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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Triumphant Typists: Speed Contests and the Legitimization of Women's Work	Brianna Allen	01
"I Powder With My Brother Ball;" Analyzing Powder Horns From the Colonial Period	Ethan King	24
God-Sanctioned Espionage in the Middle Ages: Female Spies in the Flemish Revolt	Skylar Stagaard	55
Depictions of Disability and Masculinity in Victorian Literature: Dinah Mulock Craik's <i>A Noble Life</i>	Mackenzie Pike	75

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Article 1

Triumphant Typists: Speed Contests and the Legitimization of Women's Work

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TRIUMPHANT TYPISTS: SPEED CONTESTS AND THE LEGITIMIZATION OF WOMEN'S WORK

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Abstract: In 1851, a census began circulating which brought to attention the surplus of unmarried, middle-class women in Britain. Gender norms of the time held that a woman's role was to be a mother; work, especially paid work, would degrade a woman and interfere with her sacred role. Yet, with the surfeit of men, there simply were not enough husbands to go around. Consequently, for those Victorian women with no fathers, brothers, or husbands to take care of them, destitution was their fate. Thus began debates about what to do with this so-called "odd woman," who could neither marry nor enter the workforce without sacrificing her status as a respectable lady. As these unmarried women began to search for jobs, the role of a typist became appealing, since it required little physical effort and was not *too* contrary to the conservative Victorian notions of a virtuous woman. At the same time, women competed in typewriting speed competitions alongside men. Frequently, they took home gold medals and proved to have superior typing skills. Demonstrating their skills at these contests generated dialogue about what physical and psychological attributes made women more proficient typists than men. Women's accomplishments in typewriting speed contests and the subsequent debates around their attributes highlight the process of transforming social attitudes that is required for lasting societal change. This paper seeks to demonstrate that by proving their superior typewriting skills in speed contests, these contest winners helped to legitimize their place not only as typists but also in the professional workplace as a whole.

Introduction

"[He] presented Miss Orr with the gold medal, whereat the whole audience [...] broke into a most enthusiastic applause, while the modest little lady carried off the token in triumph."²

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² "The Convention," *The Cosmopolitan Shorthand* 9, no. 8 (September 1888).

Champion of Toronto's 1888 typewriting speed contest, Miss Orr was one of many young women seeking work as a typewriter. The circulation of a census in 1851 brought to attention the surplus of unmarried, middle-class women in Britain. Gender norms of the time held that a woman's role was to be a mother. Thus, work would degrade a woman and interfere with her sacred role. With the surfeit of men, however, there simply were not enough husbands to go around. For those Victorian women with no fathers, brothers, or husbands to take care of them, destitution was their fate. This issue began debates about what to do with this so-called "odd woman," who could neither marry nor enter the workforce without sacrificing her status as a respectable lady. One solution to the odd women question required shifting the cultural mindset around what constituted respectable work through professionalization. In short, "women's work had to be professionalized" in order to make it culturally safe.³

As these unmarried women began to search for jobs, the role of a typist became appealing since it required little physical effort and was not *too* contrary to the conservative Victorian notions of a virtuous woman. In addition, as a piece of modern technology, the typewriter escaped the burden of gendered stereotypes and "allowed women to define themselves as workers with specialized technical skills."⁴ Women competed in typewriting speed competitions alongside men, frequently taking home gold medals and proving their superior typing skills. Demonstrating their skills at these contests generated dialogue about what physical and psychological attributes made women more proficient typists than men. Women's accomplishments in typewriting speed contests and the subsequent debates regarding their attributes highlight the process of transforming social attitudes required for lasting societal

³ Arlene Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 4.

⁴ Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*, 116.

change. This paper seeks to demonstrate that these contest winners helped to legitimize their place as both typists and in the professional workplace as a whole by proving their superior typewriting skills in speed contests.

Historians who focus on the role of female typists in spearheading women's entry into the professional field often ignore the critical role that speed contests played in the process of legitimization. Female typists quickly outnumbered male typists because their employers believed women to be better equipped for sitting still and focusing for long stretches of time. Additionally, as employers realized there was an abundance of young women ready to work for low wages, it became economical to hire more female workers. As other scholars have made clear, when women began to excel in these jobs, other positions, such as roles in the government, post office, and bookkeeping opened up to them. Clearly, the typist was a significant steppingstone for the modern female professional. The role of typewriting contests in shaping the public perception of a woman's capacity to work allowed for this process to occur.

Opening the Door: Female Typists and Women's Work

At the time of the odd woman debate, the typewriter was gaining prominence as a useful workplace tool. In *Gender, Technology, and the New Woman*, historian Lena Wånggren writes that "...from the 1880s onward the typewriter had a firm place both in office and popular culture."⁵ With its place established in professional life, the typewriter opened up new avenues for middle class women seeking work. Wånggren argues that as a result, "the typewriter has been read as a technology of emancipation."⁶ While the typewriter may have helped open the door for opportunity, the culture regarding women's work had yet to shift. Thus, "when women first

⁵ Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology and the New Woman* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 34.

⁶ Wånggren, *Gender, Technology and the New Woman*, 34.

started to work in offices, their presence was regarded pretty much as an oddity, and either praised as a courageous experiment or castigated as a ridiculous mistake.”⁷ Women who had already entered the workforce still needed to validate their role as respectable, professional, and compatible with motherhood.

Historians such as Carole Srole define two main approaches that women used to legitimize the female typist. In one, women emphasized their femininity. Victorian polite society insisted a proper lady managed her household gracefully and without complaint, devoting her life to obeying her husband and raising her children. In congruence with these norms, some female typists portrayed themselves as fragile and charming, dressing up for the office and segregating themselves from the men. Many of these women intended to marry, but wished to work to support themselves in the meantime. In an effort to ensure that their marriageability was not compromised, they stressed their femininity and propriety in the workplace. However, Srole proposes that “the image of the physically fragile, modest, and ornamental woman, guided by the rules of etiquette and the expectation of achieving her real calling of marriage, threatened her fitness for the office.”⁸ Following this argument, if professional work could compromise a woman’s respectability and virtue, then she should not be there at all. In effect, those who overemphasized stereotypes of femininity helped to strengthen the argument that women did not belong in the workplace.

The second method through which women sought to legitimize their place as typists was to “[turn] to a feminine version of the self-made man, the New Woman, to shift the balance closer to manliness and the male work ethic.”⁹ Essentially, women tried to prove their physical

⁷ Margery Davies, *Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter* (Temple University Press, 2010), 79.

⁸ Carole Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender: Masculinity and Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Courts and Offices* (University of Michigan Press, 2012), 145.

⁹ Srole, *Transcribing Class and Gender*, 159.

capabilities and their equality to men in terms of their ability to work. While Srole's first approach leaned into Victorian values, this method sought to uproot the basis of Britons' understanding of women and women's roles. It intended to use women's inherent capabilities to prove that like men, they could be tenacious, rational, and competent.

Typewriting speed contests and their role in justifying women's work fall into the latter category. In *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Victorian England*, Arlene Young uses speed contests as evidence of women who attempted to equalize their roles in the Victorian office through "consistently [demonstrating] their superior skills in typewriting competitions in Europe and North America."¹⁰ Young fails to elaborate on what the general public reactions to their "superior skills" were, however, and what impact that commentary had on perceptions of women's work as a whole. She later argues that "commentaries in the media that associate women workers with typewriters in the 1880s stress the promise of the work and the capabilities of the machines and operators, not the personal qualities of the women workers."¹¹ However, a close analysis of speed contests challenges this assumption. The media, specifically typewriting periodicals, began to point out specific qualities that women possessed which made them superior typists, such as their nimble fingers, neatness, and steady hands.

This paper illustrates that, for women to be viewed as legitimate workers without sacrificing their status as respectable ladies, two shifts in the conceptual schema were required. First, women needed to be seen as physically capable of taking on the demands of the workforce. If work was too difficult for a woman – demonstrated by an inability to keep up with her male counterparts or cope with the pressure of a fast-paced environment -- she could never be

¹⁰ Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*, 13.

¹¹ Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman* 113.

respected by employers. Secondly, the impact that work would have on a woman's purity and virtue required re-evaluation. Fears abounded that a young woman's innocence would be tainted in a male dominated sphere. More severely, there was widespread fear that partaking in work, a male duty, would unsex women by removing them from their natural role as mothers.

Historians such as Srole, Young, and Wånggren emphasize the typewriter and typist as drivers of female emancipation, but they neglect the critical role that speed contests played in legitimizing women's work. In secondary literature on female typists, contests are either alluded to as a negligible facet of the typewriter craze, or simply ignored. Reports and commentary on specific contests, advertisements, and debates in which women's statistics were invoked as proof of women's dexterity are subjects worthy of further evaluation. This evidence reveals that far more than a passing fad, contests were instruments of ideational progress. Specifically, speed contests provided an arena for women to prove to a wide audience that they could handle, even excel, in terms of manual dexterity and that they were no less feminine, respectable, or ladylike when working. Analyzing the perceptions of the female typist through the lens of the speed contest provides a more nuanced understanding of the cultural elements at play as women's world expanded into the 20th century.

Nimble Fingers and Exemplary Women: Speed Contests

Reports and commentary on speed contests illustrated to a contemporary audience that women could be proficient typists while maintaining their respectability. While there is ample evidence that typewriting speed contests were popular and frequent events, few are recounted in detail. The main sources for typewriting speed contests and typewriting in general come from periodicals such as *Bengough's Cosmopolitan Shorthander*, the *Shorthand Review*, the *London*

Phonographer, the *Phonographic World*, and *Browne's Phonographic Monthly*. Each of these periodicals had international audiences, with the United States, Canada, and England being the primary publishing sites. Contests were also international, taking place in New York City, Toronto, Chicago, and London. Two contests which were given detailed reports and commentary are the Metropolitan Typewriter Contest on August 2nd, 1888 and the Toronto Speed Contest on August 13th, 1888.

Important contestants in these competitions included Miss Mae E. Orr, Miss M. C. Grant, and Mr. Frank E. McGurrin. The *Evening Mail of Toronto*, referenced in the *Phonographic World*, gave details on Miss Orr's life outside of her participation in speed contests. It was reported that she "owns a very prosperous copying office in New York. Her nimble fingers bring her an income of about \$3,000 per year."¹² A successful business woman, Miss Orr fascinated typewriter periodicals and was a frequent contestant in speed contests of the late 1880s.

On August 2, 1888 in New York, the Metropolitan Typewriter Contest took place. Described as the "long-looked-for speed contest on typewriting machines," there were four total contestants: Ms. Grant, Ms. Orr, Mr. Myerson, and Mr. McGurrin.¹³ Each contestant had five minutes to type a letter that they could either have dictated to them, or could write from memory. At 479 words written, Mr. McGurrin placed first, followed by Ms. Orr, then Ms. Grant.¹⁴

Although McGurrin won the competition, the description of the contest is indicative of how female contestants challenged the perception of women's physical capabilities. In particular, the author described McGurrin as "one of the most expert in the United States, although it will be seen from the above that he was hard pushed by his fair lady opponents."¹⁵ To all those who

¹² "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," *The Phonographic World* 4, no. 1 (September 1888): 16.

¹³ E. N. Miner, ed., "The Metropolitan Typewriter Contest," *The Phonographic World* 3, no. 12 (August 1888): 263.

¹⁴ Miner, "The Metropolitan Typewriter Contest. 263

¹⁵ Miner, "The Metropolitan Typewriter Contest. 263

witnessed the contest, the skill of McGurrin's female peers was evident. The author made it a point to recognize that this win was a challenge for McGurrin, with both female contestants following close behind. Orr and Grant's performance, and the following commentary on the contest, highlighted to readers of the *Phonographic World* that these women provided fierce competition to an "expert" in the typewriting field. It could be of no doubt that in terms of physical capabilities, these women possessed skills worthy of notice.

The Toronto Speed Contest was a highly anticipated international speed contest hosted by the Canadian Shorthand Society to determine the "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World."¹⁶ *Bengough's Cosmopolitan Shorthand* and the *Phonographic World* each provided unique commentary on the competition and contestants. They both agreed that on August 13th, 1888, five women and four men, including Ms. Orr, Ms. Grant, and Mr. McGurrin, gathered to compete on a worldwide stage. Considered one of the largest attendances for a speed contest, with "seventy-five being present in the afternoon,"¹⁷ the results were highly anticipated by typewriter-enthusiasts and laymen alike. Each participant had five minutes to type- then their work was examined by a committee. After four hours of deliberation, the committee pronounced Miss Mae E. Orr as the winner. She took home a gold medal and \$50 prize (no small sum) for her impressive average of 98.7 words per minute.¹⁸

To begin with the description from *Bengough's Cosmopolitan Shorthand*, the writer noted that "the male operators had an advantage over the ladies" because they could peel off their coats and roll up their sleeves so nothing would interfere with their movements.¹⁹ Yet, Ms. Orr obtained first place and Ms. Grant fourth. Here, the writer admitted these women proved

¹⁶ "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 16.

¹⁷ "The Convention."

¹⁸ "The Typewriting Tournament," *The Cosmopolitan Shorthand* 9, no. 8 (September 1888): 213.

¹⁹ "Tournament Notes," *The Cosmopolitan Shorthand* 9, no. 8 (September 1888): 214.

their skills, even at a marked disadvantage. No claims were made to defend or excuse the men's loss. Instead, the female contestants' success was made to be more impressive and undeniable.

Following the summary of events were sketches of the contestants. The article reported that Ms. Orr had a "most modest and unassuming manner," and Ms. Grant "sat with quiet dignity amidst the excitement of the conflict."²⁰ Significantly, Grant and Orr were described in ways that highlighted their propriety. These descriptions helped prove that professional work and feminine traits were not mutually exclusive; the female typist could both excel at her trade and possess important Victorian traits such as modesty and dignity. On the other hand, eighth place contestant Ms. Berry was described as having "unusual pluck and determination."²¹ Though considered "unusual" for these traits, she was sketched with professional terms that were stereotypically masculine descriptors. Notably, these traits were deemed "unusual," yet that was as far as the author is willing to draw conclusions- her "determination" is merely "unusual," not threatening or subversive to her propriety. This speed contest and the subsequent commentary in *Bengough's Cosmopolitan Shorthand* demonstrated to a wide audience that the female typist could be both ladylike and professional.

In a similar way, commentary on the 1888 Toronto Speed Contest and its contestants in the *Phonographic World* helped to legitimize the female typist's ability to work. On account of Orr's win, the author wrote that she "...has proved her claim to the distinction [Champion Typewriter Operator of the World], at actual work, in International contest."²² Here, the word "proved" is especially important. Ms. Orr verified in a categorical fashion that in fair competition with the greatest speed typists in the world, she was the best. In a society grappling with how to

²⁰ "Sketches of Contestants," 214.

²¹ "Sketches of Contestants," 214.

²² "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 16.

correlate women's skill with preconceived notions of her inferior abilities, Orr gave undeniable proof that women were physically capable of typewriter work.

In addition to its own commentary, the *Phonographic World* reported on what other news outlets had to say about the contest. In terms of her demeanor, the author of the *World* reported that Orr "...sat as straight as an arrow right through the contest. One could observe the signs of unusual mental activity in her face, but her bearing was calm throughout. And how her nimble fingers did fly over the key-board of the Remington!"²³ In many ways, this report exemplified both how Orr challenged preconceived notions of a woman's capacity to work and the ways in which her contemporaries rationalized her superior performance. Primarily, the author took notice that neither the pressure nor the physical work of the contest was detrimental to Orr's physical bearing or calm disposition, indicating that she endured such an environment without consequence. Perhaps in an effort to understand how Orr prevailed over McGurkin and the other male contestants, the writer pointed to her "nimble fingers" and "unusual mental activity." Similar to Ms. Berry, Orr was deemed "unusual" for her intellect, but not dangerous or subversive. Further, focus on her "nimble fingers" was an explanation based on something unique about women that made them quick typists. Through her performance and bearing, Orr showed that women could work successfully without detriment on the basis of features unique to them.

