirely; suddenly being expected to support herself from 1774 onwards and yet to still maintain the façade of respectable middle class femininity, so as not to incur the displeasure of those who still deigned to remember and support her, must have proved difficult, frustrating and lonely. Yet Sabrina came through with honour and dignity, even though there seems to be some implicit expectation that she would not. Commentators on Sabrina's life, such as Anna Seward, were at pains to emphasize how well she had conducted herself since her disappointment over Day.²¹ This emphasis tacitly points to her background as a foundling child, by implication illegitimate and in contemporary discourse vulnerable to sexual impropriety by the very nature of her birth; and the fact that she was to all intents and purposes abandoned by Day to fend for herself. These two factors were signifiers of fallen womanhood and could easily have rendered Sabrina vulnerable to seduction of one kind or another. But she remained respectable, genteel and therefore eminently marriageable.

²¹ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

Sabrina's response to Bicknell's proposal can therefore be read in these terms. It is reasonable to contend that she had expected a life based around marriage and motherhood; this she had thus far been denied. Latterly, it is equally reasonable to contend, she had expected a life of comfortable and secure middle-class domesticity and the accrual of the status of wife to a wealthy and well-educated gentleman; this too had been denied her. For ten years she had existed as one of the many gentlewomen of the impoverished middle classes who lived a curious half-life in service to others, but never allowed to acknowledge their own financial dependence for fear of losing their status as ladies. At the age of twenty-seven, she was past the first flush of youth and heading towards the age of confirmed spinsterhood. John Bicknell's re-entry into her life presented her with what must have look like a second chance. Not just a second chance at assuming the role she was trained for, but also a second chance at obtaining the security inherent in the status of wife. For someone in Sabrina's position, the choice between being a spinster lady's companion or a wife could well have been a straightforward one, perhaps fearing Emma Woodhouse's later assertion that 'it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible'.²² There was a status in the appellation of wife in the same way there was shame in that of spinster and therefore Sabrina's acquiescence to Bicknell's proposal is easy to understand.²³

Not everyone agreed, however, not least of whom was Thomas Day himself. According to Anna Seward, 'When Mr Day's consent was asked by his protégé, he

²² Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: J Stockwell, 1816).

²³ See Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) for discussion of the position and status of spinsters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

gave it in these ungracious words: "I do not refuse my *consent* to your marrying Mr Bicknell; but remember you have not asked my *advice*" [original emphasis].²⁴ Again we have to bear in mind Seward's own agenda in her reportage of the relationship between Day and Sabrina, but nonetheless this comment does betray a certain hypocrisy at the heart of the re-negotiated relationship between Sabrina and Day. While Day had long since abdicated any real responsibility for the care and support of Sabrina, he now laid claim to a patriarchal deference from her regarding the important decisions in her life. This, despite the fact that Sabrina had existed for ten years during which time Day had kept her at arm's length and she was now a grown woman nearing the age of thirty. In Day's grudging consent we gain another glimpse of the quixotic role he played in Sabrina's life - he demanded the rights of a patriarch without acknowledging the responsibilities.

What of Sabrina's application to Day in the first place? As reported by Edgeworth, Sabrina accepted Bicknell 'Conditionally, for Mr Day, her friend and benefactor, was to be consulted',²⁵ but as we have considered, he was a 'friend and benefactor' only when it suited him and Sabrina could have been forgiven for thinking that she had the right to determine the course of her life for herself. However, in Sabrina's application we can detect hints of an astute ploy. Firstly, by the terms of the agreement drawn up in 1776 for the continued maintenance of Sabrina by Day, he promised her the sum of five hundred pounds on her marriage 'provided she do not marry without the consent of Dr E Darwin of Lichfield and Mr J Keir of Stourbridge'.²⁶ Therefore Sabrina

²⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

²⁵ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.112.

²⁶ BAHS, MS 1651 (Acc 91/108), Thomas Day's undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney, 25th January 1776.

was following the dictates of the agreement closely; whether she applied to Darwin and Keir explicitly is unknown. However, Keir appears as a witness to the marriage, so it can be deduced that his consent was given and it would be unlikely that Darwin would have refused. Secondly, in applying also to Day, Sabrina could well have been taking a holistic approach, ensuring Day was aware of her intended marriage and ensuring she had obtained his consent. Sabrina also approached the gentleman who had been her legal guardian until her age of majority, Richard Lovell Edgeworth; again in this it can be argued that Sabrina displayed a certain amount of political astuteness.²⁷ Since the age of twelve her fate had resided entirely in the hands of a group of men whom it behoved her to retain as patrons. Having been taught to cultivate a subservient and grateful deference during her years at the Foundling Hospital, Sabrina continued to learn the lesson that making herself agreeable - not just because she was female but because she was a highly dependent female - was vital to her survival. In applying to Edgeworth and Day, she was merely continuing to play the role she had been required to play all her life and reiterating her deference to the men that controlled her fortune and future. However, she played the role carefully. Day's requirement of her in the agreement of 1774 had been to obtain consent only and it is telling that this is all she did request - she had not been required to, nor did she feel the need to obtain, the advice of the men she was dependent on. In this she retained her autonomy and thus a modicum of control over her own destiny. It can be argued this was a clever move on her part; she had been offered an unlooked for and unexpected escape route from dependency, by no less a gentleman than the close friend of the men on whom she had thus far been

²⁷ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.112.

dependant. If she asked their advice, what was she to do if they advised her against the marriage? If they did this, it would leave her with the problematic decision as to whether she walked away from the only opportunity she was likely to have of becoming a wife, or keep in the good graces of her benefactors by heeding their advice. By asking for their consent only she was tacitly informing them that she had made her own decision and that their advice was not needed, only their blessing; a tactic which retained control over her decisions while giving the appearance of obeying her patriarchal guardians. Of course consent could have been refused, but as Maria Edgeworth explained regarding her father's views of the match: 'His office of guardian had long since ceased; the parties were at years of discretion'.²⁸ The application for consent was strategic but necessary.

Sabrina's wariness regarding the advice she may have been given regarding her marriage to John Bicknell appears to have been well founded. According to Maria Edgeworth, both her father and Day had similar concerns regarding Bicknell's character and motivation:

... he [Edgeworth] saw no objection to the match, except that Mr Bicknel's [sic] health might fail, and that his application might not be sufficient to secure, by his profession, a maintenance for a family. This objection appeared much more alarming to Mr Day, than to my father, who always looked to the hopeful side of human affairs; and who believed that no motive could be stronger or more likely

²⁸ *Ibid.*

to make a man exert himself, than the desire of providing for a woman he loved.²⁹

This indicated that both had an understanding of the life Bicknell had been leading hitherto and a level of concern that he would not take seriously the responsibilities he would be undertaking as a husband and, more than likely, a father. However it also gave a hint of the advice that each man would have given; Edgeworth would have encouraged Sabrina, believing she had as much to offer Bicknell as he had to her; Day would have strongly cautioned against, perhaps fearing a double claim on his munificence once his wastrel best friend and erstwhile pupil were joined in matrimony.

The marriage between Sabrina Sidney and John Bicknell took place on 16th April 1784 at St Philips, Birmingham.³⁰ The marriage record states it took place by Special License.³¹ Between them, the license and the marriage record reveal both concrete facts and pertinent aspects of the relationships affecting Sabrina at the time, as well as the ways in which she may have been constructing herself. Both documents record that John Bicknell was a resident of the Parish of St Andrews, Holborn, Middlesex and Sabrina 'hath had her usual abode for the space of four Weeks last past' in the parish of St Philips, Birmingham. This allows us to place Bicknell's bachelor residence in London and suggests that Sabrina re-located to Birmingham for the marriage ceremony. It also allows some indication of the timespan, for if Sabrina

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp.112-113.

³⁰ BAHS, DRO 25 Vol 4, St Philips Parish Records, Marriage Register 1775-1784, p.182.

³¹ Lichfield Record Office (LRO), B/C/6,7, Special Licence for marriage of John Bicknell and Sabrina Sidney, 1784.

had been resident in St Philips for the requisite four weeks prior to her marriage, this suggests Bicknell arrived in Newport and proposed sometime before mid-March 1784.

It is interesting to note here, the involvement that two stalwarts from the Lunar Society had in Sabrina's marriage, Dr William Withering and James Keir. Withering appeared as a witness and counter-signatory to the special license obtained by Bicknell, and this involvement supports the earlier contention that Withering may have been involved, through his relationship with the Yonge family, in procuring Sabrina her position as ladies companion.³² That he appeared as witness to the marriage license again suggests he remained active and involved in Sabrina's life at this time and supportive of her marriage. Withering placed his reputation on the line by vouching for John Bicknell, by signing his name and fixing his seal to the special license, which suggested a high level of concern for the future of Sabrina Sidney. Keir appeared as a witness to the marriage and again this indicates a considerable level of involvement with Sabrina at this time.³³ That Keir participated in the marriage between Sabrina and Bicknell is supported by a reference made by Esther Day in her later communication with Edgeworth. In deciding to settle on Keir's daughter Amelia the sum of £2000 from her late husband's estate, Mrs Day explains that 'Mr Day always said that he considered himself under very particular obligations to Mr Keir for the integrity and fidelity with which he had discharged the trust reposed in him

³² LRO, B/C/6,7, Special Licence for marriage of John Bicknell and Sabrina Sidney, 1784.

³³ There were two other witnesses to the marriage, Catherine Bicknell and Mary Yonge. As has already been suggested, Mary Yonge could have been Sabrina's employer while at Newport, perhaps a female relation of Dr William Yonge, who was an associate of Dr William Withering, and Catherine Bicknell is likely to be Bicknell's younger sister.

respecting Sabrina'.³⁴ While this is not definitively a reference to Keir's involvement in Sabrina's marriage, it is clear that Keir acted on behalf of Day regarding Sabrina and Day considered that he acted well. What is significant is the involvement of Withering and Keir and the absence of Day. It appeared as though Day did not undertake any involvement with the marriage between his ward and friend, preferring to devolve the responsibility onto Keir. Again, this suggested a coolness on the part of Day towards Sabrina, perhaps because she did not apply for his advice regarding her marriage. Regardless of the reasons, it indicated a wish to maintain a distance between the former tutor and pupil and an unwillingness to involve himself in discharging his responsibilities towards the woman he once considered making his wife. It also attests to the faith Day had in his Lunar friends and the strength of the bonds between them, that Withering and Keir did undertake a responsibility that should have remained with Day.

Two other interesting aspects are revealed in the documentation for the marriage. The first is that the license was granted and the service conducted by the Reverend Charles Newling, Rector of St Philips, Birmingham.³⁵ Other marriages appear to have been conducted by John James who was the curate of St Philips, so the undertaking of the marriage service by the Reverend Newling could be reflective of the fact that this marriage was being conducted by Special License and therefore involved those of a higher social status.³⁶ However, records of the Foundling Hospital show that during Anne Kingstone's residence at Shrewsbury, the Reverend Newling became a governor

³⁴ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 23rd December 1789.

³⁵ BAHS, DRO 25 Vol 4, Marriage Register 1775-1784, p.182.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

and was still acting as one in June 1769 when her apprenticeship to Richard Lovell Edgeworth was recorded in the committee meeting minutes, although the record indicates that Reverend Newling was not present at the specific meeting approving the apprenticeship.³⁷ It appears that one of the Foundling Hospital governors conducted Sabrina's marriage service and this raises the question as to whether Reverend Newling knew of Sabrina's prior existence as a Foundling Hospital child and the manner of her removal from Shrewsbury. Although it is unlikely that Reverend Newling's awareness of this issue will ever be confirmed, it remains an interesting coincidence in the history of Sabrina Sidney.

The second point of interest is the way Sabrina appears to be constructing herself at this time. Both the license and the marriage record state that she was going under the name of Anna Sabrina Sidney and her signature on the marriage register confirms this.³⁸ This is the first time that the name Anna has appeared as a first name in any record concerning Sabrina. However, given her Foundling Hospital name was Anne, it is not unexpected to find a derivation of it as part of her name. What is interesting is the change from Anne to Anna and that it is recorded as her first name rather than a name additional to Sabrina. How can this be explained? It can be argued that, as far as Sabrina was concerned, her name held less importance to her than to others. Certainly names probably hold more psychological importance for those of us in the twenty-first century than in the eighteenth, but even by the standard of her contemporaries, Sabrina had collected more changes in identity than was normal for someone not actively trying to evade the law. Ironically not even Anne Kingstone was

³⁷ LMA, A/FH/D/02/01/001, FHR, Shrewsbury Hospital Committee Minutes, 13th May 1766 and 30th June 1769.

³⁸ BAHS, DRO 25 Vol 4, Marriage Register 1775-1784, p.182.

her first given name; that was Manima Butler which, in 1757, had been sealed away in the entry billet of child 4579 and would not have been revealed to that child, even upon her removal from Shrewsbury.³⁹ Anne Kingstone then summarily became Sabrina Sidney, due to the whim of a wealthy gentleman with dilettante tendencies; why could not Sabrina Sidney become someone else just as easily? Certainly the choice of Anna recalls her former Foundling Hospital identity of Anne, which interestingly suggests an acceptance, even a hankering after that previous identity, but possibly more pertinent was Sabrina's relationship with Anna Seward. The formidable presence of Anna Seward in Lichfield could hardly have been unknown by Sabrina even if her guardian had not been a close friend of the Swan of Lichfield. Sabrina became an acquaintance of many of Day's Lichfield friends and as one of the women on the fringes of the Lunar circle, Seward got to know Sabrina well.⁴⁰ It appears as though, just as with Edgeworth, Darwin, Withering and Keir, Seward remained friendly with, and concerned for, Sabrina after Day's withdrawal and Seward herself remarked that she met with Sabrina when the latter was invited to the home of Dr Darwin.⁴¹ Did Sabrina see Seward as a specifically female benefactor and role-model, in contrast to Edgeworth, Keir and Day as specifically male benefactors? Was the adoption of the name 'Anna' not only an assertion of her former identity, but also a minor tribute to a lady who must have been an important and influential presence in Sabrina's life for the short time she resided with Day in Lichfield and who possibly was the most constant female acquaintance since she left the Foundling Hospital? Again it is impossible to state this with any certainty,

³⁹ LMA, A/FH/A/09/001/056, FHR, Billet Book, 1757.

⁴⁰ See Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward* for an indication of the friendship between the two women and Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, pp.239-40 for his assessment of Sabrina's friendship with the Seward family during her residence with Day.

⁴¹ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

although a strong argument can be made that this was the case. What can be stated is that it is clear that to Sabrina, her name - and possibly with it a corresponding identity and sense of self - was interchangeable, malleable and fluid and that its fluidity was dependent not necessarily on internal promptings but external expediencies.

According to contemporary accounts, once married, the Bicknells set up home in London and, despite Day's fears to the contrary, 'Mr Bicknel [sic] did exert himself and Sabrina made him an excellent wife'.⁴² Details of Sabrina's married life are sparse in the extreme. According to the Edgeworths it was a happy marriage. Maria Edgeworth recalls that when Bicknell wrote to her father, 'he spoke of his wife and children with all the delight of the most happy husband and father'.⁴³ All we can assert with any certainty are locations in which she was residing at various points, extrapolated from parish records, for between April 1784 and April 1787, Sabrina went from being a wife, to a mother, to a widow. John Bicknell, his health already compromised by the time he married Sabrina, died in March 1787 from what Seward termed a 'paralytic stroke'.⁴⁴ By this time Sabrina had given birth to her eldest son, named John Laurens, after his father. Subsequent records claim that he was born in either 1785 or 1786, but no birth record has yet been found to confirm this. A record for the christening of Sabrina's second son, Henry Edgeworth Bicknell, has been located and records his birth on 16th December 1786 and his christening on 2nd

⁴² Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.74.

April 1787 at Old Church, St Pancras.⁴⁵ However, parish records for St Dunstan in the West, a parish that lies within the legal district of London (the church itself is situated on Fleet Street, between Chancery Lane and Fetter Lane) records that a John Bicknell, residing in Chancery Lane, was buried there on 2nd April 1787.⁴⁶ Does this suggest that on the same day, Sabrina Bicknell crossed London between St Dunstan in the West parish church and St Pancras for the burial of her husband and the christening of her son? Geographically, this is not beyond the bounds of possibility, however it does raise two issues; firstly did Sabrina attend her husband's funeral and secondly, why, if the two events happened on the same day, did they not take place in the same church?

Regarding the issue of Sabrina's attendance at the funeral, there are two factors to consider; firstly the logistics of burials in the city of London at this time militated against attendance by family members. In the early part of the eighteenth century, with the growth in numbers of the living, there came a concomitant growth in the numbers of the dead, bringing pressure to bear on the graveyards of the city's churches.⁴⁷ The result was that in 'many (if not most) metropolitan churchyards any burial was impossible without disturbing previous burials' and therefore 'in urban burial grounds relatives very rarely went to the graveside for the committal of the body: to do so would have been too distressing.'⁴⁸ St Dunstan in the West was

⁴⁵ The main source for the details of the birth and christening of Henry Edgeworth Bicknell is the International Genealogical Index. It has been cross-checked with a microfilmed copy of the original parish record, which is of extremely poor quality. However it is possible to confirm the date of christening as 2nd April 1787, therefore the birth date of 16th December 1786 has been accepted here.

⁴⁶ Guildhall Archives, P69/DUN2, Register of Burials, St Dunstan-in-the-West, 1739-1791.

⁴⁷ See J.S. Curl, *Kensal Green Cemetery: The Origins and Development of the General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London 1842 – 2001* (London: Phillimore, 2001).

⁴⁸ Curl, *Kensal Green Cemetery*, p.15.

unquestionably an urban burial ground, situated in the historic City of London and so could well have been exhibiting the strains on its infrastructure.

Secondly, there was a move in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries towards discouraging women from attending funerals because of the health risks associated with the graveyards that were 'prejudicial to the health of the living' and because women were increasingly thought to be 'too delicate to bear the public rituals of death'.⁴⁹ In 1787, it could be argued that this was a nascent shift and that it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that this attitude was widely accepted and fashionable. In Sabrina's case it is more likely that the unpleasant state of urban burial grounds kept her away from Bicknell's funeral; which may have incorporated fears over the health risks, both to her and potentially to her two sons (approximately three years and four months old respectively). However, there could also have been a consideration of the appropriateness of attending the funeral, given that Sabrina, through her marriage to Bicknell had entered the ranks of the 'middling sort' and may have internalised the increasing solidification of gender roles. While it is not possible to give a definitive answer to the question of whether Sabrina attended John Bicknell's funeral, given that her son was christened on the same day and that the trend, at this time, regarding urban burials was for the family to remain absent, it seems reasonable to conclude she may not have done. Therefore on 2nd April 1787, Sabrina Bicknell was more than likely concerned with the christening of her son, Henry Edgeworth, at St Pancras Parish Church.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.408.

This leads to the second issue raised by the double event in the Bicknell family which took place on 2nd April 1787, why did the funeral of Bicknell and the christening of his son not take place at the same church? The answer would seem to be that Henry Edgeworth's birth and his father's death took place in different parishes. The records themselves offer contradictory information about the location of the Bicknell family. The record of John Bicknell's burial in the St Dunstan in the West parish registers states he was living in Chancery Lane which is consistent with his residence within the parish in which he was buried.⁵⁰ However, it is Henry Edgeworth's christening in the parish of St Pancras that is interesting, as there had been, until then, no evidence that the family resided in St Pancras at any time. Henry Edgeworth could only have been christened there if he had a legitimate claim to a settlement and therefore this indicates that he was indeed born there. The date of his birth is given as 16th December 1786, almost four months prior to John Bicknell's death.⁵¹ How do we account for Henry Edgeworth's birth in St Pancras in late 1786, which suggests that the family were resident there at the time, and John Bicknell's burial in St Dunstan in the West which suggests they were also resident there? The answer may lie in the geography of London at the time.