After speaking about Miss Orr's personal attitude, the author of the *World* article compared her actions to the other lady contestants. The writer broadened Orr's behavior, and noted that "what has been said of Miss Orr as to her bearing before the machine, may be said also of the other ladies. They didn't stoop at the shoulders and make faces."²⁴ In one sense,

²³ "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 17.

²⁴ "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 17.

pointing out that these women retained a good posture and a calm countenance indicates that this disposition was unexpected. They defied assumptions about their behavior, setting a new example that women could excel at typing without detriment to their posture or attitude. Broadening this insight to all the female contestants suggested to the audience that Miss Orr's demeanor was not merely a fluke, perhaps permitting a generalization to how most women would act.

Typewriting speed contests created a space where women could not only showcase their talents, but also quell fears about the unwomanly woman through being both respectable and skilled. The article "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World" in the *Phonographic World* devoted a significant amount of space to Miss Orr and her personal achievements following a description of the speed contest. The author observed that in terms of personal qualities, "she combines with business ability an unassuming and attractive manner; but is possessed of a quiet determination, the exercise of which carried her successfully through the Toronto contest."²⁵ In this statement, the author acknowledged two ideas which had been seen by many as incompatible within a woman: "business ability" and "determination," with an "attractive manner." Through her character, Orr proved that engaging in typewriting and business did not unsex her. Importantly, the writer believed Orr's "quiet determination" helped her win the competition. In a subtle way, attributing her win to professional, rather than nurturing characteristics, helped to legitimize Orr as a respectable worker. Orr's success, attitude, and praise qualified her as a typist and businesswoman who was both feminine and skilled, setting an example for what all typewriter women could be.

²⁵ "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 16.

Furthermore, contemporaries believed that speed contests were fundamental to advancing women's work. "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World" took Ms. Orr's praise a step further by suggesting that "such women are ornaments to the profession, and do more every day toward advancing the interests of, and removing the prejudice against, female labor, than does a "Woman's Rights" Convention."²⁶ While taking a somewhat cynical view of women's rights conventions, this statement nonetheless emphasized the importance of speed contests in legitimizing women's work. Orr, Grant, and the other female contestants demonstrated to a wide audience two key ideas: their capacity to excel at manual labor, and that they retained their propriety in a professional setting. They remained calm, proper, and agreeable, never once flinching under the pressure. When given the opportunity, Orr and the other female contestants categorically proved that they were superior typists to their male peers. Evidently, contemporaries viewed speed contests as indispensable evidence towards a woman's cause as she fought for her place in the workforce. Effectively, speed contests served as evidence to advocates of women's labor that a woman could work without physical consequence, excel at her job, and do so without threatening to unsex herself.

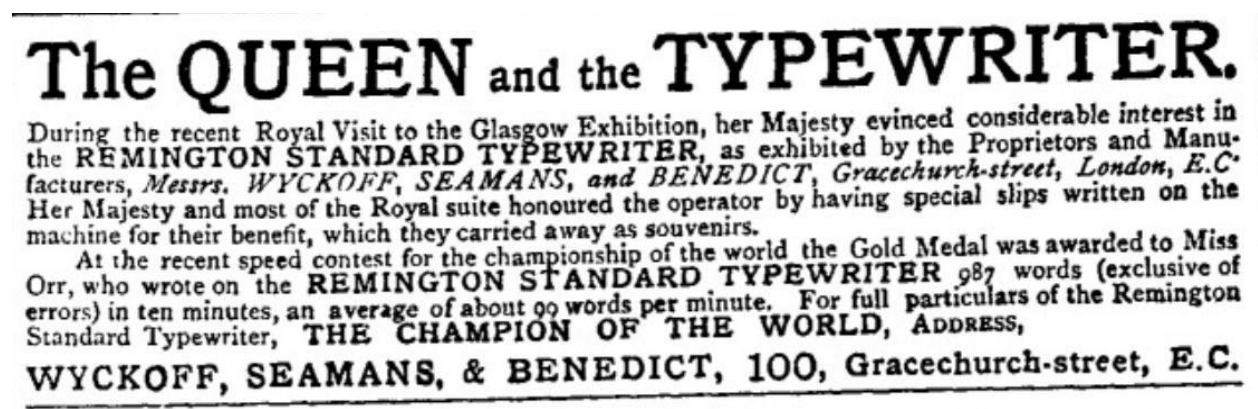


Figure 1.²⁷

²⁶ "Champion Typewriter Operator of the World," 16.

²⁷ "The Queen and the Typewriter," *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 15, 1888, British Library Newspapers, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BA3200412921/BNCN?sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=838a16b2>.

Advertisements spread the news of women's triumph in speed contests to wide audiences. For example, on September 15th 1888, a notice was published in the Pall Mall Gazette, a London newspaper (fig. 1). Advertising the Remington Standard Typewriter, it used Ms. Orr's win in the 1888 Toronto Speed Contest as evidence for the typewriter's superior performance compared to other models. Here, the audience was much broader than a stenography and typewriting periodical. Individuals from around London, on any side of the women's work debate, would see that Miss Orr was the gold medal champion. Speed contests and advertisements like this one allowed for evidence of women's success in typewriting to reach a broader audience, spreading notice of women's achievements, thus providing support to the women's work movement. In this way, Orr and her success was broadcasted widely, serving as proof that women were just as talented and physically capable as men at speed typing.

Contests in Commentary

Not only was commentary on specific speed contests useful for legitimizing women's work, but references to them as evidence for women's capabilities contributed to the advancement of women's labor. These contests became useful examples of the female typist's skills and her manual dexterity. Mr. Caswell, employer of Miss Grant, was interviewed in *Browne's Phonographic Monthly* (1887), and expressed that Miss Grant and Miss Orr were the fastest typists he knew. He supported this idea by using a speed contest they competed in, where "Miss Orr won a prize offered by Remington [...] by writing 385 words in 4 minutes and 30 seconds."²⁸ His conclusion, based on Miss Orr and Miss Grant's performances in speed contests, was that, "there are a number of ladies who are expert stenographers as well as typewriters." Due

²⁸ "The Bridal Art," *Browne's Phonographic Monthly* 12, no. 12 (December 1887): 375.

to the fact that Orr and Grant consistently proved their skills in these contests, influential men like Caswell began to advocate for the fact that there were many ladies who were expert stenographers and typists. In this example, Caswell was able to make a larger argument about all female typists because he could use speed contests as compelling evidence to fortify his case. The skill which female contestants exhibited in speed contests provided ammunition for advocates of female typists and women's work more broadly.

In an article titled "Women" from the *Phonographic World*, an unknown author promoted speed contests as a means to validate typists' skills. The author observed that:

"Women rank as equals with men as the best and most rapid type-writers, which certainly calls for the highest possible degree of skill, both in deftness of fingers and quickness of brain; in fact, it is an open question to-day as to whether the very best operators are not women rather than men."²⁹

The author followed this bold claim by wondering, "why should not some of our women court writers enter the lists at the coming Speed Contest and prove their claim to recognition as the equals of men in phonographic proficiency?"³⁰ Significantly, this author believed speed contests had the ability to prove that female typists could be equal to male typists. Additionally, she held that they reinforce the idea that women possessed "deftness of the fingers and quickness of brain." In this instance, speed contests functioned as the means to prove these women's capabilities since they served as concrete evidence that women could compete equally with men based on their inherent traits.

Women setting records in speed contests contributed to the legitimation of the typist as a proficient worker. For instance, in the December 1888 edition of Bengough's *Cosmopolitan Shorthander*, *The Office* announced a typewriting speed contest to take place on January 9th in

²⁹ "Women," *The Phonographic World* 3, no. 10 (June 1888): 204.

³⁰ "Women," *The Phonographic World*. 204

London. Unfortunately, later editions of the *Shorthander* from after 1888 to see the results of the contest are unavailable. However, the notice advertised the contest by noting that a “...special prize of \$20 to an operator exceeding Miss Orr’s speed of 98.7 words per minute” would be awarded at the contest.³¹ Here, Miss Orr set the new standard for speed typing. Not only did she succeed in contests, but her remarkable speed became a goal for other typists to strive towards. In this way, Orr’s recognition continued to spread, and with it the notion that women were setting the new bar for speed and excellence within the field. Though subtle, Orr’s record functioning as the benchmark helped to further the idea that women were indeed capable at typewriting, if not superior to their male counterparts.

Similar to typewriting periodicals, the success of Miss Orr’s 1888 Toronto Speed Contest was used as evidence towards the legitimization of work in women’s journals. For instance, the *American Woman’s Journal* reported that “it is only by special mental qualifications, combined with manual dexterity, that Miss Orr and other expert operators have acquired such a wonderful degree of skill.”³² The *American Woman’s Journal* described its cause as to “prove woman’s ability to manage large enterprises.”³³ While selecting stories for the journal, the editors believed that Orr’s triumph fit their mission to prove women’s capabilities. The mental and physical qualities which Orr demonstrated in the competition furthered the woman’s work argument across many fields, and in this case, business and stockholding. The physical and mental attributes requisite of speed contests were transmutable to other fields. Thus, Orr helped substantiate women’s work as a whole based on her performance in contest.

³¹ “Typewriting Speed Contest,” *The Cosmopolitan Shorthander* 9, no. 11–12 (December 1888): 258.

³² “The World’s Champion Operator, Miss Mae E. Orr,” *American Woman’s Journal, the Business Woman’s Journal* 5, no. 1 (October 1, 1892): 39.

³³ “An Investment for Women,” *American Woman’s Journal, the Business Woman’s Journal* 5, no. 1 (October 1892): 1.

Into the twentieth century, women's performances in speed contests were cited as evidence for their manual dexterity and typewriting skills. For instance, C. E. Smith, early twentieth century author of *Practical Course in Touch Typewriting*, advocated for women's physical capabilities in the workforce. To support his argument, Smith observed that "...many women had won typewriting speed contests," which led him to conclude that women should be considered "equal, if not superior, to the opposite sex as typists."³⁴ Approximately twenty-five years after Miss Orr won the Toronto Speed Contest, Smith used women's performance in speed contests to justify their role as superior typists to men. Since contests were empirical evidence of speed and dexterity, they served as proof of proficiency for decades after they took place. Orr, Grant, and other winning women, though unnamed by Smith, created a significant enough impact that a quarter century later their successes were still used as justification for female typist's abilities.

Denigration of the Typist and Speed Contest

Speed contests helped legitimate a new field of respectable work for women and their position in the workforce as a whole, but their prestige soon began to decline. Towards the end of the 19th century, perceptions of female typists began to shift yet again. From fearful assumptions that typewriting would unsex women, to the industry flooded with eager applicants, by the 1890s, "the work [...] was fast gaining notoriety as an occupation debased by underselling among workers and by exploitation on the part of employers."³⁵ An imbalance of uneducated typewriter women created "intense anxiety about the erosion of the typewriter's status," as more

³⁴ C. E. Smith, "Are Men Better Typists than Woman?," *Scientific America* 109 (1913): 411.

³⁵ Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*, 121.

women sought clerical work than there were positions.³⁶ While the typist lost status, the stenographer gained distinction. The typist became regarded as an uneducated and unskilled worker, whereas the stenographer position required intellect, education, and focused skill. The stenographer moved upward into more honorable positions, such as within law courts, while the typist moved downward into a position scarcely above sweated labor. As the typist fell from grace, so too did typewriting speed contests suffer a loss in prominence and credibility.

For instance, in 1893, the validity of speed contests as a means to measure competency came under scrutiny in the *Shorthand Review*. Reporter W. J. Guest argued that “it is safe to say that no reporter who has made any reputation on his own merits will ever have anything to do with these fraudulent ‘speed’ contests.”³⁷ For Guest, since the contests only served to measure speed and not intelligence or stamina, they could not be considered true measures of a typist or stenographer’s capabilities. The central debate had shifted from wondering if women could work, to which professions should they be relegated to. As Guest diminished the speed contest to a “fraudulent” activity, he also diminished the value of the typist. Speed and manual dexterity alone were no longer satisfactory qualifications for higher professions such as reporting, court stenography, or bookkeeping. These premier roles required a certain level of intellect to, in Guest’s words, “produce an intelligent report...”³⁸ Having proved their physical capabilities in contest, this narrative shift meant that the traits (women’s nimble fingers and deftness) which helped them enter the field now functioned to keep them from rising in their careers. If women were proficient typists because of their quick fingers, then professions requiring intellect and

³⁶ Young, *From Spinster to Career Woman*. 119

³⁷ W. J. Guest, “A Review of Speed Contests,” *The Shorthand Review* 5, no. 7 (July 1893): 117.

³⁸ Guest, “A Review of Speed Contests,” 117.

advanced education ought to be left to the men. In effect, women's success in typewriting speed contests had become a detriment to their ability to move up in the professional world.

Compounded by the increasing value placed on stenographers over typists, speed contests became further denigrated. Editor of the July 1893 volume of the *Shorthand Review* commented that:

“It is not so very long ago that the “Speed contest” craze was in “full blast,” and accounts of the wonderful performances that it engendered filled the columns of shorthand journals with fish stories and the minds of beginners with amazement. It then fortunately died out, for the shorthand world very soon decided that speed contests were of no practical value.”³⁹

Speed contests, as quickly as they had gained popularity, lost their repute as measures of proficiency. Now, with accuracy all the rage, short bursts of quick typing were deemed “utterly unworthy [...] [of] the attention of competent stenographers.”⁴⁰ With stenography placed above typewriting in terms of professional legitimacy, speed contests were relegated to the silly games of novice typists, leaving the real work to skilled stenographers. Devalued, speed contests no longer provided compelling evidence of a woman's capacity to work. What did it matter if Miss Orr was champion typist of the world, if speed contests no longer proved any sort of expertise?

Into the 20th Century: Legacy of Speed Contests

In the *Shorthand Review*, an article written by “one who typewrites,” brought a new perspective to the devaluation of typewriter women. In defense of her fellow typists, she wrote:

[Female typists] have, by dint of perseverance and ability, made a niche in this very high wall of woman's progress for themselves, and now they claim it as their right to hold the place they have won regardless of the jibes, caused by the fear of being left in the race than for any other reason. The typewriter is not an abused person, neither is she an inane, giggling piece of sweetness, but an earnest, brave toiler in

³⁹ W. E. Carson, ed., *The Shorthand Review* 5, no. 7 (July 1893): 112.

⁴⁰ Carson, *The Shorthand Review*, 112.

the ranks of bread-winners, asking but justice and sure of obtaining it, and willing to give in return intelligent, honest service.⁴¹

The “one who typewrites” demonstrates why it matters that women proved their capabilities in speed contests, regardless of how contests came to be perceived. It is because she has persevered; against insults and assumptions, fears and stereotypes, with determination and grace, the female typist used her innate abilities to stake her claim in professional life.

Typewriting speed contests, the female typist, and more broadly the perception of a woman’s legitimacy in the professional world went through major shifts in the latter half of the 19th century. Debates about whether or not women could work, from a moral, physical, and mental perspective, morphed into discussion of where a woman could work, provided that she lacked the higher intellect necessary for professional life. However, as the “one who typewrites” suggests, “by dint of perseverance and ability, [they] made a niche in this very high wall of women's progress for themselves.”⁴² The struggle for legitimacy in the workforce remained an ongoing battle, yet the female typist helped open the door for women to step into the arena.

At the heart of the struggle, typewriting speed contests were essential to creating this niche for women. Women’s proficiency in these contests, evident through Miss Orr, Miss Grant, and others, provided undeniable evidence that women did possess the physical capacity to work without impeding their womanhood. With the world as an audience, these contestants exemplified that women could be both successful in the business world and retain their femininity. Efforts to denigrate speed contests and typists could only go so far; women prevailing triumphant could not be unwritten from history. The legacy of the triumphant typist fueled arguments for a woman’s capacity to work for decades to come. Venturing into uncharted

⁴¹ One Who “Typewrites,” “Truth About Typewriting,” *The Shorthand Review* 5, no. 9 (September 1893): 163.