In 1786, St Pancras was technically outside the suburbs of London, but was considered one of the 'five villages beyond the Bills' (Hammersmith, Paddington, Marylebone and Chelsea being the other four).⁵² These five villages were 'becoming recognised as an integral part of the metropolis' but nevertheless 'Hammersmith,

⁵⁰ Guildhall Archives, P69/DUN2, Register of Burials, St Dunstan-in-the-West, 1739-1791.

⁵¹ LMA, P90/SAV, St Pancras Parish Register of Births, 1787.

⁵² G.F.E. Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714-1808* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), p.3.

Paddington and St Pancras remained small villages'.⁵³ St Pancras especially became popular with the urban dwellers of the nearby city as a place of pleasure and leisure and for its springs - St Pancras Wells, St Chad Wells and Battle Bridge Wells - which according to one later commentator, 'were as noted for their waters as Harrowgate [sic], Tunbridge or Cheltenham'.⁵⁴ Given that John Bicknell's health had been declining since before his marriage to Sabrina, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Bicknell family may have relocated temporarily to St Pancras for the good of John Bicknell's health, during which period Sabrina gave birth to Henry Edgeworth, thus giving him a claim to a settlement and christening in the parish of St Pancras rather than St Dunstan in the West. Evidence to support the contention that John Bicknell's health was in terminal decline during the latter part of 1786, can be found in a reference to Sabrina in a letter written from Susannah Darwin to Erasmus Darwin Jnr; 'Poor Mrs Bicknell, I much pity her'.⁵⁵ This letter is dated 21st December 1786, a few days after Henry Edgeworth's birth and suggests that the plight of Sabrina as a young mother and widow-in-waiting was being communicated around the Lunar circle and their families; a plight that was confirmed with the death of her husband early the following year.

The death of John Bicknell brought Sabrina's period of married life to an end after three years. Not only had she lost her husband but she now had two small children for whom to provide. The impact of Bicknell's death on Sabrina must, once again, have reiterated to her the transience of both relationships and her social standing.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Samuel Palmer, *History of St Pancras* (London: Samuel Palmer, 1870), p.16.

⁵⁵ University of Cambridge, DAR 227.6:22, Letter from Susannah Darwin to Erasmus Darwin jnr, 21st December 1786. With thanks to Desmond King Hele for this reference.

She was experiencing yet another reversal of fortune, no longer a wife but a widow, yet another archetype of vulnerable femininity. Although she had apparently enjoyed three years of marriage, she was now almost back in the position of three years previously, unsupported and unprovided for, and she was the sole parent to two small boys. Once again Sabrina was in a situation where she was left to her own devices, her wits and her ability to construct herself in ways that would secure the future for both herself and her sons. How she did this in the face of the grief and uncertainty she must have felt is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9: CONSTRUCTING THE MOTHER 1787 - 1804

By April 1787 Sabrina Sidney Bicknell had again experienced a major shift in her life; no longer a wife with all the cultural and social expectations associated with it, she was a widow and also a mother. For the first time she had not only her own survival to ensure, but that of her sons. This chapter examines how Sabrina Bicknell responded to this further change in her circumstances and the ways she constructed herself in order to support herself and her children.

It would be easy to suppose that John Bicknell's death was sudden and therefore came as a shock to his wife, rendering her bereft and vulnerable. However evidence suggests that Bicknell's health had been in a precarious state for a period of time, even prior to his marriage to Sabrina, therefore his last months could well have been indicative of his early death and given his wife ample time to consider her future as a widow. Despite this, the actuality of losing her husband must have had a significant impact on Sabrina; not only did she have to raise her two sons single-handedly, but the oldest, John, was barely out of infancy and the youngest, Henry was only four months old. Both emotionally and practically, John Bicknell's death was a major event in Sabrina's life, not least because it placed on her the inevitable construction of 'widow'.

There was, however, a network of acquaintances who offered Sabrina support at this time. The most obvious members of this network were those associated with the Lunar Society, not least of which was Thomas Day. Unfortunately Day possessed

neither the empathy nor the sense of responsibility towards Sabrina that prompted extensive action now that she was widowed. Day's attitude towards Sabrina in the years since the final break between them in 1774 seems cold and distant. A man of strong opinions and standards, he appears to have been able to abandon his projects with the same enthusiasm that he undertook them. Upon dismissing Sabrina as his future wife, he supported her financially until his rather grudging agreement to her marriage but in no way appears to have offered her moral or emotional support. However, Sabrina was not alone in experiencing a dramatic shift in Day's attitude towards her. As much as Day seems to have taken a rather intellectual attitude towards romance and marriage, in fact his passions led him into romantic scrapes and then to an equal and opposing passionate distaste for the former object of those passions. His early romance with Margaret Edgeworth appeared to have ended with mutual agreement and acceptance on both sides.¹ However, writing to Anna Seward in 1771, Day recalled Miss Edgeworth in less than flattering terms:

How different are the sentiments I retain for E.S. [Elizabeth Sneyd] from those I have constantly felt for my first Mistress. I have never recollected Miss Edgeworth without contempt mix't with Detestation; I see her as I should a Toad, which I should not injure, but cannot help beholding with abhorrence.²

This illustrates both the extent to which Day felt the power of rejection, especially from women and the extremities of dislike, bordering on hate, which the former

¹ See Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. / begun by Himself and concluded by his Daughter Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London: R. Hunter, 1820), Vol 1 for details of Day's relationship with Margaret Edgeworth.

² Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB), 2001-71-17, Letter from Thomas Day to Anna Seward, 14th March 1771.

object of his affection could provoke. Day was a man of extremes and while Sabrina did not seem to engender such violent emotions or language when Day refers to her, he still executed a dramatic *volte-face* regarding his attitude towards her. We have already seen a suggestion of his attitude in his correspondence with Richard Lovell Edgeworth over the adoption of a child from the lower orders and Day appeared to have viewed with contempt his own plan of making 'a lady out of what fortune has intended for a serving wench'.³ When discussing with Seward her own romantic entanglements he articulated a point of view that could equally have been applied to his own experiment with Sabrina:

Do you imagine that either Man or Woman would execute after a moments consideration, half the extravagant schemes they formed when under the influence of any strong passion? If you will attend to human conduct, you will in general find it is sufficient for any man to have formed a project today, to be disgusted with it tomorrow, and to do directly the contrary.⁴

It seems that with hindsight Day came to regard his attempts at forming a wife with disgust and, while partly accepting his own naiveté, chose to distance himself from Sabrina as a way of trying to reverse the process and turn a lady back into a serving wench. Thus Day's response to Sabrina always seemed to be filtered through an economic lens, fearing, as he did, the effects of surplus wealth, luxury and leisure. He

³ Letter from Thomas Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth quoted in Peter Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day, 1748-1789: English Philanthropist and Author: Virtue Almost Personified* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996) p.261 from Thomas Day, *The Letters of Marius: or, Reflections upon the Peace, the East-India Bill, and the Present Crisis* (London: John Stockdale, 1784).

⁴ SJBM, 2001-71-17, Letter from Thomas Day to Anna Seward, 14th March 1771.

supported her, but only to keep her from outright poverty and always seemed to want her to exert herself in her own support, while not seeming to understand the implications this might have had for Sabrina herself. It appears that Day did undertake some further financial support for Sabrina, but it appeared to be grudging and provided possibly because others of his acquaintance offered support more willingly.⁵ Evidence of Day's attitude towards Sabrina at this time is found in the communications of those around Sabrina and Day, rather than the protagonists themselves. In letters of Anna Seward to George Hardinge, Seward describes Day's behaviour towards Sabrina in negative terms:

Yet lives there one whose still more bounden duty it is to consider her as his child, so far at least as to shield her from the miseries of apprehended want ... This one gives away two-thirds of a large income in charity - or rather alms; but gloomy stoicism, and sour-headed infidelity, are, amidst an ostentatious display of moral exertion, wondrous prone to neglect and defy the claims of obvious duty.⁶

As has been highlighted previously, care needs to be taken regarding Anna Seward's construction of Day and his relationship with Sabrina; but the basic premise of Seward's contention - that Day did little to support Sabrina at this point in her life - is echoed, albeit in a different tone, by Day's wife Esther. In a letter to Edgeworth in

⁵ Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Erasmus Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*, ed. by Philip K. Wilson, Elizabeth A. Dolan and Malcolm Dick (London: Joseph Johnson, 1804; repr. Warwickshire: Brewin Books, 2010), p.74.

⁶ Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th November 1788 in Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between 1784 and 1807* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1811), pp.195-6.

1790, Esther wrote, 'Mr Day who always considered the lasting good of others more than their present gratification, was not so lavish of his services at first, that he might lead Mrs B to exert herself'.⁷ Again, this suggests that Day was concerned that Sabrina did not look to him for financial support and did not consider herself above 'exerting' herself, therefore not becoming one of the idle rich whom he so despised. Day seemed to be anxious to prevent Sabrina constructing herself as a 'lady' and therefore unable to support herself by work and this anxiety frames his attitude and behaviour towards her.

Others in the Lunar Circle appeared to have had less anxiety over helping Sabrina and it was the friends of Day who did more to help Sabrina at this time than Day himself. Edgeworth, who seriously undertook the legal responsibility bestowed upon him by Day in 1769 as Sabrina's guardian, began steady support of Sabrina and her sons.⁸ The correspondence which has survived between the Edgeworth family and Sabrina is evidence that their relationship did not suffer the same dislocation that Sabrina and Day's had and the Edgeworths seemed to offer Sabrina both financial and emotional support.⁹ In correspondence between Esther Day and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, an explicit reference is made to an offer from the latter to Sabrina, which Mrs Day terms as a 'generous offer of educating her son and giving her a year's residence in your house'.¹⁰

⁷ National Library of Ireland (NLI), MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

⁸ See various letters from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell, NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers.

⁹ See various letters from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell, NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers.

¹⁰ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, January 1790.

The other evidence we have of the support that Sabrina received is from Anna Seward. There is no direct evidence of Seward helping Sabrina financially, for example nothing is left to Sabrina in Seward's extensive will, although that is not to suggest that she did not.¹¹ However, Seward clearly used her network of acquaintances to raise the issue of Sabrina's plight and in so doing certainly helped financial support to be forthcoming. Seward's friend and correspondent, George Hardinge, held the position of Solicitor General to the Queen, and therefore he was a member of the same profession as John Bicknell. In 1788, Seward used her position as friend of both Hardinge and Sabrina to bring to the attention of the former the circumstances of the latter, writing, 'I have lately talked about you to a sweet unfortunate who knows you well - the widow of poor Mr Bicknel [sic] ... She and her children are left without any provision'.¹² Hardinge appeared to have taken the hint and prompted his legal colleagues to offer financial support to Sabrina which, according to evidence from Seward's letters, seems to have been forthcoming around the early months of 1789.¹³ This would have gone some way to ameliorating the threat of immediate economic hardship which Sabrina faced as the mother of two young sons.

Therefore the evidence suggests that, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, after the death of her husband Sabrina was the beneficiary of help and support from the Lunar Circle, and the networks that had previously worked for her in other ways still

¹¹ For a transcript of Seward's will see Marion Roberts, 'Close Encounter: Anna Seward 1742 – 1809, A Woman in Provincial Cultural Life' (unpublished MLitt, University of Birmingham, 2011), pp.170-174.

¹² Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th October 1788 in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, p.176.

¹³ Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 24th November 1789 in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, p.245.

existed to ensure her survival at this point in her life. But there were also extensions to that network that brought opportunities for Sabrina from unexpected quarters. One of Thomas Day's and John Bicknell's friends from their Charterhouse days was a gentleman called William Seward (no relation of Anna Seward).¹⁴ William Seward remained friends with Day and visited Lichfield during Day's residence at Stowe-Hill, becoming acquainted with the Lunar Circle, including Anna Seward and inevitably Sabrina.¹⁵ At the same time, William Seward was acquainted with the *literati* of London and became an intimate of the Johnson-Thrale circle centred on Streatham.¹⁶ Also in this circle was Dr Charles Burney, who taught music to Hester Thrale's daughter Queeny.¹⁷ William Seward would have been well acquainted with the story of Day's educational experiment with Sabrina and probably met her. Presumably, she made a similarly good impression on him as she made on everyone else, except Day. It appears as though he conveyed the plight of Mrs Sabrina Bicknell to Dr Burney and for the first time Sabrina was brought into direct contact with the Burney family.

A close-knit and self-made family, the Burneys were firmly embedded within the intellectual, literary and musical middle classes.¹⁸ Dr Burney was a musicologist, his daughters Frances and Sarah became authors, and a third daughter, Susannah, inherited her father's musical talents. Of his sons, it is his eldest, Charles, who is of interest to this study. After being sent down from Cambridge for stealing books, he

¹⁴ George Warren Gignilliat, *The Author of Sandford and Merton: a Life of Thomas Day* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p.17.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.83.

¹⁶ See Roger Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) and Percy Alfred Scholes, *The Great Dr. Burney: his Life, his Travels, his Works, his Family and his Friends* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) for discussion of Burney's involvement with the Streatham circle.

¹⁷ Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney*, p.228.

¹⁸ See Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney* and Scholes, *The Great Dr. Burney*.

faced a limited professional future and taught at Dr William Rose's school in Chiswick.¹⁹ He married Dr Rose's daughter and undertook responsibility for the school upon his father-in-law's death in 1786.²⁰ In the same year, the school was relocated to Hammersmith and the following year, Charles Burney became aware of the situation that Mrs Sabrina Bicknell found herself in and offered a place at his school for her eldest son, John.²¹ The letter that Sabrina wrote in response to this is one of the few of hers in existence and the first written source that we can unequivocally attribute to her. In it she gives her 'ardent and most grateful thanks for your truly great and friendly offer to me and my dear little boy' but 'I sincerely lament that he is not at present of an age to accept your kindness'.²² Showing the tact and astuteness that may well have contributed to her survival up to this point, Sabrina constructed herself as a humble and grateful mother:

I hope he will in future [feel] the gratitude your goodness to him merits, and as for myself I shall look forward with impatience for that period you shall judge him capable of applying and making a proper use of the opportunity you so kindly offer to improve himself.²³

As the first unmediated piece of written evidence from Sabrina, this is an important source. It testifies to the level of instruction that Sabrina had received throughout her rather convoluted and inconsistent education - at this point we should remind

¹⁹ Charles Burney's Obituary (1819) *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, 89 (1): p.369.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (YL), MSS 3, Box 2, f.120, Burney Family Collection (BFC), Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Charles Burney, D.D, 16th May 1787.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

ourselves she had gone through a rural upbringing until the age of eight; experienced the Foundling Hospital's educational framework which twinned basic learning with practical skills; followed by a year's worth of Day's random, Rousseau-inspired curriculum and then concluded by four years in a provincial ladies boarding school. Sabrina's letter to Charles Burney is clearly written in a good hand, is articulate, polite and respectful without being obsequious and yet there is a clear determination to ensure for her son the benefit of an education at Burney's school at the appropriate time. In this, and in Sabrina's reaction to the offer she received from Edgeworth, we can detect a hint of determination to maintain control, limited or otherwise, over her situation and that of her sons. Sabrina declined Edgeworth's offer, just as she declined Burney's; a circumstance that caused Esther Day to comment that in this instance, 'I think she did not exert a proper degree of prudence and judgement'.²⁴ But it was Sabrina's judgement to make and it appears she chose not to place herself or her sons in situations in which, for whatever reason, she did not want them to be.

Returning to the communication between Sabrina and Charles Burney, it appears as if there was nothing remarkable about the offer he made. There was even an inevitability about their communication, as the networks in which they were both involved were bound to bring them into contact with each other eventually. What is remarkable is that the Burneys made the offer to the former pupil of one of the two writers of the *Joel Collier* satire, who also happened to be the widow of the second. Moreover they were also offering an education to that second gentleman's son, who, given the straightened circumstances in which his father had left his mother, would

²⁴ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

not have received such an education without the benevolence of a family such as the Burneys. This leads to a consideration of the extent to which the Burneys associated Day and Bicknell with the *Joel Collier* satire and, if they did, the magnanimous attitude they showed to Sabrina and her sons.

Dr Burney was embarrassed and hurt by the publication of the *Joel Collier* satire.²⁵ Coming as it did, and by no means coincidentally, just after the failure of his Music School plan for the Foundling Hospital, it led to a breakdown in his health and his considering the abandonment of his latest project, a history of music.²⁶ The Burneys, from the evidence of their correspondence and writings, were a loving and supportive family and loyal to each other, especially their father. Fanny Burney in her memoirs of her father was scathing about the satire itself and seriously downplayed its popularity to the point of being ahistorical.²⁷ The Burneys were not impressed with the joke made at the expense of their patriarch and the sense of hurt and humiliation was felt across the generations. From its first publication there was discussion over the authorship of the *Joel Collier* satire, discussion which continued until Lonsdale's clearly supported contention that it was indeed Bicknell and Day who were responsible.²⁸ In 1787 it was far from certain who the author was, but John Bicknell had emerged as a suspect and his obituary had openly assigned authorship to him.²⁹ It is unknown whether any of the Burney family knew of this

²⁵ Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney*, p.155.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Fanny Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney: Arranged from his own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832).

²⁸ Roger Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina' in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship: Essays in Memory of James Marshall Osborn*, ed. by René Wellek and Álvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.293-4.

²⁹ John Bicknell's Obituary (1787), *European Magazine and London Review*, 11 (London: J. Sewell, Cornhill and J. Debrett).

assertion, although given the close links that existed between those in the intellectual and literary circles of the time and the fact that *Joel Collier* was so blatantly a satire of Dr Burney, it seems reasonable to question for how long they could have remained ignorant. To this must be added the caveat that Fanny Burney did not seem to have an awareness of the author when she referred to the *Joel Collier* satire in the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, which was published in 1832. Nonetheless, the offer to Sabrina on behalf of her son does have an added resonance due to the literary exchange between Burney, Bicknell and Day. The Burney family, despite being humiliated by John Bicknell and Thomas Day were among those who offered tangible support to Sabrina and her children. The irony continues, for the communication between Sabrina and the Burneys must have continued to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, for by 1791, Sabrina was living and working for Charles Burney as 'housekeeper and general manageress' of his school.³⁰

Despite the fact that she gratefully and graciously declined Dr Burney's offer in 1787, the letter Sabrina wrote to him at the time allows us to locate her only a month after John Bicknell's burial and her son's christening. The letter was written from Shenfield, a village on the outer suburbs of Brentwood. It is unclear what Sabrina was doing at Shenfield at this time, however it is not unreasonable to suggest she was a guest of one of the network of acquaintances that had grown up around her.

This letter not only locates Sabrina geographically, but emotionally as well. This is the first sustained and unmediated source we have from Sabrina herself. The letter

³⁰ Joyce Hemlow, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, Vol 1, 1791-1792 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.70.

places her son, John, at the centre of its narrative, with an appreciation of Charles Burney's generosity to him as its twin theme. This, it will be argued, marks the emergence of yet another construction of Sabrina, that of Mother, which would take on a greater importance in future years.

Sources for Sabrina's life between the years 1787 and 1791 are scarce; we only have partial accounts of how she supported herself at this time, through references in other people's correspondence. The main event that prompted these references was the death of Thomas Day in 1789. Day and Esther had been living the life that he had wished for himself since he was a young man. They had retired to Anningsley where Day dabbled in agricultural theory, had minor excursions into politics and played host to his nephews and children of his Lunar friends, including Maria Edgeworth.³¹ While out riding, he was thrown from his horse and died from the fall.³² At only 41 years of age, Day's death came as a shock to his friends and acquaintances as, despite his unusual and rather intractable nature, he was genuinely liked and respected by those who knew him well. Dr Darwin wrote to his son, Robert Darwin in November 1789, 'I much lament the death of Mr Day. The loss of one's friend is one great evil of growing old. He was dear to me by many names ... as friend, philosopher, scholar, honest man'.³³ He was also genuinely mourned, not least by the two women who arguably had loved him the most, Esther Day and Sabrina Bicknell. Esther's reaction to her husband's death has been well documented and she survived him by only a few years, such was the devastation his death caused her.³⁴ Sabrina's reaction is harder

³¹ See Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*.

³² *Ibid*, p.330.

³³ This quote is taken from Rowland, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day*, p.335.

³⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.73.

to gauge, but we can detect in the reporting of her reaction a genuine grief for the death of the man who had such a massive impact on the course of her life.

It is from Richard Lovell Edgeworth that references to Sabrina at this time are found. He wrote several letters to various people that refer to Sabrina and the marks of respect that she demonstrated for Day. The first was to Charles Bicknell, Sabrina's brother-in-law:

Mrs S Bicknell very properly put on mourning for Mr Day – has Mrs Day ever taken any notice of this mark of her respect? Or given her any assistance to defray an expense which Mrs B [~~she~~] ought not to have avoided but which she cannot well afford – Pray give my respects to Mrs B and assure her that if Mrs Day's other friends should forget this circumstance – I will not forget it.³⁵

This letter gives an indication of three points, firstly, that Edgeworth was aware of Sabrina's situation and that she had put on mourning for Day, secondly, that she was not in a position to afford it, and thirdly, that he feels that Esther Day should be informed and thank Sabrina for the respect she has shown. It shows a genuine concern for Sabrina and the financial situation in which she found herself, but also a concern that Sabrina's feelings for Day and the respect she shows is not forgotten. In a further letter to Esther herself, Edgeworth reports, 'Mrs S Bicknell informs me that she has put on deep mourning as you may suppose we have done' which supports the

³⁵ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Charles Bicknell, n.d. (possibly October 1789).

keenness that Edgeworth clearly felt that Esther should know of Sabrina's actions and acknowledge them.³⁶

Whether through this communication from Edgeworth, or because she was, and always had been, cognisant of Sabrina's situation, Esther acknowledged the respect shown to her husband. In a subsequent letter to Edgeworth, Esther wrote at length about her feelings towards Sabrina and articulates her determination to continue to help her. Esther applied to Edgeworth concerning 'a subject on which I wish to have your advice and opinion' and goes on to explain, 'it is my firm intention to do something for Mrs John Bicknell: from considering the subject I think the best method will be to give her an annuity not less than thirty, or more than fifty pounds a year. Be so good as tell me what you think of it'³⁷

Esther then explained the several reasons why she considered Sabrina worthy of her assistance:

Poor woman she has lost her friend and benefactor; and it is my duty to supply his place! ... When I reflect that the circumstances that deprived Miss Sidney of Mr Day's confidence, were the means of all my happiness, she appears to me doubly entitled to my pity and assistance ... You will perhaps my dear sir think me very romantic, when I say, that I feel peculiarly interested about her from the belief that she once really loved the ever lamented object of my friendship

³⁶ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Esther Day, 29th November 1789.

³⁷ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

and veneration. Then without any fault of her own she has been peculiarly unfortunate; for as to the state of her husband's affairs, she is certainly acquitted of all blame.³⁸

On a number of levels this indicates that Esther felt a responsibility towards Sabrina and gives us another insight into both Sabrina's feelings towards Day and her relationship with John Bicknell. Esther quite clearly states that she believes Sabrina really loved Day, as Esther did herself and in this the two women are joined in love and grief. However, Esther accepts that she gained where Sabrina lost and the break between Day and Sabrina - the end of their tacit romantic relationship - enabled Esther and Day to become acquainted and subsequently to marry. Dr William Small introduced Esther to Day as a potential wife, only after the latter's final break with Sabrina in 1774. Esther also commented on Sabrina's relationship with John Bicknell, absolving her from any responsibility for 'the state of her husband's affairs' but clearly signalling that Bicknell had left his wife and children seriously ill-provided for.³⁹

It appeared that Day's death did have a significant impact on Sabrina and that she mourned him openly. Despite the way in which he had treated her, with very little respect for what she might have wanted or needed and placing her in situations that required her to construct herself in ways that pleased him, Sabrina appeared, at this point in her life, to have retained respect, affection and even love for the man who made the single greatest impact on her life. A mixture of father figure, lover,

³⁸ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

benefactor and task-master, Sabrina's relationship with Day was complicated and convoluted but still she mourned his loss.

Despite the uncertainty that must have followed the death of John Bicknell it is clear that the networks that sprang from the Lunar and Lichfield circles played an important role in helping and supporting Sabrina in the years between 1787 and 1791. Exactly where she was living and what, if any work she undertook is unknown, however as has been previously stated, communication of some description must have continued between herself and the Burney family, for in 1791, Fanny Burney wrote, 'His [Charles Burney] wife was here on Sunday, with Mrs Bicknell, who I had never seen before. I was extremely pleased with her. She is gentle and obliging and appears to be good and amiable'.⁴⁰ Therefore it seems that it is at this point that Sabrina began working for Charles Burney at his school.

Charles Burney's school catered for the sons of the business and commercial middle classes.⁴¹ Very little information has survived regarding the school or its management, but some anecdotal evidence sheds some light on the school environment. It catered for around 100 'boys and young men' and although it became 'one of the largest and most respected public schools in England', the quality of the education might have been dubious.⁴² Burney reported to Joseph Farington in 1803 that, 'his object was to establish in them [his pupils] *habits of regularity* and *principle of integrity* – learning was his last consideration, - *that* would be easily

⁴⁰ Letter from Frances Burney to Mrs Francis, *Burney Letters and Journals*, 19th October 1791.

⁴¹ Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life* (London: Vintage, 1999), p.226.

⁴² J.W. Kirby, 'Early Greenwich Schools and Schoolmasters', *Transactions of the Greenwich and Lewisham Antiquarian Society*, 3(5) (1930), p.238 and Chisholm, p.226.

added to the other requisites.’⁴³ Farington also observed that the ‘108 boys under his care ... seemed to be under admirable regulation’.⁴⁴ However, there is evidence that Burney as a schoolmaster could be ‘strict and severe with them’, which led in 1808 to a pupil rebellion after which two boys were expelled.⁴⁵

The role Sabrina undertook in the Burney establishment was termed that of ‘housekeeper’ which, by the eighteenth century had come to take on a quasi-professional meaning distinct from its earlier generic association with ‘maintainer of a household’.⁴⁶ The newly emerging profession of housekeeper referred to the administration and management of a household with many and varied responsibilities. This development of housekeeper as a distinct, and distinctly female role in an establishment, has been attributed to the ‘general downgrading of domestic work’ during the eighteenth century which saw ladies of fashion moving away from their traditional role in domestic management which allowed a rise in ‘a new class of professional housekeepers’.⁴⁷ This contributed to the anxieties, which have been considered earlier, over ladies who had become ‘idle, frivolous creatures who disdained all household activities’ and the ‘eighteenth-century terror of the debilitating effects of the rise in luxury on the moral and economic health of the

⁴³ Greenwich Heritage Centre (GHC), [no ref], Burney Folder, Farington, J. The Farington Diary, 13th June 1803.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ GHC, [no ref], Extract of letter from John Graham [schoolboy at Dr Burney’s School], 24th February 1808.

⁴⁶ This reference to Sabrina as ‘housekeeper’ is made in various sources including Seward and *The journals and letters of Fanny Burney*.

Gilly Lehmann, ‘The Birth of a New Profession: The Housekeeper and her Status in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’ in *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women’s Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by I. Baudino, J. Carré and C.C Révauger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

nation'.⁴⁸ Which were, of course, exactly the anxieties that haunted Thomas Day and prompted his experimental education of the adolescent Sabrina Sidney. It is ironic that the role that Sabrina Bicknell eventually came to occupy was very similar to the one that Day had envisioned for her and yet was created by the societal changes he feared, or as Lehmann has termed it, the breakdown of the seventeenth-century domestic model which saw the 'mistress and her gentlewomen ... associated in many household activities'.⁴⁹ Lehmann has also identified a concomitant diminution in 'the status of the person who now performed the role which had once been a badge of social standing'.⁵⁰ The role of housekeeper therefore might have been professionalised in the eighteenth century, but because that role was increasingly occupied by those of a lower social standing than their employers, it was devalued.

Despite the 'breakdown' which precipitated a transfer of those household activities to the servant, otherwise known as the newly professionalised housekeeper, it offered the possibility of employment to the group of women who straddled the problematic divide of poverty and gentility - women like Sabrina Bicknell. Outwardly, the role of housekeeper, like those of governess and ladies companion, offered women the chance to continue to construct themselves, and be constructed by society, within the ideology of eighteenth-century femininity. Housekeeping could legitimately be seen as merely an extension of the housewife role that all women were expected to undertake. In reality it could well 'involve highly skilled supervisory tasks'.⁵¹ While there is no direct evidence of the role Sabrina undertook at the Burneys we can

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.2.

extrapolate from other sources the type of work with which she may have been involved, and in doing so it must be remembered that the Burney establishment included the hundred or so males that resided at the school as well as the family members.

If we take at face value that Sabrina's role was that of 'housekeeper', then we can look to secondary sources to identify the range of duties of which the role comprised. These included superintending all household affairs, directing maid servants, looking after visitors, purchasing good quality provisions at reasonable prices, looking after household goods and chattels, recruiting new servants and 'being the first person to rise and the last to go to bed in order to assure herself that all is in order', organising household supplies, dealing with tradesmen, drawing up bills of fare and being familiar with all aspects of cookery and confectionery.⁵² It also demanded a certain level of education as reading, writing and arithmetic would all be required to ensure that the above tasks could be adequately performed. As housekeeper, Sabrina could have had responsibility for this entire range of activities, not just for the Burney family but for the boys they housed and educated. It was a demanding and responsible position, both intellectually and physically, to have held in a household. One contemporary source suggested that the role be undertaken by a woman 'of age and experience' who was 'a grave, sober, virtuous person'.⁵³ It has to be assumed that Charles Burney believed Sabrina Bicknell to be exactly that type of woman. The type of work that Sabrina undertook can be reconstructed and it included

⁵² *Ibid*, p.19.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

considerable administrative and managerial work, the ability to manage staff, intense physical labour and the ability to undertake multiple tasks.

Sabrina's role with the Burneys, given that they were running a school, may well have crossed over into that of 'matron' or 'house-mother'. It is only through anecdotal evidence that we can examine this contention, but when Maria Edgeworth wrote to Sabrina in 1818 she received a response that articulated one of Sabrina's roles in the Burney establishment, 'she goes on to say that she must pack the clothes of a boy who is going to university on Wednesday'.⁵⁴ This suggests that Sabrina undertook the practical and material care of the boys at the school and thus the responsibilities that we would now assign to the Matron of a residential school did come under her jurisdiction, as well as the responsibilities of Housekeeper.

Further evidence from the Burney letters and journals testifies to yet another role that Sabrina undertook, this time within the specific family and domestic dynamic and reveals the relationship that developed between the Burneys and Mrs Bicknell. Sabrina became a much loved and respected member of the family - far more than a domestic servant or employee. Fanny Burney's letters are peppered with affectionate and concerned mentions of Sabrina, who clearly endeared herself to the family due to the care with which she treated them:

⁵⁴ Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth, quoted in Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England, 1813-1844*, ed. by Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.110.

I shall always love Mrs Bicknell for the tender care she has shewn [sic] upon this occasion [Charles's illness]

1793⁵⁵

I am very sorry too for poor Mrs Bicknell, who so greatly requires - and I think I may say deserves health and strength - from the excellent and cheerful use she makes of them. Pray remember me to her kindly and assure her of my concern and regard.

1799⁵⁶

Remember us both kindly to Mrs Bicknell who I am very sorry to hear has been much indisposed, though I know not how.

1800⁵⁷

- my best wishes, with best compliments to Mrs Bicknell, whose gentle interest in what was passing with me I often saw in her Eyes - I hope she is now better.

1800⁵⁸

... and always remember us to Mrs Bicknell - with whom Mrs Angerstein was extremely pleased - which gave me great pleasure in rebound - but no surprise.

1800⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Joyce Hemlow, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, Vol 2, 1793 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.182.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, Vol 4, 1797-1801 p.373.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.379.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.403.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.413.

... our Alex in almost a storm of sorrow, sobbing, stamping, his whole little expressive face full of despair flew from his aunt, to Mrs Bicknell, and rushed into my room ...

1802⁶⁰

What this selection of comments reveals is the extent to which Sabrina became a part of the Burney family and, in so doing, her role is revealed as being far more complex than the label of 'housekeeper' might suggest. She appears to have performed many functions - nurse, companion, pseudo-mother and grandmother and so far a part of this close-knit family did she become, that the way she conducts herself is felt to be reflected glory on the Burneys themselves. Another Burney sister, Sarah Harriet, states that Sabrina accompanied herself and her brother James to 'see Lord de Clifford's house' in 1793.⁶¹ This was during the illness of Charles mentioned by Fanny, about which Sarah Harriet says, 'it is with my poor brother Charles and on his account that I am here [at Clifton], as a sort of assistant-nurse to Mrs Bicknell, who, for above a month has been confined to the closest attention to him'.⁶² There is no doubt that Sabrina came to be a member of the Burney family in a very real way. It seems that from this point on her life acquired both a stability and an emotional depth that had been absent for much of her life before. The Burney family, while enduring the same shifts in fortune and relationships as any other family, were a loving and loyal one and enjoyed the company of each other. Charles Burney wrote

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, Vol 5, 1801-1803, p.149

⁶¹ Letter from Sarah Harriet Burney to Mary Young, 2nd-4th August 1793, quoted in *Catalogue of Burney Family Correspondence*, ed. by Joyce Hemlow (London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1971), p.10.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.9.

to his sister Fanny in 1799 and described a family gathering, 'we were as merry, & laughed as loud as the Burneys always do, when they get together and open their hearts; tell their old stories; & have no fear of being Quizzed by interlopers'.⁶³ While care needs to be taken not to overstate the relationship between Sabrina and the Burneys, it is clear from the above quotes that Sabrina did spend time with the family in a capacity which was more than merely a housekeeper or general manageress.

Therefore it is possible to identify Sabrina's development as a 'professional mother'. Her role in the Burney school was to care for the boys in a practical and maternal sense and this role seems to have extended to other members of the Burney family themselves. The construction of Sabrina at this point is that of mother, not matriarch, as this implies a position of power and authority; but certainly she locates herself and remains located in a maternal role and one that seems to suit her very well and bestows on her the affection and respect of a family whose love and loyalty for each other was extended to Sabrina herself. In this role, Sabrina managed to secure for herself a level of stability which allowed her to support herself without losing too much in the way of status. It has to be considered how far removed being housekeeper for the illustrious Burney family was from being the wife of an ailing and impoverished barrister. In the context of her own history, it was a significant ascendancy; it was not a position a child of the Foundling Hospital could have aspired to and it gave a greater degree of autonomy and status than the position of ladies companion. Sabrina seems to have settled into the role of housekeeper, which offered her the opportunity of earning a living and supporting herself and her sons.

⁶³ Lonsdale, *Dr Charles Burney*, p.400.

Between the years of 1787 and 1804, Sabrina therefore was placed in the position of needing to reconstruct herself yet again. With the death of John Bicknell in 1787 and Thomas Day in 1789, she lost the two men who had continually turned the circumstances of her existence around and ultimately left her, in 1789, entirely dependent on the benevolence of others and the industry of her own hands. Yet it is testament both to the character of Sabrina herself and those of the people who unstintingly strove to help her that she did survive. She continually demonstrated not only respect for others and a determination to behave like the lady Day had unwittingly made of her, but also a respect for herself and a determination to do the best for her sons. Ironically the role she seems to have excelled at, was the one role for which she herself had had no model since her days at Longden, that of mother.

Through the latter years of the eighteenth century and early ones of the nineteenth, Sabrina's life gained a stability and consistency that it had not had since her days as a Foundling Hospital child. Although direct evidence of her life is scarce we know she lived with the Burney family and became an important and beloved member of their family. However, in 1804, the very networks that had supported and helped her throughout the years since Day and Bicknell plucked her from the Foundling Hospital began to prove more of a curse than a help and once more Sabrina found herself at the mercy of others. She found herself being 'constructed', in a variety of different ways, for the agenda of others. The first indication of this came in 1804, which saw the publication of a book that offered not only a memoir of Dr Erasmus Darwin, but the 'singular and interesting history' of his young friend Thomas Day and an incident

in his 'domestic history' which was 'unaccountably omitted by the gentleman who wrote his life'.⁶⁴ In doing so it revealed the relationship between Thomas Day and Sabrina Sidney. The implications for Sabrina are the subject of the following chapter.

⁶⁴ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.52. The gentleman referred to by Seward is Day's first biographer, James Keir.

CHAPTER 10: CONSTRUCTING THE HEROINE 1804 – 1843

By 1804 Sabrina was aged 47 and had been employed as matron and housekeeper for the Burney family and the boys at their school for thirteen years. Her situation was more settled than it had been for many years and she was in a position to support and provide her sons with access to the education, influence and connection that would hopefully allow them to enter society as gentlemen, like their father before them. In many ways, Sabrina had entered the ranks of the respectable middling classes. Despite her lowly origins, the compromised and potentially compromising association with Day and the penurious situation in which she was left after Bicknell's death, she had avoided the more dubious methods of financial and physical survival. But we must resist the assumption that this meant her life was now without trial, trouble or disruption. This chapter will consider the years between 1804 and 1843, when Sabrina's life was on the one hand as settled and secure as it had ever been and on the other disrupted by a series of life events and literary revelations. These events caused, with varying degrees of power, vacillations in the life of Sabrina Bicknell but also open up sources of information about her and indicate the continuing and changing ways she chose to construct herself and how she reacted to those who attempted constructions of, and for, her.

The period between 1804 and 1843 was one of contradictions. On the one hand, Sabrina's residence with the Burneys was settled, but it appears to be characterised by hard work and troubled by concerns for her sons. On the other hand, this settled existence was disrupted by the publication of Anna Seward's *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*,

which disturbed Sabrina's peace of mind and had a detrimental effect on her relationship with her sons. Through the role she undertook at the Burney's school, Sabrina had constructed herself as 'respectable' and through this period seems to have acquired a confidence which derived from that respectability and a growing financial security. Correspondence between Sabrina and the Edgeworths provides the most complete set of writings from Sabrina and reveals the close relationship that had developed.¹ [See Appendix 5 – Correspondence between Sabrina Sidney and members of the Edgeworth family] In these letters, Richard Lovell Edgeworth addresses her as 'my dear Sabrina' and she addresses him as 'My dear friend'.² The tone of the letters is warm and affectionate, 'the sight of your hand writing is really delightfully gratifying to me' writes Sabrina in 1817 and in another letter signs herself 'your very faithful and affectionate / Sabrina Bicknell'.³ It appears that the visits the Edgeworths made to England included meeting with Sabrina which gave her much pleasure. In 1813, Sabrina wrote to Mrs Edgeworth:

I cannot tell you how much I regret and lament not having seen more of you since your arrival in London – three times I have gone to town in the hope of passing a few hours with you but alas! I only succeeded once in obtaining that

¹ See Edgeworth Papers held at the National Library of Ireland (NLI), Dublin, MS 22470 and letters held in The British Library.

² British Library (BL), ADD 70949, Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell. 28th August 1808 and NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 13th May 1817.

³ NLI, MS 22470, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st April 1817, Edgeworth Papers.
NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Mrs Edgeworth, 9th June 1813.

happiness – for this bit of good luck I am most thankful – but I confess I am not satisfied.⁴

The letters also attest to the on-going and generous financial assistance which Richard Lovell Edgeworth offered Sabrina; assistance that Sabrina is mindful is not to be assumed and for which she is careful to convey her gratitude.⁵ In 1817, she wrote to Edgeworth to defend herself against an accusation that appears to have been levelled at her by Edgeworth that she ‘did not acknowledge the receipt of the £30 you were so good as to send me some years ago’.⁶ She reminded Edgeworth that she did, in fact acknowledge the gift and thank him at the time and ends her defence with ‘I trust you will credit what I now state and banish from your mind the unpleasant impression that I could act so carelessly and ungratefully’.⁷ Other letters from Sabrina reinforce her gratitude towards him, ‘Adieu dear dear sir - and again accept ten thousand grateful thanks for all your goodness to me’.⁸

A later letter of Edgeworth’s explains that ‘the distress which overwhelms England is equally felt in this country [Ireland]’ and that because ‘Where the income is diminished, if the expenditure is not diminished in the same proportions, ruin must ensue’ he ‘must therefore beg you - to accept of £50, in lieu of any larger sum, that

⁴ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Mrs Edgeworth, 9th June 1813.