⁴² One Who “Typewrites,” “Truth About Typewriting,” 163.

territory with bravery and elegance, the female typist encapsulates the spirit of the women's movement as she sought to legitimize herself as an intellectual, capable, and respectable professional.

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Article 2

“I Powder With My Brother Ball;” Analyzing Powder Horns From the Colonial Period

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“I POWDER WITH MY BROTHER BALL;” ANALYZING POWDER HORNS FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the engravings of powder horns in 18th century New England, primarily from the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. These horns offer unique insights into the lives of the largely anonymous men who fought in these wars. The horns are first evaluated from a cultural perspective, looking at references to religion, love, and death. Secondly, the horns are analyzed from a political perspective, focusing on the shifting loyalties of New Englanders away from the British King and toward a new nation.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, North America was plunged into a series of wars that changed the trajectory of the continent. These wars were fought primarily by anonymous men whose lives are largely forgotten. Despite their lack of paper trails, many of these men left behind personal objects that were preserved from generation to generation. Engraved powder horns were saved and preserved up until today, leaving a large collection of objects to evaluate. These horns, created by men from all different backgrounds and social strata, illustrated the men’s hopes, fears, beliefs, and values. Most importantly, they showed the large-scale but gradual change in political opinion on the British monarchy from its highest ebb in 1763 to the outbreak of revolution in 1775.

The first of these conflicts, the Seven Years’ War, was a worldwide conflict fought between 1756 and 1763, in which the war in America—the French and Indian War—was a subsection. In the Americas, Great Britain controlled the burgeoning thirteen colonies that hugged the Atlantic seaboard, while France controlled a vast but sparsely populated land referred to as New France, that included Canada and the Mississippi regions. France and her Native

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American allies gained the upper hand early on, defeating British regulars and American provincials who were ill prepared for wilderness fighting. However, with the rise of William Pitt in the British government, Britain and its American colonies redoubled their efforts and gained victories in 1758 and 1759 and eventually conquering New France. In 1763, the war ended with a decisive British victory and France ceded the majority of its territory in North America.²

Britain had more than doubled its national debt to 146,000,000 pounds to win this victory. The British ministry, which had generally pursued a policy of “salutary neglect” towards the thirteen colonies, began taxing the colonies to fund a war which they had benefited heavily from. Many provincials perceived this as an infringement on their rights as Englishmen and prompted a tumultuous decade, culminating in 1775 with war. Despite tremendous battlefield victories, Great Britain could not crush the American rebellion, forcing their withdrawal from the thirteen colonies and the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, which formally recognized America’s independence.³

The engravings of powder horns flourished during these wars, ushering in a period known as the ‘golden age’ of powder horns. Powder horns were relatively small, conical-shaped objects made of oxen horns. Powder horns carried the black powder necessary to fire a musket, making them essential tools in eighteenth century warfare. They hung from a cord over a man’s shoulder and sat next to the waist, like a briefcase.⁴ Although not all powder horns were engraved, the ones that were typically shared several commonalities, including inscriptions of the owner’s name, the year, and the horn’s place of origin. The owner of the powder horn was not

² For information on the Seven Years’ War in America, see Fred Anderson, *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York, 2005).

³ For information on the American Revolution and the years preceding, see David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride* (Oxford, 1995).

⁴ Steven V. Grancsay, *American Engraved Powder Horns: A Study Based on the J.H. Grenville Collection* (New York, 1945), 1-2.

always the actual carver of the horn. Most of the time, men would have other soldiers particularly proficient in carving engrave their horns, resulting in both a combination of images and ideas requested by the owner and new artistic flourishes added by the carver.⁵ Famous carvers, most notably Jacob Gay and John Bush, developed their own signature styles which are identifiable without even seeing a carver's mark. These carvings were often made in forts or military encampments. During the Seven Years War, most horns were carved in the forts that protected the New York frontier from French attacks from Canada. In contrast, horns of the American Revolution were predominantly carved during sieges like the Siege of Boston in 1775.

This paper will focus on powder horns made by men from New England between 1747 and 1778. The powder horns will be evaluated first from a cultural perspective and then from a political perspective. The cultural section will be broken down into three main themes—love, religion, and death—which were chosen based on the frequency the images or inscriptions appear on the horns and their importance in understanding New England society. The political section will analyze the horns chronologically from the Seven Years War up to the start of the American Revolution. Of note will be the changing imagery in comparison with those of the Seven Years War and before. Prior to the above analysis, this paper will begin with three biographies of men who owned powder horns to provide a context in which to think about these objects.

⁵ E. Lome, "Horns of Plenty: Decorated Military Powder Horns in Colonial America," *Journal of Antiques and Collectibles*, <https://journalofantiques.com/features/horns-plenty-decorated-military-powder-horns-colonial-america/>.

Three Lives

An eclectic group of men from various social statuses, economic groups, and ethnic backgrounds owned the powder horns of the American colonial-period. Some powder horn owners stamped their names prominently in history books, while others have faded into obscurity, leaving little evidence of their existence. Amos Barrett came from an influential family that settled in Concord in 1640 and was a typical powder horn owner, making him quite representative of the group as a whole. Barrett's horn was carved in 1775 in Concord, Massachusetts. (Figure 1) and is inscribed with his name and some depictions of animals. Most interestingly, it bears the inscription "April XIX", which was carved on the horn at a later date.⁶ When the horn was carved, Barrett was 22 years old and living with



Figure 1. Powder Horn of Amos Barrett. The phrase, "ARIL XIX" symbolizes the importance Barrett placed on his participation in the Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775.

his parents, which meant he likely spent most of his days working on his father's farm or performing manual labor on other farms as part of the common New England village exchange

⁶ For Amos Barrett's Powder Horn see, <https://concordmuseum.org/collection/powder-horn/> accessed 4/3/2023

systems that took the place of physical currency. He would remain dependent on his father until he married, at which point his father would either pass down part of his estate or give him money to purchase his own land.⁷ Alongside his farming duties, Barrett served in Captain George Minot's company of militia with many other men in Concord between the ages of 16 and 60, whom for the most part he was closely related to by blood or marriage.⁸

When the Revolutionary War broke out in April of 1775, the Battle of Lexington and Concord marked the most important event of Barrett's life. The memory stuck with him for most of his life, and in 1825 he recorded an account of the battle, writing "When I come to look back I find it is 50 years since, though so long [ago], I can remember the whole of it I think better than I can remember things 5 years ago."⁹ He commemorated the importance of this event with the inscription on his powder horn of "April XIX," carved in remembrance of the date of the battle, April 19, 1775. Like many other provincials who fought in major battles, this experience greatly impacted Barrett because its drastic difference from the ordinary life of a rural farmer. Barrett later served in the American Revolution, most notably participating in the Battle of Saratoga.¹⁰ After the war, like other younger Concord residents, he moved to the frontier because land was becoming scarce in the early settlements of New England. Barrett settled in Union, Maine where he lived out the rest of his life.¹¹

The lives of other powder horn owners during this time period were strikingly similar to Barrett's, living most of their lives in small farming towns while also serving as soldiers during the Seven Year's War or the American Revolution. Israel Putnam's horn was carved at Fort

⁷ Fred Anderson, *A People's Army* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 34.

⁸ Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York, 1976), 71.

⁹ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 11.

¹⁰ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 7.

¹¹ Barrett, *The Concord Fight*, 5.

William Henry in 1756 by the prolific carver John Bush and contained a four-line rhyme and a map of British forts in upstate New York. (Figure 2.)¹² While the precise engravings and careful calligraphy are important, the value of this horn lies in its owner. Putnam was a New England



Figure 2. Israel Putnam's powder horn carved in 1756 at Fort William Henry. It features a four line rhyme and the motto, "W A R," directly underneath.

hero who fought in both the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution. His exploits were numerous; he narrowly escaped death several times and, most famously, he commanded American forces at Bunker Hill where some say he uttered the words, "Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes."¹³ He was widely respected and known throughout the Americas, as

¹² William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 15.

¹³ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'Beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), 93-96.

demonstrated by the fact that he was the only man aside from George Washington to be unanimously appointed a general in the Continental Army.

The word that seems to symbolize Putnam's life best is inscribed on his powder horn in three large uppercase letters: "W A R." Putnam's life, like many other fellow colonists, was punctuated by imperial wars that spilled over to the colonies. He was not a professional soldier, per se, but much of his adult life was spent as a soldier on campaign. This was a common experience; during the eighteenth century, wars were a fact of life with Queen Anne's War (1702-1712), King George's War (1744-1748), the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), and the American Revolution (1775-1783), all taking place within a hundred years and affecting the lives of countless New Englanders. As David Hackett Fischer notes in *Paul Revere's Ride*, "In 1775, many men of Massachusetts had been to war. They knew its horrors from personal experience. With a few exceptions, they thought of fighting as a dirty business that had to be done from time to time if good men were to survive in a world of evil."¹⁴ While Putnam occupied a higher social status than some other powder horn owners due to his widespread fame and long-time service, his wartime experiences were shared by many other New Englanders.

Putnam's life story was well preserved due to his elite status, but this was not the case for countless others like Prince Simbo. Simbo was an African American and probably a free man because it was quite rare for masters to allow enslaved people to go off and fight. The fact that the horn was carved before he enlisted furthers this point and indicates that he may have served in his town's militia unit before enlisting in the Continental Army. Simbo's enlistment date signifies his lower status within society. Many men of substance fought in the early years of war, but gradually grew war-weary, resulting in the phenomenon that Robert Gross writes about,

¹⁴ David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 155.

which is that “by 1778, “the war was now being fought principally by landless younger sons, by the permanent poor, and by blacks” who were hired to replace conscripted men.¹⁵

Simbo’s horn was carved in 1777 in Glastonbury, Connecticut (Figure 3), with the most prominent image being a dove flying and carrying a feather with “Liberty” written on it.¹⁶



Figure 3. Prince Simbo’s horn carved in 1777 in Glastonbury, Connecticut. In the center of the horn is a dove carrying a feather with the word “liberty” inscribed on it.

As an African American man, Prince Simbo’s horn illustrates the paradox of his situation. Simbo clearly was a staunch believer in the American cause and the idea of liberty, which he professes proudly on his horn. Nevertheless, he must also have recognized that these slogans would not immediately bring change to society and that many opposed equality for all. Despite these contradictions, this horn shows that many African Americans did fight for American Independence. This was not a new development; in the Seven Years’ War African Americans, including the famous horn carver John Bush, fought in provincial units.¹⁷ While it is easy to think of the owners of the powder horns solely as white farmers, this was not always the case, as

¹⁵ Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*, 149-151.

¹⁶ For Prince Simbo’s Powder Horn, see https://www.si.edu/object/powder-horn-carved-name-revolutionary-war-soldier-prince-simbo:nmaahc_2009.14.1 accessed 4/3/2023.

¹⁷ P. Terjanian, “Rediscovering John Bush: Recent Research Sheds Light on the Life and Work of a Massachusetts Militiamen and Influential Horn Carver,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (2023).

highlighted through the experiences of African-American soldiers like Prince Simbo. These three men, along with countless others, engraved their foremost thoughts and emotions onto their powder horns. In doing so, the various rhymes and imagery provide unique insights into their lives, frequently relating to themes such as love, religion, death, and politics.

Love

Love features prominently on powder horns, often in a frustrated and depressed manner. A prime example of this theme is Thaddeus Bennet's horn, which was carved in 1757 at Fort No. 4 in New Hampshire. The horn is inscribed with a short rhyme which states "The rowse is red the violet is blue and a fols love can not be true."¹⁸ Bennet appears to be referring to himself as a "fol," whose love was not reciprocated. The men who served in the provincial armies of the Seven Years' War were away from home and encountered very few women for at least a year at a time. Stranded in forts in the remote wilderness of North America, most soldiers felt a similar futility about their love lives. Sergeant Ichabod French's horn, made between 1755 and 1757, expresses similar sentiments, although in a less direct manner. French's horn depicts two well-dressed couples ballroom dancing.¹⁹ (Figure 4.) Through this horn, French was likely both expressing sadness over missing out on this aspect of life and, perhaps, worrying about his love interest dancing with another man at home. Stephen Tambling's horn expresses his lustful desires. Carved in 1761, the horn is inscribed with four lines, which say, "Curteous lady these

¹⁸ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 19.

¹⁹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 21.

lines I do present / Unto you to give your heart



Figure 4. Ichabod French's horn carved between 1755 and 1757 near Lake George, New York. The dancing couples on the back show French's longing for a companion.

content / Not only this but willingly would kneel / The first letter of each line to feel.”²⁰ When spelling out the first letter of each four lines, the result is a derogatory phrase for the female reproductive organ. It is important to remember that the provincial armies were mostly composed of younger men, whose desire and feelings were preoccupied by thoughts of the opposite sex. Army life suppressed many of these emotions, whether it be worry or lust, which boiled over into inscriptions on the powder horns.

The horns also expressed another kind of love, one more familial and platonic. The inscription on Ebenezer Hitchcock's horn describes that it was “made at Crown Point October 17th 1762 in the 12th year of his [the owner's] age.”²¹ While it is possible the owner was actually 12 years

²⁰ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 53.

²¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 48.

old, it is not likely that he enlisted at such a young age. A much more plausible explanation is that the true owner of this horn was Hitchcock's father, Captain Amos Hitchcock, who would have had the horn engraved and then given it as a present to his son on his return home. It is telling that rather than simply engrave the horn for himself, Hitchcock's thoughts turned to his young son. This emphasizes the longing for family that soldiers away on campaign experienced, which were exacerbated by the fact that for many men these campaigns were some of the only



Figure 5. Nicholas Edgecomb Pickett's horn carved in 1766 probably in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Pickett's three children figure prominently at the bottom of the horn with both of the boys wearing crowns.

times that they were away from home for significant periods of time. Nicholas Edgecomb Pickett's horn was carved in 1776, while he was home after the Seven Year's War and echoes these sentiments. (Figure 5.)²² It bears the carving of three faces, two male and one female. Underneath are inscribed Mary, Nicholas, and John, the names of Pickett's three children at the time of the horns' creation. Nicholas and John both wear crowns, illustrating both their importance and Pickett's loyalty to his family. Almost all the iconography on his horn focus on

²² William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 65.

his family, with more illustrations depicting his wife and family doing various activities. This shows the importance of family in this era, when many people who did not go away to college and lived in their fathers houses well into their twenties and stayed dependent until middle age. Familial connections were critical to and often defined the trajectory of a man's life.

Religion

Religion was a central part of life for New Englanders from a young age, as seen through the ample religious imagery on powder horns, specifically of Biblical stories. Biblical narratives were ingrained in New England men's minds from a young age. *The New England Primer* was a textbook used by many young children, which not only taught the basics of English literacy, but also incorporated religious themes throughout the lessons. In the section devoted to learning how to read, the first sentence says, "In Adam's Fall, we sinned all."²³ For many New Englanders, biblical stories were as well known to them as their ABCs and were used to teach children the difference between right and wrong.

James Meldrum's horn underscores the religious culture that ran rampant through New England. Meldrum was a British soldier serving in the 42nd regiment at Crown Point in 1759, but the horn was carved by a 'professional' American carver, who most likely incorporated much of his own imagery on the horn. One scene on the horn depicts two people under a tree each with an apple. The image, labeled "Adam" and "Eve," depicts the creation story in Genesis from which original sin began.²⁴ Simeon Smith's horn, carved during the American Revolution, is

²³ *The New England Primer: Twentieth Century Reprint* (Boston, 1948), 20.

²⁴ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 60.

inscribed with the words, “Grait God of Worship protect our cause and we’ll submit thy will.”²⁵ (Figure 6.) The phrase emphasizes that God intervenes in human affairs and that by maintaining religious piety, God will intervene on one’s side. This concept was widespread, with many men in the Seven Years’ War attributing victories and losses to the will of God.²⁶ For Smith and others like him, God was not far off, but rather a driving force for good and bad things that happened in life.