⁵ See the Edgeworth Papers and letters held in the British Library for references to the financial support given to Sabrina Bicknell.

⁶ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. 21st April 1817.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. 13th May 1817.

you may have expected from me'.⁹ The tone of this letter is regretful and Edgeworth makes it clear that he counts Sabrina as 'one of those who deserve and want our friendship'.¹⁰ Sabrina's response conveys her gratitude for the help she has received and articulates that she does not expect his help; 'Accept I pray you my warmest and grateful thanks ... for the liberal enclosure of £50 ... I really had not the slightest expectation of receiving this, or any other sum of money from you'.¹¹ This communication raises the question of just how much Edgeworth had given Sabrina in the past, for £50 is not an inconsiderable amount of money and it clearly was an amount some way short of his previous gifts. Also interesting to note is the fact that, while it initially appeared as if Edgeworth was going to be unable to offer Sabrina any help at this time, 'I have lost this year, by the failure of tenants above fifteen hundred pounds - I have therefore been obliged to deprive myself and my family, not only of luxuries, but of conveniences', he still sent her a comparatively generous sum of money.¹² Sabrina, it appears, was deserving of a considerable amount of Edgeworth's support. However, by this point in her life, Sabrina's circumstances have changed and she was able to qualify her gratitude for the £50 with the assertion that she is less in need of it than formerly, 'but for myself I am happy to own that I am less an object of such kind assistance than formerly ... I am therefore able to lay by yearly a part of my income and thereby make a reserve for infirmities'.¹³

⁹ NLI, MS 22470 Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell. 6th May 1817.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. 13th May 1817.

¹² NLI, MS 22470 Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell. 6th May 1817.

¹³ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. 13th May 1817.

Here we begin to see the emergence of a new construction of Sabrina Bicknell, one that is rather more independent than we have previously seen. In her defence of herself to Edgeworth in 1817, she gives a robust account of herself and although she is respectful, she is also clear about the ill-founded nature of Edgeworth's assertions:

I have referred to my records and find by them, that I received the said £30 on the 7 of September 1808 – and which I acknowledged immediately by a letter addressed to you at Edgeworthstown – and since that time, by your desire I again wrote to you, and stated the exact time I got the money – and also the date of a letter from me acknowledging the receipt of it. These circumstances must have escaped your recollection.¹⁴

Despite the fact that Sabrina remained grateful and respectful in her deference to Edgeworth, there was a confidence to her tone in these exchanges which suggests a construction of the 'self' which is now less willing to be compromised by others.

As Sabrina grew older, so did her sons and there is evidence that although the family were in a better material position than they may otherwise have been, motherhood proved as much a double-edge sword for Sabrina as for other women. She commented to Edgeworth in 1817 that although 'I am happy to say that both my dear sons are affectionate and while they continue so - and are also honourable and useful members of society I shall be contented and thankful', that contentedness was

¹⁴ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth. 21st April 1817.

marred by concerns typical of the time.¹⁵ She wrote, 'My eldest son ... has been a great sufferer from ill health ... he still continues an invalid and I fear likely to remain so' and 'my dear younger son has also been visited by affliction - his children have been sickly - and within the last eighteen months he has lost three out of six'.¹⁶ Thus illness and child mortality afflicted the Bicknell family and, in her own words, caused Sabrina 'very heavy and severe trials' and kept her 'anxious and unhappy - and I lament to own, has made greater havock [sic] with my constitution - than 15 or 20 years labour would have done free from mental suffering'.¹⁷ This indicated the emotional investment that Sabrina had in her sons and her grandchildren. She also gave an indication of her attitude towards the trial of life; 'suffering is the inevitable lot of all of us poor mortals and it is our duty to bear our trials with Christian fortitude and resignation'.¹⁸

Sabrina lived with the Burneys with a level of contentedness that is difficult to quantify but certainly she was beloved by them.¹⁹ In later years, she did 'retire to some quiet retreat' and took up residence in Circus, a newly developed street in Greenwich, not far from the Burney's school at Crooms Hill.²⁰ It is reasonable to suppose that it was at the point she began living at Circus that marked the beginning of her retirement from the Burney's employment and she had 'leisure to devote my

¹⁵ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st April 1817.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See Burney Letters and Journals for evidence of Sabrina Bicknell's relationship with the Burney family.

²⁰ Clive Aslet, *The Story of Greenwich* (London: Fourth Estate Ltd, 1999).

mind to subjects necessary to prepare me for a better world'.²¹ The actual date of Sabrina's retirement is difficult to clarify, but rate books for the Greenwich area offer a broad time frame for the beginning of Sabrina's independent residence.²² Sabrina Bicknell is listed as resident in Circus, living in a house with a garden in 1828; rate books for 1827 and 1826 have not survived. In 1825, there is no record of Sabrina Bicknell living at Circus but Charles Parr Burney's house and school are recorded and we know this is where Sabrina was resident before her retirement.²³ This suggests that between 1825 and 1828 Sabrina formally retired from service with Charles Parr Burney and moved into her own house. This did not mean that her relationship with the Burney family was diminished; on the contrary, two pieces of evidence suggest she continued within their social circle and very much in their affection and esteem. In 1834 Fanny Burney wrote to her nephew, Charles Parr Burney promising to repay him for 'the print of Mrs B which you promised to order for me' and Fanny Anne Burney made two references to an aging Sabrina:

July 27th, 28th 1837 – I am taking Baby, who has begun to crawl, to see old friends – to the Collins' at Maze Hill; to dear old Mrs Bicknell ('Bicky') - she is alas! much changed.

²¹ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st April 1817.

²² GHC, [no ref], Greenwich Rate Books, 1818-1841.

²³ Charles Parr Burney was Reverend Charles Burney's son and took over the management of the school from him in 1813.

20th June 1841 – We have been spending our time among our relatives and friends, - my sister and her husband, dear old Mrs Bicknell (a very old friend indeed).²⁴



Figure 4: Portrait of Sabrina Bicknell by S. P. Denning, 1832. Now held in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

This not only suggests that Sabrina remained beloved by the extended Burney family and counted as one of their close friends, but also that she gained yet another construction and another name - the appellation of 'Bicky'. This suggests an affection for her that is revealed in the use of the nickname that allows the younger members of the family to express their affection for her without undermining her status as an

²⁴ Letter from Fanny Burney to Charles Parr Burney, 23-24th October 1834, Burney Family Letters and Journals. The print referred to is probably a portrait of Sabrina Bicknell by Lane, R. J., after Denning, S. P and now held in the National Portrait Gallery. F.A.B. Wood, *A Great-Niece's Journals: Being Extracts from the Journals of Fanny Anne Burney (Mrs. Wood) from 1830 to 1842* (London: Constable, 1926), p.123 and p. 327.

elder. Here we also see the construction of Sabrina as family retainer and elderly matron, gaining a status and respect through her long-lasting association with the family.

Evidence therefore suggests that Sabrina did remain close to the Burney family and also to her sons, John and Henry. The elder, John, appears to have remained in the Greenwich area for, despite his mother's assertions that he suffered from ill-health, he qualified as a solicitor and in 1821 is listed among the rate payers of Greenwich.²⁵ Ten years later he is listed as in residence on Crooms Hill, not far from the Burneys and the following year, in 1832, he is listed as living in Circus next to his mother.²⁶

Little evidence exists for the final years of Sabrina's life. She is recorded on the 1841 census as of 'independent means' and living with two servants, Ellen Woolvett and Sarah Hunt, both then aged 25.²⁷ Two years later on 8th September 1843 Sabrina Bicknell died at her home at 9 Circus, Greenwich at the age of 86 and she was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery.²⁸

As sparse as these last details of her life are, they allow us to extrapolate some information concerning the latter years of Sabrina's life and offer a useful comparison with her earlier years. We can draw the conclusion that Sabrina was now very definitely 'middle class'. Her stated occupational status on the 1841 census that she is financially independent, serves to confirm what she wrote to Maria Edgeworth in

²⁵ GHC, [no ref], Greenwich Rate Books 1821.

²⁶ GHC, [no ref], Greenwich Rate Books 1832.

²⁷ HO107/489/14, Census, 1841.

²⁸ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), DL/T/041/011, All Souls Cemetery, Kensal Green, Transcript of Burials, 1843.

1817, 'I am therefore able to lay by yearly a part of my income and thereby make a reserve for infirmities, which I feel daily approaching'.²⁹ Not only does her income appear to be sufficient to support herself, but also the two servants who were resident at 9 Circus; given that she was elderly, we can offer the suggestion that at least one of them, if not both, were caring for her and acting as her companions. The location of Sabrina's home also offers evidence of her social status. Historically, Greenwich had been associated with royalty and the military, through the army and navy.³⁰ By the late eighteenth century families such as that of John Julius Angerstein, who was a wealthy insurance underwriter, moved to Greenwich, as did Charles Burney when he relocated his school there.³¹ The area in which the Burney's school was located was middle class and Circus, not far from Crooms Hill, was a new development begun in the late eighteenth century and completed by 1809.³² Circus was an attempt to mimic the planned architecture of other towns such as Bath, although not presumptuously so, for 'Greenwich Circus aspired to be nothing more than middle class'.³³ Nonetheless the fact that Sabrina lived here from the mid-1820s until her death suggests that middle class was exactly what she was and was allowed to be. The geographical location of her later years clearly indicates her social status.

The location of her burial is also a strong indication of her status. Kensal Green was one of the first cemeteries to be developed under the auspices of a company rather than a parish and was a response to the overflowing graveyards of the city.³⁴ It was

²⁹ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 13th May 1817.

³⁰ See Aslet, *The Story of Greenwich*.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.127.

³² *Ibid*, p.208.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ See Curl, *Kensal Green Cemetery*.

developed as a 'middle class' cemetery and in 1843, Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, the son of King George III and Queen Charlotte, was buried there which marked the rise of the cemetery as a society burial ground.³⁵ Thus it was here, rather than her parish church in Greenwich that Sabrina was buried, whether by her choice or that of her sons we do not know, but the choice is nonetheless significant. Sabrina Sidney Bicknell, foundling child in 1757, had risen sufficiently in society to be buried in the fashionable, elegant and peaceful surroundings of Kensal Green; those buried within it were described by an anonymous commentator in 1849 as 'departed excellence', amongst which in death, Sabrina Sidney Bicknell was counted.³⁶

A second piece of evidence attests to Sabrina's social status and her financial situation in her later years - that of her Last Will and Testament.³⁷ Her greatest bequests are to her sons, to John she gave the sum of £2000 and to Henry she gave £1000. This distinction between her sons, she explained, was due to John's poor health, his 'anxious and laborious' professional duties and that, 'unlike his brother [he] has no fixed salary or any retiring pension'.³⁸ Her other bequests ranged from those of 50 guineas each to her daughters-in-law; 10 guineas each to Charles Parr Burney and his wife, Fanny, for mourning rings; 50 guineas to Susan Sabrina Burney and to Fanny Anne Wood, nee Burney, she gave 10 guineas for 'a ring or any other memorial of old times and of many kindnesses'.³⁹ Her servants Ellen Woolvett and Sarah Hunt are also remembered and Sabrina's reference to them supports the

³⁵ Curl, *Kensal Green Cemetery*, p.112

³⁶ Quoted in Curl, *Kensal Green Cemetery*, p.107.

³⁷ National Archives (NA) Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC), PROB 11/1986, Last Will and Testament of Sabrina Bicknell, 1843.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

contention that both, but especially Ellen Woolvett, were more like companions than servants. The death certificate of Sabrina recorded that Ellen Woolvett was both present at her death and informed the registrar.⁴⁰ To Ellen, she left 'wearing apparel and thirty pounds to mark my sense of her faithful and unremitting attention to me'; also she leaves to both Ellen and Sarah Hunt £15 for mourning and 'desire[s] my executors to pay to them respectively a full quarters wages from the day of my decease over and above any balance due for wages up to that day.'⁴¹

Sabrina's will then proceeds to direct how the interest and dividends of the rest of her personal estate, comprising of stocks, shares and government securities, should be dispersed between the children of her sons. What this document shows is the personal wealth that Sabrina secured during her working life; she was able to bequeath a total £3000 to her sons, which would equate to £132,300 in 2005.⁴² To this can be added the investments that she had made and from which an income was bequeathed to her grandchildren. Therefore the amounts Sabrina was able to bequeath to her family were considerable and illustrate just how far removed she was from the foundling child of 1757. Sabrina's will also demonstrates those relationships that meant the most to her. The Burney family figures strongly, not just Charles Parr and his wife, but also younger members of the family. Here we can specifically highlight Charles Parr's daughters, Fanny Anne Wood who recorded her visits to Sabrina in 1837 and 1841 and her god-daughter, Susan Sabrina Burney.⁴³ In

⁴⁰ Death certificate of Sabrina Bicknell, Registration District of Greenwich, 1843.

⁴¹ NA, PCC, PROB 11/1986, Last Will and Testament of Sabrina Bicknell, 1843.

⁴² Currency conversion taken from The National Archives website <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid> [accessed 27 December 2011]

⁴³ In Sabrina Bicknell's Last Will and Testament, Susan Sabrina Burney is explicitly named as her god-daughter.

these bequests we can again see that the ties of affection between Sabrina and the Burney family were strong and supports the contention that the Burneys provided some form of surrogate family to Sabrina in her later years. Likewise Sabrina's mention of, and bequests to, Ellen Woolvett and Sarah Hunt, the bequest to Ellen of £30 is equivalent to £1,323 and that of £15 to her and Sarah Hunt is equal to £661 both of which are substantial sums, to which Sabrina adds a proportion of their wages after her death. Sabrina did not overlook or take for granted the service and companionship which these two women gave her.

We can extrapolate from Sabrina Bicknell's Last Will and Testament a great deal about the last years of her life and the relationships that populated them. From the evidence examined above we can conclude that Sabrina's latter years were relatively secure, both financially and emotionally and that she had withstood the various disruptions to her life that occurred at regular intervals, through no fault of her own. However, as indicated earlier, this relative security was undermined by further 'constructions' of her that moved her from the limited sphere of her immediate friends and family into the public world of published literary works.

Sabrina Sidney Bicknell's history ultimately became reconstructed in print because the gentlemen who made up the Lunar Society included men of literary ability as much as scientific innovation and were likely to write memoirs of their lives and experiences. Thomas Day presented an idealised version of Sabrina, through the character of Sukey Simmons in *Sandford and Merton*. Sukey, having received an education that bore marked resemblance to that which Sabrina underwent and from

a gentlemen suspiciously like Day himself, can be seen as the first reconstruction of Sabrina in written form. There are clear differences between the life of Sabrina and Sukey, and it would therefore be wrong to suggest that Sukey Simmons is a biographical portrait of Sabrina Sidney. It would be more accurate to suggest that Sukey is a highly romanticised version of what Day wanted Sabrina to become, of how he wanted her to respond to his educational programme and reflect the values he wanted in a wife; Sukey is the woman he wished Sabrina to be. In literary form, Sabrina was of more use to Day than in person. In this respect, Day set a literary precedent for the reconstruction of Sabrina in the written discourse, taking her and her experience with him as a model to remould according to his literary aims. In the case of *Sandford and Merton*, Day's aim was to extol the virtues of Rousseau's philosophical and educational theories and offer a clear outline of his own views on the short-comings of female education and how to remedy them. Others followed this precedent and slowly a new set of constructions of Sabrina Sidney emerged that were distinctly literary in form.

As well as the literary gentlemen of the Lunar Society, there were associated with them at least two highly respected literary ladies, Anna Seward and Maria Edgeworth. Both these women were remarkable for their writings and, as has been discussed previously, both became acquainted with Sabrina, acquaintances who in time became friends. Perhaps what is more interesting is that the literary reconstructions began well before Sabrina died - it was not her death that prompted the biographical and literary discourses, it was the deaths of the men around her.

The book, whose publication in 1804 was to cause the first disruption for Sabrina, was entitled *Memoirs of the Life of Dr Darwin, Chiefly During his Residence in Lichfield; with Anecdotes of his Friends, and Criticisms of his Writings*; its author was Miss Anna Seward. Before embarking on the main subject of her memoir, Seward provided 'Anecdotes of his Friends', including a substantial diversion into the history of Thomas Day. The diversion, for Seward at least, naturally included the tale of Day's adoption of two girls from Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital and his educational experiment. In so doing, Anna Seward explicitly described the nature of the relationship between the then twenty-one year old Day and the adolescent Sabrina. This description revealed to the world that Sabrina Sidney had been an inmate of the Foundling Hospital, and was by implication illegitimate, and had been at the centre of an unorthodox educational experiment. With the publication of the *Memoirs* and the public revelation of the circumstances, not only of her birth but her identity as Sabrina Sidney and latterly Mrs John Bicknell, Sabrina had been exposed and reconstructed by another in a very public manner. This development had a profound effect on Sabrina and marked yet another turn in her fortunes and opened up fault lines in her relationship with her sons and her Lichfield associates.

However, the first biographer of Sabrina, due to the fact that he was the first biographer of Day, was James Keir. Keir's biography of Day was a completely conventional life history of a man whom he considered a friend and a man of high principles and literary talents. He painted a rather opaque picture of the more unconventional aspects of Day's life, due to the fact that Keir was looking to honour the strengths of Day's unique character, to encourage 'readers of better taste' to

contemplate 'a character, distinguished for genius and virtue'.⁴⁴ In so doing he glossed over the Sabrina episode, focusing less on Day's rather quixotic application of Rousseau's theory and more on the naivety of Day's devotion to Rousseau and the error of Rousseau's theory itself. Sabrina herself is not even named, and concerning Day's acquisition of the girls Keir only says 'He received into his guardianship two female children'.⁴⁵ The only hint of the real purpose behind the experiment was in Keir's off-hand comment, 'It is not improbable, that at the time when Mr Day undertook to educate, according to his own ideas, these two female children, being himself but young, he might entertain some expectation of marrying one of them' but Keir quickly moves away from the subject and Day's travels to France and residence in Lichfield are mentioned without any further reference to Sabrina.⁴⁶

Thus in Keir's account, Day lived an uneventful life of virtuous philosophising and the Sabrina episode is sufficiently airbrushed, so as not to expunge it completely, but effectively spin to fit it more suitably to the image Keir was keen to portray. In doing so Keir was not so much mindful of the feelings of Sabrina, as of those of Day's wife Esther and his mother, Jane.⁴⁷ The unintended benefit for Sabrina was that as long as Keir shielded Day's scheme from public view, he shielded her identity and it is therefore unsurprising that she did not become aware of Keir's account until many years after its publication.

⁴⁴ James Keir, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day* (London: John Stockdale, 1791), p.4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.28.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ See Keir's dedication to Esther Day, *Thomas Day*, p.iii.

There was a second and in some ways equally opaque reconstruction of Sabrina in print prior to 1804, that of Maria Edgeworth's in her novel *Belinda*.⁴⁸ Maria Edgeworth's relationship with Thomas Day was equally as problematic as that of Sabrina's.⁴⁹ Day was her father's best friend, a strong influence on her developmental years, and surrogate parent when the young Maria Edgeworth stayed with Day and his wife, Esther, during her holidays from boarding school. A strong case has been made by Myers that it was Day who was the prime literary influence on Maria Edgeworth, rather than her father, and it was from Day's shadow that she emerged as a writer.⁵⁰ In *Belinda*, Maria Edgeworth critiques the influence of Rousseau on Day and his educational experiment through the character of Clarence Harvey, the ultimate suitor of her eponymous heroine, and his attempt to educate a young girl he names Virginia St Pierre. The whole of the Virginia narrative serves to examine, subvert and critique male views of women, their education and the narratives that men choose to construct around women and their lives. Edgeworth reworks the history of Day and Sabrina and in doing so highlights the male fantasy of moulding the perfect, submissive, domestic and yet intellectual daughter-wife for what it is - a romantic fantasy that fails and ultimately almost ruins lives. Ultimately, as much as Edgeworth's reconstruction is a re-formation in favour of the female, it remains a romanticised fairy tale - Virginia is re-claimed by her father and goes on to discover her true love in the form of his friend Captain Sutherland and Clarence Harvey and Belinda are free to marry. In reality, Sabrina was left virtually abandoned by Day and

⁴⁸ Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1801; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

⁴⁹ See Mitzi Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Text of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority' in *Revising Women: Eighteenth Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. by Paula R. Backscheider (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), for a discussion of the problematic relationship between Maria Edgeworth and Day.

⁵⁰ Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy?' in *Revising Women*, ed. by Backscheider, pp.104-146.

dependent on the benevolence of friends and her own hard work in order to survive and bring up two sons. The novelisation form that Maria Edgeworth used once again effectively shielded Sabrina and Day from the public gaze. In her addition to her father's *Memoirs*, Maria Edgeworth openly acknowledged that the source of this subplot in *Belinda* was suggested by Day's education of Sabrina.⁵¹

Anna Seward's *Memoirs*, on the other hand, made no attempt to shield Day or Sabrina. In fact Seward was almost brutal in her intention to reveal the story of Day and the Sabrina experiment. Reacting to the prevailing tendency of contemporaneous biographers to offer rather hagiographic renderings of their subject and to Keir's biography of Day in particular, Seward prefaces her recollections of Dr Darwin with the following observation, 'Biography of recently departed eminence is apt to want characteristic truth'.⁵² Seward clearly had formed set ideas regarding the role of biography and so appears to have had every intention of including not only the 'characteristic truth' regarding Darwin, but also:

the characters and talents of those who formed the circle of his friends while he [Dr Darwin] resided in Lichfield; and the very singular and interesting history of one of them, well-known in the lettered world, whose domestic life, remarkable as it is, has been unaccountably omitted by the gentleman who wrote his life.⁵³

Explicitly referring to Keir's biography, Seward here signalled her intention to draw into her account the lives of Darwin's friends, specifically Thomas Day. This was not

⁵¹ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.349.

⁵² Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the first time Seward had offered a different reading of Day than those given by his Lunar friends. After Day's death in 1789, she sent a letter to the editor of the *General Evening Post* in which she attempted to correct the 'little misinformation in your account of the late Mr Day'.⁵⁴ To this end she pointed out, 'In his death, the indigent of his neighbourhood have an unspeakable loss - but let him be spoken of as he was, for truth is better than indiscriminate eulogium' and then she did precisely that.⁵⁵ Seward produced a blistering pen-portrait, and one that amply illustrated her views on the correct way to handle biographical material.

In 1804, Seward considered Day a subject of 'just biographical record' and included his history in that of Darwin's. She gave the first and most complete account of the early life of Mrs Sabrina Bicknell that had thus far been published. In attempting to lift back 'the veil of suppression' from the story of Day and Sabrina, Seward's affection and respect for Sabrina clearly emerged and Seward brings Sabrina's history up to date by recording her residence with the Burney family, concluding, 'She is treated by him [Reverend Burney] and his friends, with every mark of esteem and respect due to a gentlewoman, and one whose virtues entitle her to universal approbation'.⁵⁶ However, Seward's account does what Keir's did not and included details of Sabrina's residence with Day, recounted in some less positive ways. Seward outlined the education that Sabrina and Lucretia received from Day, including their brief residence in France which Seward chose to describe thus, 'They teased and perplexed him; they quarrelled, and fought incessantly; they sickened of the

⁵⁴ Letter from Anna Seward to the *Editor of the General Evening Post*, 11th October 1789 in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, pp.329-331.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.330.

⁵⁶ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.74.

smallpox; they chained him to their bedside by crying and screaming if they were ever left a moment with any person who could not speak to them in English'.⁵⁷

Seward called the girls 'the little squabblers' and later, when she described Sabrina and her reaction to Day's educational practices, she did so in rather equivocal terms. Sabrina, she said 'betrayed an averseness to the study of books and the rudiments of science' and she implied Sabrina had a 'natural preference ... of ease to pain, of vacant sport to the labour of thinking'.⁵⁸ Running parallel to this description of Sabrina was Seward's description of Day, which contained the clear opinion that the source of the difficulties that Sabrina experienced were to be found in her teacher and mentor, Thomas Day. Seward betrayed a wry scepticism in her commentary on the endeavour as a whole. Sabrina she said, was to 'one day be responsible for the education of youths, who were one day to emulate the Gracchi'.⁵⁹ Seward was actually assessing Day's qualities as a teacher rather than Sabrina's as a pupil:

The only inducement, therefore which this lovely artless girl could have to combat and subdue the natural preference, in youth so blooming, of ease to pain, of vacant sport to the labour of thinking, was the desire of pleasing her protector, though she know not how, or how he became such. In that desire, fear had greatly the ascendant of affection, and fear is a cold and indolent feeling.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.70-1.

This betrayed where Seward's sympathies lay and offered some psychological insight into Sabrina's reaction to her new and rather unconventional situation.

Seward revealed a picture of Day that is significantly less bland but more controversial than that of Keir's. This she could do because Esther Day had died in 1792 and Day's mother, Jane Phillips in 1796. There was no-one left who would be personally distressed by the revelation of Day's marital experiment, apart from Sabrina herself. In presenting the whole history of the experiment, Seward revealed Mrs Sabrina Bicknell to be a foundling, and by implication illegitimate, a revelation Seward herself seems to have made with impunity, but a revelation that would have profound implications for Sabrina.

Here we can pause to consider why Seward may have included this rather extensive detour into the life of Thomas Day and Sabrina Sidney. That Day and Seward were friends is undeniable, but Day certainly was a character of unusual temperament and his rejection of polite society did not necessarily endear him to that aforesaid polite society. Likewise his views of women and the role this took in shaping his views on marriage may have irritated the politely, but well educated Seward. What is more, after losing interest in his experiment with Sabrina, Day turned his attention to Seward's own educational project and one that had turned out far more satisfactorily - Honora Sneyd.⁶¹ Day attempted to woo Honora and if he had been successful, would have cut her off from her family and friends as surely as he did Esther Milnes. How

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.71

did Seward view this re-direction of amorous intent towards her friend, protégé and surrogate sister?

In *Memoirs*, Seward succinctly summed up Honora's virtues, while at the same time giving Day's educational theory a pithy critique and tacitly compares Honora to Sabrina, 'Without having received a Spartan education, she united a disinterested desire to please, fortitude of spirit, native strength of intellect, literary and scientific desire, to unswerving truth, and to all the graces'.⁶² Honora, as a product of Seward's educational schemes, was far superior to Day's in the form of Sabrina and as irony and Seward would have it, Honora did not want Day. Was Seward ever concerned that she may lose Honora to Day? Was she pricked by Day's assumption that he could appeal to the gracious Honora and be worthy of her? We know Seward did not look kindly on Richard Lovell Edgeworth's successful suit towards Honora, was this another example of her love of Honora and pride in her, which partly reflected on her, overshadowing her opinions of others?⁶³

Seward's manuscript did not reach publication without problems, specifically over her inclusion of the Sabrina and Day episode. She described a small altercation with her publisher on the subject which is worth quoting at length, as it articulated both the circumstances of their disagreement, and the vehemence with which Seward defended the inclusion of the narrative diversion, that does little to illuminate the life of her purported subject, Darwin:

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

I had mentioned some facts respecting one of Darwin's Intimates, which Johnson, on a more attentive perusal of the Tract, refuses to record. The specious Villain they concern is an Author of some reputation, & Johnson has published his works ... Accusation against him, & the facts I mention were, at the time they happened, as publicly known as they are singular. Interwoven as they are with the history of an extraordinary character, which forms the most amusing part of my little work, I cannot consent to suppress them. - However, at the expense of some time, and trouble, I have altered the passages & softened the colour of the facts, to render them, if possible, palatable to my over scrupulous Publisher ... If they do not satisfy Mr Johnson I must encounter the vexatious circumstance of dissolving our agreement, and looking out for some other Bookseller ...⁶⁴

The quote sheds an important light on Seward's opinion of the Sabrina story. So adamant was she that it should remain in the manuscript that she was willing to part with her publisher if he disagrees; her reference to Day himself as a 'specious Villain' suggests once again that, by this point, he had become so diminished in her opinion that she was driven as much by him as by Darwin, as her subject. This quote suggests that Seward felt she had a score to settle with Day, which supports the argument that she was unsettled, to a greater or lesser extent by his relationship with Sabrina and Honora Sneyd. What is interesting is the lack of reference to Sabrina; it is Day, and the damage to his reputation that informs the objections of Johnson and equally it is because of Day that Seward is so determined to publish. Sabrina did not figure in the

⁶⁴ National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS 879 20, Letter from Anna Seward to unknown, 20th June 1803.

argument over whether to make this story public; therefore, here she is noticeable by her absence.

This absence is all the more striking when contrasted with an earlier literary construction of Sabrina by Anna Seward, that did not then make it into the public sphere, but did help to provide material aid to Sabrina when she needed it the most. After the death of John Bicknell, as has been stated, Seward was in correspondence with George Hardinge who shared John Bicknell's profession as a barrister.⁶⁵ Their correspondence resulted in financial support being given to Sabrina in the form of the £800 raised from Bicknell's legal brethren.⁶⁶ Seward is careful how she portrays Sabrina in her letters to Hardinge, calling Sabrina 'a sweet unfortunate who knows you well' and referring to 'the romantic circumstances of her early youth'.⁶⁷

Whether or not Hardinge had intended to secure help for Sabrina is at this point in time unknown; however, Seward's reference to Sabrina's situation - 'She and her children are left without any provision' - drew a response from Hardinge and efforts to secure some financial help for Sabrina. However, Seward was equally clear about the neglect of one person in particular regarding Sabrina; 'Yet lives there one whose still more bounden duty it is to consider her as his child, so far at least as to shield her from the miseries of apprehended want, and from fatigues to which her tender degree of strength is incompetent'.⁶⁸ This is a clear reference to Thomas Day and his equivocal response to the plight of his former pupil. Seward's sympathy lay with

⁶⁵ See Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*.

⁶⁶ Seward, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, p.74.

⁶⁷ Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th October 1788, in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, p.176.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Sabrina regarding their relationship and Day's dereliction of duty towards her. Seward pointed out to Hardinge the irony inherent in the nature of Day's philanthropic gestures contrasted with his neglect of Sabrina, 'This one gives away two-thirds of a large income in charity - or rather alms; but gloomy stoicism, and sour-headed infidelity, are, amidst an ostentatious display of moral exertions, wondrous prone to neglect and defy the claims of obvious duties'.⁶⁹

It was this perceived neglect that Esther Day had gone some way to explaining in her letter of 1790 to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, but that clearly did not convince Seward.⁷⁰ This exchange with Hardinge revealed the affection that Seward held for Sabrina and the extent to which she used her influence over those in positions of power to secure for her friend a better standard of living. In these private letters we see a glimpse of how Seward constructed Sabrina for this purpose. Sabrina was cast as a minor romantic heroine, with the romance of her early youth compounded by a poverty struck situation due to the profligate living of an unworthy husband. Despite her lowly background, Seward clearly considered Sabrina to be elevated beyond the servant, plebeian class, and she regarded Sabrina's situation to be beneath her, noting that Sabrina must 'labour for her daily bread, in a situation scarce above that of a common servant, and much more harassing'.⁷¹ This view is strengthened in the way Seward invoked the language of family and close kinship ties when assessing how others should have treated Sabrina. Seward called the legal fraternity, 'his [Bicknell's]

⁶⁹ Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th November 1788, in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, pp.195-6.

⁷⁰ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Esther Day to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 21st January 1790.

⁷¹ Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th November 1788, in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, p.195.

brothers' and therefore extended to Sabrina the status of 'sister-in-law'.⁷² This placed Sabrina amongst the middling classes and implicitly constructed her within the discourses of middle-class femininity, more delicate than women of the labouring poor and in need of male protection and care from 'the fatigues to which her tender degree of strength is incompetent'.⁷³ In this correspondence we clearly see that Seward bestowed on Sabrina the virtues and characteristics of middle-class womanhood and used language tactically to engender sympathy from Hardinge.

The two literary constructions of Sabrina that Seward presented suggest a complex response on the part of Seward towards Sabrina. In the first she paints a pen-portrait in service of Sabrina, with some acerbic comments regarding Day included for good measure. This pen-portrait is sympathetic and offers an entirely positive construction of Sabrina; crucially it is also romantic and in some ways can be compared to Maria Edgeworth's version of her in *Belinda*, in the character of Virginia. Sabrina is portrayed as a romantic heroine, bordering on tragic, but nonetheless virtuous and betrayed by the man who is supposed to care for and protect her. In her second construction, *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, Seward worked out her love and admiration of Honora together with her opinion of Day and his views on women, education and marriage. In this Sabrina, as much as she was respected by Seward, was caught up and became something close to collateral damage. The episode of Day's relationship with Sabrina, his high-minded views on life and his subsequent treatment of her was of great value to Seward and she used the cover of *Memoirs* to include in it a portrait of flawed masculinity embodied in Thomas Day.

⁷² Letter from Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 19th November 1788, in Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, p.195.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

These readings of Seward's constructions of Sabrina are important because they offer ways in which Sabrina continued to be constructed even after her own life appeared stable and she had 'constructed' herself in ways that suited her. Unfortunately for Seward, Sabrina was not happy with the appropriation of her history for the purpose of Seward's biography. We do not currently have any evidence of whether Seward gave any deep consideration to the effect her writings would have on the woman she so clearly respected but whose reputation she effectively sullied. What we do know is that Sabrina's sons, who until this point, had no idea of their mother's past history, were shocked to learn the facts as laid out by Seward. Maria Edgeworth, when visiting Sabrina in 1818, was informed by Sabrina of her eldest son's reaction to Seward's work, saying 'He came to his mother in such a state of irritation as she could not describe. He was in high spirit and violently enraged with Miss Seward'.⁷⁴ Believing his mother to have been unjustly maligned, John Bicknell then wrote to Seward, advising her of his intention to publicly state as much.⁷⁵ Seward, in correspondence with her friend Dr Whalley articulated her response to this young man's anger:

His foolish pride is stung by the publicity of circumstances concerning his mother's singular story, which cast no shade of reflection upon her in any respect, viz. her being originally a foundling child, and having been left in straitened circumstances, and a subscription having been raised for her. Surely

⁷⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Letters from England, 1813-1844*, ed. by Christian Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp.121-122.

⁷⁵ Thomas S. Whalley, *Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley* (London: Richard Bentley, 1863), p.262.

she appears in a very amiable light from my representation, and for that glowing testimony to her merit, this is my reward.⁷⁶

Seward did not see the psychological shock that being revealed as the son of an illegitimate woman might inflict on a young man in 1804. To Seward's credit she values Sabrina's intrinsic worth far above her lowly origins, but she cannot see that in a world where lineage, wealth, reputation and respectability still mattered a great deal, her remarks could be highly damaging and embarrassing. To Seward, ultimately Sabrina's story can be summed up as 'the most amusing part of my little work' and, as much as she exhibited empathy with the adolescent Sabrina, she could not exhibit the same for the adult Sabrina and her son.⁷⁷ Thus with a certain amount of hard-headed self-righteousness Seward claims that she will stand by her words, publically if necessary, 'I must publicly defend my own truth, by calling upon several credible witnesses who are yet living, and who knew all the circumstances I have stated to be true.'⁷⁸

So despite the respect Seward had for Sabrina and the evident affection she bore her, she was in no way going to compromise what she saw as the truth and instead of acknowledging the pain she may have inflicted, casts herself in the role of victim:

Mrs Bicknell well knows that they are all unvarnished facts. If she has sanctioned this dark, malicious, and lying scroll, the virtues which I believed she

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.263.

⁷⁷ NLS, MS 879 20, Letter from Anna Seward to unknown, 20th June 1803.

⁷⁸ Whalley, *Journals and Correspondence*, pp.263-4.

possessed, and with which my memoirs have invested her, could not have been genuine. This ungrateful accusation has hurt me more than it ought.⁷⁹

In Seward's reading of this exchange, Sabrina was at fault, but again Seward cannot see it might be because she was distressed over the events of her childhood and adolescence becoming public and because of the unorthodox nature of those events. More importantly Sabrina may have been genuinely concerned they would compromise her, especially in her construction as 'mother'. Her past could have compromised her role as housemother, and therefore *in loco parentis* over the sons of middle class families, and it had the potential to compromise the future of her sons. This episode demonstrates how easy it was for Seward to betray the privilege of class, in which she can appreciate and reward amiable working-class virtue, but considers that Sabrina's history is open to Seward to use as she wished. Seward does not consider Sabrina to have the right to protect that history, or acknowledge that the exposing of it, may have caused pain. As beneficial as Seward's friendship was to Sabrina, it came at a price.

With Seward's revelations clearly causing some disruption and unhappiness to her, Sabrina began to emerge as a stronger and more self-confident person, but the biographies did not end with Seward's *Memoirs* in 1804. In 1817 Richard Lovell Edgeworth died and this, quite possibly, was more of a blow to Sabrina than the earlier deaths of Day and Bicknell. Sabrina had first met Edgeworth when she was twelve years old; for forty-eight years they had known each other, the longest

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.264.

relationship Sabrina had enjoyed with anyone. The letter Sabrina wrote to Maria Edgeworth upon hearing of Edgeworth's death survives and in it Sabrina articulated her feelings regarding him:

The melancholy tidings of the death of your dear father, and of my much valued, esteemed and loved friend reached me a few days ago ... by this sad loss I am deprived of my oldest friend, and one I have always found most ready and prompt to assist me in every way in his power – his kindness to me is deeply engraved on my heart and while I have life I shall dwell with grateful pleasure on his dear and loved memory.⁸⁰

However, Edgeworth's death led to another publication - that of Edgeworth's *Memoirs*, started by himself and completed posthumously by his daughter Maria. Again it was felt that the biographical account of a Lunar man could not be produced without an account of Mr Thomas Day and his educational experiment. This time this view was probably more justifiable. Day and Edgeworth were close friends for many years and held each other in great affection and esteem. Edgeworth, as Sabrina's legal guardian, had been explicitly involved with the Sabrina experiment in a way that Darwin had not. Therefore there was an inevitability about Sabrina's history making it into print once again. Maria Edgeworth dealt with the situation with far more sensitivity than Anna Seward. She took the precaution of writing to Sabrina to inform her of the planned publication and sent to Sabrina the manuscript her father had

⁸⁰ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth, 30th June 1817.

written regarding the life of Day.⁸¹ Edgeworth planned to publish his recollections of Day and some of their letters, but desisted when it became clear that Keir was planning the same.⁸² It appears that Maria Edgeworth sent this manuscript to Sabrina and, when it was not returned, requested it be so.⁸³ This manuscript appears never to have been recovered, leading to the tantalising possibility that Sabrina kept it in her possession, possibly even destroying it. Although this cannot be positively proved, Maria Edgeworth seemed to have taken a more cautious attitude when it came to sharing her father's memoirs with Sabrina and visited her to go through the manuscript with her. Maria Edgeworth recorded the circumstances of her visit in a letter to her step-mother in October 1818 and revealed that Sabrina articulated strong opinions against the inclusion of her history in the manuscript.⁸⁴ The reasons given by Sabrina centre around her sons, supporting the contention that at this time Sabrina was attempting to maintain the construction of herself as 'Mother' and therefore her reputation and construction reflected on her sons. Maria Edgeworth's letter also refers to the Keir biography, noting her 'surprise neither he [John Laurens Bicknell] or Mrs Bicknell are aware that Mr Keir ... had told all the circumstances' and that another account 'in some magazine' had reported 'a half true, half false history of Mr Day and his mother which ended with saying she was dead'.⁸⁵ This second account has not been positively identified but it shows the growing fame the history of Day and Sabrina was attracting and the ease with which history and literature, fact and fiction merged in the pen-portraits of Sabrina Bicknell.