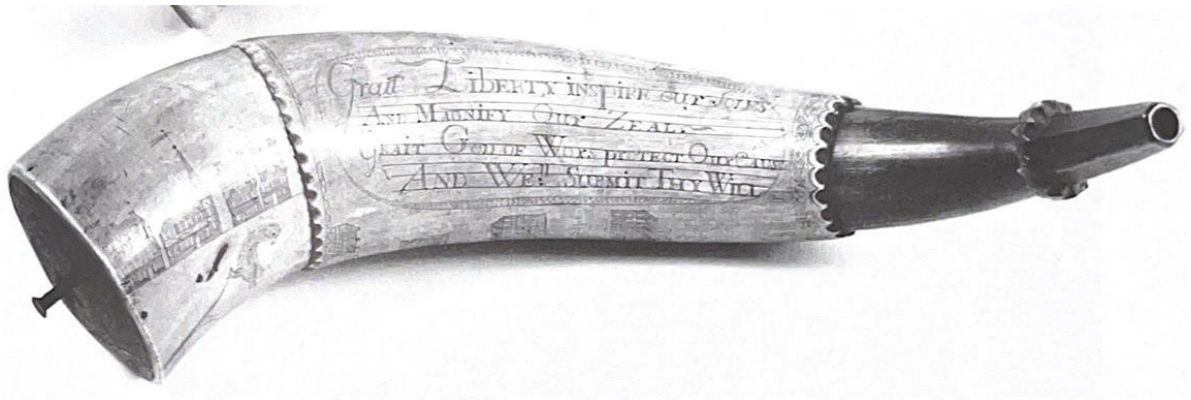


Figure 6. Simeon Smith’s horn carved in 1775 in Charlestown, Massachusetts. The horn’s rhyme shows how many New Englanders saw God as a part of everyday life and as driving force in the results of contemporary events.

Despite all this, the many religious references to God and the Bible does not necessarily mean that every New Englander was devout. Overall, it does appear that New England was a more religious society than its mother country and her soldiers. Many provincials wrote in their diaries and letters with shock about British soldiers’ lack of religiosity during the Seven Years War.²⁷ That said, to a lesser degree some men also wrote with disappointment about the lack of provincial piety. Reverend John Cleaveland wrote that in the provincial army there was a “small number of saints that appear amongst us.”²⁸ The varying degree of strict religious adherence is

²⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 82.

²⁶ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 197-210.

²⁷ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 117-118.

²⁸ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 217.

shown on Shuball Bragg's horn. His horn, carved in 1776, satirizes overzealous religious preachers. It depicts an old clergyman on horseback with a speech bubble that says, "Flee from the wrath to come."²⁹ Bragg's horn is evidence of the carver's casual attitude toward religion. He poked fun at clergymen, who preached that those who did not strictly adhere to religious doctrine would feel God's wrath.

New England was not a homogenous society; everyone had personal beliefs, and some people's faith was stronger than others. Still, New England was an area steeped in religious tradition that formed the base line for how men thought and viewed the world. Historian Fred Anderson writes,

"Whether the soldiers of New England were personally devout men matters less than the fact that, if they wanted to think seriously or abstractly about their experiences at all, the profound religiosity of New England's formal discourse offered them few alternatives to thinking in religious terms."³⁰

The widespread religiosity Anderson mentions is evidenced in the use of religious imagery and language on powder horns. Men displayed their emotions, political thoughts, and hopes through a religious lens.

Death

The topic of death was just as prominent on the powder horns. A fine example of this is found on Joshua Wolcott's horn, carved in 1759 and inscribed with the ominous Latin phrase *Memento Mori*, which means "Remember You Must Die." (Figure 7.)³¹ The horn speaks to the fragility of

²⁹ T. Grinslade, "Twelve Great Carvers," *American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin*, 119, fig 35.

³⁰ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 217.

³¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 30.

life; a sentiment no doubt understood by the men of New England. In civilian life,



Figure 7. Joshua Wolcott's horn carved in 1758 at Fort Edward, New York. The phrase *Memento Mori* means "Remember We Must All Die."

the loss of children was a common occurrence due to a lack of advanced medicine. Ephraim Stow, a farmer from Concord, lost his four children within two weeks and then his wife a few weeks later because of a "throat distemper."³² While this was an extreme case and some families did see all their children live to maturity, disease lay heavily on the minds of men who carried these horns into campaign. Smallpox and other illnesses plagued army encampments to a much greater degree than country towns, especially during the fall and winter. According to historian Fred Anderson, a typical provincial private in the Seven Years' War was four times more likely to die from disease while serving in the army, than while living at home.³³ These realities worried many men and they searched for different outlets for their fears. Some vented their concerns in journals, like the Reverend Cleaveland, who wrote, "I am in health at present ... but God only knows how long I shall enjoy it. People begin here to be taken down with very

³² Gross, *The Minutemen and their World*, 77.

³³ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 101.

malignant fevers. We lost three or four last week.”³⁴ Others used the powder horn as a canvas to illustrate their fear. The powder horn of John Rockwell depicts a devil with the speech bubble, “See we fools.”³⁵ The phrase exemplifies the creator’s regret at joining the army and increasing his risk of dying by doing so. The use of the devil to portray himself may indicate the man’s moral doubts about being a soldier, which has led him to see himself as evil.

Politics

The powder horns of the colonial era reflected the provincials' changing beliefs regarding their king and government. Prior to the revolution, New England powder horns were steeped with iconography that showed support for the king and the British Empire. The British royal coat of arms, a symbol of the king’s authority, was one of the most common depictions. In William Guthman’s authoritative catalog of surviving powder horns, more than a quarter of the powder horns engraved between 1756 and 1774 contain the British royal coat of arms.³⁶ This far exceeds other popular images and themes of the time, such as religion or family.

The standard imagery of the British royal coat of arms was a shield with a lion on the left and a unicorn on the right, with the crown of the British monarch on the top of the shield. The arms came to be a representation of the king and a symbolic pledge of loyalty towards him. This basic blueprint remained the same on most powder horns with minor variations depending on the carver’s ability or style. A typical coat of arms is seen on Philip Bunker’s horn, carved in 1759.³⁷

³⁴ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 103.

³⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 31.

³⁶ For data on powder horn engravings, see William B. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), 73-211.

³⁷ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 42.

(See Figure 8.) It beautifully depicts the royal coat of arms with a muscular unicorn on the right and a lion on the left.



Figure 8. Philip Bunker's horn carved in 1759 near Lake George, New York. The British Coat of Arms, a popular image on pre-American Revolution powder horns, features prominently in the center.

The widespread engraving of this image shows the prominence of the king and the colonists' respect for his authority. When the later significant Patriot, Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, visited the king's throne in 1768, he was left in complete awe and said the place was like being on sacred ground. He wrote that he "gazed for some time at the throne with emotions that I cannot describe."³⁸ These sentiments through words and imagery show how the colonists, even ones who would later spearhead the independence movement, were enthusiastic supporters of the king, perhaps, at times, even more so than their English brethren.³⁹ This is not to say that colonists were completely enraptured by the British imperial politics in London. Most colonists were much more concerned with local issues and rarely participated in politics outside

³⁸ Gordon. S Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 15.

³⁹ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 15.

of their villages.⁴⁰ Still, the powder horns show that the king was a well-respected figurehead whom the colonists saw as a benevolent monarch.

Other engravings showed the colonists' pride in being a part of the British Empire and their feelings of camaraderie with their fellow subjects across the Atlantic. While less popular than the royal coat of arms, British war heroes commonly appeared on powder horns. David Fletcher's horn, carved in 1746, depicts two figures, one in a regal pose, holding a spyglass, and another looking more militaristic, holding a pistol and a sword.⁴¹ (Figure 9.) They are labeled the "Duke of Cumberland" and "Admiral Warren," respectively. William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland, was the favorite son of King George II and the well-renowned suppressor of the Jacobite Rebellion in Scotland in 1746.⁴² Admiral Peter Warren was a naval officer who assisted a large provincial force in capturing the near-impregnable French fortress of Louisburg in Canada in 1745.⁴³

The decision to include Cumberland and Warren rather than local, provincial military leaders indicates how colonists viewed their position in the British Empire. The colonists truly considered themselves Englishmen and were deeply connected to the British Empire, sharing in her successes and failures even if they bore little effect on the colonies. Jonathan Mayhew, in his "Twin Discourses" sermon in 1759, thanked God for British military successes in the Americas, but also for successes in the "West-India islands, the coasts of Portugal and France ... [and] Hanover and the Prussia dominions." He saw America as a partner in the British Empire and envisioned America blossoming into a mighty empire, but explicitly noted, "I do not mean an

⁴⁰ Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York, 1976), 33.

⁴¹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 2.

⁴² Fred Anderson, *The War That Made America* (New York, 2005), 57.

⁴³ Gerald S. Graham, *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America* (Toronto, 1958), 116-142.

independent one.”⁴⁴ For Fletcher, then, it makes sense why he included Cumberland and Warren: fellow Englishmen who were heroes of the British Empire. ⁴⁵

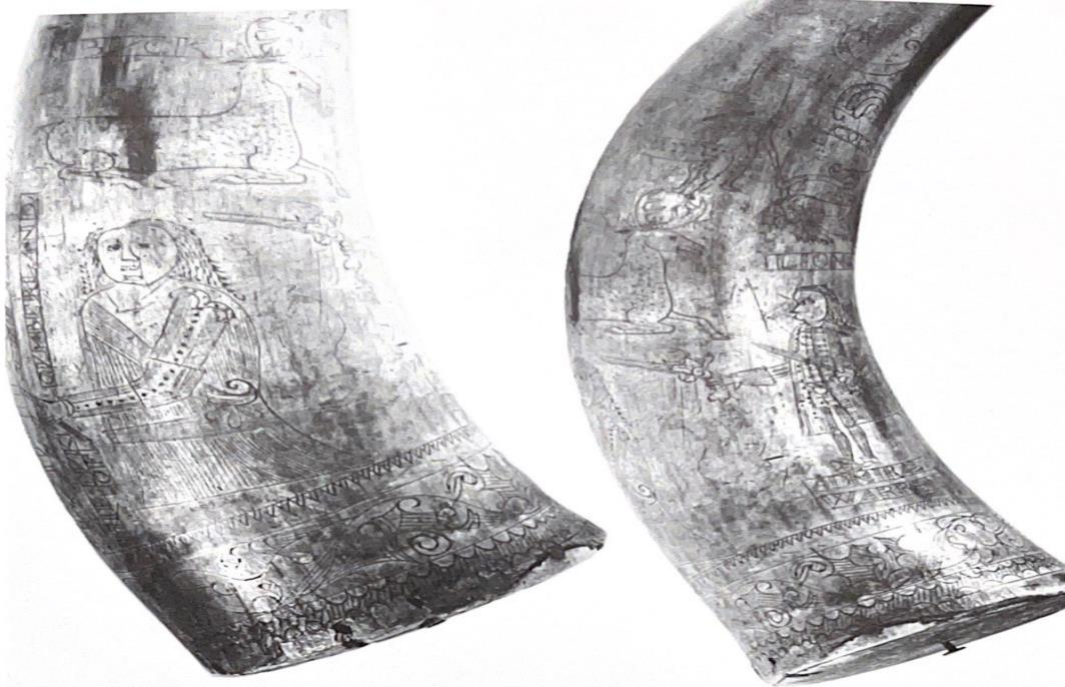


Figure 9. David Fletcher’s horn carved in 1747 in New England. The Duke of Cumberland is on the left and Admiral Peter Warren is on the right.

While the close of the Seven Years War 1763 brought America and Britain closer than ever before, it also laid the groundwork for the revolution that happened only 12 years later. Some powder horn engravings blatantly convey these early signs of frustration and dissension. John Pemberton’s horn, which was carved in 1759 by the prolific carver Jacob Gay, is an excellent example. (Figure 10.) The horn contains a seemingly normal British royal coat of arms, but on closer inspection Gay switched out the normal mottos usually inscribed on it and

⁴⁴ Jonathan Mayhew, *Two discourses delivered October 25th, 1759. Being the day appointed by authority to be observed as a day of public thanksgiving, for the success of His Majesty's arms, more particularly in the reduction of Quebec, the capital of Canada. With an appendix, containing a brief account of two former expeditions aagainst that city and country, which proved unsuccessful* (Boston, 1759), 33-60.

⁴⁵ Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 12.

inscribed, “Most To Be Mad.”⁴⁶ This cryptic phrase suggests that Gay felt the war was nonsensical and “mad.” The questioning of the righteousness of warfare occurs on some other horns as well, but the placement of this phrase on the British royal coat of arms seems to imply a direct issue with the crown, not just the war itself.



Figure 10. John Pemberton’s horn carved in 1759 at Fort Edward, New York. The horn shows a satirical British Coat of Arms with the typical Latin lines replaced by the phrase, “Most to Be Mad.”

Problems with the British army, and indirectly the Crown, began in 1756 when British officers insisted on taking command of provincial armies, with many provincials flatly refusing to serve under British officers. This proved to be a festering issue during the campaign of 1756, but was eventually solved with the combination of the Provincial and British armies under British command in 1757.⁴⁷ Serving under British officers came with iron discipline that was uncommon and shocking to many provincial soldiers.⁴⁸ Private Luke Gridley recorded 82 punishments in a 6 month span in 1757, which included 71 floggings and 6 executions.⁴⁹ David

⁴⁶ William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 39.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *The War That Made America*, 95-99.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 121-135.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 136.

Perry, a soldier writing years later, wrote of three provincials who were whipped for a small offense. He said, “it was the most cruel punishment I ever saw inflicted - by far worse than death. I felt at the time as though I could have taken summary vengeance on those who were the authors of it ... had it been in my power to do it.”⁵⁰ These events led to dislike and distrust of the British army and particularly of its aristocratic officers. Perhaps a particularly bad punishment prompted Jacob Gay to inscribe “Most to Be Mad” on the British royal coat of arms.

Aside from these more serious issues, provincial soldiers also found that while they considered both themselves and men from Britain to be Englishmen, there were many apparent cultural differences between the two groups. British soldiers celebrated different holidays and were considered morally lackluster, with a propensity for swearing that was disliked by many provincials. Provincials also noted their distaste for the British practice of dueling; a practice which was much less common in Colonial America.⁵¹ John Vaughan’s horn, carved in 1764, depicts a rare image of two men fighting with swords.⁵² (Figure 11.) On the left is the devil with the speech bubble that says, “I’ll have one of them.” The iconography clearly shows the carver considered dueling an evil activity with hell as its punishment. The context of the horn, carved most likely at Fort George, indicates that the carver was likely stationed with British regulars who participated in dueling and gave him a poor idea of the practice. The close contact provincial soldiers had with the British army during the Seven Years’ War contributed to new and not always positive perspectives on the British soldiers. Many carried with them the harsh discipline they were subjected to under British officers and the large cultural differences they had

⁵⁰ David Perry, *Recollections of an Old Soldier: The Life of Captain David Perry* (Windsor, 1822), 32.

⁵¹ Anderson, *A People’s Army*, 115-118.

⁵² William H. Guthman, *Drums A’beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 63.

with the British soldiers.⁵³ These issues were documented on powder horns that showed their frustrations and concerns with the British, which may have contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution.