⁸¹ BL, ADD 70949, Letter from Maria Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell, 17th August 1817.

⁸² Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol 2, p.116.

⁸³ BL, ADD 70949, Letter from Maria Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell, 17th August 1817.

⁸⁴ Edgeworth, *Letters from England*, p.121.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.122.

As with her reaction to *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, Sabrina displayed a negative response to Edgeworth's *Memoirs*, not only to the literary constructions of herself and her life, but to the actual experiment itself. Thus, finally, almost fifty years after she was removed from the Foundling Hospital by Day and Bicknell, Sabrina was able to articulate her reading of those events. Maria Edgeworth records:

I was struck with a great change in Mrs Bicknell's manner and mind. Instead of being as Mr Day thought her helpless and indolent she is more like a stirring housekeeper - all softness and timidity gone! She spoke of Mr and Mrs Keir with great resentment and of Mr Day as having made her miserable - a slave!⁸⁶

This quote is both revealing and important in beginning to extrapolate Sabrina's voice from the many others that 'told' her story. Firstly it revealed a change in the 'manner and mind' of Sabrina, so much so that it surprised Maria Edgeworth. This suggests that previously Sabrina had constructed herself as pliable and pleasing. Secondly, Maria Edgeworth's comment that 'instead of being as Mr Day thought her helpless and indolent' leads to the question as to whether this does not say more about Day than Sabrina and we can rightly question whether Sabrina had ever been helpless and indolent, or soft and timid. These appear to be readings of Sabrina by Day, Maria Edgeworth and their peers that arise from constructions of her, either by Sabrina or by themselves. Maria Edgeworth's identification of Sabrina as 'a stirring housekeeper' can be read both as a reflection of Sabrina's experience, status and self-confidence in herself and the stability of her situation and Maria Edgeworth's reading

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

of Sabrina in the context of her position with the Burneys. Thirdly, this quote articulated Sabrina's views on her time with Day and interestingly those who were involved with her because of it. There is a real anger here and provides a different version of the time she spent with Day. It is difficult to interpret what is meant by Sabrina's assertion that Day treated her like 'a slave' and this certainly goes against the readings of her education with him that suggest it was eccentric but essentially benign. It also gives another reading to the account that Day gave Edgeworth in 1770 in which he claimed, 'I have made them, in respect to temper, two such girls, as, I may perhaps say without vanity, you have never seen at the same age' and asserts they 'have never given me a moment's trouble throughout the voyage, are always contented, and think nothing so agreeable as waiting upon me'.⁸⁷ Therefore, despite arguments to the contrary, Sabrina clearly stated that her time with Day was not benign, content or particularly happy, something she is now able to articulate.

A later letter from Sabrina to Maria Edgeworth, stated her response in gentler terms but nonetheless with equal conviction to that which Maria Edgeworth had earlier attributed to her. This letter, the fullest response we have from Sabrina herself regarding her experience with Day, is worth quoting at length, not least because Sabrina's voice had for so long been ignored, silence or suppressed, both by herself and others:

I have read the part of the manuscript you have favoured me with and I see nothing in it that [sic] I ought to object to. On the contrary I feel sincere

⁸⁷ Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, Vol.1, p.225.

sentiments of gratitude for your friendly attention and caution not to [arouse] my feelings. And for this your goodness, I beg you to accept my heartiest thanks but my dear friend you must pardon me when I confess that I do wish the life of my very dear and excellent friend your father could have been compleat [sic] without introducing the events of my childhood and adventurous history.

I am particularly obliged to you for omitting to mention the circumstances of my having been taken from the Foundling Hospital. And I will also thank you to say as little as possible respecting Mr Day's having given me the name of Sabrina Sydney – these romantic fancies do well enough in youth, but in age they are repugnant and distressing to one's feelings.⁸⁸

Here Sabrina gave a very clear articulation of the way she wanted to be 'reconstructed' in the literary discourses that were developing around her contemporaries, Day, Darwin and Edgeworth. Put simply, she did not want to be reconstructed at all; instead she wished to be excluded from the page, omitted from the narratives and distanced from any philosophical or romantic readings of her past. While, with historical hindsight, this might seem a naïve wish, the fact remains that for Sabrina, her peace of mind and her comfort in old age rested largely in her own reputation and the lives and successes of her sons. As a widow, a mother, grandmother and faithful retainer she wanted to remain invisible.

In considering why Sabrina reacted so strongly to public constructions of her as a foundling, protégé, pupil and wife-in-training, constructions that were, after all, to

⁸⁸ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth. 29th October 1818.

some extent truthful, we have to remind ourselves of the context in which Sabrina was living, especially regarding respectability, class and illegitimacy. Despite her lowly origins Sabrina had managed to rise to become a member of the respectable middle classes, largely by her own hard work and politically astute conduct. Nonetheless her foundling and presumed illegitimate status could easily have compromised her and her sons. This was due to a shift in attitude towards illegitimacy which is reflected in the growing equivocal status of the Foundling Hospital and in the wider literary discourses that had developed.⁸⁹ As has been previously discussed, illegitimacy was not a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century, but the eighteenth century has nonetheless been dubbed 'the century of illegitimacy' because of the growth in illegitimacy rates and the concomitant social problems it appeared to present.⁹⁰ A specific literary consequence of this was the growth of writers who dealt with the character of the 'foundling child'; and a foundling child who was, either explicitly or by implication, illegitimate. A sub-tradition evolved termed, 'a significant literary phenomenon', where it became acceptable for male foundlings to remain illegitimate but after a convoluted series of events, the female foundling was actually revealed to be legitimate.⁹¹ If the female foundling or nominal heroine remained illegitimate, she remained unworthy of respectable society and her vulgarity is explained by the circumstances of her conception. By placing the female foundling outside the family, she can be tested for her good sense and virtue in her own right, but that she was actually conceived within lawful marriage attests to the chastity and moral stability of her mother,

⁸⁹ See Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005) for the shift in public perceptions of the Foundling Hospital.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.1.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.12.

making her both fit to claim her own inheritance and be the appropriate steward of her husband's heritage, both in terms of children and property.⁹² So the more humane attitude was tempered by a continued anxiety that a family's wealth should still remain within the hands of its legitimate heirs.

An articulation of the stigma attached to being a foundling can be found in Fanny Burney's most controversial novel, *The Wanderer* published in 1814. The heroine, initially known only as 'the stranger' but later named as Juliet, is being interrogated regarding her identity. The inference is that, with the revelation of her name, those around her will be able to 'best judge what should be done for [her]'.⁹³ The stranger gives the reply of "Alas! I hardly know it myself" to which she receives the following response:

... Mrs Maple, indignantly swelling, exclaimed, "Not to know your own name? Why I hope you don't come into my house from the Foundling Hospital?"

Harleigh, throwing down his book, walked hastily to Mrs Maple, and said, in a low voice, "Yet, if that should be the case, would she be any less an object of compassion? Of consideration?"

"What your notions may be upon such sort of heinous subjects, Mr Harleigh," Mrs Maple answered, with a look of high superiority, "I do not know; but as for mine, I think encouraging things of that kind, has a very immoral tendency."⁹⁴

⁹² See Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings*.

⁹³ Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.58.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

This shows the response that could be forthcoming from some people on the knowledge of a foundling status; a response that follows the former children of the Foundling Hospital into adulthood and impacts on the willingness or otherwise of others to associate with, and assist, them despite obvious need. It is interesting that Fanny Burney, who we know had a long and friendly relationship with a former foundling, Sabrina Bicknell, chose to frame the heroine of *The Wanderer* as a potential foundling. *The Wanderer* is subtitled *Female Difficulties*, and articulates the equivocal position and status that women faced in contemporary society. It is worth considering that Fanny Burney's association with Sabrina was part of the inspiration for the writing of this novel, one of the most problematic and controversial that Burney wrote.⁹⁵ The above passage regarding children of the Foundling Hospital articulates not only the negative opinions some people held, but also a firm rebuttal of those opinions, and this could be too much of a coincidence, in light of the affection and regard the Burney family held for Sabrina.

Against this context of the stigma attached to illegitimacy, we can read Sabrina's distress over the revelations of her early life. The 'self' she had created, by taking advantage of the middle-class education finally bestowed upon her by Day, by continually making herself agreeable to the likes of Darwin, Anna Seward and the Burneys and by hard work and respectable behaviour, was conventional and stereotypical for middle-class womanhood. Unfortunately it could be very easily compromised by the resurgence of her past; which explains why Sabrina so fiercely resented its use by Anna Seward and was clearly discomforted by the more discrete

⁹⁵ See the introduction to Burney, *The Wanderer*, pp.vii-xxxvii.

use by Maria Edgeworth. A concrete example of the ways in which Sabrina was vulnerable to insinuations regarding her character and reputation can be found in references to her in letters written by Hester Thrale Piozzi. Mrs Piozzi, once the stalwart of the network that brought Sabrina into contact with the Burney family, latterly came to distrust Reverend Charles Burney and her hostility to him had an impact on Sabrina.⁹⁶ In two letters, Mrs Piozzi hinted at an improper relationship between Charles Burney and Sabrina. To Lady Keith she writes 'he is the Man who *keeps* the great Grammer School at Greenwich where the Boys learn Eschylus, Sophocles &c and come away Saying that he *keeps* the famous Sabrina educated by Mr Day – for his *Housekeeper*. Caetera desunt' [original emphasis].⁹⁷ In the second reference she writes that Burney is 'living all but openly with a Woman in his own house'.⁹⁸ These inferences of Piozzi do not appear to have been widely promulgated, but nonetheless it is clear that Mrs Piozzi had no compunction over making these claims to at least two of her acquaintance and therefore may have repeated them to others. This suggested that amongst some of her contemporaries, Sabrina's reputation was called into question. By insinuating sexual indiscretion, Mrs Piozzi reminded people yet again of her origins as a putatively illegitimate foundling.

The literary and therefore public constructions of Sabrina Sidney Bicknell did not end with her death or the death of her contemporaries. In becoming part of the Lunar Society story, Sabrina's relationship with Thomas Day was repeated and re-told in the biographies, histories and readings of the lives of the Lunar men that began

⁹⁶ See Hester Thrale Piozzi, *The Piozzi Letters: 1817-1821* (Cranbury: University of Delaware, 2002) for the background to the hostility between Mrs Piozzi and Rev Charles Burney.

⁹⁷ Piozzi, *The Piozzi Letters*, p.87.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.296.

appearing, repeated but not necessarily re-evaluated.⁹⁹ Early biographers of Day took Keir and Seward's representation of Sabrina's history at face value and later ones included it as an amusing anecdote or illustration of Day's unorthodox character.¹⁰⁰ Later works, which included histories not only of the Lunar men and their associated ladies, Anna Seward and Maria Edgeworth,¹⁰¹ but histories of education,¹⁰² histories of the Enlightenment¹⁰³ and literary criticism,¹⁰⁴ all made reference to Sabrina, constructing her in various ways. Thus Sabrina Sidney Bicknell developed not only from an abandoned eighteenth-century foundling child to a respectable Victorian matron, but also from a complex, historical person to a variety of constructions that can symbolise Enlightenment experimentation, female education and literary inspiration as well as male eccentricity. The constructions of Sabrina Sidney Bicknell are many and varied, both those under her own control and those outside it. The concluding chapter assesses those constructions and analyses their value to readings of the self, gender and class for audiences today.

⁹⁹ For examples see John Blackman, *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Author of "Sandford and Merton."* (London: J. B. Leno, 1862), Michael Sadler, *Thomas Day: an English Disciple of Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928) and Hesketh Pearson Pearson, *Dr Darwin* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1930).

¹⁰⁰ For examples see Mary Anne Hopkins, *Dr Johnson's Lichfield* (London: Peter Owen, 1956) and Desmond Clarke, *The Ingenious Mr Edgeworth* (London: Oldbourne, 1965).

¹⁰¹ For examples see Margaret Ashmun, *The Singing Swan: An Account of Anna Seward and her Acquaintance with Dr. Johnson, Boswell and Others of Their Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931) and Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: a Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹⁰² For examples see Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School: a Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929) and Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965).

¹⁰³ For example see Roy Porter, *Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000)

¹⁰⁴ For examples see Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy?' in *Revising Women*, ed. by Backscheider, Roger Lonsdale, 'Dr Burney, Joel Collier and Sabrina' in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship: Essays in Memory of James Marshall Osborn*, ed. by René Wellek and Álvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women's Writing, 1790-1810: Wollstonecraft, More, Edgeworth, Wordsworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

Sabrina Sidney Bicknell's life was irrevocably changed by the experiment in which Thomas Day made her a protagonist when she was twelve years old in August 1769. For many years that experiment defined who and what she was: a pleasant young woman who failed to impress Thomas Day, but who after a few tribulations, secured herself a husband and then a responsible position in the household of a respectable and well-known family. She was a foundling child who 'made good'. This study has argued that this is a superficial and simplistic reading of Sabrina Sidney's history and presents Sabrina's life and experiences in a more nuanced way. This exploration leads to several conclusions in response to the research questions that were identified in Chapter 1. Firstly, we can provide a fuller account of Sabrina Sidney's life. Secondly, this fuller life history together with the placement of Sabrina at the centre of an historical enquiry, does significantly change existing readings of the historical narratives of which she has been a part including how we interpret the members and associates of the Lunar Society. Thirdly, we can identify Sabrina Sidney's historical voice and that her response to the experiment can be located and interrogated. Fourthly, several constructions of Sabrina be identified and it can be seen that she was not passively constructed. Constructions of her were mutable and unstable and had a significant impact on Sabrina's sense of self.

These specific conclusions lead to wider, methodological conclusions. Firstly, when 'minor' figures in history are shifted from the periphery to the centre, new perspectives on historical figures, their lives and the environment in which they

existed become available and new readings of history are opened up. A fuller account of the life of Sabrina Sidney offers a new perspective on the history of Thomas Day and that of the Lunar Society. Secondly, this study demonstrates a way of shifting those 'minor' historical figures to the centre and allowing them to participate more fully in the historical records. Minor figures are often thought to be such because, compared with others, there is less source material available with which to reconstruct their lives. The judgement about a person's historical importance can be due to the survival of material that allows historians to research their lives. This thesis offers a different way of constructing biography, one that uses a hybrid and holistic approach to open up the lives of figures for whom little source material may have been created or survived. This chapter will examine these conclusions more fully and consider how this study contributes to the existing research environment.

Archival research has yielded a great deal of source material about Sabrina Sidney Bicknell which has enabled a detailed narrative of her life to be constructed. This has provided not only a more detailed account, but a more balanced one. The periods of her life about which the most was known and that gained the most notoriety, the years she spent with Day, distorted the history of Sabrina and contributed to some of the insubstantial readings of her life. Now that we can track the whole of her life from birth in 1757 to death in 1843, far more of her life can be understood in greater detail and the historical record is more even-handed.

The conclusions that we can draw concerning Sabrina Sidney Bicknell are that she was one of many children in the mid-eighteenth century for whom the Hospital for

the Education and Maintenance of Exposed and Deserted Young Children offered a chance of survival when their parents were unable to care for them. Within the environment of the Foundling Hospital, Sabrina was constructed as an abandoned, illegitimate child of the lower orders, who was educated and trained to undertake laborious, manual labour and to accept her place at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. It was this construction that rendered her suitable for the experiment that Thomas Day decided to undertake, as he sought a child who could offer the raw material with which he could mould a new type of wife. A careful and considered examination of the circumstances around Day's decision to educate a young girl to be his wife has revealed the experiment to be far more subtle and complex than has previously been acknowledged. It was the product of the Enlightenment environment, in which the education of girls acquired a new importance, alongside shifts in thinking about women. Sabrina's time with Day involved her in another construction of femaleness, one that demonstrated practical domestic skills, a Spartan attitude to life and a rejection of polite society, a construction that was ultimately unsuccessful. It also offered her an extensive and practical education, which was enhanced by her time at the Sutton Coldfield ladies boarding school and that she was able to use as she grew older. Sabrina became a young woman who was pleasing, respectful, but also self-sufficient and aware of her dependence on other people and her own ability to make herself agreeable and conform to societal expectations. Sabrina successfully internalised the characteristics of genteel, respectable middle-class women, to the extent that she was acknowledged as such by her peers and became the wife of a middle-class, professional gentleman. Sabrina's later years were characterised by hard work but framed in such a way so

that she remained respectable and she retained her status as middle class despite being widowed and earning her own living. Significantly, she secured for her sons access to middle-class society and security through their attendance at Dr Burney's school. As she grew older, Sabrina became more confident in articulating her responses to the way she had been treated, not only by Day but others. Here Sabrina's voice emerged, demonstrating her own reluctance to be remembered as part of an unconventional education experiment and exhibiting anger over the appropriation of her life story. Finally, her residence in Greenwich, the financial security she attained and her burial in Kensal Green are an indication of the journey her life had taken from abandoned Clerkenwell infant to middle-class, respectable, Victorian matron. We can therefore conclude that Sabrina Sidney Bicknell was an intelligent and astute woman, who despite living a life characterised by instability and being subjected to the whims of others, nonetheless took advantage of the opportunities offered to her to improve the quality of her life. While she internalised the gendered standards of contemporary society, she exhibited qualities of self-sufficiency and self-esteem which ensured she retained the respect and support of those who could help her. Not only did she survive, she thrived and ended her life in a very different situation from that in which it started.

These conclusions concerning Sabrina and the narrative that now exists of her life allows the experiment undertaken by Thomas Day to be interrogated and contextualised to offer a different perspective. This thesis provides a deeper analysis of the experiment Day undertook than has previously been attempted, using readings of Day's juvenile writings and later poetry, a wider reading of Rousseau's writings

and the Enlightenment context. These, together with a consideration of Sabrina's early years at the Foundling Hospital, gives a deeper level of understanding of how Sabrina, a child from the Georgian underclass, came to be a part of such an unusual experiment. The experiment becomes less about an eccentric aberration and more about a genuine desire for social and emotional change and is located in a socio-economic environment in which revolutionary change was actively pursued and desired. The new reading of the experiment results in Day's motivations becoming less aberrant, but paradoxically, his treatment of Sabrina in her adult life becomes more equivocal, as his willingness to devolve responsibility for her onto his Lunar Society friends becomes apparent. Also, by recovering Sabrina's voice, especially in her later years, we are able to construct a new reading of the experiment, from both Day's and Sabrina's standpoints.

The fuller reading also uncovers the involvement of Day's Lunar Society friends with Sabrina, some of whose support is well-known, such as Edgeworth and Seward and others whose involvement was not known, such as Keir and Withering. This contributes to the construction of a new collective biography of the Lunar Society, which has already been undertaken by other researchers, for example Uglow, but now can be re-examined in light of the new research presented by this thesis.¹ The emergence of collective or group biography has been discussed by Caine and she articulates why it has become one of the most significant developments in historical biography and why it is relevant to women's history.² Sabrina's history exemplifies the arguments Caine puts forward: that group biography can allow for an analysis of

¹ Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002)

² Barbara Caine, *History and Biography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp.61-65.

interaction between individuals and allows for ‘the sustained analysis of how people are linked to each other’ and that for women, group biography can be particularly useful because ‘most women’s lives are closely enmeshed with each other.’³ This is true of the Lunar Society and Sabrina’s association with some its members. The Lunar Society has already been the subject of group biography, by Schofield and Uglow, because of the close links its members enjoyed and the influence they had over each other. Day’s decision to educate a child to become his wife was clearly influenced by the theories of Rousseau, but it was also influenced by his relationship with Edgeworth, who was conducting his own educational experiment, and the Lunar society as a whole, whose members encouraged experimentation and embraced practical improvement. While Sabrina’s association with the Lunar Society has previously been acknowledged, this thesis demonstrates that it was more firmly embedded within the history of the Lunar Society, its acknowledged members and associated individuals, than has thus far been explored. It therefore adds to a collective understanding of how the Lunar Society functioned in two specific ways, through a gendered reading of the Lunar Society and illuminating the familial functioning of the group.

Sabrina was always read as part of the Lunar Society history, even though latterly she had been included in other discourses. Sabrina's story inevitably impacts on those of Day, Edgeworth and Seward, but it also enriches the history of the wider Lunar circle, contributing towards an already developing gendered reading of it and to a rather more underdeveloped familial reading. The gendered reading, as it exists already,

³ *Ibid*, p.61.

places the Lunar Society's relationships with women, wives, daughters and friends at the centre of its understanding of the Society and into this must be added the narrative of Sabrina Sidney. Until now, she has formed a minor role in this reading, whereas Anna Seward, Mary Priestley, Sally Wedgwood, Maria Edgeworth, Anne Boulton, and Susan and Mary Parker have been privileged over Sabrina, although even most of these women have not had a full enough reading of their history.⁴ The research into Sabrina's life shows that this work is vital if we are to understand how, at one level, the Lunar Society and at another level, networks, groups and sections of society functioned. Day's story as a Lunar Man cannot be understood without Sabrina's story and Sabrina's history offers new ways of reading how the Lunar Society functioned at a familial rather than intellectual level. It demonstrates the involvement of Richard Lovell Edgeworth with Sabrina and Lucretia's apprenticeship; of James Keir and Erasmus Darwin as Sabrina's guardians in Day's 1776 undertaking of protection for Sabrina; the potential involvement of William Withering with Sabrina's employment with the Yonge family; the involvement of Keir and Withering in Sabrina's marriage to John Bicknell and the gratitude that Day expressed for Keir's involvement with Sabrina which Esther Day articulated in her letter to Edgeworth in 1789. These examples demonstrate that several of the Lunar men had a level of involvement with Sabrina that has not previously been considered. It also suggests that Day felt able to involve his friends in his experiment, especially after Day himself had lost interest in it and in Sabrina. This suggests that the Lunar Society functioned not only as a group of intellectuals, exchanging scientific, technical and philosophical

⁴ See Jenny Uglow, "But What About the Women?", *The Lunar Society's Attitude to Women and Science and to the Education of Girls*, in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by C.U.M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

ideas, but also as a familial group, who exchanged roles of guardianship over those who were dependent on them.

This changes understandings of both the relationships between Sabrina and other members of the Lunar Society and the dynamics of those relationships. It is the uncovering of Sabrina's reaction to Day and his experiment, both in deed and later in word, which changes the historiography profoundly. Sabrina's early perseverance, her tact and political astuteness and later, her angry and vocal responses, indicate that she was not always a passive participant and when she could shape her own destiny, and articulate her own opinion and responses, she did. This challenges the constructions of the Day/Sabrina narrative and therefore Day's experiment can no longer be discussed without reference to this new reading.

Sabrina's 'voice' and the fact that through it we can interrogate her response to the experiment and identify ways in which she constructed herself, allow us to draw conclusions regarding the way the self was understood and constructed. Sabrina was not a passive construction, but neither was she fully able to control the ways in which she was seen and judged. We can identify that there was never a time when Sabrina was not in the process of construction and those constructions were framed by external understandings of her status and position in society. The construction of her early years was framed by understandings of foundling children, illegitimacy, class and gender and these fed into the ways Day wanted to, and tried to, construct a wife. Later constructions of Sabrina were supported by the middle-class female education Day permitted her in Sutton Coldfield and these seem to be the constructions she

absorbed and promulgated in an effort to secure a continued genteel, respectable and middle-class existence. This construction, which later incorporated those of wife, mother, widow and housekeeper appears to be the one Sabrina wanted for herself and her relationships with her family and the external world. Other constructions were more conscious, such as the one by Day in *Sandford and Merton*; the multiple constructions by Seward and the fictional version of Sabrina and Day produced by Maria Edgeworth. Sabrina actively resisted those constructions of which she was aware, because they undermined those that she had created and with which she was comfortable. This suggests an active and deliberate construction of the self, over which Sabrina gained increasing control as she grew older, moved further away from the protagonists of the experiment and gained a secure environment separate from the circles that had supported her earlier. However, the constructions by Seward and by Maria Edgeworth within her father's memoirs, prove how vulnerable constructions of the self can be. For Sabrina, her vulnerability to class and gender dialogues had the power to undermine the control she had gained over her own construction, threatening her reputation and the foundations of her sense of self as a respectable, middle-class woman and mother.

This series of conclusions about Sabrina Sidney Bicknell, gained through a close analysis of her life and relationships, enable wider methodological conclusions to be drawn. The first methodological conclusion is that those figures in history which have been consigned to the footnotes, or classified as minor should be moved to the centre of research frameworks in order to ascertain if their histories can be uncovered and a fuller narrative be constructed for them. This in turn allows analysis

of those narratives to inform the wider historical record. This has a specific impact for women, one of those groups most widely perceived as minor in the grand narratives of history and still at risk of marginalisation in historical research and academic discourses. One reason for this is the perception that the inclusion of women in the historical record does not fundamentally change it.⁵ This study disproves that hypothesis (which still has worrying currency) and supports the opposing one that 'there is no aspect of human existence ... that is untouched by gender' and therefore demands the inclusion of women, minor or not, into research frameworks.⁶ Sabrina's story shows that by asking questions about those minor figures, by placing them at the centre of a research framework, a great deal of new material can be uncovered which can help to inform our understanding of the past.

One reason Sabrina has been consigned to the footnotes and could possibly have remained there, is the lack of a discrete archive or collection of material created by, or about, her. While it is true that for some periods of her life, information is absent, this study has offered a model of constructing biography that accepts that lack of information and seeks new ways of constructing a history. This constitutes the second methodological conclusion. There is a far greater amount of primary source material relating to Sabrina Sidney than might at first be expected, but it is buried within archival collections relating to institutions or other people, such as the Edgeworth papers in the National Library of Ireland, or it exists within published works, such as *Sandford and Merton*. It is also sporadic and sometimes contains no

⁵ See Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) p.31 for the articulation of this point of view summarised as 'my understanding of the French Revolution is not changed by knowing that women participated in it'.

⁶ T.A. Meade and M.E. Wiesner, *A Companion to Gender History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p.6.

more than passing references, such as those within the Piozzi letters. This study has sought to draw all of this material together and in doing so, allows it to stand together to balance, confirm or question the initial narrative. It also means that even a slight or passing reference, which might mean little on its own, gains greater importance when read alongside other material. This method requires careful use of the material, in order not to overemphasise certain aspects or to imply too much from a passing reference, nonetheless this study has shown that this method can support a comprehensive narrative for an historical figure about whom material appears to be slight. Alongside this drawing together of disparate primary sources, is the use of contextual material to illuminate aspects of a life for which there might not be explicit information. This study has made extensive use of such material, and has enabled us to understand how Sabrina might have experienced different aspects of her existence, such as employment as a ladies maid or a housekeeper; or by using broader studies, such as those of Levene, from which to extrapolate possible conclusions about Sabrina's parental circumstances and background. Other contextual material, especially that pertaining to place, has been utilised to gain a greater understanding of the socio-economic contexts and geographical locations in which Sabrina lived, especially during those periods of her life when little specific information is available. This method also allows for the incorporation of other material, again selected with caution, such as literary sources. It is easy to dismiss fiction and poetry when conducting a historical study, but it can be argued that in some cases, such as that of Sabrina Sidney, to ignore the poetry and prose of Thomas Day or the writings of Maria Edgeworth would be to exclude two important sources. Day's writing articulates his philosophical opinions, which are vital to his understandings of

concepts such as marriage, women, and fashion and in Sukey Simmons these concepts are explicitly drawn. In the description of her education we potentially have an insight into that of Sabrina; the internal evidence within *Sandford and Merton* is compelling, especially when read in conjunction with Day's acknowledged opinions and the details offered by others, notably Seward. In this instance, fiction can offer a way of supporting and contributing to other sources and thus becomes a source in itself.

Maria Edgeworth's fictional portrait of Sabrina is included because it offers a different perspective on Day's experiment and can be read alongside that of her father's and Anna Seward's. It can be argued that literary sources merely articulate their artificiality more explicitly than other sources; that biographies and memoirs traverse an uneasy line between fiction and non-fiction and, in their very format, can be termed literary sources. Biographies and memoirs can be deemed just as partial, biased and unstable as works of fiction and still be used by historians to construct history. Likewise letters are constantly used in research but they can be constructed much like fiction. It is not being argued here that fiction is interchangeable with historical documents. *Sandford and Merton* is included because it can be read alongside other (historical) texts. It straddles the genres of fiction and polemic and its author offers a scheme of female education that is remarkably similar in content and format to that which he provided for his real-life pupil. *Belinda* has been included because Sabrina and Day were the openly acknowledged sources for characters in the book and because this study is concerned with the constructions of Sabrina Sidney, including those in print. Both works are read in conjunction with other, more

conventional, 'historical' sources and their shortcomings are acknowledged, but it is suggested that to ignore them limits historical understanding, while including them, along with appropriate caveats, deepens it. What is suggested here is that a methodology for historical re-construction can use and interrogate fictional works to extend its scope.

This thesis has offered a hybrid model of historical research and the development of biographical material, a model that can support the shift of minor figures to the centre of research frameworks and thus broaden out the historical record, providing a continually enriched understanding of the past. It offers a practical example of the trend that Caine identified, of 'changed biographical practices which have developed as a result of the introduction of new biographical subjects whose lives had long been hidden or forgotten.'⁷

With these conclusions, how then, does this thesis relate and contribute to the existing research landscape? It does so in two ways, with regard to gender history, and by offering a contribution to theory of the self.

Gender history encompasses a variety of strands, two of which are pertinent for this study: the concept of gender as a construct and gender as a category of analysis.⁸ The history of Sabrina Sidney suggests that for her, gender operated in two powerful ways: it informed the ways she was constructed and constructed herself and it was

⁷ Caine, *History and Biography*, p.105.

⁸ For a discussion of both these concepts see Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) Meade and Wiesner, *A Companion to Gender History* and Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*.

performative. Throughout her life, Sabrina was constructed, through education, experience and expectation, as female and against the binary opposite, the male. She was constructed in this way by the Foundling Hospital, which taught her how to be female from the age of seven in a variety of ways, not the least by segregation from the male 'other'. Sabrina continued to be constructed as female in the heavily gendered perception of Day, which informed the education she received and the ways in which Day related to her, both during the experiment and after. Sabrina's 'femaleness' was constantly being assessed; her worthiness and respectability were measured against various understandings of 'female'. Sabrina understood her survival was, to a large extent, dependant on that femaleness and that it was, at times, a consciously performed role. This is suggested in the ways she demonstrated her femaleness at various points in her life: in her pleasing countenance and manners at the age of seventeen, in her deference to Day and Edgeworth upon Bicknell's proposal, in her respectful mourning of Day after his death and in her distress at the revelation of her background by Seward in 1804. Sabrina demonstrated she had learnt, understood and internalised what the external world meant by 'female' in general, and what it meant by 'female' for her. Thus she demonstrated a femaleness that was respectful, obedient and conforming, and in doing so was read as 'respectable' and a positive example of womanhood. The performative aspects of Sabrina's gender role can be seen as partly conscious and partly unconscious, but nonetheless they were adopted and performed by her.

This study has also offered a way of using gender as a category of analysis that extends beyond women's history. Gender operates across society and therefore as a

category of analysis is as applicable to men as women; it extends beyond the domestic/private sphere to the extent that the notion of public and private are questioned and disrupted. Scott has commented that within historical frameworks for men's history, their domestic circumstance and family background remain unreferenced or interrogated, while for women, comparable frameworks foreground that information.⁹ This study has shown that in order to understand Thomas Day as a man, as a figure of the Enlightenment, as an intellectual and as a political figure, we must understand his attitude towards women, marriage and relationships between the sexes. Gender is a crucial category of analysis for the life of Thomas Day and concomitantly for the wider Lunar Society. Thus Day's domestic life, extending beyond Sabrina to his marriage to Esther Milnes, becomes open to historical inquiry. What this study has also shown is that this gendered reading of history need not place men and women antagonistically against each other and that gender history is not necessarily about privileging the female over the male in a history-as-revenge theoretical model.¹⁰ Men and women can have opposing agendas, exist antagonistically in specific situations and women can be disadvantaged at a systemic level, but this does not negate the fact that men and women have interacted positively and meaningfully. Therefore an antagonist model is of little value. Thus Sabrina's history, while areas of antagonism can be identified and interrogated, is not set in opposition to that of Day. Some of the areas of antagonism in Sabrina's life involve women rather than men, and so the gender divide is an unhelpful one when considering them. Likewise, Day's history is not presented as the 'norm' or the

⁹ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p.53.

¹⁰ Bennett, *History Matters*, p.11.

universal experience against which Sabrina's is particular.¹¹ In many ways, both histories are particular, but read integratively they provide an insight into how gender, both male and female, functioned together, how it impacted on the gendered individual's sense of self, on notions of conformity and respectability (Day did not conform, while Sabrina did) and how women found power and control within situations in which they appeared powerless.

Within gender history, this study has also contributed to understandings of how the Enlightenment functioned for women, especially with regard to education. Much work has been undertaken on the role of education for girls in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, including the growing debates about the role of women in society, as wives and mothers.¹² It was within these debates that Rousseau's *Emile* offered a model of womanhood, in the form of Sophie, which both privileged motherhood and the domestic role for women, but effectively imprisoned her there. Sabrina Sidney Bicknell provides an historical exploration of that model and as such offers a way of examining Enlightenment attitudes towards education. The argument that education played a central role in determining what it meant to be female and in mediating societal understandings of this for girls and women, is one that has been considered elsewhere and to which Sabrina's history can contribute.¹³ We can begin to explore the faith that was placed in education by Enlightenment thinking and the extent to which biological readings of the body and gender were both undermined

¹¹ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p.25.

¹² See Deborah Simonton, *Women in European Culture and Society: Gender, Skill and Identity from 1700* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹³ Rebecca Rogers, 'Learning to be Good Girls and Women: Education, Training and Schools' in *Women in Europe since 1700*, ed. by Simonton. pp.93-133.

and reinforced. We can also investigate the ways in which education was adapting to a changing social landscape, but remained a vital tool in the construction of gender as well as class. Sabrina's experience of education was unusual but if we examine the evidence, its peculiarity lies in its continually changing nature, rather than its inherent content. To explore this further, we need to look at its constituent parts. Her early education was standard for the institution under whose care she was and consistent with her Foundling Hospital peers, although it was potentially of a higher standard compared with other children of the poor. Her education with Day did contain, if Seward is to be believed, quixotic elements, but also contained standard educational elements for a section of the intellectual and entrepreneurial middle classes. Put simply, Sabrina's education can be compared with that of the daughters of the Lunar Men.¹⁴ When this phase ended, Sabrina experienced another standard method of delivering a middle-class female education, that of a girl's boarding school. Each stage of Sabrina's educational life is not necessarily unique, however what is distinctive is the fact she experienced both a lower-class education and two modes of middle-class education and the object of one of those modes was not just education for a specific role, that of wife and mother, but a specific man, Thomas Day. This reading of Sabrina's education allows us to examine how education functioned in the construction of her as female and the ways in which, despite their differences and different *modus operandi*, there was a coherence identifiable across all three. Although functioning as training for life as a lower-class, working woman, a model of Enlightenment marriage or eighteenth-century respectable femininity, the educational models inculcated similar understandings of what it meant to be female

¹⁴ See Uglow, 'But What About the Women?' in *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. by Smith and Arnott for a detailed discussion of the education received by the Lunar daughters.

and therefore can be seen to be a 'critical element in determining [Sabrina's] place'.¹⁵ We can argue that as unstable as Sabrina's education appears, there was an inherent stability concerning who Sabrina was – female – and what she was destined to become – a good wife and mother. In these terms the answer to the question: What are girls educated for? is: To learn what it means to be a good woman, wife, mother and worker. Within these parameters, can we argue that Sabrina's education was a success, despite Day's conviction that it was not? If we argue that it was, then Sabrina Sidney's history offers a model for exploring why this was and how education functioned in her life as a part of the 'construction' process.

Inherent in this construction process, of which notions of gender played such an important part, is the concept of the self. This concept has been explored by Wahrman, who identified a point at which the notion of the self emerged in modern thought and how, during the eighteenth century that notion was malleable, especially regarding gender, but then shifted towards more fixed and rigid understandings.¹⁶ While accepting that the notion of the self is a relatively new idea and that there was, for some people during the eighteenth century, space in which to play with, and subvert, notions of gender, the history of Sabrina Sidney offers a construction of the self which is tightly bound by fixed understandings of gender. It therefore challenges the idea that 'gender-play' was an option generally available. Instead, Sabrina's life suggests that a disruption of gender categories is only possible if one's relationship with the external world is sufficiently stable to allow that disruption; Sabrina's was

¹⁵ Rogers, 'Learning to be Good Girls and Women: Education, Training and Schools', in *Women in Europe since 1700*, ed. by Simonton, p.93.

¹⁶ See Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (London: Yale University Press, 2004) for a detailed analysis of the shift in understandings of the self and what he terms 'gender-play' to 'gender-panic'.

not. Yet, what Sabrina's history also indicates is that within those rigid gender boundaries, there can be identified different 'selves' which offer the possibility of flexibility within fixed boundaries. Sabrina, while consistently framing herself as 'female', nonetheless demonstrates in the later years of her life, that the notion of 'female' has, for her, changed as she has aged and therefore has an inherent malleability. In her youth and early womanhood, Sabrina's femaleness was predicated on obedience, being pleasing and accommodating, showing respect and deference and ultimately living within the power of others. In later years, this deference and obedience was replaced by femaleness that was fiercely protective of her reputation and that of her sons' and was demonstrated by an anger and self-defence. In her letter to Maria Edgeworth in 1818, Sabrina very clearly shows that her sense of self has changed, not because of the relaxation of gender boundaries, but the stage she is in her life-cycle; 'these *romantic fancies* do well enough in youth,' Sabrina says of her experiences with Day, 'but in age they are repugnant and distressing to one's feelings'.¹⁷ What was permissible at the age of seventeen, definitely is not at the age of sixty-two. Thus Sabrina's history can contribute to our understanding of the self and how it was constructed historically. It can also inform such questions as to what extent the so-called *ancien régime* of the self was relevant to women such as Sabrina Sidney or if the model that Wahrman identified as becoming more prevalent during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, that of fixed understandings of gender, was actually more pertinent to the majority of people during the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁸

¹⁷ NLI, MS 22470, Edgeworth Papers, Letter from Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth, 29th October 1818.

¹⁸ Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, pp.40-41.

The story of Sabrina Sidney and the short time she spent as wife-in-training for Thomas Day, will no doubt continue to be included in the historiography of the Enlightenment, in literary criticism and in biographies of her contemporaries. In some she may still only reside as a passing footnote to the Lunar Society and their most eccentric member, Thomas Day. However, this study has shown that Sabrina Sidney Bicknell was far more than a footnote, far more than the construction of a quixotic, wealthy gentleman and far more than a stereotypical romantic heroine. She was a remarkable woman, who endured the unconventional attentions of a young man and a concomitant change in her social position and status that affected her for the rest of her life. She experienced many changes in fortune and favour and must have suffered much uncertainty. Yet she did more than survive, she thrived and, through a skilled understanding of the ways she was and could be constructed, and by conforming to the most positive of those constructions, she moved from the position of a putatively illegitimate foundling girl in Georgian England to the status of a middle-class matriarch, who was independently wealthy in Victorian Britain. The real Sabrina can never be truly found, the irony inherent in this thesis is that it is yet another construction of Sabrina Sidney, but it is hoped that this is one construction which comes closest to constructing Sabrina comprehensively and will therefore support further research into her life, the constructions that characterised it and the meanings that can be drawn.

APPENDIX 1

Regulations of Shrewsbury Hospital, Undated (poss 1760).