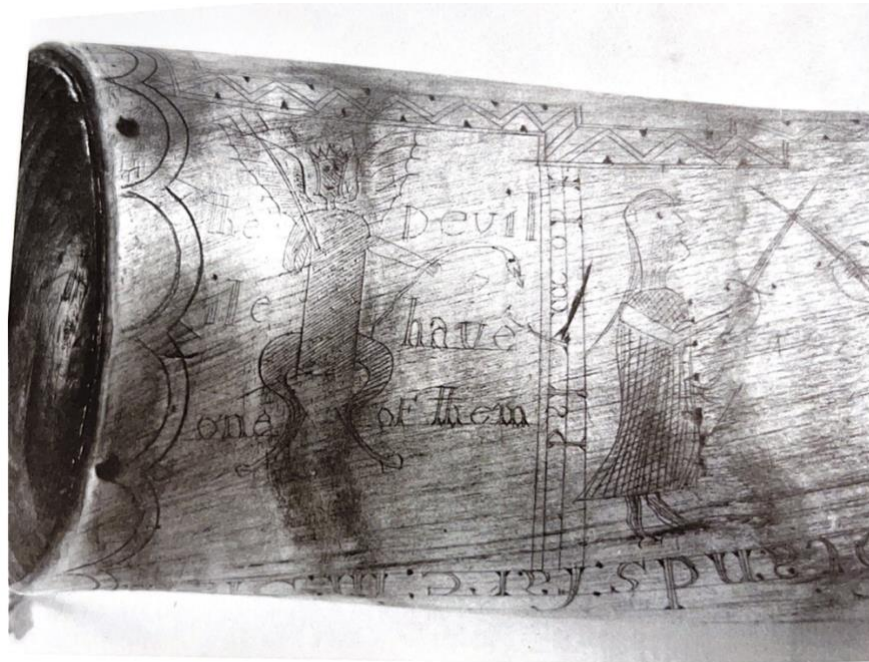


Figure 11. John Vaughan's horn carved in 1764 around Lake George. It shows two men dueling with swords and the devil on the left preparing to get the loser.

It can be assumed that amidst the tumultuous period between 1763 and 1775, powder horns quickly changed to depict radical patriotic sentiment, but in reality, they largely did not. In fact, in proportion to other periods, the early 1770s had a larger number of horns adorned with the royal coat of arms. A prime example is Tilton Bennet's horn, carved in 1770, which is decorated with many imaginative animals and the British royal coat of arms.⁵⁴ (Figure 12.) These depictions during the crises of the pre-war years suggest the continued respect New

⁵³ Anderson, *A People's Army*, 222-223.

⁵⁴ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 66.

Englanders had for their King and their hesitancy to even contemplate separation from the mother country. This cautionary posture is embodied by the Massachusetts town of Concord, a hotbed of rebellion during the revolution. Despite the rebellious reputation of Concord, many of the town's actions and sentiments were relatively moderate until 1774. Concord's General Court representative until 1768 was Charles Prescott, a supporter of the hated Stamp Act whom the men of Concord continued to re-elect even after radical patriots called for his removal.



Figure 12. Tilton Bennet's horn carved in 1770 in New Hampshire. It depicts the British Coat of Arms, which continued to be a popular theme even as tensions between the colonies and Britain continued to rise.

Despite this hesitancy, many provincials were growing increasingly upset with Great Britain's prerogative of maintaining the right to tax the colonies and responses to subsequent provincial protests. Hamilton Davidson's horn, carved by Jacob Gay in 1772, is engraved with a scene of the Boston Massacre, presumably based on the famous Paul Revere print.⁵⁵ (Figure 13.) The orderly British soldiers are shown in lines presenting their muskets to fire while the Bostonians stare blankly at the soldiers, while several bodies lie lifeless on the ground. Carved two years after the massacre, the horn represents the continued anger provincials felt toward

⁵⁵ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 69.

Great Britain and the actions of her soldiers. Despite this depiction of anger, the other side of the horn proudly displays the British royal coat of arms. The juxtaposition of displaying the cruelty of British troops and a pledge of loyalty towards the king in the form of the British royal coat of arms underscores the complicated feelings provincials felt toward Great Britain. Many provincials made a sharp distinction between the actions of the king and those of parliament, which explains continued loyalty to the king. They perceived the king as a good and benevolent monarch who was being led astray by designing ministers, who were the real suppressors of provincial rights.⁵⁶



Figure 13. Hamilton Davidson's horn carved in 1772 in New Hampshire. It depicts the Boston Massacre here on the back, while on the front is the British Coat of Arms.

This sentiment of separating the king from Parliament is exhibited in how provincials referred to British armies. The troops occupying Boston were referred to as ministerial or

⁵⁶ W. D. Liddle, "A Patriot King, or None: Lord Bolingbroke and the American Renunciation of George III," *The Journal of American History*, 4 (1979), 960-963.

parliamentary troops rather than the king's troops.⁵⁷ The powder horns of the pre-war era indicate the simmering anger towards Great Britain, while also indicating the continued respect for King George III and the reluctance of many to move towards decisive action against Britain.

After 1774, powder horns with imagery related to freedom and liberty began to increase rapidly. Horns were emblazoned with popular patriotic rhetoric, as seen in Asa Willcock's horn. Carved in 1775, Willcock's powder horn is engraved with soldiers fighting and the phrase "Liberty and Property" wrapping around the butt of the powder horn.⁵⁸ "Liberty and Property" was a popular phrase that appeared on many horns, which referenced people's inherent natural rights that the colonists believed were being violated. This change demonstrated the shift from minor discontent to calls for decisive action.

The most significant new change was the engraving of satirical British royal coats of arms in place of the traditional British ones. Amos Bostwick's horn, carved in 1776, is a good example. It shows the typical lion and unicorn on each side surrounding a crest, topped with a crown.⁵⁹ (See Figure 13.) Interestingly, instead of the traditional British mottoes, the new motto says "Success to America." The new satirical "Success to America" coat of arms underscores the end of support for the King among most Americans. The royal coat of arms historically symbolized loyalty to the crown and its removal extinguished the last symbolic link between Great Britain and the colonies.⁶⁰ It represented how the colonists' loyalties had shifted towards a new entity that was not a monarch but the idea of a new country—America.

⁵⁷ Liddle, "A Patriot King," 965.

⁵⁸ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 80.

⁵⁹ William H. Guthman, *Drums A'beating, Trumpets Sounding: Artistically Carved Powder Horns in the Provincial Manner 1746-1781* (Hartford, 1993), fig. 95.

⁶⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 2017), 286.



Figure 14. Amos Bostwick's horn carved in 1776 in New York. It shows the new "Success to America" Coat of Arms that replaced the British ones during the Revolution.

This abrupt shift was a result of the actions of King George III and parliament, who believed that a seditious group of colonists were conspiring to foment rebellion among the populace and that the only way to stop it was to pursue a hard line.⁶¹ The belief resulted in the Coercive Acts of 1774, which convulsed the colonies and infuriated many New Englanders. King George III publicly renounced the colonies in August 1775 after long being seen as the colonies' savior. He declared that the colonist's last attempt at reconciliation, the Olive Branch Petition, was "meant only to amuse, by vague expressions of attachment to the parent state, and the strongest protestations of loyalty to me, whilst they are preparing for a general revolt."⁶² Bloodshed at the Battle of Lexington and Concord only strengthened New Englanders' conviction that peace was no longer an option. Altogether, these events forced the mostly hesitant and indifferent colonists into much more radical beliefs that appear in the imagery and inscriptions of the powder horns in 1775 and 1776.

⁶¹ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, 151-159.

⁶² Joseph J. Ellis, *The Cause: The American Revolution and its Discontents, 1773-1783* (New York, 2021), 63.

Conclusion

New England powder horns of the Colonial Era held great material significance to men of the time period. Many of New Englanders served in military capacities either during the Seven Years' War or the American Revolution, leading many male members of society to own and engrave their own powder horns. These engravings offer unique insights into the lives of countless men who otherwise would be largely forgotten. Powder horns highlight the impacts of love and lust on the soldiers, largely devoid of romantic connections while on campaign. They highlight the prominence of religion in New England society and the ways in which religious education formed people's thoughts and actions. Further, these horns highlight the timeless travails of soldiering with the risks of death and men's longing for home. Perhaps most fascinating, they document the shifting political opinions of the colonists. The history of powder horn imagery begins in the 1740s and 1750s with pledges of loyalty to the king the form of British royal coats of arms and images of famous British generals. Soon after the Seven Years War, small changes began to occur, such as John Pemberton's horn which voiced frustration with the British war effort. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s tensions began to grow and appear in illustrations, but the horns still mostly showed a continued loyalty to the crown. From 1774 onward, liberty motifs and "Success to America" inscriptions replaced this ongoing loyalty. Working in tandem with diaries and letters of these New England men, a picture emerges of who these men were, what they believed in, and why they decided to revolt. Powder horns are a valuable and unique source for studying early American history.

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Article 3

God-Sanctioned Espionage in the Middle Ages: Female Spies in the Flemish Revolt

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GOD-SANCTIONED ESPIONAGE IN THE MIDDLE AGES: FEMALE SPIES IN THE FLEMISH REVOLT

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Abstract: The Flemish Revolt against Maximilian I was a series of uprisings that took place in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century in Flanders, which was then part of the Holy Roman Empire. The revolt was sparked by a combination of factors, including economic grievances, religious tensions, and political disputes. The Flemish people were unhappy with Maximilian's rule, and they began to rise against him in various ways. The rebellion was led by a group of nobles, including Philip of Cleves and Henry of Nassau, who formed a confederacy to resist Maximilian's authority. They were joined by a large number of peasants, who were also unhappy with the emperor's policies. The rebellion continued for several years, with the rebels winning some battles and losing others. Ultimately, Maximilian was able to suppress the revolt and reassert his authority over Flanders. During a span of ten years from 1482 to 1492, female spies played an essential role in gathering information and transmitting it to the rebel leaders. Notable spies from that time include Kathelijne van Merode, Cornelia Lampsins, and Josine Hellebout. These women played crucial roles in the Flemish Revolt; they gathered information for the rebels, carried letters between cities and their militias, and were integral to rebel communication networks. These women broke the status quo for female involvement in medieval wars. There were opposing opinions publicly shared about women's ability to serve the peasant army. This paper analyzes how women's espionage roles were defended using religious imagery and stories. Previous authorship on this group of women is fairly limited, especially works considering the legitimizing force of the Virgin Mary employed by the militia to verify the women as tools of espionage.

Hebrews 11

³¹ By faith Rahab the whore received the spies with peace and perished not with unbelieving men.

James Chapter 2

²⁴ Ye see that a man is justified of works, and not of faith only.

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25 In like manner, whether also Rahab, the whore, was not justified of works, and received the messengers, and sent them out by another way?

26 For as the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Passages from The Wycliffe Bible

Introduction

Medieval women's agency is a hotly debated subject among contemporary scholars. In the Low Countries, in particular, there are historical elements to women's identity that make it difficult to determine how limited or free women were. Accounts of women as spies in the Flemish Revolt from 1482 to 1492 indicate some sense of trust by political institutions in the capabilities of women. The areas in which these female spies were maneuvering were highly Catholicized by the French and Habsburg dynasties. Pilgrimages to Holy sites, biblical paintings, and books describing Saints' stories were widely available to people on all tiers of society. There is a distinct connection between stories of espionage and womanhood in the Bible and the authority given to medieval Flemish women between the most dangerous era of the revolt from 1488-1489.

The Flemish Revolt against Maximilian of Austria, later Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, was a series of uprisings that took place in the late fifteenth century in Flanders, which was then part of the Holy Roman Empire. The revolt was sparked by a combination of factors, primarily including economic grievances and political disputes. The Flemish people were unhappy with Maximilian's rule, and they began to revolt against him in various ways. The rebellion was led by a group of nobles, including Philip of Cleves and Henry of Nassau, who

formed a confederacy to resist Maximilian's authority.² They were joined by a large number of peasants, who were also unhappy with the emperor's policies.

This paper will argue that women were contracted by Flemish cities and the Habsburg armies as spies based on biblical precedent in combination with their relative invisibility in medieval military contexts. Analyzing the political and cultural contexts of Flanders and the Habsburg army in the late fifteenth century will allow me to explain how religion influenced the political actions of women during the Flemish revolt. The stories of these women parallel biblical stories, so drawing a comparison between the two within the analysis of their spy work will show how the Bible justified the otherwise immoral conduct of these women. The motivation between using women for espionage as well as the methods by which the spy work was carried out are both useful in examining this conflict.

The Flemish Revolt had a lasting impact on the region, as it highlighted the growing power of the nobility and the tensions between the rulers and the people. It also contributed to the rise of the modern state system in Europe, as rulers began to consolidate their power and centralize their authority in response to such challenges. Beyond the literal outcome of the civil war, the revolt has been used to showcase the work of medieval women as spies for both the rebelling and Habsburg armies. The religious culture in the Southern Netherlands and Flanders in the late fifteenth century was motivation for the use of women as spies in the Flemish Revolt.

Historiography

The history of the Habsburg Empire is a far-reaching academic pursuit with various intricacies addressed by hundreds of scholars. Narrowing this broad discourse to a niche focus on

² Jelle Haemers, "Opstand Adelt? De Rechtvaardiging van Het Politieke Verzet van de Adel in de Vlaamse Opstand (1482-1492)," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (January 1, 2008): 586–87, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.6888>.

espionage within a specific time frame is useful in uncovering larger conclusions about this massive section of history. The amount of research conducted about women as active spies in the fifteenth century and the Flemish Revolt is limited. Commonly medieval women have been characterized as the complacent minority population who are responsible for spreading misogyny among each other and occasionally expressing anger towards their husband. Research on female espionage in the Middle Ages is growing, but there are still holes the coverage.

This paper will differ from the previous publications about espionage during the Flemish Revolt because of its reliance on Christianity as a consistent presence throughout the story of the conflict. Most other scholarship on the events between 1482 and 1492 focus on the political pressures of either Flanders or the Habsburg Empire. If political reasoning and consequences are not the primary subjects of the books and articles, the writings usually analyze various groups' involvements in the conflict. Similar to this paper, there are sources spotlighting women's roles in the Flemish Revolt. As stated earlier, with Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, and Lisa Demets have published and continue to publish didactic literature on the role of female spies in the Flemish Revolt. This paper will draw on their writings but will diverge by introducing the interplay of Catholicism and gender in legitimizing women as spies primarily from 1488 to 1489.

Historical Context

Frederick II (Frederick the Fat) was the elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1440 against his own wishes. After gaining the title of Holy Roman Emperor, he embraced the power of his seat and established an adage Habsburgs to follow similarly lived and ruled by, AEIOU: *Austria Est Imperare Orbi Universo* or *Alles Erdereich Ist Österreich Untertan* meaning Austria rules over

the rest of the world.³ Frederick had a genuine belief in the God-determined supremacy of Austrian Habsburgs that he instilled in generations to come. Frederick's son, Maximilian I of Habsburg, was the Duke of Austria until 1493 when the duke's father died, and Maximilian was named the Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick III and Maximilian were both crowned by the Pope in Rome as the Holy Roman Emperors, establishing an alliance between Catholicism and Habsburg rule, a medieval success for the empire. The Habsburg Empire was constantly caught between political and religious conflict, with the two overlapping at various points over the family's centuries-long rule of various European lands, and having the support of the Vatican was a religious power with political influence that could be useful for Habsburg interests.⁴ Habsburg power in the fifteenth century was deeply connected to the Catholic Church. Their emperors were crowned by the Pope in Rome, the Church had approval of Bishops in the Habsburg Lands, and the clergy were part of three curiae in Habsburg Estates.⁵ The clear connection between Catholics and Habsburgs meant challenges posed to the Habsburgs were directly correlated to a challenge of the Catholic Church.

The cities revolting against the Habsburg dynasty—Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres in Flanders—had a very pious Christian population who were also loyal to the Catholic Church. Much of the art from this pre-Reformation era is indicative of the standards for Christian worship among the elite classes as well as the peasantry. In the Middle Ages, illiteracy was fairly common. In the wake of the black death that spread across Europe in the fifteenth century, Flanders was struggling economically; once prosperous cities such as Ghent were losing traction

³ Benjamin W Curtis, *The Habsburgs: The History of a Dynasty*, Dynasties (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 49.

⁴ Christopher Hare, *Maximilian the Dreamer; Holy Roman Emperor, 1459-1519*, (London: S. Paul & co, 1913), 19.