London Metropolitan Archives, A/FH/M/01/013/001, Foundling Hospital Records.

The Children

The Children rise before six in the summer and never later than seven in the winter.

The larger children make the Beds sweep under them, empty the Chamber Potts into the Pail and carry it down every morning early – assisted by the Nurses. All of the children are washed Hands and Face and Comb'd before they come down and soap is allow'd for that purpose. Immediately after coming down Prayers are said in the Dining Room one of the Children by Rotation repeating them to the Rest.

Breakfast at Seven in summer and Eight in winter.

At school from Eight to Twelve the larger children staying no longer than the saying of their Lessons, then go to the work of the House or Manufactory and Labour and Learn alternately so that they may say two Lessons in the Morning and two after Dinner.

Dine at Twelve the Tables served by the larger children and Grace is said by one of the children before they sit down and at rising. – The nurses carve and the Children carry away their own Trenchers piggins.

The larger children go to work at one and the smaller play from Dinner till two.

Go to school from two till five and play from five till six. – The working Children going from School to Work alternately till six.

Sup at six – from supper till Bed time play abroad in the summer – in the Dining room in Winter – Prayers and go to bed at Eight in Winter and Nine in Summer. – The Boys are provided with play things that may habituate them to robust Exercise such as Hoops Tops Balls and Batts. The Girls are taught to sew and knit before they are big enough to be employed in the Manufactory.

5.

The children are punished for small offences by being put out of the Dinner and being obliged to stand while the Rest dine or with some other mark of Reproach – for greater offences by the Rod. All the children that are able to go to Devine Service every Sunday Morning and Evening attended by the School Masters and Mistresses or such of the Female Servants as the Matron shall appoint for that purpose. Each child is allow'd two suits of Cloths, two pair of stockings and shoes one Hat and three of each sort of Linnen garment, these are in charge of the respective Nurses and are kept in Boxes annexed to each Bed marked with the initial Letters of each child's Name.

The Children's Linnen is changed once a week, the Table Linnen twice a week and their Sheets once in six weeks.

APPENDIX 2

Letter from Mr Taylor White to Rev Dr Adams, 31 August 1769.

London Metropolitan Archives, A/FH/A/6/002/001, Foundling Hospital Records.

Dear Sir,

I am just returned from the Chester circuit and found at the Committee yesterday signed by Mr Magee a Letter which I am desired to Answer. If I had passed thro' Salop on my Circuit as I intended, I should have had an opportunity of preventing all the mistakes which has happened but since that is now too late, I shall obey the commands of the General Committee and explain to you the Circumstances of this Hospital and what has been done relative to the placing out the Children, which will also in some measure shew you what can be done hereafter for the establishing of this Charity.

The Number of children in several Hospitals are

	Boys	Girls	Total
At Salop	58	299	357
At London	176	126	302
At Westerham	-	158	158
At Ackworth	<u>137</u>	<u>251</u>	<u>388</u>
	371	834	1205
In the Southern Nurserys	33	187	220
In the Western Nurserys	<u>24</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>41</u>
	428	1038	1466

These are all the remaining Parliamentary children.

Of which there are at Ackworth 56 who are lame, blind, and incapable of Being put Apprentices. There have been apprenticed this year 906 children of which 47 were apprenticed without fees.

The Sum Granted by Parliament for the placing out Children this year was £5600 of which there has been spent as nearly as we can compute the sum of £3879.12

Expense of children from hence to Ackworth	<u>132</u>
	4011.12

The remainder to be expended this year in that service is	1588.88
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which probably may apprentice 360 Children but this is not certain, for the Girls will cost more than the Boys, and the younger than the Older Children, then the Number of Children under the care of this Charity and taken in by Order of Parliament will be nearly 1150, which will be distributed in the Hospitals of London, Salop and Ackworth, in such manner that they may most probably be disposed of in the Years 1770 and 1771.

The money which will be Granted by Parliament will probably be after the rate of £7.10 a head for the Maintenance of each child, and will be divided so that each of those Hospitals may be supplied for the Children who were at Chester are all apprenticed and the Girls at Westerham will be sent for to London as soon as may be, so that this Hospital, yours and Ackworth will only remain, and these having been Built and the Land purchased at a great expense it is very much to be wished that they always remain and be serviceable to the purposes for which they were erected.

As to what money will be Granted for the placing out the Children the next year I cannot yet conjecture.

Having now laid before you the State of the Parliamentary Children, by which you will see how greatly the number of Girls remaining does exceed that of the Boys, I should think it better that the remainder of apprentice money of this year should be expended in placing out the Girls, than in placing out the Boys, for the Girls will be harder to be placed out properly and will probably cost the Public more money than the Boys will, but I fear in the next Money Granted by Parliament for that Service, the distinction will not be made.

I now proceed to lay before you that part of the Charity which has no connection with Parliamentary Supplies and must subsist by other means; which are the Children which are taken in since Lady Day 1760, part by order of the General Courts and are subsisted by the revenue of the Corporation and the Charitable Contributions or Donations of the Governors, and by Legacies and part from the several Parishes according to the Powers given by an Act made in the 7th year of his present Majesty entitled an Act for the better regulation of Parish Poor Children, of the several Parishes therein mentioned, within the Bills of Mortality, by which Act the Parishes have liberty of sending Parish Poor Children under 6 years of age to this Hospital under such Terms as shall be agreed on, which Terms are £9.2.6 by monthly payments for every other year, for such time as is mentioned in the respective Agreements. We apprehend this will produce a reasonable fund for the support of those children, but it is not being made compulsive on the Parishes to send their Children, the Numbers yet sent are not great, many Parishes yet rather being willing, that their Children die than pay for the keeping of them alive, but it is probably this may be remedied by the next session of Parliament as the Act aforementioned wants several amendments.

The numbers of children taken in by Order of the Corporation and to be by them maintained at their expenses are

	Boys	Girls	Total
	94	88	182
Parish Children	97	84	181

You see by these accounts that the Number of Children at each of the three Hospitals will be greatly lessened before a proper supply, either of Children or money for their support can be found, and therefore fewer attendants and servant will be necessary and also a proportionable reduction of Expence, but the regulations of each Hospital must be considered by each Committee and their Plan transmitted to the General Committee, so that the whole may be properly supported without interfering with each other. This is a work which deserves the greatest attention as also does the Care which should be taken in the having proper Characters of the Persons to whom Children are placed out.

...

As to the residue of your letter this committee think themselves extremely obliged to yourself and their brethren the Gentlemen of your Committee for the very great and tender care they have taken of the Children and may be assured that no steps will be taken relative to the Hospital at Salop without consulting your Committee thereupon. You will excuse the length of my letter, which is occasioned by my endeavouring to lay the whole state of the Corporation before you, that you and we may work together for the common good of the whole.

APPENDIX 3

Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton, a work intended for the use of children*, 3 vols (London: John Stockdale, 1783-1789; repr, Gloucester: Dodo Press 2008), pp.170-171.

While this conversation was going on in one part of the room, a young lady, observing that nobody seemed to take the least notice of Harry, advanced towards him with the greatest affability, and began to enter into conversation with him. This young lady's name was Simmons. Her father and mother had been two of the most respectable people in the country, according to the old style of English gentry, but her father having died while she was young, the care of her had devolved upon an uncle, who was a man of sense and benevolence, but a very great humourist. This gentleman had such peculiar ideas of female character, that he waged war with most of the polite and modern accomplishments. As one of the first blessings of life, according to his notions, was health, he endeavoured, by a robust and hardy education, to prevent that sickly delicacy which is considered so great an ornament in fashionable life. His niece was accustomed, from her earliest youth, to plunge into the cold bath at every season of the year, to rise by candle-light in winter, to ride a dozen miles upon a trotting horse, or to walk as many, even with the hazard of being splashed, or soiling her clothes. By this mode of education, Miss Sukey (for so she had the misfortune to be named) acquired an excellent character, accompanied, however, with some dispositions which disqualified her almost as much as Harry for fashionable life. She was acquainted with all the best authors in our language, nor was she ignorant of those in French. Her

uncle, who was a man of sense and information, had besides instructed her in several parts of knowledge, which rarely fell to the lot of ladies; such as the established Laws of Nature, and the rudiments of Geometry. She was, besides, brought up to understand every species of household employment, and taught to believe that domestic economy is a point of the utmost consequence to every woman who intends to be a wife and a mother. As to music, though Miss Simmons had a very agreeable voice, and could sing several simple songs in a very pleasing manner, she was entirely ignorant of it; her uncle used to say, in his humorous way, that human life is not long enough to throw away so much time upon the science of *making a noise*. He would scarcely permit her to learn French, although he understood it himself. Women, he thought, are not birds of passage, who are to be eternally changing their places of abode. "As to various languages," he would say, "I do not see the necessity of them for a woman. My niece is to marry an Englishman, and to live in England. As to the French nation, I respect and esteem it on many accounts; but I am very doubtful whether the English will ever gain much by adopting either their manners or their government; and when respectable foreigners choose to visit us, I see no reason why they should not take the trouble of learning the language of the country."

APPENDIX 4

Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service, MS 1651 (Acc 91/108), Thomas Day's undertaking of protection for Sabrina Sidney, 25th January 1776.

That the young person, whom I have some years past, educated, under the name of Sabrina Sidney, may not consider herself dependant [sic] upon me, I do hereby oblige myself to allow her, the sum of fifty Pounds a year, so long as she shall continue, under my protection; and should she be inclined to marry, instead of that Annuity, I do hereby engage to settle upon her the sum of five hundred Pounds, in whatever manner I shall judge most advantageous to her, provided that she do not marry without the consent of Dr. E. Darwin of Lichfield and Mr J. Keir of Stourbridge.

Thomas Day, Lichfield, January 25th 1776.

APPENDIX 5

Correspondence between Sabrina Sidney and members of the Edgeworth family.

British Library, ADD 70949, Fol. 280.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell 28th August 1808.

My Dear Sabrina,

If your sons marry to please you I wish you joy with all my heart.

I thank you for your very kind and friendly letter and I assure you most sincerely of my esteem and affection. My Banker by next post will send you thirty pounds which I did not like to send in smaller sums – I believe that July was the time when I usually made you a small instance. I must repeat that this trifling instance of my regard was always intended for your own use.

Mrs E, Mrs Sneyds and Maria and Sneyd E. send their love to you.

I am dear Sabrina

Your most truly

Richard Lovell Edgeworth.

British Library, ADD 70949, Fol. 271.

Maria Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell 17th August 1817.

My dear Mrs Bicknell or if you will allow me – my dear Sabrina – We thank you for your very affectionate letter.

Alas when you received my fathers and when you answered it how little you thought it would be the last – I did not – But God's will be done – He shewed the most admirable submission of mind and patience – we endeavour to imitate him in this –

Mrs Edgeworth is well and all you might expect from her of firm and good and kind –
The employment which I find the most interest at present is reading over his letters –
Those to and from Mr Day especially – Have you a little Manuscript life of Mr Day
written in my father's hand – I think my father lent it to you – I am particularly
anxious to have it because it was in fact not mine but his. It was all spoken of by him
to me – I entreat you to look carefully before you give me the pain of answering No –
Adieu your very affectionately
Maria Edgeworth.

National Library of Ireland, MS 22470, Edgeworth papers.

Sabrina Bicknell to Mrs Edgeworth 9th June 1813.

My dear friend,

I cannot tell you how much I regret and lament not having seen more of you since
your arrival in London – three times I have gone to town in the hope of passing a few
hours with you but alas! I only succeeded once in obtaining that happiness – for this
bit of good luck I am most thankful – but I confess I am not satisfied – and the time of
your departure draws so fearfully near that I quite despair of being able to see you
again – the near approach too of our holidays (which always loads me with an
unconscionable accumulation of business) robs me of all hope of sparing another day
to go to town and I know your time is too precious and your engagements too
numerous to allow of my asking you to come down to Greenwich ardently as I long
to see you once more I cannot request this.

Believe my dear friend with sincere respects your very faithful and affectionate

Sabrina Bicknell

P.S. Allow me to hope that I shall hear from one of you before you quit London.

Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth 21st April 1817.

My dear and [...] friend,

The sight of your hand writing is really delightfully gratifying to me – but alas this pleasure is dampened by the sad account you give me of your health – suffering is the inevitable lot of all of us poor mortals and it is our duty to bear our trials with Christian fortitude and resignation – and this I have no doubt you do.

I must ardently hope and trust that as the weather becomes more genial and the summer advances you will recover your health.

You accuse me my dear sir unjustly when you say that I have neglected writing to you and that I did not acknowledge the receipt of the £30 you were so good to send me some years ago – I have referred to my records and find by them, that I received the said £30 on the 7 of September 1808 – and which I acknowledged immediately by a letter addressed to you at Edgeworthstown – and since that time, by your desire I again wrote to you, and stated the exact time I got the money – and also the date of a letter from me acknowledging the receipt of it. These circumstances must have escaped your recollection – but I trust you will credit what I now state and banish from your mind the unpleasant impression that I could act so carelessly and ungratefully.

Your friendly inquiries of how, of where I live, is readily answered – I am still toiling on with Mr Burney – and I shall be thankful to enjoy health enough to enable me to keep my post 3 or 4 year longer – when I fear I shall be past the power of enduring the labours of this situation – I shall then (with some assistance from my sons) hope to retire to some quiet retreat where I may have leisure to devote my mind to subjects necessary to prepare me for a better world.

I assure you my dear friend, I have had very heavy and severe trials for the last three years on account of my eldest son – who has been a great sufferer from ill health during that period, he still continues an invalid and I fear likely to remain so – this circumstance keeps me anxious and unhappy – and I lament to own, has made greater havock [sic] with my constitution than 15 or 20 years labour would have done free from mental suffering. My dear younger son has also been visited by affliction – his children have been sickly – and with the last eighteen months he has lost three out of six. I am happy to say that both my dear sons are affectionate and while they continue so – and are also honourable and useful members of society I shall be contented and thankful.

Dr Burney is much obliged by your friend's mention of him and begs me to offer you his best compliments and regards – I am sorry to say that he is frequently confined to his house by that painful disorder the Gout.

I am glad to find the world is soon to be favoured with other publications from the sensible, elegant and useful pen of Miss Edgeworth and i hope to be fortunate enough to get a [peek] at them. With affectionate and respectful remembrance to all your circle – ever your affectionate friend SB.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Sabrina Bicknell 13th May 1817.

My dear madam,

The distress which overwhelms England is equally felt in this country and people of all ranks find themselves suddenly obliged to reduce their expenses. Where the income is diminished, if the expenditure is not diminished in the same proportions ruin must ensue -

I have lost this year, by the failure of tenants above fifteen hundred pound – I have therefore been obliged to deprive myself and my family, not only of luxuries, but of conveniences – one of our greatest luxuries is the pleasure of assisting those who deserve and who want our friendship -

I find it however, but just to diminish my gifts in the same proportion, as I diminish my other expenses -

I must therefore beg you – to accept of £50, in lieu of any larger sum, that you may have expected from me, up to the 31st day of this month, which is my birthday – my age and ill health are such that this is probably the last sum you will receive on my account. Mrs E and Miss E their love to you.

I am dear Sabrina

sincerely yours

Richard Lovell Edgeworth.

Sabrina Bicknell to Richard Lovell Edgeworth 13th May 1817.

My dear friend,

Accept I pray you my warmest and grateful thanks for your dear letter and also for the liberal enclosure of £50 – which I assure you my excellent friend, I receive with a deep sense of regret and compunction – and so far kind sir from my having expected a larger sum from you – I really had not the slightest expectation of receiving this, or any other sum of money from you.

Some years back when your friendship and humanity prompted you to say, that you would allow me £10 a year – you then stated and I perfectly understood, that the promise was conditional and depended upon your power to spare the sum – as also upon my circumstances needing it, that your means are diminished I sincerely lament as many will miss your bounty – but for myself I am happy to own that I am less an object of such kind assistance than formerly, my sons being older they are not drag on my purse as the used to be. I am therefore able to lay by yearly a part of my income and thereby make a reserve for infirmities, which I feel daily approaching – not perhaps so much from actual old age, as from the many trials I have had to encounter. whenever my life ends I trust I shall feel it has not passed uselessly or intirely [sic] unfortunately.

Your account of yourself and declining health gives me great uneasiness – and has sunk my spirits more than I can express. I had hoped for the happiness of seeing you once more – but should this blessing be denied me in this world – God grant that I may be worthy of meeting in that world were all is peace and joy.

If I am not asking too great a favour, I should esteem it very kind if Mrs Edgeworth will now and then indulge me with a few lines stating how you are – as I am and shall be very anxious to hear of you -

With best and kindest compliments to Mrs and Miss Edgeworth and to the other branches of your family – believe dearest sir with sincerest affection and gratitude your friend and servant.

Sabrina Bicknell.

Your letter is dated the 6 but it did not reach me till yesterday the 12 – and I answered it by the return of post.

Adieu dear dear sir – and again accept ten thousand grateful thanks for all your goodness to me.

Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth 30th June 1817.

My dear Miss Edgeworth,

The melancholy tidings of the death of your dear father, and of my much valued, esteemed and loved friend reached me a few days ago – and I should not have been silent but that I have been occupied in packing up the wardrobes and sending to their respective homes of 5 boys – this toil ended – I take the first leisure moment to express my grief for the severe affliction you, dear Mrs Edgeworth and family are thrown into by the late melancholy event. Your loss is not that of common parent but also that of a delightfully cheerful and pleasant companion who always kindly

condescen'd to accommodate his manners and conversation to those around him – would to Heaven it was in my power to offer you consolation, but for this both you and I must look to a higher power and humbly hope that the Almighty who thinks fit to afflict us, will in his own time sooth our woe, by this sad loss I am deprived of my oldest friend, and one I have always found most ready and prompt to assist me in every way in his power – his kindness to me is deeply engraved on my heart and while I have life I shall dwell with grateful pleasure on his dear and loved memory.

Will you do me the favour to present my best respects to Mrs Edgeworth and also to the Miss Sneyds should they be with you – with every sentiment of esteem and regard believe me dear Miss Edgeworth your sincere and affectionate friend and servant.

Sabrina Bicknell.

Sabrina Bicknell to Maria Edgeworth 29th October 1818.

My dear Miss Edgeworth,

I am sorry to have been so long in replying to your kind letter, but the truth is I have waited in the hope of getting a quiet hour but this hope has be [sic] frustrated. And I now sit down in the [hurry] of occupation and in the disagreeable expectation of being disturbed every moment. I have read the part of the manuscript you have favoured me with and I see nothing in it that I ought to object to. On the contrary I feel sincere sentiments of gratitude for your friendly attention and caution not to [arouse] my feelings. And for this your goodness, I beg you to accept my heartiest thanks but my dear friend you must pardon me when I do wish the life

of my very dear and excellent friend your father could have been compleat [sic] without introducing the events of my childhood and adventurous history.

I am particularly obliged to you for omitting to mention the circumstances of my having been taken from the Foundling Hospital. And I will also thank you to say as little as possible respecting Mr Day's having given me the name of Sabrina Sydney – these romantic fancies do well enough in youth, but in age they are repugnant and distressing to one's feelings.

I have not consulted either of my sons concerning your intended publication, for as I see nothing they would reasonable [sic] object to and not liking to dwell upon the subject with them, I venture in my own name to assure you that I am not only satisfied but that I am extremely obliged to you for your truly friendly conduct to me, in having studied my feelings so kindly. When the life is finished I shall eagerly seek to possess it. And I am sure I shall read it with very painful sensations of pleasure.

I shall be most happy to hear from you whenever you can indulge me with a few lines for while my heart beats it will take an interest in all that relates to you and your dear family. I pray you to offer my best and grateful compliments to Mrs Edgeworth and family and also to Miss Sneyd should she be with you. I believe my dear Miss Edgeworth with every sentiment of esteem and affection yours very faithfully

Sabrina Bicknell.

P.S. I am happy in being able to tell you that my health is improving and that the complaint in my back is progressively getting well. and my surgeon assures me that he hopes very soon to take his leave.

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