⁵ Benjamin W Curtis, *The Habsburgs*, 33.

to incoming cities that were flourishing such as Antwerp.⁶ This struggle contributed to an increased amount of poor people who were illiterate—at this point in time, illiteracy was applied to those who could not understand Latin, Dutch, or both. In turn, to worship in a community that practiced in Latin, pictures were commissioned to tell the stories that were being spread visually.⁷ Flemish Art analyzed together with city records and other documents from the time show a newfound popularity in the Virgin Mary as a biblical subject for paintings and for worship by Christians in the low countries.⁸ Although the peasants in Flanders were technically doing better economically than before the plague, the increased taxes and redistribution of land from communal peasantry ownership to Lord’s ownership led to a consensus among the lower classes that they were unfairly deprived of the status that the previous generation once had. In the 1470s, wages fell, rents rose, and new taxes were being imposed and the message of the Virgin Mary was spreading through towns with the messages of spiritual hope and prosperity to carry them out of the dwindling economic state.⁹ Rumblings of dissatisfaction with local clergies and indulgences taken by the Church were spreading during the 1470s as a predecessor to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. In the time leading up to the uprising against Maximilian of Austria, Flemish people were already feeling the tensions against the nobility fueled by taxation and legitimized by belief that the Virgin Mary was in support of the peasantry.

Prior to serving as the King of Romans and Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I married the heiress of the Kingdom of Burgundy, which contained the county of Flanders. It was a political strategy to marry Mary of Burgundy and this strategy of marriage alliances was

⁶ Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, “Patterns of Urban Rebellion in Medieval Flanders,” *Journal of Medieval History* 31 (December 1, 2005): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2005.08.001>.

⁷ Lionel Rothkrug, “Religious Practices and Collective Perceptions: Hidden Homologies in the Renaissance and Reformation,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 7, no. 1 (1980): 133.

⁸ Emma Capron, *The Charterhouse of Bruges: Jan van Eyck, Petrus Christus, and Jan Vos*, First edition.. (New York : London: The Frick Collection ; D Giles Limited, 2018), 9.

⁹ Rothkrug, “Religious Practices and Collective Perceptions,” 123.

employed by Maximilian many other times over his reign for both himself, his children, and his grandchildren. The success in the first part of his royal career can be attributed entirely to his marriage and military skills. When Mary of Burgundy died, the rule of Burgundy was not turned over to Maximilian to rule, but his son, Phillip I of Castile (also known as Phillip the Fair or Phillip the Handsome). Phillip, being four years old at the time of his mother's death, was determined unfit to serve as the Duke of Burgundy by Maximilian who claimed the title as his own. The respect the subjects of Burgundy and Flanders, particularly, once had for Maximilian as Duke of Austria and heir to the Holy Roman throne was stripped from him as many of his subjects in Burgundy refused to recognize him as their ruler. Between the years of Maximilian claiming the Duchy of Burgundy and his coronation in Rome as the Holy Roman Emperor, Mary of Burgundy's death sparked a civil war in Burgundy.

Habsburg power was exerted at two levels: as emperors on the Holy Roman Empire (limited by the rights of the other princes) and as rulers of their different lands, including Austria wherein their power was shared with The Estates. The Estates generally had three curiae: clergy, lords and knights (nobility), princely towns and markets (independent towns). They met in a Diet convoked by the sovereign to cooperate with the Habsburgs. The two halves of the leadership had to agree on taxes, mobilization of troops, and finances. To finance the wars, the Habsburgs are heavily dependent on the Estates.¹⁰ The royal family primarily got their money from the Regalia, right of minting, ordinary taxes. Justice among the lands was regulated by Courts nominated by the estates and appointed by the sovereign. These Courts had jurisdiction over nobles. Town and markets had lower courts and the lords had jurisdiction over their subjects.

¹⁰ Justine Firmhaber-Baker editor of compilation and Dirk Schoenaers editor of compilation, *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, Routledge History Handbooks (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 214.

The Habsburg rulers and Estates swung between periods of cooperation and rivalry because of the power the Church held in the affairs and relationship between the two.

The lands within the Empire were still divided into kingdoms and duchies with their respective leaders. The lands also had their own alliances, causing factional divides. Before serving as emperor, Maximilian I participated in the factional divide of his family's lands. While the Estates in Burgundy wanted to act as regents until Phillip the Fair—who they recognized as their natural lord—came of age, Maximilian claimed the power as his own. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Habsburgs were engaged in a war against France for the control of Burgundy. After the death of Charles of Burgundy, Louis XI of France seized Artois, Flanders, and Picardy. Burgundy was divided: The Duchy of Burgundy went to France, and the County of Burgundy to Mary, wife to Maximilian.¹¹ Decades earlier, during the Hundred Years' War, Burgundy allied itself with England, France's enemy.

The animosity between the two lands was still present in the late fifteenth century. Estates who sought control of their lands did not want to prolong the war with France and in an attempt to force Austrian retreat from the war, Estates of Flanders and Brabant refused to pay taxes to finance Maximilian's personal ambitions to claim his wife's inheritance. Maximilian defended the inheritance of his wife and defeated Louis XI at the Battle of Guinegate in 1479. In 1482, Maximilian became regent of Burgundy, but Ghent and Bruges rose, sided with France, and seized Maximilian's children as leverage. The Flemish Revolt has been known mostly for the disastrous period between 1488 and 1489. The rebellion continued for several years, with the rebels winning some battles and losing others. Ultimately, however, Maximilian was able to suppress the revolt and reassert his authority over Flanders. During that time, female spies

¹¹ Jan Dumolyn, "Privileges and Novelties: The Political Discourse of the Flemish Cities and Rural Districts in Their Negotiations with the Dukes of Burgundy (1384–1506)," *Urban History* 35, no. 1 (2008): 7.

gathered information and transmitted it to the rebel or Habsburg leaders. These women played crucial roles in the Flemish Revolt; They were integral to rebel communication, Habsburg information, and general espionage networks.

The Flemish Revolt 1482-1492

The facts of the Flemish Revolt have mostly been constructed through city records of Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres, records from the Habsburg Empire under Maximilian of Austria, and contemporary chronicles. Although much of the documentation has been preserved, there are still contradictory remarks across modern scholarly volumes. For instance, the definition of the actual Flemish revolt is skepticized. While the Civil War between the people of Burgundy has been clearly defined as occurring between the years of 1482 and 1492, ending before Maximilian's ascension to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire, some sources refer to this time as the Flemish Revolt. Other sources strictly make the distinction between the Civil war that lasted the 10 years at the end of the fifteenth century, and the two years 1488-1489 that are some of the most precarious years of the conflict. Regardless of the true historical definition of this time, the conflict between Maximilian of Austria and the 'Three Members' of the county of Flanders (Ypres, Bruges, and Ghent) spanned the ten years after Mary of Burgundy's death.

Prior to Mary of Burgundy's death, there was unrest in the county of Flanders. In 1477 Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy was killed in an uprising against his controlling and authoritarian policy that limited the freedoms of the nobility and cities.¹² This led to Mary of Burgundy's ascension to the ruling seat of the Duchy of Burgundy. As a means of self-preservation against the grievances from cities within her lands and nobility, the dynasty granted

¹² Jelle Haemers, "Opstand Adelt? De Rechtvaardiging van Het Politieke Verzet van de Adel in de Vlaamse Opstand (1482-1492)," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (January 1, 2008): 588, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.6888>.

far-reaching privileges to her subjects in exchange for their military support in the case of an anticipated invasion by the French king. Noblemen were appointed by the Court as military leaders. The roles, in turn, made them the links between the Court and the Dynasty's dependent regions. A crisis ensued over who would succeed Mary of Burgundy at her death as the Three Members opposed the restrictive ruling method of Maximilian who wanted to limit local autonomy of cities to increase political power of his state apparatus.¹³ Permanent representatives for the Three Members and some sympathizing noblemen created a Regency Council to lead in the name of Maximilian's son instead of surrendering to the Habsburg ruler.

The Archduke of Austria did not revoke the Regency Council until November 1483, although it remained operational. The conflicts between the reigning council and Maximilian were diplomatic through meetings of the Catholic order of chivalry, the Knights in the Order of the Golden Fleece, that continually sided with the Regency Council.¹⁴ In the autumn of 1483, Maximilian attacked Flanders and failed to dismantle the Council. The Habsburg succeeded eventually in June 1485 and promptly imprisoned all nobility on the Regency Council after seizing all their goods. The only nobleman left unscathed was Adolf van Kleef because of his son's loyalty to Maximilian and presence in his court. There was a two-year interim where Maximilian claimed Phillip the Fair's regency over Burgundy until Ghent revolted in November 1487 with Bruges following in February 1488.¹⁵ This initiated the fiercest period of the Flemish-Habsburg conflict and the highest rate at which women were used by each opponent in espionage.

¹³ Senne Starckx, "Hoe Maximiliaan Bepied Werd Door Vlaamse Spionnes," *De Standaard*, December 1, 2019, https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20221128_98063262.

¹⁴ Hare, *Maximilian the Dreamer; Holy Roman Emperor, 1459-1519*, 53.

¹⁵ Haemers, "Opstand Adelt?," 590.

Flemish Female Spy Work

Many modern understandings of gender in the Middle Ages apply contemporary gender roles and stereotypes that construct a narrative in which women had minimal agency and men were dominant in all spheres of life. Medieval women such as Joan of Arc or Jean Hachette are exemplified as ‘breaking the standard’ with their outstanding stories, but such labels enforce the stereotypical notion that women in the Middle Ages could not break the misogynist constraints placed upon them. Medieval literary tropes of the angry wife causing disturbances or protector of the home based on biological nature contribute to the understanding that women in the Middle Ages were seen as nothing but inherently different and inferior to men.¹⁶ The reality of Flemish women in the late 1400s was different than what has routinely been represented. Women were the managers of their household, but ‘management’ was not restricted to chores or tending to children. Middle-class women also maintained the finances for her household.¹⁷ They could be shopkeepers, preachers (Cathars), and merchants; Not all women did fulfill these roles however, because social rank, marital status, chronological and geographical location affected women’s agency.¹⁸ Middle-class Flemish women were primarily afforded the freedoms within the dominantly patriarchal systems in fifteenth century Burgundy.

Such positions for these women were available in the military as well. They marginally circulated around medieval armies as logistics suppliers, diplomatic messengers, and spies. Women also served as prostitutes for men serving in the military—there is little evidence to suggest the overlap between prostitution and female espionage in the Middle Ages although

¹⁶ Lisa Demets, “Spies, Instigators, and Troublemakers: Gendered Perceptions of Rebellious Women in Late Medieval Flemish Chronicles,” *Journal of Women’s History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2021.0013>.

¹⁷ James A. Welu et al., *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World* (Yale University Press, 1993), 20.

¹⁸ Martha Howell, “The Problem of Women’s Agency in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” in *Women and Gender in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Sarah Joan Moran and Amanda Pipkin, vol. 217 (Brill, 2019), 22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctvrk3hp.7>.

many scholars speculate it was a common occurrence.¹⁹ Similarly, there are few sources on medieval spies and medieval female spies because their missions were carried out clandestinely. Most information about their positions is gleaned from urban chronicles, trials from convicted spies, few preserved secret notes, and documents cataloging the payment for the spies in employment. Spies were a fact of medieval life that chroniclers documented candidly. Although the concept that “the Ambassador should not behave like a spy” from the Italian humanist Ermolao Barbaro’s maxim in the 1430s was repeated in diplomatic discourses, it was not followed.²⁰ English espionage agents were placed in the Papal court at the same time women were spying on the Habsburg army in the 1480s.

Uniquely, there are enough surviving documents from the Flemish Rebellion to piece together a detailed story of the war and women’s places within it. The rebelling Three Members and the Habsburg army simultaneously employed women as key figures in urban espionage networks. These women circulated letters, carried out secret missions, and were recorded to have been recruited by commanders to observe the enemy’s troop movements.²¹ Men were completing espionage missions as well, but not to the extent that much research has illustrated with men being the sole actors in any medieval military operations. They were involved in the revolt in violent and nonviolent means. While some women such as Josine Hellebout went on over ten missions in various cities to deliver letters and obtain new information, some women were armed and protecting their cities.²² Weapons and duties were gendered between men and women, but women were still enlisted to secretly stand outside city gates in case of invasion from Habsburg

¹⁹ Lisa Demets and Jelle Haemers, “‘Omme maren te vernemene van den Deutschen’: Vrouwen als spionnen en boodschappers in de Vlaamse Opstand (1488-89),” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 135, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 23, <https://doi.org/10.5117/TvG2022.1.003.DEME>.

²⁰ Ian Arthurson, “Espionage and Intelligence from the Wars of the Roses to the Reformation.,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35 (January 1991): 135, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.NMS.3.197>.

²¹ Demets and Haemers, 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

armies.²³ Female Flemish spies had the duty of collecting as much information as possible about their enemy and then coordinating their actions to outsmart and escape Imperial troops.²⁴ Women were not completing the spy work for their respective armies as replacements for men who were fighting but were deliberately chosen for strategic purposes.

Flemish cities systematically chose more than one hundred women to spy on the enemy Habsburg army. The means by which women were engaged and used in the Flemish revolt is distinct from the other sporadic accounts of female spies in the late Middle Ages of Europe because these women were not chosen in spite of their sex, but because of it. There was an awareness in Flemish culture of the wiles of women and their ability to disturb political order reflected in urban chronicles.²⁵ There was a dichotomy produced regarding medieval understandings of women: They were noticed to be capable of dangerous rebellion while synchronously invisible as political actors capable of infiltrating male spaces.²⁶ Women were considered as marginal within political organizations and military units and tended to receive less harsh punishments for the same offences to men. While they still were publicly humiliated, physically tortured, and often expelled from home cities women were not imprisoned, as harshly tortured, or sentenced to death like men. Women were entrusted with espionage for the duality of their visibility as disruptors and invisibility as actual threats.

Biblical Authority for Women to Spy

Religion in the Middle Ages was not merely a personal choice of faith—it dictated decision-making, law, and morality in the Low Countries at this point in time: To justify war and

²³ Demets, “Spies, Instigators, and Troublemakers,” 20–22.

²⁴ Starckx, “Hoe Maximiliaan Bespied Werd Door Vlaamse Spionnes.”

²⁵ Lisa Demets and Jan Dumolyn, “Urban Chronicle Writing in Late Medieval Flanders: The Case of Bruges during the Flemish Revolt of 1482–1490,” *Urban History* 43, no. 1 (2016): 28–46.

²⁶ Demets, “Spies, Instigators, and Troublemakers,” 20.

spying on an opponent, it is likely biblical stories were referenced. Mary Magdalene was closely tied to worship and morality in the Burgundian Duchy. This witness to Jesus' crucifixion was routinely used as a piece of political propaganda by the French Valois, Burgundian Courts of Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy, and Maximilian of Austria—each of these political actors used the reverence of Mary Magdalene in Burgundy to assert their claim over the Duchy. Miniatures, Prayer Books, and Books of Hours featuring Mary Magdalene were all commissioned throughout the fifteenth century by the political actors to disseminate the notion that they had the Godly authority over the Duchy. The stories in circulation show Mary Magdalene as the embodiment of Christian devotion and her duty to assert Holy claim over the lands of Burgundy.²⁷ Urban women in Flanders from the early 1470s through the beginning of the sixteenth century would have been familiar with the folios portraying Mary Magdalene as their protector—commissioned by city guilds and the Habsburg empire.²⁸ The imagery of Mary Magdalene as a fellow woman using her authority to protect Burgundy legitimized women as an option for espionage networks in the Flemish Revolt. Conversely, before these women were enlisted as spies, the figure of Mary Magdalene was an aspirational position for Flemish women to achieve. They could do this by acting as spies against the invading Habsburgs.

Women acting as spies is a continuation of a longer tradition with evidence in the Bible. As illustrated earlier, Christianity permeated Burgundian society. Flanders was a cultural hub for the production and showcasing of art that was drenched in Christian motifs, stories, and patrons. Religion was present in political, professional, social, and secular spaces. Catholicism had been

²⁷ Susan Haskins, "Mary Magdalen and the Burgundian Question," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 73 (2010): 108.

²⁸ Paul Srodecki editor, Norbert Kersken editor, and Rimvydas Petrauskas editor, *Unions and Divisions: New Forms of Rule in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Themes in Medieval and Early Modern History (London ; New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 186.

embraced by the French and Austrian empires that held control over Burgundy in the fifteenth century. While different authors have proposed various reasons for why women were used as tools for espionage, none have used religious evidence to suggest the biblical predecessors to the female spies of the Flemish Revolt. Although lying is the foundational element of spying, it is prohibited by the Eighth Commandment. How can a Catholic Duchy embrace espionage executed by women—who may have an elevated status in Flanders, but are still expected to be the picture of morality—if the basic need for spy work is for the women to lie and act against one of the pillars of Catholicism? The Bible is not free of any stories of espionage. The first spies of the Bible are mentioned in Genesis 42:9 with their purpose being “to see the nakedness of the land” or expose what otherwise would not be seen, according to Joseph’s biblical Hebrew.²⁹ Another example of espionage at work in the Bible is from the Book of Numbers Chapter 13. Moses sends his people to gather information to help the Israelites prepare their campaign. This is a predecessor to the military espionage used by the Habsburgs and Three Members in the Flemish Revolt.

The Book of Joshua provides another story that justifies the use of women as spies during the Flemish Revolt: the story of Rahab. In Chapter 2, during an invasion, Joshua sent two spies to spy on Jericho. They left and stayed in a brothel where a prostitute, Rahab, protected them.

The passage from the Wycliffe Bible reads:

¹ Therefore Joshua, the son of Nun, sent from Shittim two men, spyers in huddles, and said to them, Go ye, and behold ye the land, and the city of Jericho. Which went, and entered into the house of a woman whore, Rahab by name, and rested at her.

² And it was told, and said to the king of Jericho, Lo! men of the sons of Israel have entered hither by night, to espy the land.

²⁹ Meir Shalev, *Beginnings: Reflections on the Bible’s Intriguing Firsts* (Harmony/Rodale, 2011), 113.

³ Therefore the king of Jericho sent to Rahab the whore, and said, Bring out the men, that came to thee, and that entered into thine house; for they be spyers, and they came to behold all the land.³⁰

Jericho was, in the end, conquered based on the information obtained by the spies protected by Rahab. This woman's story introduces elements of morality and gender into biblical espionage. Rahab's character as a prostitute engaged in espionage has a typical connotation that she would be a negative example of womanhood in the bible, however, her identity as a descendant of Jesus and her choice to preserve members of the Israelite conquest lead to the salvation of Rahab and her family. The story of Rahab situates Jesus and stories of the New Testament in a context that is central to pre-Christian, Judeo history of the Bible to make the larger argument that Christianity is a continuation of the fulfillment of the Judaic story from the Old Testament.³¹ Rahab's story justifies espionage and seduction, especially in the context of a woman performing these actions. After agreeing to associate with either the Habsburg army or Flemish rebellion, potentially encouraged by imagery of Mary Magdalene, women's spy work would have been a continuation of the story of Rahab. As followers of Christ, the women who were engaged in medieval espionage were uncovering information that would otherwise be secretive and were lying to do so, but they were acting to preserve their homeland.

Conclusion

The Flemish Revolt would not have been as long-lasting if women were not used as spies against the Habsburg army. The information the spies provided was crucial in the pivotal period of 1488-1489 when the Three —Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres—were fighting to regain regency of

³⁰ *The Wycliffe Bible: John Wycliffe's Translation of the Holy Scriptures from the Latin Vulgate* (Lamp Post Incorporated, 2011).

³¹ Shira Weiss, *Ethical Ambiguity in the Hebrew Bible: Philosophical Analysis of Scriptural Narrative* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11.

Burgundy over Archduke Maximilian of Austria. The conflict ended with a peace agreement between the two factions granting Maximilian the power of Burgundy before his ascension to the throne of Holy Roman Emperor. Although the Flemish women's spy work did not lead to victory, it prolonged the confrontation between urban autonomy with state centralization and the struggle for power at the top of the state apparatus.

The question that has been debated by contemporary scholar is not the question of the women's importance to the revolt, but why they were used. Besides the relative difference in which women did not have the same visibility in men in a medieval military context, there are also deep religious connotations and precedents to female espionage. Flanders was part of the Catholic Burgundian Duchy, and its art is evidence of the Christian culture that dominated the area. Regardless of the different sides of the conflict, both the Habsburgs and Flemish rebels held Catholic beliefs. Stories from the Old and New Testament of the Bible legitimize women as protectors of the home (outside of a biological need to preserve their kin). The image of Mary Magdalene was prevalent in medieval Flemish art, folios, and culture to legitimize different claims to the Duchy as the Saint was the embodiment of Burgundy as a Holy land that she would protect. Rahab, a prostitute from the Old Testament book of Joshua, engages in espionage and has the gift of salvation because of it. Women in Flanders, whether they fought for the rebellion or imperial army, would have been familiar with these biblical stories. They would have been able to draw the connection between their own identities and potential to serve their respective causes just as the Christian women, sanctioned by God, would have. The Three Members cities and the Habsburg army would have also been well-acquainted with the biblical women and used the stories to recruit and use women for political espionage.

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Article 4

Depictions of Disability and Masculinity in Victorian Literature: Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Noble Life*

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DEPICTIONS OF DISABILITY AND MASCULINITY IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE:

DINAH MULOCK CRAIK'S *A NOBLE*

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Abstract: Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Noble Life* uniquely depicts disability and masculinity in Victorian Scottish society. The protagonist, the Earl of Cairnforth, is physically disabled and able to rule over his property and subjects with nobility and kindness, almost never being fully hindered by his disability. He is feminized but still regarded as a noble man worthy of respect and honor. This paper explores the relationship between disability and masculinity throughout this novel along with the intersections of religion. The implications of disability representation in the past, present, and future are also heavily considered and analyzed throughout the paper.

Introduction

Dinah Mulock Craik is one of few Victorian authors to center the disability experience in their novels and include disabled protagonists. Her 1866 novel, *A Noble Life*, is unique for its time in its depiction of disability as it focuses on the life and emotions of the last Earl of Cairnforth and explores the intersections of the disabled and masculine experiences. Under heavy religious influence, Craik's characters view disability as a condition directly handed down by God, and the societal expectations of the Victorian era provide challenges to the representation of masculinity. Craik's novel highlights the intersections between standards of masculinity and the treatment of disabled people in Victorian society while also serving as a foundation for future disability representation in literature.

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Craik is often heralded as an underrated author, read heavily in the Victorian era but largely forgotten in the contemporary age. J Russell Perkin, in *Narrative Voice and the "Feminine" Novelist: Dinah Mulock and George Eliot*, emphasizes Mulock Craik as "an example of a woman who, in spite of a promising beginning as a writer, was 'edged' out of the field, and who therefore was unable to achieve recognition as a serious writer."² Craik "was reviewed in major periodicals and compared to other women writers, like Charlotte Bronte, who are still famous", but her work lost popularity after her death in 1887.³ However, with an increased societal interest in diverse literary topics, many scholars once again turn to Craik's novels as early forms of disability representation.

A Noble Life follows the traditional trajectory of a *bildungsroman* but radicalizes this storytelling method for the Victorian period by centering the story around a character who cannot physically complete the typical coming of age journey. The Earl of Cairnforth is born physically disabled, being described as "the smallest, saddest specimen of infantile deformity. It had a large head—larger than most infants have—but its body was thin, elfish, and distorted, every joint and limb being twisted in some way or other."⁴ The Earl's disability is described before his personhood, with the pronoun 'it' determining that a disabled child is less than human. He was immediately orphaned, causing those around him to call on God's mercy and remark that the Earl is "to be left to nature."⁵ It is assumed from his birth that he will be the last Earl of Cairnforth, implying that because he is disabled, he is infertile. This, however, highlights the feminization of disability as the paradigm of aristocratic masculinity is being able to leave

² Perkin, J. Russell. "NARRATIVE VOICE and the "FEMININE" NOVELIST: DINAH MULLOCK and GEORGE ELIOT." *Victorian Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, pp. 24–42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27794709>.

³ Perkin, J. Russell. "NARRATIVE VOICE and the "FEMININE" NOVELIST: DINAH MULLOCK and GEORGE ELIOT."

⁴ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*." Edited by Clare Walker Gore. Brighton, Victorian Secrets, 2016: 63

⁵ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*," 93

behind an heir. This possibility of leaving an heir is taken from the Earl before he even comes of age, foreshadowing his lack of ability to fit the *bildungsroman* model and his preceding femininity. Because of the lack of physical access, the Earl is largely isolated for the early years of his life until he is educated by Minister Cardross and essentially joins the Cardross family. He shares an intimate relationship with the eldest daughter, Helen, who is described as having a “serious, gentle, motherly way” from a young age.⁶ The Earl remains in love with Helen for his entire life but accepts that he can never be with her because of his disability, a societal limitation placed on him due to the feminization of disability. He does, however, adopt and co-parent her son after she is left widowed by the Earl’s cousin. The Earl, who remains unnamed until Craik reveals his epitaph at the end of the novel, is well loved by everyone he meets and transforms Cairnforth into a prosperous and joyful community. Despite having treacherous family members who connive their way into the Earl’s life and attempt to overthrow him as Earl and take his inheritance, he maintains his kindness and goodhearted nature— typical traits assigned to female characters.

Representation of Disability

Craik writes in *MacMillan’s Magazine* in April 1861 that the reason for writing novels about human life is “as Milton puts it [in *Paradise Lost*], ‘To justify the ways of God to men.’”⁷ The depictions of disability in *A Noble Life* from a highly religious understanding of the conditions of humankind. She also remarks that “human as we are, we must have something divine to aspire to.”⁸ Under the guise of religion, the Earl’s caretakers choose not to question the

⁶ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*,” 89

⁷ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*”

⁸ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*”

reasoning behind the Earl's disability and instead accept it for what it is with both pity and compassion. Craik sets her novel in an undisclosed time in the past, but it can be assumed to be the mid to late 18th-century as she describes the actions of the characters and the setting as being the results of the previous century. When describing travel between Cairnforth and Edinburgh, both in Scotland, about 40 years after the Earl's birth, she writes, "since civilization had now brought Edinburgh to within a few hours' journey of Cairnforth", hinting at the advancements in transportation in the early 1800s and revealing that the Earl was born in the late 1700s.⁹

Disability in the 18th century was defined differently than it is in the contemporary age. David Turner, a historian focusing on disability history from the 18th century, writes that,

"eighteenth-century dictionaries defined 'disability' as a 'being unable [or] incapable,' the usage of the term that drew most attention was that in a 'law sense', as when 'a Man is so disabled, as to be made incapable to inherit, or to enjoy a Benefit which otherwise he might of done.'"¹⁰

Thus, the Earl's experience with his disability would directly contradict the definition of disability at that time. The Earl maintains his ability to inherit the benefits he is entitled to as well as work to upkeep the land he is placed in charge of. He is able to do so with the help of the Cardross family and his caretakers, but he is also extremely mentally competent. His intelligence and sensitivity contrast with his physical limitations, representing an early manifestation of the Savant syndrome trope. Savant syndrome is defined as "a condition where prodigious talent can co-occur with developmental conditions such as autism spectrum conditions."¹¹ In literature, film, and TV, this trope is often a problematic form of representation as it implies that a disabled

⁹ Craik, Dinah. "A Noble Life," 343

¹⁰ Turner, David. "Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment." New York, Routledge, 2012.

¹¹ Hughes, James E A, et al. "Savant Syndrome Has a Distinct Psychological Profile in Autism." *Molecular Autism*, vol. 9, no. 1, 12 Oct. 2018

person is only useful if they can somehow provide an exemplary service to their able-bodied counterparts. While the Earl's disability is physical in nature and not mental, this representation cannot completely be classified as Savant syndrome, but it does resemble the basic trajectory of a Savant syndrome trope: Craik gives the Earl an incredible mastery over his emotions and intellect to make up for the lack of control he has over his physical body.

Clare Walker Gore, who wrote the introduction to *A Noble Life*, writes that Craik represents disability "as a spiritually uplifting and morally improving experience, which renders the protagonist selfless, compassionate and pious."¹² While many readers were drawn to the sensationalist fiction that included stories of disability, critics and authors like John Ruskin believed the genre of sensationalist fiction to be "in the category of 'literature of the Prison-house' or 'Fiction mecroyante.'"¹³ Ruskin "identifies the origin of disability in sensation fiction as 'the grotesque and distorting power' of brain disease and other types of 'personal weakness' experienced by the authors of 'foul' fiction."¹⁴ This view is reciprocated in Henry James' review of the novel when he remarks that Craik has always been distinguished for being particularly drawn to characters with disabilities.¹⁵ This piqued interest in disability is seen as something vulgar and radical, and Craik's portrayal of the Earl's masculinity in conjunction with his disability is rejected by James. Throughout his review, James chooses to remark on Craik's character and the idea of masculinity in her novel rather than the aspect of disability. James claims that the accurate depiction of masculinity "was doubtless beyond Miss Mulock's

¹² Walker Gore, Clare. "Introduction." Dinah Craik. *A Noble Life*. Brighton, Victorian Secrets, 2016. Pp 6-21.

¹³ Holmes, Martha Stoddard, and Mark Mossman. "Disability in Victorian Sensation Fiction." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, 2011, www.academia.edu/1091824/Disability_in_Victorian_Sensation_Fiction. Accessed 14 Dec. 2022.

¹⁴ Holmes, Martha Stoddard, and Mark Mossman. "Disability in Victorian Sensation Fiction."

¹⁵ James, Henry. "A Review of A Noble Life, By the Author of John Halifax, Gentleman." *Nation*. 1 Mar. 1866. In Dinah Craik. *A Noble Life*. Edited by Clare Walker Gore. Brighton, Victorian Secrets, 2016. Pp 428-434.

powers—as it would indeed have been beyond any woman’s; and it was, therefore, the part of prudence not to attempt it.”¹⁶ Walker Gore insightfully writes that “translating disability into gender does have the convenient side effect of enabling critics to avoid talking about disability in itself, and to avoid the more obvious conclusion that Craik was actually interested in disability in its own right.”¹⁷ James argues that Craik sees men and women through “rose-coloured glasses” and that her appreciation for human nature prohibits her from accurately portraying a story simultaneously about disability and masculinity. The contemporary reviews surrounding *A Noble Life* seem to find the novel’s trajectory lackluster, but modern critics, such as Walker Gore, determine the novel to be radical in that it does not follow the traditional sensationalist genre.

The *Saturday Review* determines in 1866 that, “she takes her stand among the remnant who have not bowed the knee to sensationalism. In the midst of a naughty and depraved generation of novelists she grows more and more severely didactic. She addresses a demoralized public in a crescendo strain of earnestness and solemnity.”¹⁸ They refer to the novel as an “anachronism”, directly opposing Walker Gore’s idea that Craik’s novel was progressive for its time. This reviewer takes the opposite stand to Ruskin’s disdain towards sensationalist fiction as it is claimed that Craik avoids sensationalism and that her story of disability takes a higher moral standing than the contemporary audience. This is in conjunction with the underlying religious tones of the novel, such as accepting disability as being given by God. Because disability, in Craik’s world, is a divine ‘gift’, it provides the disabled person with abilities outside of the mortal realm, as seen in the Earl’s extreme compassion, sensitivity, and kindness. However, the

¹⁶ James, Henry. “A Review of A Noble Life, By the Author of John Halifax, Gentleman.”

¹⁷ Walker Gore, Clare. “Introduction.”

¹⁸ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present. *Saturday Review*. 14 April 1866. In Dinah Craik. *A Noble Life*. Edited by Clare Walker Gore. Brighton, Victorian Secrets, 2016. Pp 434-441.

Saturday Review takes a sexist approach in explaining how the influence of novels differentiates based on sex.

“A man takes up a novel for the mere purpose of distraction. The interest which it excites is transient. Any impression which it leaves is sure to be modified and corrected by the suggestions of actual experience. He does not expect to find his ideal of a wife in the heroine of any novel. It is different with woman. In the first place, the greatest portion of her literature consists of works of fiction. From these she draws her ideas; by these, to a great extent, she regulates her conduct. Impressionable and imaginative, she lives in a little artificial world of her own, peopled with the airy creations of romance.”¹⁹

The reviewer makes this distinction because it is believed that the portrayal of the Earl’s masculinity is harmful since “as, in a story, the centre of interest to a young lady is always the predominant male character, should exhibit qualities which entitle him to the respect of refined and cultivated minds”, and due to the Earl’s feminization and disability he is deemed unworthy of respect to some readers.²⁰ But, Craik explicitly remarks of the Earl’s character that, “For everybody loved him. Women, of course, did; they could not help it: but men were drawn to him likewise, with the sort of reverential tenderness that they would feel towards a suffering child or woman—and something more—intense respect.”²¹ The reviewer does not overtly specify why the Earl is less deserving of respect, but it does imply sexism and ableism relevant to the 19th-century.

Craik represents the Earl as a figure of extreme innocence and purity. She takes the opposite route to sensationalism and portrays disability as a sort of divine intervention to signify purity of heart and soul, even if the body is deemed impure. After the Earl begins co-parenting Helen’s son, the boy says to his mother, “I know Jesus. He is the Earl.”²² Children are often the

¹⁹ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present”

²⁰ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present”

²¹ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*,” 236

²² Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*,” 317

epitome of purity in literature, and to have a child remark on the purity of an adult speaks to the infantilization of disabled people. Even though the Earl is a trusted authority figure, the essence of his character is that he is untainted by the woes of the world despite his physical disadvantage. The Earl's purity helps to legitimize his position as a person in power, and instead of being looked down upon by those in Cairnforth he was revered for accomplishing feats while being disabled. Helen attempted to describe the Earl's disability to her son, but he failed to understand his affliction. She writes, "There seemed to him something not inferior, but superior to all other people, in that motionless figure with its calm sweet face—who was never troubled, never displeased—whom everybody delighted to obey, and at whose feet lay treasures untold."²³

Through the innocent mind of a child, disability is not seen as a disadvantage. However, because the Earl is used to receiving pity, he obtains a significant ability to always appear calm and gracious; he never allows himself to feel the troubles and sadness that come with being disabled. Perhaps it is because he does not allow for self-pity that he is deemed respectable: he appears to be other-worldly as he handles disability with a grace that is incomprehensible to his able-bodied counterparts.

Masculinity and Disability

The *Saturday Review* takes issue with Craik's portrayal of the Earl's manhood. In this review of the novel, the reviewer writes that the Earl fits into the literary category of "perfecting strength out of weakness" and that the Earl's character "expressed two of the most creditable feminine instincts – the instinct to improve the world by means of those moral teachings which

²³ Craik, Dinah. "A Noble Life," 317

may be conveniently conveyed through some such mouthpiece, and the instinct to admire moral, as distinct from material, power.”²⁴ The *Saturday Review* then justifies this characterization of disabled people as a way to “to redress the balance of power between the sexes, and to remind their readers that, in spite of the vaunted superiority of man, there are heights of moral elevation, and even influence, which woman may claim as peculiarly her own.”²⁵ By taking away the Earl’s physical traits of typical masculinity, such as strength, height, and the ability to reproduce, it is interpreted as a way to produce some sort of gender equality: what the Earl lacks in masculine characteristics, he makes up for in the best of feminine attributes. However, this remains a problematic interpretation to many Victorian readers as it is believed that men should always be masculine figures so as to teach female readers that they should “admire what is truly admirable in the opposite sex, and weaned as far as possible from the mere fetish-worship of money and a moustache.”²⁶ Despite these qualms, the feminine and disabled male character made his way into many novels throughout the Victorian era as “a response to the rise of a new Victorian culture of industry and vitality, and its corollary emphasis on a hardy, active manhood.”²⁷ The hero of Victorian literature shifted to both reflect and counter the strong, able-bodied, Christian man that was deemed desirable by society.

Most depictions of disabled male characters during the Victorian era were used as foils to able-bodied male characters. For instance, in Craik’s most famous novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), the story is narrated by a disabled male character who tells the story of the life of the much stronger and more capable John Halifax. The narrator of the story serves to

²⁴ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present ”

²⁵ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present ”

²⁶ Anon. “Novels, Past and Present ”

²⁷ Bourrier, Karen. *The Measure of Manliness*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 10 Apr. 2015.

soften Halifax, and the two share a close homoerotic relationship that was written away by society because the disabled man was essentially characterized as a woman.²⁸ While Craik is guilty of using the trope of employing disabled characters simply to elevate the able-bodied protagonists, she eventually drifted from the stereotypes and created the unique journey of the Earl of Cairnforth. *A Noble Life* is all the more important for disability representation because, according to Bourrier,

“narrative innovation demonstrates how, far from being marginalized in a culture that prized health and industry, weakness and disability came to serve an integral role in shaping narrative form, and ideas of what it meant to be a man in the Victorian era and beyond. The weak or disabled man thus often appeared as a friend or rival of the strong protagonist and took on the affective and narrative burdens that would undermine the hero’s strength. Male invalidism and disability persisted as an alternative and complementary Victorian mode of masculinity, supplementing masculine strength, which might otherwise appear coarse and unfeeling, with loquaciousness and susceptibility.”²⁹

Craik did not use the Earl’s masculinity to enhance the masculinity of another character; she gave him his own journey and expressed his masculinity through atypical ways, keeping his manhood at the forefront of his experiences. Bourrier also discusses how “By contrast to this strong hero, who is mainly distinguished by his athletic prowess, the weak or disabled man was physically distinct and able to articulate his feelings, as well as narrating those of his stronger friend.”³⁰

Historian Josephine Jobbins traces the roots of toxic masculinity to the Victorian period. She writes in her article, *Man Up – The Victorian Origins of Toxic Masculinity* (2017), “Broadly, Victorian masculinity can be outlined as an ideology of spirituality and earnestness between

²⁸ Moore, Melina. “John Halifax, Gentleman.” *Nineteenth-Century Disability: Cultures and Contexts*. www.nineteenthcenturydisability.org/items/show/20. Accessed 14 Dec. 2022.

²⁹ Bourrier, Karen. “*The Measure of Manliness*”

³⁰ Bourrier, Karen. “*The Measure of Manliness*”

1837 and 1870, that changed to one of strength and stoicism from 1870.”³¹ Craik writes *A Noble Life* during the end of the period that Jobbins describes as spiritual and earnest, two characteristics she heavily applies to the Earl. Many historians pin the shift in gender roles to the burgeoning industrial and economic sectors of British life. With the changing society and increased importance on imperialism, the responsibilities of men needed to change as well. Author Martin A. Danahay claims that the male identity in the Victorian era was modeled on the Protestant work ethic, which equated worth with the amount of labor produced under a strong religious pretext. The Earl is unable to physically work because of his disability, so his time is largely spent reading, telling stories, and delegating work on behalf of Cairnforth. Unable to conform to the traditional masculine work ethic leaves the Earl with the pressure to be useful to those around him. Bourrier, in comparing the past times of traditional strong men to ‘weak’ men, quotes from Walter Scott’s memoir: “‘My lameness and my solitary habits had made me a tolerable reader,’” he writes, “‘and my hours of leisure were usually spent in reading aloud to my mother.”³² Craik would have been aware of the previous representations of disabled men in literature, so even though her novel takes place before the Victorian period she gives the Earl typical characteristics of disabled Victorian men. The Earl relies on storytelling because it gave him the opportunity to feel connected to those around him, something he was unable to do physically. The Earl more closely falls into the trope of “The muscular Christian hero of the 1850s [who] was a broad-church man who was more interested in rowing than debating the finer points of theology, and whose worship was all the healthier for it.”³³ Although the Earl is unable

³¹ Jobbins, Josephine. “Man up – the Victorian Origins of Toxic Masculinity – the Historian.” Qmul.ac.uk, 2017, www.projects.history.qmul.ac.uk/thehistorian/2017/05/12/man-up-the-victorian-origins-of-toxic-masculinity/. Accessed 12 December 2022.

³² Bourrier, Karen. “*The Measure of Manliness*”

³³ Bourrier, Karen. “*The Measure of Manliness*”

to fit into society in the traditional way, his insurmountable wealth and privilege allow him to fill roles that poorer disabled men could not.

Along with his inherited wealth, the Earl has the supposed comforts of a strictly religious society. However, while the intentions of a religious society are to help and guide the followers, it in fact makes it more difficult for the Earl and those around him to discuss in depth his condition and how it affects him, lending a hand in the inability for Victorian men to communicate their feelings. Throughout the novel, the Earl maintains a sense of stoicism surrounding his disability so as to not burden his chosen family. While he is a more highly emotional man than the men he surrounds himself with, the emotions which seem to perturb him the most are withheld from those he trusts. This may be due to the discourse surrounding the reason behind his disability; since his birth, the adults in his life claimed “‘He is what God made him, what God willed him to be,’ said the minister, solemnly. ‘We know not why it should be so: we only know that it is—and we cannot alter it. We can not remove from him his heavy cross; but I think we can help him to bear it.’”³⁴ Without question, his disability is attributed to God and it is decided that it will not be thought of any more than as something that God willed. The complex feelings that surround disability are not explored, allowing the Earl to fall into the traditional masculine experience of withholding emotions. The thing that separates him from other men, his disability, is also the thing that allows him a glimpse into Victorian masculine stoicism due to his heavily religious upbringing. It is also notable that the minister, without question, offers to help the Earl bear his burden from birth. The minister is characterized as a benevolent and wise man who is beloved throughout Cairnforth, but perhaps this is Craik also utilizing the trope of a disabled man helping to bring out the best in the stronger, able-bodied

³⁴ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*,” 118

man. During the Earl's childhood, the only character to never shy away from his physical state was Helen, as Craik states, "Men shrink so much more than women from any physical suffering or deformity."³⁵ The minister eventually moves forward from his discomfort and treats the Earl as a member of his own family. The Earl and the minister both solidify their faith through each other; the Earl helps the minister grow in his acceptance and the minister helps to bring the Earl comfort through God. Although, it seems as though religion acts more as a comfort to the able-bodied characters as it is easier for them to will something away through God when they do not have to physically experience the torments of God's will. The Earl expresses his faith in God, as Craik writes, "'He is a just God. In my worst trials I have never doubted that,' replied Lord Cairnforth, solemnly."³⁶ While the Earl expresses his love for the savior, he does so in a manner that implies there is an unspoken sadness or disdain towards his situation that he is unable to express due to Victorian masculinity standards and strict religious beliefs.

Even though the Earl is described throughout the novel as a respectable man, he and those closest to him occasionally struggle with his ability to act on his masculine duties due to the standards imposed on them by the Protestant work ethic. When he offers to take Helen's son to Edinburgh for university, Helen is shocked at his offering to do so, to which the Earl replies, "'You think I shall be useless? – that it is a man, and not such a creature as I, who ought to take charge of your boy?'"³⁷ The Earl then goes on to describe why he would be the best person to go with Helen's son, as he says, "'I shall also give him somebody to take care of. I shall be as much charge to him almost as a woman—and it will be good for him."³⁸ Despite his proven ability to take care of the boy and his duties as Earl, the most masculine position of fatherhood is still out

³⁵ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*," 99

³⁶ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*," 399

³⁷ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*," 375

³⁸ Craik, Dinah. "*A Noble Life*," 376

of his reach. The Earl compares himself to a woman, showing the overtness to which disabled men were feminized both in literature and in contemporary society. The Earl's masculinity is not used to either elevate or incriminate the boy's biological father's masculinity. The Earl's cousin, Bruce, passed away before he was able to raise the child and after he connived his way into the Cardross family, which left his memory tainted. However, it is made clear throughout the child's life that the Earl is the best option for his father-figure on the basis of the Earl's integrity, respectability, and compassion rather than his masculinity. It is as though the Earl's feminine attributes best suit him for the titles of masculine role model and father.

Implications and Progression of Disability Representation

The Cambridge Dictionary defines toxic masculinity “as ideas about the way that men should behave that are seen as harmful, for example the idea that men should not cry or admit weakness.”³⁹ Josephine Jobbins argues that toxic masculinity originates from the Victorian era standards of masculinity and claims that “Strength and athleticism were vital aspects of Victorian masculinity, as today. In the twenty-first century, this often takes the form of unrealistic expectations of the male body, as exemplified in the ever-popular superhero film, which reflects a wider expectation of emotional strength.”⁴⁰ Because of Britain's global expansionism, “Physical rigour was needed for men to be fit enough to fight and defend the British Empire. Late Victorian ideals of manhood as war-ready are evident in the literature of the

³⁹ Cambridge Dictionary. “TOXIC MASCULINITY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge.org*, 13 Nov. 2019, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/toxic-masculinity. Accessed 12 December 2022

⁴⁰ Jobbins, Josephine. “Man up – the Victorian Origins of Toxic Masculinity – the Historian.” *Qmul.ac.uk*, 2017, www.projects.history.qmul.ac.uk/thehistorian/2017/05/12/man-up-the-victorian-origins-of-toxic-masculinity/. Accessed 12 December 2022.

time.”⁴¹ Taken into consideration with the viewpoints expressed by *The Saturday Review*, the type of masculine representation in literature drastically affects the way people view other men and their expectations of men. The importance of imperialism created a new standard of living for men that continued to be expected of them well into the 21st-century. Men are still expected to remain stoic and uphold certain gender roles that are largely outdated, such as being the main breadwinner for the family. In modern society, disabled people still struggle for equal rights and access to public spaces, along with fighting ableism and discrimination. According to the Office for National Statistics, “Disabled people aged 16 to 64 years had poorer ratings than non-disabled people on all four personal well-being measures; average anxiety levels were higher for disabled people at 4.6 out of 10, compared with 3.0 out of 10 for non-disabled people (year ending June 2021).”⁴² While *A Noble Life* is quite radical in its disability representation, it highlights many of the issues that disabled men still face to this day, for example, “‘For,’ said his guardian, sadly, ‘I own I never thought of him as a young man – or as a man at all: nevertheless, he is one, and will always be.’”⁴³ Sentiments like these can influence the way readers shape their opinions on people who are different than them. Craik does the unique thing in that she has the characters be open about their ableism and emasculation of the Earl (though without using those specific terms) and confront it by having them admit they were wrong. This is unique even for today’s standards, as many books and films that include disability either ignore or are ignorant to the implications of their portrayal of disabled characters, such as the bestselling novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon or the film *Music* by Sia

⁴¹ Jobbins, Josephine. “Man up – the Victorian Origins of Toxic Masculinity – the Historian.”

⁴² Office for National Statistics. “Outcomes for Disabled People in the UK - Office for National Statistics.”

Www.ons.gov.uk, 10 Feb. 2022,

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2021. Accessed 15 Dec. 2022.

⁴³ Craik, Dinah. “*A Noble Life*,” 376

(2021). While not perfect in its representation, *A Noble Life* does what no other novel in the Victorian era was willing to do: highlight the life of a respectable, disabled, and feminine man while highlighting his underappreciated masculinity. Representation of different identities in literature is especially important because the stories being told are often stories of real people and are not entirely fiction. Disabled people still lack access to space in society, both physical and representational, and media is sometimes the only exposure to disabled people able-bodied people will experience.

Conclusion

Victorian representations of disability and masculinity heavily contribute to modern day understandings of masculinity. The feminization of disabled men in Victorian literature highlights the strenuous expectations placed on men during the mid-to-late 19th-century that have unfortunately remained despite large social changes. The increased interest in sensationalist fiction in the Victorian era highlights the treatment of disabled people as ‘other’, revealing a desire to understand those who are different without putting this desire into practice. Dinah Mulock Craik’s 1866 novel, *A Noble Life*, deeply emphasizes the pressures of toxic masculinity and the disability experience. Craik gives her disabled male protagonist agency over his being and places him into a position of power, but he is able to act in such a way because of the privileged position he was born into. The Earl of Cairnforth falls into some common disability tropes, such as his existence being used to make those around him better people, but he remains a unique protagonist in that it is his life, experiences, and feelings that are at the forefront of the novel. Craik’s novels reveal an interest in portraying and appreciating the vast human experience while also serves as a foundation for disability representation in the future.

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